

**MESSAGE TO ALL THE BROTHERS AND SISTERS
OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER (OFS)
AND FRANCISCAN YOUTH (YOUFRA) OF EUROPE**

“Live in a manner worthy of the call you have received” (Eph 4: 1)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

May the Lord give you peace!

Three years after the first Congress, approximately 100 Secular Franciscan and members of Franciscan Youth (YouFra), together with their Spiritual Assistants, coming from 22 European countries, gathered for the 2nd European Congress of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) and YouFra, held in Mostar (Bosnia and Herzegovina) from August 17th to 23rd 2015.

The participants of the Congress enjoyed the cities of Mostar, with its famous bridge and Medieval Centre, and Sarajevo, called the “European Jerusalem”. Bosnia and Herzegovina is an example of a place where people are “living together” across cultural and religious borders. It is a place that invites us “to build bridges” (as Pope Francis has said) between ourselves and God, between our fraternities, between the OFS and YouFra, between the OFS and the Church, and between our Franciscan Family and the world.

The week together was an excellent opportunity to deepen our fraternal relationships as we celebrated the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours together. We were invited to reflect on our Christian and Franciscan vocation through the presentations by members of the Franciscan Family (Friars, Secular Franciscans and members of YouFra), both from our host country and from the international fraternity.

Full of gratitude to God for this unforgettable time, we offer you this message, hoping that it will help you to live your vocation more fully and to develop creative projects in order that the OFS and YouFra can increasingly become a light in the Church and in the world.

The topics of the conferences, group work, round table and testimonies of best practices can be summarized in the following four priorities:

1. Life of prayer – fostering a closer relationship with Christ

The universal call for all Christians is the call to holiness. Our vocation as Secular Franciscans is a process that we continue to build through personal conversion to Christ, who is the center of our lives. We follow him after the example of our Seraphic Father. Some means to cultivate our vocation, individually and in fraternity, are: Eucharist, the Gospel, fasting, reconciliation and prayer – particularly, the rosary.

2. Life in fraternity – living the Gospel

The fraternity is the perfect place where we can live the love that we have encountered in the Gospels. Fraternal life is of vital importance. It provides an opportunity to support one another, to embrace challenges and to experience perfect joy. Our fraternities need to be strengthened at all levels by intensifying common prayer, deepening the relationship between brothers and sisters and creating a spirit of welcome.

3. Family – giving a good example

We live in a society where the number of marriages is decreasing, where the family is considered less important and where many children grow up in families that are incomplete. In addition, the Catholic teaching on marriage is being challenged by different ideologies including gender ideology.

The family can be considered to be the heritage of all humanity. We are therefore called to promote and protect the family, starting with our own families, by living strong lives of prayer, practicing forgiveness, communicating with each other in our daily lives, spending time together, and sharing our faith with children by giving a good example. Through these efforts, and by prudently but openly presenting our way of life in the media, we will provide a witness to society of the beauty and the importance of family life, without judging people in different circumstances.

Our fraternities should find ways to support families and family life, taking seriously the Conclusions of the last General Chapter. The OFS and YouFra must follow the teachings of the Church, especially in light of the upcoming Synod of Bishops on the Family.

Proper formation of YouFra and OFS members on the Family is of significant importance.

4. Social and ecological commitment – developing our spirit of service

It is important to note that we do not live for ourselves but for others. As part of our growth in Franciscan spirituality, we are called “to embrace the leper”. This will lead us to challenges on several topics, for instance:

- protecting human life from conception to natural death, with special attention to the most vulnerable;
- being sensitive and reacting to the problems of poverty in the world, and making more responsible use of the goods that we need;
- studying and implementing the encyclical letter of Pope Francis, *Laudato si'*¹ and thereby “converting to ecology”

We entrust this message and the future of the OFS and of the YouFra in Europe to Our Lady, Queen of Peace, to our Father Saint Francis, to Saint Louis and Saint Elizabeth, praying that they will lead us to fruitful actions.

Omnipotent, Eternal, just and merciful God, grant to us wretches that doing for Thy very own sake, what we know Thou wants, and always wanting, what pleases Thee. (EpOrd)

¹ See also www.francis35.org