

The Federation of Koinonia John the Baptist

Updated file of Raffaella Di Marzio – May 29, 2016

Koinonia John the Baptist is an association made up of lay people, families, consecrated brothers and sisters and priests founded by Fr. Ricardo Argañaraz in 1979. Born in Salta, Argentina, on 3rd July 1936, Fr. Ricardo Argañaraz was ordained a priest on 15th July 1962. He breathed in the atmosphere of Vatican Council II in Rome and, after having graduated both in canon law and philosophy at the Pontifical Gregorian University, he founded the 'Presbyteral Fraternity of Contemplative Life' together with two other priests in 1969. The Fraternity was welcomed by the bishop of Padua in the vicinity of Ronchi di Villafranca.

For ten years, from November 1969 until 1979, Fr. Ricardo resided in the diocese of Vicenza and preached with official canonical approval, giving courses on spiritual exercises to female Religious in the diocese.

In October 1974, after experiencing the effusion of the Holy Spirit, he heard a voice which he believed to be of the Lord. It invited him to withdraw for a period of recollection and solitude. In July 1975, with the agreement of his brother priests, he left the Fraternity and remained for two months in a small chapel on the Palon Summit of Mt. Pasubio where he prayed and fasted. He recalls having very profound times of listening to God, above all after evening Mass. On these occasions the Lord revealed in Ricardo's heart his desire to provide him a place to the left of Val Leogra, as well as showing him 'images' of the sick and suffering ascending to that place and returning healed.

He returned to the Fraternity and began looking for the place that the Lord wanted to give him as a 'promised land'. Providentially he visited Camparmò in the municipality of Valli del Pasubio. Camparmò was an area of land that had been left uninhabited after the First World War and he understood that this was the place. He bought up the various parcels of land one at a time, overcoming difficulties thanks to the Lord's help.

He took up residence on the land, in the ruins of a barn, in 1976, and thus began a period of living alone for three years, interrupted only by the visits of some young people and by going down to teach in a religious institute. During one visit abroad, from December 1977 to March 1978, he got to know other representatives of the international Charismatic movement. During this period extraordinary events and healings in the area of Camparmò were attributed to the prayers of Fr. Ricardo and his first followers.

In August 1978 Fr. Ricardo received a message from Antonietta which she claimed to have received from the Lord in locutionary form. This sister had been in Charismatic Renewal from its early days and was considered to have a prophetic gift. She currently holds a pastoral ministry in her diocese of Biella. This message is

what Fr. Ricardo defines as the 'Prophecy of Camparmò'. It states that Camparmò would become a house of prayer, a house of conversion and communion, a place of welcome for consecrated persons and the poor, a place of unity, holiness and glory, God's dwelling place from where 'new vocation' and 'new evangelization' would spring forth. After some time, through the words of Pope John Paul II the concept of 'new evangelization' would ring out powerfully in the universal Church. This is why the community has a very strong sense of the call to the new evangelization. Moreover, the Lord would attract people to Camparmò, to be nourished spiritually and be loved by Fr. Ricardo and used and moulded by the Lord himself.

Spiritually, the community was founded on 1st January 1979, on the Solemnity of Mary, Most Holy Mother of God. It was formed by Fr. Ricardo and three others: a young woman, a young man, and a doctor of Law, all of whom were called to consecrate themselves in virginity for the Kingdom of Heaven by the Lord. The community took the name of 'John the Baptist', a name that came to Fr. Ricardo and the brothers and sister on different occasions of prayer. John was the precursor of the Incarnate Word and the first great evangelizer who proclaimed the coming of the Saviour. The Community of John the Baptist was born through an experience of community life, prayer and evangelization. The present Koinonia John the Baptist springs from this, an association at the service of the new evangelization. In the beginning it also included agricultural activity which occupied the time of all its members. The agricultural work was subsequently suspended, given the increase of various commitments to evangelization, the multiplication of pastoral activities and the need to form its members.

In 1979 Bishop Onisto, the bishop of Vicenza, accepted the presence of the contemplative experience initiated by Fr. Argañaraz for a period of three years, to be renewed annually. Ministerial faculties were granted contextually, but not incardination.

It is difficult to clearly reconstruct the events relating to Fr. Ricardo and his canonical position in the diocese of Padua and Vicenza – from 1969 until 1992 – because of some contradictions present in official documents that concern him. For example, the Bishop of Salta, in a reply to a letter from Cardinal Ruini (dated August 28, 1992) affirms that Fr. Ricardo has been present in Italy for thirty years with official permission (“...desde treinta anos en Italia con los debidos permisos otorgados por nuestros Predecesores..”) and, with the same, renews the authorization for Ricardo to continue his priestly activity in Italy. However, the Decree of the Congregation for the Clergy, dated 4th December 1992 (Prot.2231/1) and then issued at a later date, claims that “the same bishop of Salta repeatedly recalled him to his diocese and, at least since 1981 had not renewed his permission to reside elsewhere”. Furthermore, this same document claims that Fr. Ricardo had been “expelled from the presbyteral community of which he was a member since 1969”, a circumstance categorically denied by Fr. Ricardo himself.

The community of Camparmò was civilly established as an association called 'Koinonia Giovanni Battista' in 1987. In 1988, Bishop Nonis, the new bishop of Vicenza, invited Fr. Ricardo Argañaraz to transfer to another diocese and Fr. Argañaraz, after having attempted in vain to comply with this request by seeking to transfer to other dioceses in the north of Italy, decided to appeal to canon law. In 1990 he founded the Koinonia School of Evangelization, from which other schools have emerged in Europe, North and Latin America, Asia, Africa and Oceania.

On January 15, 1992, the Koinonia obtained the decree of recognition as a Private Association of the Faithful according to Canon 299. It was issued by Cardinal Camillo Ruini, Vicar General of the Diocese of Rome, to where Fr. Argañaraz had transferred. In June of the same year, the bishop of Vicenza revoked the ministerial faculties and licence for further stay in his diocese (decree prot. N° 1087/92). Fr. Argañaraz appealed to the Congregation for the Clergy but on December 4, 1992 the Congregation for the Clergy confirmed the decree issued by the bishop of Vicenza and rejected the appeal presented by Fr. Argañaraz (decree prot.2231/1).

In the summer of 1993, the first International School of Evangelization took place in Rome. On 7th April 1996, Koinonia obtained recognition as a Private Association of the Faithful from Bishop František Radkovsky of Plzen (in the Czech Republic), prelate of the diocese in which the association was established on 25th January 1996 by private agreement, and where Fr. Argañaraz is incardinated. On 25th May 1996 the bishop of Plzeň ordained a number of priests who were members of the Koinonia for his diocese. As a consequence of this, and with a decree issued on 4th December 1994, Cardinal Camillo Ruini revoked the recognition of Koinonia John the Baptist in the diocese of Rome, due to the fact that the bishop of Plzeň had assumed responsibility for the community and ordained priests at the service of the same.

It is during this period that the criminal proceedings against Fr. Ricardo began. In 1996 a woman, who was separated from her husband and had been welcomed into the Koinonia for about two years, left the community and took legal action against Fr. Ricardo. There were eight charges of which he was acquitted, whilst being convicted of an offence that did not appear among the original charges: fraud against a person who had given money in exchange for a healing which did not take place. His sentence was confirmed on appeal but under a different charge and an appeal to the court of cassation was refused on 13 June 2001. During the hearing seven people were accused of false testimony, that of having endorsed Fr. Ricardo Argañaraz's version of events, in contradiction to that of the woman. The investigation against all seven supposed false witnesses (including Fr. Argañaraz) was concluded with the declaration that there was "no grounds to prosecute because the crime does not exist", declared by the Judge of Preliminary Enquiries in Vicenza on 12th November 2003. Fr. Ricardo has fulfilled all legal obligations imposed on him and paid back all money. The judicial case is closed and for many years now Fr. Ricardo has not held any office of responsibility within the Association.

In the intervening period, the episcopal curia of Vicenza issued two official communications: the first one on 24th March 1999 and the second on 25th January 2000, confirming that Fr. Ricardo Argañaraz had never been incardinated in the diocese of Vicenza and reinforcing all the injunctions and prohibitions already notified previously. Regarding the position of the Association in the diocese of Rome, a dialogue between representatives of the Koinonia and the diocesan ecclesiastical authorities (initiated in the final months of 2006) is currently in progress.

On 22nd June 1998 the Federation of the Associations of Koinonia John the Baptist was created under which all the various local associations are brought together. The federation is currently located at Plzeň-Valcha in the Czech Republic where the Moderator General also resides.

In this structure Fr. Ricardo Argañaraz holds no associative or authoritative role, although he remains a point of reference for the community as founder and inspiration of the project for the New Evangelization.

The local model is an oasis, which is a community where brothers and sisters who have a vocation to celibacy, married couples with children, widows and young people, decide to consecrate themselves to evangelization with the intention of walking in the lifestyle proposed by Koinonia. This reality also becomes a centre of evangelization. The consecrated brothers and sisters live in the same campus but in different buildings, together with a leader of the oasis who may or may not be a priest. It is possible to host others who would like to have a time of spiritual retreat and experience community life. The mother house is at Camparmò, from which all the other houses have developed. The activities that take place in an oasis consist of daily prayer, evangelization meetings, intercession for the sick, and youth meetings.

Their goal is to promote and animate houses of prayer and familial communities. Familial communities organise monthly meetings, animate activities in the Oases and run various ministries. Houses of prayer are organised weekly prayer meetings in family homes and are involved in widespread evangelization work directed towards those who are far away from the Lord. Charisms are used in the community, and from these ministries arise (“new vocation”) the Good News is proclaimed, i.e. the kerygma (“new evangelization”) which spreads by means of schools of evangelization and houses of prayer. Formation consists of three levels: basic, middle and superior. Various community members have ministries within their own parish as catechists or other duties.

In **2008** there were about 900 houses of prayer throughout the world, of which around 200 were in Italy. The others were in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Germany, Poland, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Belgium, Spain, France, USA, Israel, Mexico, Africa and India. There were 11 communities of consecrated life with 150 consecrated brothers and sisters and 23 priests. Several hundred people

regularly participated in the Koinonia Sunday celebrations. Overall there were several thousand associates - in Italy and abroad.

The **estimated figures** for 2015 are as follows: 1.592 houses of prayer. There are 24 communities of consecrated life, 246 (132 sisters and 114 brothers), and 45 priests. Lay members account for more than 7,000.

Koinonia John the Baptist wants to live and propose the words of Jesus in Jn 15:16: "I appointed you to go [and announce the Kerygma, the direct and explicit announcement of Jesus Christ] and bear fruit [with the power of the charisms that accompany preaching], fruit that will last [forming Koinonia community, which manifests the communion of the Trinity which operates in the community]". Koinonia proposes the "Ke Ka Ko Project" which aims to form evangelizers and leaders for the new evangelization. It wants to fulfil this through the kerygmatic school (Ke), evangelization with the power of the Spirit through the use of charisms (Ka) and by promoting Christian communities, which are the first sign of evangelization (Ko). This project is considered by them and by the bishops who have recognised this community as a work of the Holy Spirit, which contributes to the fulfilment of the missionary vocation of the Church.

Koinonia was born from faith in the Word of the Lord and as such, in order to be understood, it must be first lived and then loved. Great importance is to charisms and prayer for spiritual and physical healing given in this community which should be called "messianic signs" because they testify that Jesus is risen, is alive and living among us, according to what He himself promised (cf. Mt 28:20 and Mk16:20).

Members are used to loving and using the Bible. The community teaches that by praying and proclaiming the divine words of the Bible with faith, words which are most suited to the difficulties that they are going through, and believing in these words, the mountain of difficulties move. It is not enough to believe. You also need to profess faith with your mouth to obtain salvation; both eternal salvation and salvation from all the difficult situations in life. The word that the believer professes has the power to become reality because it is the Word of God. As it says in the Book of Proverbs (18:21): "The tongue has the power of life and death". To speak negatively turns away blessings. This is why God wants us not just to speak ordinary human words but use his own words, those written in the Bible and so remind Him of the promises that He himself has made to us. Scripture is seen as a treasure chest of God's promises: there are thousands of them, one for every situation, and for every person there is a promise of blessing that can become a victory over every kind of evil. A believer must proclaim his own victory and by faith in Jesus all the promises in the Bible become "Yes" (2Cor 1:20).

In the course of its expansion, Koinonia John the Baptist has found a welcome in various countries and has received canonical recognition as a private association of the lay faithful in the following dioceses: Plzeň (Czech Republic); Banska Bystrica,

Kosice and Presov (Slovakia); Dresden (Germany); Getafe and Astorga (Spain); Acapulco and Cancun (Mexico); Brooklyn and Los Angeles (USA); Umzimkulu, Pretoria and Durban (South Africa); Jhabua (India). It has received homologation in the dioceses of Hamburg (Germany) and Hradec Kralove (Czech Republic). Decrees of welcome and authorization have been given by the dioceses of Zilina (Slovacchia); Elblag, Lublin, Warsaw and Koszalin (Poland); Vercelli and Casale Monferrato (Italy); Jerusalem (Israel); Tehuacan, Zamora, Morelia and Guadalajara (Mexico); Brisbane (Australia). The dioceses of Wroclaw (Poland) Salem and Bhopal (India), Belfast (Ireland), Bulawayo (Zimbabwe), Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic) and Biella (Italy) have granted declarations of praise. It is a member of ACCSE Europe (the European Association of Catholic Schools of Evangelization).

NB: Information on the history and structure of Koinonia in the Ke Ka Ko Project can be found in Ricardo Argañaraz' booklet, *'Koinonia Giovanni Battista'*, Ke Ka Ko, Malo (Vicenza) 1998. The diary of an evangelization mission promoted by the community of John the Baptist in Poland and Germany in March 1993 by Kerygma, Effatà, can be found in *'Diario di una esperienza straordinaria'*, published by Ke Ka Ko, Malo, (Vicenza) 1993. Testimonies of physical and spiritual healings are found in *'Gesù mi ha guarito!'* edited by Fr. Ricardo Argañaraz, Ke Ka Ko, Malo (Vicenza) 1996. A guide to the promises with a list of biblical citations to proclaim, suitable for every spiritual and material need in Fr. Emanuele De Nardi – Daniele Cassetta's book, *'Proclama la tua vittoria'*, Ke Ka Ko, Malo (Vicenza) 1998. Information on the canonical situation of Fr. Ricardo Argañaraz in the diocese of Padua and Vicenza from 1969 until 1992 are drawn from the decree of the Congregation for the Clergy of the 4th December 1992 (Prot.2231/1), from the letter of reply to Cardinal Ruini sent by the Bishop of Salta Msgr. Moises J. Blanchoub dated 28 August 1992 and from the declaration of Msgr. Gianni Cielo, bishop's delegate for the religious orders of Vicenza, dated 5th December 1979.

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