

SCL

SHAPE Community Life

April 2024



SWEDEN ACCESSION CEREMONY

EDITOR'S *Letter*



Dear Shapians,

In the crisp April air, as the world welcomed spring, Sweden brimmed with anticipation for its forthcoming accession ceremony. It wasn't merely a formal event but a celebration of unity and cooperation.

Meanwhile, on the international stage, the 75th NATO anniversary on 4 April marked a milestone in the Alliance's journey. From its inception amidst the ashes of World War II to becoming a beacon of collective defense, NATO stood as a testament to the power of collaboration. The NATO anniversary, soon to be celebrated at SHAPE on 2 May, stirred excitement among SHAPE community members.

Another significant occasion loomed large in the global consciousness. April is also the month of the military child. Across nations, communities paid tribute to the resilience and sacrifices of these young souls who stood steadfast behind their parents in service.

In the midst of diplomatic ceremonies and military commemorations, one common thread unites them all – the spirit of cooperation and shared purpose. Whether it was Sweden embracing its role in the international community or nations coming together to honor their military children and commemorate decades of NATO's existence, this month serves as a reminder of the bonds that bind us.

As the days dwindle towards May, be ready to celebrate a bunch of great upcoming events at SHAPE: SHAPE Half Marathon, Spanish Feria, Polish Constitution Day, Eurovision Watch Party, TOBE, Make-A-Wish, Greek Summer Night, and many more to come!

María José Tezanos Bustamante
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Base Support Group

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**All the events announced could be postponed or cancelled due to security or any unforeseen reason.
Please, visit our SHAPE2DAY website or SHAPE Base Support Group Facebook Page for a more accurate and updated information.**

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GIANTS, THEIR ROLE IN BELGIAN FOLKLORE AND BIRTH OF A NEW GIANT

By Linda Nash

Pamela Giacomello, founder of SHAPE IC3 Association (IC3) and I met with L'Abbe Xavier Nys, Curate of the pastoral unit of Ath and Father Andre Luczak, Curate of the Pastoral Unit of Chievres-Brugelette and Rector of the Basilica of Tongre-Notre-Dame. We wanted to find out more about the part played by giants in the folklore of Belgium, Northern France and, in particular, about the recent addition to the giant family, Monsieur Vincent.

M. l'Abbe Nys, explained that the role of Giants in Belgian folklore goes back to the Middle Ages and originates in the North of France. Processions with giants taking part are often called Ducasses, indicating a connection with the church. He cited the Procession in Ath, held on the 4th Sunday of August, which is the closest to the Saints Day of St Julien, the patron saint of Ath. There are seven giants in the Procession, most of whom have a biblical connection and they only appear on the actual day of the Procession. In the 18th Century when Belgium was under the rule of the Hapsburgs, Emperor Joseph forbade religious Processions, the towns then organised lay processions. Vespers, a religious service, was held on the Saturday evening, preceding the Ath Procession, but by the 1960's this had almost disappeared. A newly appointed priest, Father Keyser, assisted the commune of Ath in the appointment of a Director to the Ath Music Academy. To show his gratitude, the Director offered to help adapt the service of Vespers, by adding a choir, blessing the religious relics, thus making the service apt for the people.

Giants are to be found in many villages in Belgium, including Maffle with four - Zante, Rinette, Pelot and Pelette. They not only take part in festivities in Maffle, but travel to other villages to take part in their celebrations, whereas the Ath giants remain in Ath. Giants are also to be found in the North of France and Catalonia.

Exchanges take place, giants, together with their porters travelling on occasions as far as Catalonia.

The creation of a giant is a joint project, involving many people, as it has to be designed, constructed and clothed, requiring multiple skills and this acts as a unifying factor within a village, where the poor are not always welcome.

It was Father Andre, a self-confessed dreamer, who first had the idea of creating a new giant. Of Polish nationality, a missionary, and a member of the Congregation of Saint Vincent de Paul (a Lazarist), he came to Belgium in 1994, having served in the Congo from 1987 until 1994, a very difficult period in the country's history. After experiencing war, pillaging and continuous unrest, exhausted he returned to Lessines to the House of the Lazarists.

In 2000 he was appointed to Ath as a vicar and in 2017 he took the position of Vicar for Chievres, Brugelette and of the Basilica of Tongres-Notre-Dame. This appointment entails not only being rector of the Basilica, but also being responsible for pastoral activities, giving aid to the poor of the region and welcoming pilgrims, all this in collaboration with Ath. This pastoral work is divided between three priests.

On 16 October, 2001, together with Andre Marquegnies he founded the Conference of St. Vincent de Paul in Maffle, which, two years later became an ASBL, an organisation without profit.

Integration within the village was the basis of Father Andre's idea of creating another giant in Maffle, an idea which he'd originally had in 2000 when he joined Ath and had witnessed the giants present in the Ath Ducasse. In 2025 it will be the celebration of 400 years of the Congregation of

Saint Vincent de Paul, so he thought a new giant, aptly named Monsieur



Vincent would be appropriate, Monsieur is the abbreviation of Monseigneur, the correct way to address a priest.

Following his decision, he organised the project with Jerome Birlouet, a friend, who welcomed the idea and called on other people within the village, including his brother, Lucas, to help. These people, by being involved in the creation of M. Vincent indirectly became part of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

The new giant, M. Vincent will act as a key to open doors to other projects. He is a man of charity and can be taken to where the poor live. He represents 'la providence', a spiritual guide who helps with problems, when prayed to. The Centre in Maffle is also called La Providence. M. Vincent will take part in processions in the village of Maffle, as well as in the suburbs of Ath, but will not take part in the Ath procession. M. Vincent will also be present at meals for volunteers and at the annual charitable dinner for the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul on the first weekend of October. For this latter celebration local dignitaries are invited as are those wishing to take part. On these different occasions, M. Vincent is the key, provoking questions as to why he has been created, as well as bringing people together.



The actual construction of the giant did not take over long. The internal frame was bought in 2023 and seven months later, M. Vincent was completed, thanks to the enthusiasm and hard work of the volunteers, many of whom were young people.

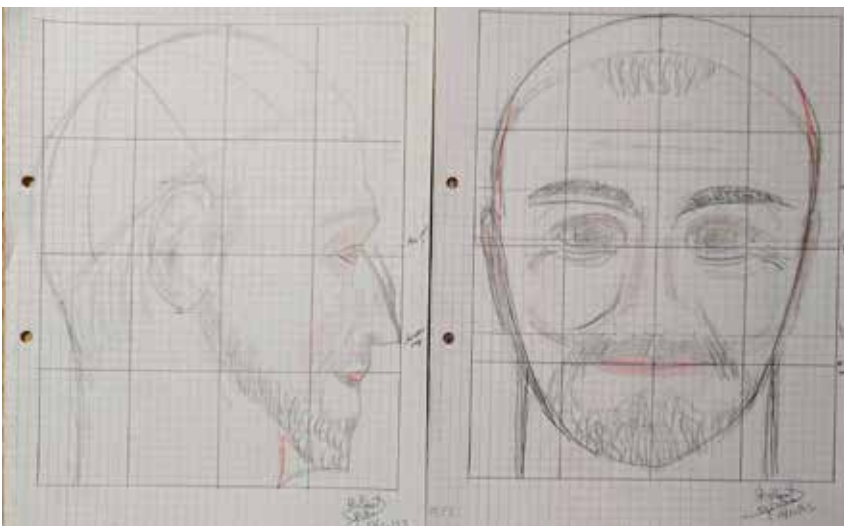
Following the celebration in Lessines next year, Father Andre intends to send letters with photos to the headquarters of the Society of Saint Paul in Rome and also to the Society in Poland, in order to make M. Vincent known, hoping that perhaps an invitation for the giant may follow to take part in the celebrations for the 400 years of the Society elsewhere.

When M. Vincent makes an appearance, he will provoke curiosity. Who is M. Vincent? Why a priest? It will start a dialogue and will give an opportunity to invite everybody to join in celebrations, whether they are believers or non-believers. He represents a universal welcome. Giants are not part of Polish folklore, but they could appear occasionally and would, of course give rise to a great deal of interest.



The young men, who act as porters for M. Vincent, may not have known anything about St. Vincent de Paul when they volunteered, but they too have become part of the family of St Vincent de Paul. A generous donor supplied appropriate t-shirts, to be worn when they carry him.

Under the umbrella of the IC3, donations have been continuously provided to La Providence in Maffle for distribution to the many disadvantaged people living in the communes of Ath, Chievres and Brugelette. Thanks to the generosity of SHAPE members, it has sometimes been money, clothes or food. It is for this reason that when M. Vincent is blessed at the church, Sainte Waudru in Maffle on Saturday 20 April and introduced to the villagers, Pamela, the founder of IC3 will be his godmother, while Father Andre, responsible for his creation, will be his godfather.



Father Andre, who has spent almost 30 years in his present diocese and is waiting to find out whether he stays here as a cure or whether he will return to Poland. Certainly, he can be very proud of his dream which has become a reality and for which he will, no doubt, always be remembered.