

AMI Retie Welcome Address by Johan VD Eeckhout

9 September 2012

Your Excellencies, Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Members and Friends of AMI,

It is my great pleasure and honor as Vicar General of the Belgian Armed Forces to welcome you all, coming from across the globe, to Belgium, in Retie, to this Annual General Assembly of the Apostolat Militaire International.

A warm welcome to you all! Literally then, as the weather conditions in Belgium are extremely good these days. Enjoy our good and sunny climate!

It is not the first time that AMI takes place in Belgium. In 1999, my predecessor Vicar General Roger Van den Berge welcomed this assembly in Blankenberge, at the Belgian coast. Now, we come together near Antwerp, ‘in the Belgian Kempen’, in this nice place of ‘Corsendonck hotels’.

In about half an hour, we will depart for Antwerp where we are expected in the Cathedral for a pontifical Mass preceded by the Belgian Military Bishop André-Joseph Léonard. He already wrote you a welcome letter and now you will see him in person. After the pontifical mass you will have the chance to meet him personally during a ‘meet and greet’. Our Belgian Chief of Defence and some generals, colonels and military people will be present as well.

However, for this assembly, allow me to introduce you to our Belgian military team which prepared, in collaboration with the Executive Committee of AMI, this Annual General Assembly 2012.

Chaplain Annie Walscharts and her husband Paul Van Uffelen;

Chaplain Erwin Vilain; and

First Corporal Chef Mia Devriese.

Thanks for your efforts and your commitment in preparation of this conference, together with the members of the Executive Committee of AMI, and in particular Nelleke Swinkels as Secretary General. I am convinced that the many preparations will lead to a successful meeting to promote the establishment of the Christian view of military life and its values.

May this international conference, with the theme: 'Commemoration: Powerful past, powerful present, challenging future' be the paragon of vision and cooperation, of reflection and meaning to life, finding its inspiration in the Biblical tradition and the faith in Jesus Christ, who gave his life for all of us, so that the love of God may flourish in our hearts and in our World.

I wish you a wonderful conference in friendship and solidarity and I thank General Major Sinn, President of AMI for his confidence in the Belgian Chaplaincy to organize this Annual Assembly.

Thank you!