

3rd European Congress

Prayer, service highlight week-long event



Many Congress delegates, replete with Franciscan youth, gather for group photo. Photo by Giedre Povilaityte.

by *MONIKA MIDVERYTE, OFS*

It was a time for prayer, for social service, for evangelizing and for raising funds to drill water wells in Africa.

It was the 3rd European OFS and YouFra Congress, which took place in Lithuania from 20 to 26 August, 2018. A total of 126 participants from 23 national fraternities gathered at Kaunas, along with 30 organizers and volunteers from Lithuania. The main aim of the Congress was to deepen the relationship with the Holy Spirit and to experience a spiritual conversion through prayer,

social services and evangelization. The opening Eucharist at Archcathedral Basilica on Monday was later followed by an evening of nations, where all countries were represented by a short video and delegates enjoyed samples of traditional food.

The second day of the Congress was dedicated to formation. Participants listened to a lecture on the main theme of the Congress, “Whoever believes in me, rivers of living water will flow from within him” (Jn 7:38), given by the general spiritual assistant,

Fr. Alfred Parambathu, OFMConv, and a lecture, “Veni Sancte Spiritus”, presented by Dr. Benas Ulevicius. Delegates broke into discussion groups to share testimonies about their relationship with the Holy Spirit. After the Eucharist, participants gathered for an evening of Prayer and Worship, where a special part of Kyrie and contrition was included. Participants asked forgiveness for all the situations in which they have not lived according to the Franciscan vocation.

The third day of the Congress was dedicated to

pilgrimage. In the morning participants travelled to Siluva–Marian sanctuary where the first apparition of the Virgin Mary in Europe took place and was officially recognized by the Church. The group listened to talks by the national spiritual assistant, Fr. Antanas Bluzas, OFM, and his brother priest, Gintaras Bluzas, OFS, who also celebrated the Holy Eucharist. Siluva is the hometown of the two brothers. In the afternoon all delegates traveled to another pilgrim site – The Hill of Crosses.

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The special Cross of the European Franciscan Family was solemnly blessed here. The long day ended in Kretinga, where local parishioners were happy to host Congress delegates in their homes.

Thursday was the day of social service. The programme started in the convent of St. Clare where participants joined the Poor Clares for morning prayer. Afterwards they split into seven smaller groups and went to social ministries of their choice: to visit elderly and disabled people, oncology patients, children's orphanage, autistic children, etc. In the afternoon the Congress went to a Lithuanian resort, Pal, and had some time for recreation by the Baltic sea. A Franciscan Fiesta at the churchyard was the festive end of the day after the evening Holy Mass. Different countries presented their national clothes, songs or dances.

This evening program was open to all parishioners and host families.

Friday was dedicated to the contemplation of the Passion of Christ and to sharing our faith during evangelization. The Congress left Kretinga and travelled to Samogitian Calvary, where the Holy Mass was celebrated together with Telsiai Bishop Kęstutis Kėvalas. He made an introduction to the Calvary Hills – traditional way of piety of the Passion of Christ. Participants walked through 20 stations remembering the painful way of the Cross. In the afternoon the Congress came back to Kaunas and all participants prepared themselves for evangelization – a massive evangelization dance in the Town Hall square. After this performance all citizens of Kaunas were invited to the Cathedral where the *Continued on next page.*



FACES OF THE CONGRESS

Photos (above and below) by Giedre Povilaityte



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program continued by worship and testimonies of participants.

On Saturday participants travelled to Vilnius – city of Divine Mercy and the Capital of Lithuania. The day started with the Holy Mass in the shrine of Divine Mercy where the famous painting of Merciful Jesus is venerated. Then participants split into smaller groups and visited other religious sites of Vilnius. In the afternoon delegates could choose to visit one of several tourist places among which was the Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights and the convent house where St. Faustina lived during her visions of Jesus. The long day continued with a trip to the old capital of Lithuania – Trakai. Participants prayed a Franciscan Crown by the miraculous painting of the Mother of God of Trakai – patroness of Lithuania. And last but not least, they enjoyed a barbecue party in the baroque monastery of Pazaislis.

Sunday was the last day of the 3rd European OFS and YouFra Congress. After morning prayer and breakfast, participants gathered for the last plenary session to discuss some important issues and to decide on the country where the next congress will take place.



Members of the CIOFS Presidency participated in the European Congress, including (from left): Minister General Tibor Kauser, OFS; General Spiritual Assistant Fr. Alfred Parambathu, OFM Conv.; Presidency Councilor Ana Fruk, OFS; YouFra Councilor Andrea Odak Karlović, OFS; and Presidency Councilor Attilio Galimberti, OFS. Photo by Giedre Povilaityte.

Some more Congress pilgrims. Photo by Ingrida Biveinyte.



The results of the social initiative, “Well4Africa,” showed that the European fraternities raised 51,000 Euros. The fundraising will continue and the implementation of the projects – to drill wells for water in drought areas of Africa – was to start after the Congress.

Meanwhile, the Icon of Mary, Queen of the Franciscan Family, which was created in 2018 in Lithu-

ania leading up to the 3rd European Congress, started its pilgrimage in Europe, the first country to visit being Ukraine. The mission of the Icon’s pilgrimage is to visit all local OFS and YouFra fraternities and to propagate the devotion of the Franciscan Crown in Europe. The Icon may also be venerated in Franciscan religious fraternities and Franciscan parishes. It is very suitable for bringing

into families with small children as well as sick and elderly members of our fraternities. The first-class relics of three main saints of the Franciscan Family – St. Francis, St. Clare and St. Elisabeth – constitute part of this Icon.

The congress was officially closed with the Holy Mass, celebrated by the Franciscan bishop of Panevezys, Linas Vodopjanovas, OFM.