



ORDO FRANCISCANUS SAECULARIS

Consilium Internationale

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Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception

To the International Councillors of the OFS and YOUFRA  
To the OFS National Councils  
To the YOUFRA National Councils

"My soul magnifies the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior"

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

May the Lord give you peace!

On such a special day for our Franciscan family, I turn to you with joy in my soul, because we also belong to the generations called to join ourselves to the Magnificat in exalting the infinite goodness of God. By saying "YES", Mary expresses her love for the humanity of Jesus. We celebrate this feast with gratitude and appreciation of Mary. We are almost halfway through the season of Advent during which we should live, like Mary, waiting for Christ, desiring Christ, loving Christ.

And, on this significant day, I send you in the name of the CIOFS Presidency, documents relating to XIII General Chapter of the Secular Franciscan Order, held in the city of São Paulo (Brazil), from 22 to 29 October of this year 2011. You already know about some of them since they have been the basis of our work during the Chapter, and the International Councilors will have probably shared them with their respective National Councils. We send them now, formally, in final form and content, since during the Chapter they were working materials to be studied and reflected upon by Capitulars (Chapter attendees).

The chapter developed in an atmosphere of prayer, of hard work, of reflection and of sharing - as was the responsibility of each person, as is life itself. During the Chapter, conscious of its responsibility, the Presidency gave important commissions to several brothers and sisters of the new generation of the Order, so that they could be involved in the life of the International Fraternity, since they should help to delineate the profile of our Order, not in the future, but rather already in the present moment. This decision was appreciated by the Capitulars and we must say that it has been very positive.

The chapter has reflected on the themes established to achieve its aim of being "Evangelized to evangelize." The keynote address had a strong impact on the Capitulars because of the challenge for each one to live his/her own vocation, which is nothing but to be truly Christian, like Francis of Assisi. The keynote speaker, Fr Fernando Ventura, OFM Cap., strongly provoked the Capitulars to elicit a strong awareness from those Secular Franciscans who have not yet assumed their own responsibility, conscious of their mission in the Church and in the Franciscan Family, bringing to both their very "being" and their actions. (The theme will be published as soon as possible on our website).

I should make special mention of two subtopics

1. *"A specific vocation for a particular mission"*-- it was followed with great attention and strongly emphasized in the work groups.

2. *"Building of a fraternal and evangelical world (Instrument of peace and reconciliation)* – it was developed in the form of a round table, and elicited a very positive reaction to the first point on respect for life, especially within the " socio-political area;" great emotion when the second point was addressed regarding the "Area of poverty and suffering", based on the experience of the Haitian earthquake, as well as the third point on "Bearers of mercy and builders of peace", based on the genocide in Rwanda and the experience of the OFS to this tragedy; a wonderful sense of hope when the fourth point was presented on "Youth and the Franciscan commitment", based on the concrete experiences lived by young people in society today and also in the Church. Finally, a summary of the work of the Presence in the World Commission was presented, illustrating the various initiatives of the Order in various parts of the world.

Both documents will be published soon on the website.

With this introduction, I communicate to you the tasks and decisions of the Chapter:

1. It approved the report of the Minister General on the performance of the Presidency and the challenges faced during the past triennium. Note that this is an internal document and cannot be published on a Web page or social Network. (Annex/Appendix 1 and its corresponding annexes/appendices -1, 2, 3-).
2. It noted with perplexity that a large number of the National Fraternities have not made their annual financial contribution. (Annex/Appendix 4).
3. It approved the financial statements for the years 2008 to 2010, verified the audit required by our General Constitutions before the conclusion of a Chapter (cf. CCGG.74.2.k) and approved the triennial budget for the years 2012 to 2014. (Annexes/Appendices 5).
4. It familiarized itself with the activities of the General Assistants, through the report of the President of the Conference of Spiritual Assistants (CAS). (Annex/Appendix 6)
5. It recognized and shared the status of the Franciscan Youth at the present time. The International Coordination for Franciscan Youth will report on its own website page which will become part of the new site being developed by CIOFS.
6. It followed with great interest the communication about the OFS in China and the work that is being done. To safeguard the security of the people involved, for the moment, we cannot attach a summary of the communication, because it must be reworked to avoid putting our brothers and sisters at risk.
7. It experienced intensely the communication on "The Importance of Family for the OFS" presented by a married couple. This communication encouraged the Chapter to deepen the foundations of Articles 12, 15, 17, 23 and 24 of our General Constitutions and may possibly be considered for further elaboration during the Elective General Chapter in 2014. (Appendix 7).
8. It reflected on the responsibilities of the International Councillor, relative to the difficulties that we continually encounter during fraternal and pastoral visits, as well as during Chapters, and relative to the absolute lack of communication by a large number of National Councils. (Annex/Appendix 8).
9. It made a major decision on the official name of our Order and the use of the corresponding acronym, referring to the official Latin name, so that it will be the same for the whole Order. (Annex/Appendix 9).
10. It interpreted Article 43 of the General Constitutions, which refers to the distinctive sign for Secular Franciscans and approved a decision which strictly forbids the use of a habit of a religious nature for members of our Order. (Annex/Appendix 10)
11. It approved the decision of the Presidency to refrain from holding Fraternal and Pastoral Visits at the same time as elective chapters. (Annex/Appendix 11)

12. It developed a message for our Poor Clare Sisters to celebrate the 8th Centenary of the birth of the "Poor Ladies," which we ask you to take to the Convent of Poor Clares closest to each local fraternity, as a sign of love for them and as a way of completing our Family. (Annex/Appendix 12)
13. It approved the Conclusions of the Chapter, which apply to the entire Secular Franciscan Order and which, together with those of the Chapter of 2008, must be studied and implemented gradually in all fraternities at all levels of our Order. The National Councils and International Councillors have a special responsibility to ensure that the conclusions reach each local and regional Fraternity of the OFS and of Franciscan Youth. (Annex/Appendix 13)
14. Lastly, it sent a message to the whole Order expressing the joy experienced during the days of the Chapter, along with its efforts and hopes for the future. Accepting the challenges that face the Church and society today confront all Franciscans, youth and adults alike. (Annex/Appendix 14)

I deeply regret not being able to offer the Statistical situation of our Order, because more than half of the national councils have not responded to a very simple survey that we requested. This lack of collaboration puts me in a situation of personal crisis (and also the Presidency) because it indicates a substantial lack of interest and a lack of the sense of belonging to our Order, at a time when the Church is calling us to show proof of our real presence in the world and to provide the true data on our numbers.

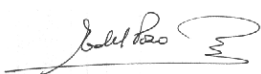
I express my sincere hope that this will not happen again. And since we are in the season of Advent I propose to you to have the courage and determination to build a new future that is rooted firmly in our past. Advent, announcing the coming of the Lord, invites us to open ourselves to the new things that God wants us to do in our lives. He comes in person to save us, and He has power to change our lives, to do something new in us.

The season of Advent is a penitential time, a time of conversion to God, but it is penance full of hope, a penance which is nourished by the joy of the event for which we are preparing. The Christmas event that is approaching is "God with us", and for this reason, we must make room in our hearts for Him. He will come, we will recognize Him, we will love Him, we will hug Him, especially in those who suffer the most and in the poor and we will remember with gratitude that it was our poverty that opened the door for us so that we might desire Him, so we might wait/hope for Him, so that we might love Him.

May the Virgin Mary, who with her "yes", opened the door to God, help us walk in faith and overcome all the difficulties that we may find in our Christian life.

My dear brothers and sisters with the Presidency of CIOFS, I wish you a Merry Christmas! May you have a happy encounter with Christ! I wish you all the best during the new year 2012!

Your sister,




Encarnación del Pozo, OFS  
Minister General