

IMS news

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This issue honours
Father Ménard's
devotion from
1997 to 2018
as an administrator
and then as the
president of the IMS



The Newsletter of the **International Missionary Benefit Society**

Editorial

Father Michel Ménard is an acknowledged and highly appreciated personality: in his Institute, for which he was the general bursar and then the superior general in Brittany and in Haiti; and on the world's 5 continents as president of the IMS in which he has participated in the Universal Mission of the Church.

His work has involved both the actions of the Priests of Saint-Jacques and those relating to the initiatives of the IMS: for 55 years of his life, Father Ménard has put all his energy and convictions as a missionary into developing the value of solidarity within the Church and in particular, healthcare for people in great or even very great difficulty.

It is he who has broadened the international representation of the IMS. The decisions have gone hand in hand with very many

meetings as well as an adaptation of the tools and systems with the aim of satisfying, as a priority, the needs of poor communities and apostolic workers.

Firm in his dealings with the superiors and bishops, continually reminding them of their canonical duty and emphasising the essential value of health, Father Ménard has worked hard to develop the solidarity of the IMS.

With gratitude and on behalf of all the beneficiaries, past, present and future, I wish to express to him all our sincere thanks for his work dedicated to the IMS and retain as the direction of our mission these words of Saint Vincent de Paul, recalled by Father Ménard :

"We must continue our work and do more to help as many apostolic workers as possible in the world and allow them to

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serve the churches and peoples among whom they live in the best conditions".



Sister Elizabeth Aulliac
President of the IMS

> Vocation inspired by the priests of Saint-Jacques

Born in 1936, in the Loire Atlantique department, Michel Ménard was ordained a priest in 1962 at Saint-Jacques (Finistère department). In the same year, for his first mission for the Society of Priests of Saint-Jacques, Father Ménard set off on the cruise liner Antilles to Haiti where, for 5 years, he served as a curate at the Cathedral of Port-au-Prince. Father Ménard was appointed Bursar General of his Institute in 1968. In Haiti, he then served as a curate at Côtes-de-Fer where his visits to the parishes were on horseback and sometimes on muleback. Between 1973 and 1993, Father Ménard was elected to the Council of the Society and multiplied missions in the parishes of Haiti. It was in 1993 that Father Ménard was elected Superior General of the Society of the Priests of Saint-Jacques, a position that he occupied for 3 terms (1993-2011).

A worker in the field and a visionary, he developed Haitian vocations. This was profitable for both the island and the Institute: the ordination of 34 priests between 2001 and 2018; the positions of Bursar General and then Superior General were entrusted to Haitian priests ; seminars in France, Haiti and Brazil.

One of Father Ménard's other large projects was to create an annual gathering, bringing together the missionaries, families and friends of the Institute: the Feast of Friendship attended by up to 1,000 people. The Our Lady of Perpetual Help Shelter was built to accommodate and protect the guests. An accommodation unit was also created at the Mother House, as well as a refectory: 36 rooms are available for all the visitors.

Convinced of the merit of new technologies and sustainable development, Father Ménard completed the ambitious project of constructing a wood-chip fuelled boiler room which now benefits all of the buildings. The House and the various projects require people's goodwill, that Father Ménard elicited from over a hundred people of all trades.

The earthquake which struck Haiti in 2010 was of an unprecedented violence (500,000 dead and injured). Although directly affected by the tragedy, the priests of Saint-Jacques made every effort to help the local people. Father Ménard multiplied conferences,



talks, communications and calls for solidarity, resulting, in particular in the shipment of many containers to the island. To provide care for the injured, a field hospital was set up at the regional house.

In 2011, Father Ménard was re-elected to the Council of the Society of the Priests of Saint-Jacques and took up the position of Secretary General, before being appointed Head of the retired Priests of Saint-Jacques in 2018. He leads, for example, a service at the Carmel de Morlaix monastery celebrating mass there every week. He also responds to the invitations of young priests of Saint-Jacques by leading masses in various parishes or during times dedicated to confessions.



Departure on mission 1962



Nairobi



Feast of Friendship 2010

**"I reserve particular greetings for the members of the IMS
Dear friends, I strongly encourage your service in the Congregations and
Dioceses to facilitate access their members' access to healthcare thereby
promoting their dedication to the mission".**

Rome, Public audience of 13 May 2015



> Twenty years of **dedication to the IMS**

The life of Father Michel Ménard has also been marked by his responsibilities within the International Missionary Benefit Society. In 1997, he was asked to serve a term as an administrator on the Steering Committee of the IMS. Father Jean Nouvel was then President.

International recruitment, mobility of members between countries, health expenditure that can in full or in part be incurred in a country different from that of the members' activities... as many particular features of the missionary congregations which resulted in the French Assembly of Major Superiors suggesting the creation of the IMS. Added to this, moreover, the strong desire to ensure solidarity between the religious communities, which included taking into account both their specificities and their institutional resources. The project was discussed with the conferences of the countries and set out to the Vatican. It was under their auspices and with their encouragement that the IMS was created in 1965. By 1997, around 12,000 priests and church men and women were benefiting from IMS' services, either affiliated to the General Section or to one of the local sections

(West Africa, Central Africa, Madagascar, Belgium). In 2002, the Steering Committee voted to appoint its new President... Father Michel Ménard was elected.

President Ménard wasted no time in setting out his policy :

- Find solutions suited to the means and needs of poor communities
- Ensure optimal management of the local option
- Manage the situation of congregations whose members are from countries with very different standards of living
- Involve the congregations more in the governance of the IMS through international representatives
- Translate the documents into different languages (English, Spanish, etc.)
- Be able to receive care regardless of the country of residence and possibly in several countries
- Create committees
- Double the number of meetings of the Steering Committee
- Adapt the contributions and the benefits as fairly as possible, taking into account local specificities

> Sometimes **complex situations**

The IMS is an organisation which is continuing to develop but subject to numerous constraints. Depending on the regions and the arrival of new medical procedures, health care costs are constantly increasing and, sometimes, very significantly.

With the Association becoming more international, new challenges are appearing regularly such as mastering a new language and - in particular - the ability to manage a new currency. Access to care is another determining factor for the governance of the IMS: the churchmen/women and priests must be able to receive care without difficulty at their mission places, regardless of the procedures required. There is also the need for rigorous monitoring of payment of the contributions, in consultation with the group leaders, and in the choice of health professionals to ensure fees are not inflated.

> A very **positive evolution**

Despite the problems, his policy has achieved results and the needs of increasing numbers of members are met. President Ménard has achieved this by emphasising accountability and autonomy of the sections, starting with Africa. This decentralisation has improved contact with the groups (in accord with an agreement signed between the President and each section). Procedures have gradually been set up. Information was initially disseminated by the sections, and then through the creation of the IMS newsletter (now IMS News) and the website.

- Regarding the management :
 - The recently created Option 4 has increasing numbers each year. The administrators have not hesitated to stabilise and even reduce the amount of contributions whenever possible..
 - As part of the adaptation to needs, options that do not benefit enough beneficiary members are withdrawn (1b, 1R, 2).
 - Members of Option 1 can count on the services of Eurocross-MUTAS (medical evacuation).
- Regarding currencies, the devaluation of the CFA franc has been fully taken into account.
- The table of assistance has changed, with the amounts of assistance increased for all optical, dental, auditory and orthopaedic procedures.
- The President has improved the services and actions of the IMS: in particular the administrators have implemented decisions granting reductions of contributions to indigenous congregations in difficulty.
- After a contact with the Missionary Commission of the Conferences of Major Superiors and the Missionary Pontifical Works of France, the Studies and Research commission was set up.



Father Ménard has made the *IMS* known, studied the contexts and tried to meet all the needs. Meetings and conferences have multiplied: superiors of missionary institutes, the Roman congregation for the propagation of the faith, Mutual for the churchmen and churchwomen of Burkina Faso, Superior Majors in Rome, Association of Episcopal Conferences of the Central Africa Region, *IMS* sections in Abidjan, Yaoundé and Antananarivo, Senegal, Chad, etc. Contacts have been made here and there and documents sent, for example to the Conferences of nuns in India. The *IMS* supports initiatives relating to social protection and health institutions (e.g. the International hospital of Dakar).

> The contribution of unique solutions

Since the early 2000s, additional steps have allowed the *IMS* to assert more fully. Indeed as President Ménard said: "I believe that the *IMS* that we manage is sound. However, we must continue our work and "do more" as Saint Vincent de Paul said to better assist as many apostolic workers in the world and allow them to serve the churches and the peoples in the environment in which they live in the best conditions". Father Ménard therefore applied to the Federal office of private insurance in Switzerland in order to have the specific nature of the association recognised. The *IMS* is not subject to insurance company supervision thanks to its particular status which guaranteeing that it will be undisturbed and giving it legal security for its existence. The newly created Investments Commission, consolidates the financial

bases of the association that is expanding steadily.

The governance of the association has increased the number of administrators (12 to 14) to give more weight to the administrators from the African and then American continents.

The very disparate level of the cost of care and resources of the religious communities depending on the regions means that administrators are broadening the local option in more countries before establishing a zoning of contributions (categories A+ to E). This major development makes the *IMS* accessible to any group. The administrators have gone further by creating Option 5: minimal contributions allowing congregations or dioceses to obtain the assistance of the *IMS* for very expensive care (hospitalisation). These issues of conduct and perception of the

technical equilibrium are studied carefully by the members of the *IMS*.

The Association must constantly adapt to the needs: the governance decided to create the East Africa section, and then the Brazil section, which became the Central America section. The West Africa section has a care centre. The use of a professional information system is essential (ICOD): the sections now use real-time software, in several languages and in several currencies.

As Father Ménard regularly recalls, the presence of the *IMS* is justified as long as local public, private or religious structures have not been set up. It is thus that the *IMS* provides its support to the project of a mutual society for the churchmen and churchwomen of Burkina Faso (ASIENA).

Conclusion

556 years of commitment to the Church, of which 20 years directly to the benefit of the International Missionary Benefit Society! Father Michel Ménard has continued, and significantly expanded, the international influence of the Association. There are around 800 congregations, institutes and dioceses which now belong to the *IMS*, i.e. 30,000 churchmen/women and priests residing in 140 countries. Assistance is provided to thousands every year, ranging from the purchase of a €2 box of medicine and a medical evacuation costing €50,000, taking in classic medical consultations, hospitalisations, purchases of glasses, etc. on the way. The second objective of President Ménard has also been achieved: churchmen/women and priests, whose healthcare is paid for, can thus be better devote themselves to their mission. Finally, faithful to his principles of generosity, the President has maintained a constant effort in supporting the most disadvantaged groups and the most expensive cases. His messages of solidarity have been disseminated very widely and constantly.



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Publication Director :
Jean-Noël Dussart
Publication Manager :
Sylvain Sacheli
Design/Production:
Isabelle Delahaye

Photo Credits :
International Missionary Benefit Societye

 **IMS**
3 rue Duguay-Trouin -75280 Paris cedex 06