



From 1993 to 2013, 10 workshops known as "Assumptionist summer universities" (universités d'été assomptionnistes/UAE) have taken place in France

by Bernard Jouanno, A.A.

The first of these workshops took place in 1993 at the Assumptionist-run reception center near Lyon, France. It had as a theme: "Building Cities for Your Children" and as its aim: "an analysis of the place of the city and its mysteries and traditional structures, to uncover urban culture, and in this context, to re-examine the role of the Church."

Behind this initiative of summer universities was a group of men and women religious of the Assumption Family as well as lay friends taken up with Assumptionist spirituality. They hoped to build on similar efforts that had taken place over the years since Vatican II.

Over a hundred participants, including children, attended the first session, which consisted of talks, discussions, workshops, panels, on-site visits, personal witnesses, and input from outsiders. All of these means contributed to a better understanding of the complexity of the urban phenomenon and its impact of its citizens, including believers.

During the first "summer university," almost all the speakers were priests or religious women. Yet, in spite of this homogeneity, the approaches taken were quite diverse: the sociological angle by Julien Potel, the philosophical by Marcel Neusch, the biblical by Jacques Nieuviarts, the economic by Michel Falise, and the psychological/psychiatric by Françoise Rougeul.

After 20 years the method and pedagogy used at the summer universities have taken a fairly determined shape: a time of formation, time for reflection, time for discussion, but also moments of relaxation, celebration, and prayer. Someone is appointed whose job it is every day to bring the participants back to the main theme by summarizing the previous day's events and lessons.

This year's summer university has already been set for May 27-29 with a theme of "Adventurers in the Faith." Speakers will include the well-known founder of the Bose community in Italy, Enzo Bianchi, to Marika and Bertrand Thomas, the lay couple in charge of the Carthusian monastery of Sélignac (a monastery entrusted by monks to this lay couple responsible for assuring that all guests have the opportunity for contemplative prayer). The final day features a session with the superior general of the Assumptionists, Fr. Benoît Grière, on prayer and meditation.