

XV General Chapter Secular Franciscan Order (OFS)

“As you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world” (Jn 17,18)

CONCLUSIONS

1. Introduction

The XV General Chapter of the Secular Franciscan Order took place in the Collegium Seraphicum in Rome, Italy on November 4-11, 2017. A long road has been travelled since Pope Paul VI approved the renewed Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order in 1978, opening the way to a unified Order and its corresponding international organization that we have today. The General Chapter is a magnificent occasion to meet and share the extraordinary gift of fraternity with brothers and sisters representing national fraternities from all over the world, together with the international representatives of Franciscan Youth. The Chapter opened with a celebration of the Eucharist, presided by the Secretary of the Holy See, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, who encouraged the capitulars to live the Christian mission and to be witnesses and servants of each other (Mt 23,11). During the course of the Chapter, capitulars also marked the Feast of the Dedication of the Basilica of St. John Lateran and were reminded of the respectful attitude that St. Francis had for the Church of his time.

A fundamental review of the way in which an international Order such as the OFS is managed was launched during the General Chapter of 2014 and has been ongoing for the past three years with significant inputs from the national fraternities. The main focus of the present Chapter was on the responses received and the concrete proposals submitted to address the various challenges. One of the most important tasks was to reflect on the co-responsibility of all Secular Franciscans brothers and sisters, especially in assuming the responsibility for guiding and animating the Order at all levels.

Celebrating the Eucharist and praying the Liturgy of the Hours were essential elements of each day of the Chapter, providing an opportunity for all the capitulars to encounter Jesus Christ, the one who is *filled with goodness and who is always open to welcoming others*¹. It is this spirit that should characterize our journey towards conversion in the light of the teachings of St. Francis.

We were blessed to have Ministers General Michael Perry OFM, Marco Tasca OFM Conv, and Mauro Jöhri OFM Cap to celebrate the Eucharist on various days throughout the week. They shared spiritual messages and reminded us of our need to assume the position of *washers of the feet*² as we work in the world. In living out our vocation, we are to be *dynamic, relational*³ and yes, even *sometimes a little crazy*!⁴ We were consoled to know that God doesn't just send us into the world, he walks with us and lives within us in an intimate way on our journey.

¹ Fr. Mauro Jöhri, OFM Cap, Minister General, Homily, November 10, 2017

² Fr. Michael Perry, OFM, Minister General, Homily, November 5, 2017

³ Fr. Michael Perry, OFM, Minister General, Homily, November 5, 2017

⁴ Fr. Marco Tasca, OFM Conv, Minister General, Homily, November 9, 2017

2. State of the Order

The Secular Franciscan Order is present in 112 countries around the world with 70 constituted and 18 emerging national fraternities, together with a special kind of Secular Franciscans presence in other 24 countries. The Order has approximately 300,000 members.

The International Presidency of the CIOFS has been supported by several commissions (Communication, JPIC, Family, Juridical and Patrimonial, Formation, Franciscan Youth, Economic).

Many activities have been undertaken on all levels, such as the development of formation materials as well as the holding of formation workshops and international gatherings all over the world. Both Project Africa and Project China were of great value for our brothers and sisters in the areas concerned, and will be continued in the next three years. In the Arab world, OFS is struggling but growing despite difficult circumstances. Through various media (CIOFS website, Facebook, the new digital magazine Vox Franciscana), the Presidency has shared the joy of fraternal events and requested help when natural disasters occurred.

Although finances continue to be an issue for the international fraternity, significant improvement has been experienced during the past three years as more national fraternities are contributing. Related to this challenge is obtaining accurate demographic data from the national fraternities.

On the international level, the relationship with the Conference of the Franciscan Family continues to grow and mature with an excellent spirit of collaboration.

YouFra now has about 50,000 members in 34 constituted, 28 emerging national fraternities and 13 Presence. With respect to fraternal animation, the situation has improved but additional work is required in appointing fraternal animators at all levels of the fraternities (local, regional and national). Promoting double belonging to OFS and YouFra keeps being an important challenge everyone should be committed to.

With a legacy received from Emanuela De Nunzio OFS, the "Beato Raimondo Lullo" Foundation has been initiated. This foundation has been established according to the wishes of Emanuela in support of specific work within the OFS in certain areas of the world.

The chapter approved the Report of the Presidency and the Minister General, Tibor Kauser, as well as the Financial report for the past triennium.

The Conference of General Spiritual Assistants to the OFS (CAS) presented its report to the Chapter which highlighted their collegial service in various fields: meetings of the Conference itself and with others, participation in Chapters, Visits, Congresses, formation courses and various activities. Capitulars noted the special commitment of the General Assistants to the OFS and YouFra with much love and affection.

3. Chapter Theme and Presentations

The main theme of the chapter “*As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world*” (John 17:18) was addressed by Michel Versteegh, OFS (Netherlands), whose ten key words challenged us to live out our Franciscan charism in the world by going from Gospel to life and life to Gospel in our secular state.

The Chapter’s theme was continued with the Round Table during which we heard from Franco Addonizio, OFS (Italy) that it is especially important to carry out our mission in the field of public life where we can promote the common good. Lorena Campos, OFS (Spain) gave us an example of a fraternity who is in the forefront of promoting justice, peace and integrity of creation. Eugenio and Elisabetta Di Giovine, OFS (Italy) shared how they responded to the call to be sent into the world as seculars, “to proclaim salvation that would otherwise remain closed within the walls of the churches into which fewer numbers are entering.”

We further explored the chapter’s theme by delving into some specific issues affecting the Order. Anne Mulqueen, OFS (USA) reminded the friars of their importance to us, even though in some areas it has been required to have well formatted Secular Franciscans serving as Spiritual Assistants. Vice-Minister General Maria Consuelo Nuñez, OFS (Venezuela) underlined the need for accurate information on membership and concluded by giving us insights into how our Order needs to be supported by all of us. This was followed by Presidency Councillor Augustine Yoon, OFS (Korea) who offered an example of how national fraternities can organize themselves to contribute in conformity with OFS Rule, Article 25.

Maria Pia Barontini, OFS (Italy) addressed the Chapter with the procedure that is to be followed in the postulation of the causes of saints, noting in particular Pope Francis’ recent document *Maiorem hac Dilectionem*, released in July 2017. She used the beloved leaders of the OFS international fraternity, Augusto Natali, Manuela Mattioli and Emmanuela De Nunzio as examples. This was followed by Gérard Cécilien Raboanary, OFS (Madagascar) who provided an update on the process that is currently in progress for Secular Franciscan Lucien Botovaso, a martyr from Madagascar who is soon to be beatified. Then, Silvia Giuliani, OFS (Austria) presented the life of Blessed Franz Jägerstätter, a Secular Franciscan from Austria who was a farmer and conscientious objector executed during World War II. Members of the Chapter were moved and enriched by these presentations of virtuous lives of exceptional Secular Franciscans.

4. Priorities and Decisions

Following an intensive reflection by national fraternities, eight priority areas were identified for improving the management of the Order at the international level and, for each of these priorities, specific initiatives were approved. The details of the specific initiatives are described in their respective Terms of Reference⁵, which were studied by the working groups (attached for reference).

⁵ A Terms of Reference document describes an initiative in detail and provides a framework for its implementation. It includes the initiative’s objectives, the scope of the work to be undertaken, the methodology that will be used to implement the initiative, the timeframe or schedule during which the work will be done, the budget required, and the composition of the team that will implement the initiative.

- Formation

A permanent International Secretariat of OFS Formation will be established to coordinate the work of both initial and ongoing formation at the international level so as to deepen the Secular Franciscan's identity and sense of belonging to the OFS. (See Terms of Reference No.1)

- Life in Fraternity

A review will be undertaken of the structures of the Secular Franciscan Order as outlined in the General Constitutions, with an openness to modifying the General Constitutions where necessary, examining the option for a more decentralized structure that reflects the secular nature of the Secular Franciscan Order and its members. Along with creating a more decentralized structure, a more flexible governance structure should be adopted for the Order that focuses specifically on animating and guiding the local fraternity. ((See Terms of Reference No.2)

- Building a Fraternal and Evangelical World

An OFS International JPIC Secretariat will be established to coordinate JPIC activities within the OFS and to work closely with other JPIC Organizations within the Franciscan Family. This Secretariat will monitor international issues of particular interest to the OFS, provide responses to these issues and act as a focal point for the OFS during natural disasters and coordinating disaster assistance with appropriate agencies, directed to both Secular Franciscans and others in the affected areas. (See Terms of Reference No.3)

- Leadership

In order to properly manage an organization, it is essential to identify its membership; national fraternities are requested to create a national registry of all permanently professed members, as well as keeping track of their temporarily professed and admitted members. To further support the leadership of the OFS at the international level, materials suitable for the training of leaders will be developed, a pool of Secular Franciscans who have acquired extensive experience in serving the OFS will be created and utilized and the collaboration with the rest of the Franciscan Family will be strengthened. (See Terms of Reference No.4)

- Communications

A permanent International Secretariat of Communication will be established and staffed with professionals possessing the required skills in communications, website/social media management and publishing. In some cases, the office may have to retain professional staff on a contractual basis to ensure quality work. (See Terms of Reference No.5)

- Finances

The International Council will develop a financial strategy and plan for the international fraternity which includes both revenue generation strategies and expenditure management controls; this financial strategy would strive to balance the distributions of financial resources between administrative /management requirements and outreach initiatives to national fraternities in need. (See Terms of Reference No.6)

- Spiritual Assistance

All national fraternities are encouraged to reflect and discuss the role of spiritual and pastoral assistance within their specific realities, including the development of effective relationship with the Major Superiors, conducting appropriate formation of spiritual assistants and ensuring ongoing communications between spiritual assistants at all levels.

- Franciscan Youth

Secular Franciscan fraternities, at all levels, are to seek the most suitable means to foster the vitality and growth of Franciscan Youth within their particular realities, accompanying and animating YouFra with all that is necessary to ensure young people are supported along their human and spiritual journey.

- Other Matters

Concluding the discussion begun at the General Chapter 2014 in Assisi regarding the possible addition of the Portuguese language as an official language, the General Chapter has decided not to increase the number of the official languages, but to keep the current four which are: English, French, Italian and Spanish.

5. Epilogue

The celebration of the XV. General Chapter was a historic and a significant milestone in the life of the international fraternity. The identification of priorities for the Order, along with concrete initiatives to implement these priorities, was an indication of the extent to which the Order has matured since the promulgation of the Rule of pp. Blessed Paul VI from 1978. These initiatives will undoubtedly be instrumental in giving life and breath to the structures of the OFS and, together, guide the Order forward with concrete actions to build a more fraternal and evangelical world⁶. It is also worth noting that national fraternities, through their respective International Councillors, offered to share in the responsibility of resourcing these initiatives, both with human and financial resources. A desire to share in the work of leading and managing the Order at the international fraternity was evident, always based on an *authentic spiritual leadership which must be grounded in humility, minority, and service.*⁷

The General Minister, Tibor Kauser also invited the Chapter to join in the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the promulgation of the Rule, starting in June 2018, by sharing its ideas with CIOFS on how national fraternities could best mark this occasion. We have been inspired by the lives of those Secular Franciscans who have preceded us, especially Lucien Botovasoa and Franz Jägerstätter, whose virtues have already been recognized by the Catholic Church, as well as Augusto Natali, Manuela Mattioli and Emanuela De Nunzio, whom we have to be grateful for all that they have done for the Order through their acts and through the example of their lives. These Secular Franciscans have certainly responded to the values contained in the Beatitudes and have responded accordingly with their lives, trusting in the one who sent them; we too need to discover how we can live out our vocation within our specific realities as we are sent into the world.

As the Order prepares to celebrate the 40th anniversary of our Rule, it is opportune to reflect on the application of this Rule and how it is to be lived by Secular Franciscans. Let us be well prepared to go out into the world following Christ in the footsteps of St. Francis and St. Clare.

Rome, November 11, 2017

⁶ OFS Rule 14.

⁷ Fr. Michael Perry, OFM, Minister General, Homily, November 5, 2017