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MERCY: TRANSFORMING GRACE AND MISSION

TO LIVE MERCY IN FRATERNITY

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Introduction

What does it mean to live mercy? How do we live mercy in fraternity? These questions pop up immediately when we write about “living mercy in fraternity”. To begin, it will help to define precisely the meaning of the terms, which will help us understand the underlying reality they seek to describe. What do we understand when we say mercy? When we say fraternity? The dictionary defines fraternity as a feeling of affection that binds brothers and sisters together. Fraternity is a feeling of affection for someone who is close, those who are “neighbors”. Consequently, we can say that to live mercy in fraternity is to live mercy among brothers and sisters, among those who are close, who are neighbors.

A doctor of the law asks Jesus in the Gospel of Luke: “Who is my neighbor? (Lk 10,25-27). For Jewish tradition, neighbor is someone who belongs to the family circle, with the possibility of widening the circle to include someone who is part of the Covenant with God, that is, a member of the same community. In this perspective it is not possible to love one’s enemies. In Jewish tradition it is only possible to create fraternity with those who participate in the Covenant, who are part of the people of God. We can say that fraternity is determined by family ties, by pursuing the same objectives and the same beliefs. Christianity widens the concept of neighbor. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus presents a new idea of neighbor that goes beyond the the dimension of family or membership in the same community. He invites the doctor of the law to widen his concept of neighbor; it is: “The one who acted with mercy toward him”. Jesus reminds the doctor of the practice of justice expressed in the works of mercy. Neighbor, fraternity and mercy are terms which are intertwined and relate to one another.

Christianity is characterized by its presentation of “neighbor” in a universal way. Neighbor is all humanity saved by Jesus Christ. Jesus, the new Moses, presents a New Law in the eight Beatitudes. He proposes: “Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. And pray for those who persecute and slander you” (Mt 5,44). His proposal transforms the concept of neighbor.

In recent centuries equality between all human beings has been presented as the foundation of universal fraternity, ignoring the fact that: “The history of faith has been from the beginning a history of brotherhood, albeit not without conflict... Faith teaches us to see that every man and woman represents a blessing for me, that the light of God’s face shines on me through the faces of my brothers and sisters...Thanks to faith we have come to understand the unique dignity of each

person, something which was not clearly seen in antiquity... At the heart of biblical faith is God's love, his concrete concern for every person, and his plan of salvation which embraces all of humanity and all creation, culminating in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ"¹.

Fraternity – what is it?

Fraternity is the path of fulfillment for human life. It is not possible to fulfill oneself humanly without being in communion with others. Without living in fraternity it is impossible to survive physically, psychologically and spiritually. "In the heart of every man and woman is the desire for a full life, including that irrepressible longing for fraternity which draws us to fellowship with others and enables us to see them not as enemies or rivals, but as brothers and sisters to be accepted and embraced"². Fraternity is an essential dimension of humankind, because humans are relational beings. "The basis of fraternity is found in God's fatherhood...It is a fatherhood, then, which effectively generates fraternity"³.

Fraternity is the dream of God revealed by the prophet Isaiah: "The wolf will dwell with the lamb; and the leopard will lie down with the kid; the calf and the lion and the sheep will abide together; and a little boy will drive them. The calf and the bear will feed together; their young ones will rest together. And the lion will eat straw like the ox. And a breastfeeding infant will play above the lair of the asp. And a child who has been weaned will thrust his hand into the den of the king snake. They will not harm, and they will not kill, on all my holy mountain. For the earth has been filled with the knowledge of the Lord, like the waters covering the sea" (Is 11, 6-9).

When the other is seen as brother or sister, his or her fulfillment becomes a priority and precedes our own fulfillment. Saint Francis calls this fraternal attitude loving obedience. "And should a subject see that some things might be better and more useful for his soul than what a prelate commands, let him willingly offer such things to God as a sacrifice; and, instead, let him earnestly strive to fulfill the prelates's wishes. For this is loving obedience because it pleases God and neighbor"⁴.

When Saint Francis composed the Canticle of Brother Sun in the spring of 1225, he included all of the other creatures, widening in this way the notion of fraternity. Saint Francis "stretches the idea of human fraternity into that of cosmic fraternity, revealing not only an ecological consciousness but also a true relationship with all of Creation"⁵. But we must be careful not "to put all living beings on the same level nor to deprive human beings of their unique worth and the tremendous responsibility it entails"⁶. Cosmic fraternity is not based on the equality of all beings, but rather on

¹ Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter Lumen Fidei*, 29 June 2013, n. 54

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20130629_enciclica-lumen-fidei.html

² Pope Francis, Message for the celebration of the World Day of Peace – 1 January 2014, n.1.

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20131208_messaggio-xlvi-giornata-mondiale-pace-2014.html

³ *Ibid* n.3.

⁴ Admonition III. Perfect Obedience. Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, Volume I, p. 130. New City Press, New York, 1999.

*NB – In medieval ecclesiastical language the term *prelate* generically designates any person who is responsible for the "care of souls", from bishops to parish priests. Francis extended the concept to include the "ministers" of the fraternities, who are called to care for the souls of the brothers (See Earlier Rule IV, 6).

⁵ Card. Roger Etchegaray, *Homily at the celebration of the Jubilee of the Franciscan Family in 2000*:

http://www.vatican.va/jubilee_2000/pilgrim/documents/ju_gp_20042000_p-5c_it.html

⁶ Pope Francis, *Laudato si*, 24 May 2015, n.90. http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

the creative love of God. “Every creature is thus the object of the Father’s tenderness, who gives it its place in the world”⁷.

Cosmic fraternity can also be grasped by the expression “*integral ecology*”, where it is understood “that everything is interconnected, and that genuine care for our own lives and our relationships with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice and faithfulness to others”⁸.

Pope Francis says that we “together form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion which fills us with a sacred, affectionate and humble respect”⁹. This communion is realized “when our hearts are authentically open to universal communion, this sense of fraternity excludes nothing and no one... Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth”¹⁰.

Mercy – what is it?

For Pope Francis, mercy is a program of life. The theme of mercy is abundantly present in his talks, homilies and catechetical teachings, because “mercy is the heart of the Gospel!”¹¹. “The calling of Matthew is also presented within the context of mercy... Saint Bede the Venerable, commenting on this Gospel passage, wrote that Jesus looked upon Matthew with merciful love and chose him: *miserando atque eligendo*”¹². Pope Francis chose this expression as his slogan and program of life¹³. He declares that mercy is the face and the name of God¹⁴, and also that “Jesus Christ is the face of the Father’s mercy”¹⁵.

In the Bull “*Misericordiae Vultus*” there is a definition for mercy. “Mercy: the word reveals the very mystery of the Most Holy Trinity. Mercy: the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us. Mercy: the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life. Mercy: the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness”¹⁶.

“God is love” (1 John 4:8.16), and “This love has now been made visible and tangible in Jesus’ entire life. His person is nothing but love, a love given gratuitously... Everything in him speaks of mercy”¹⁷.

⁷ *Ibid.* n.77.

⁸ *Ibid.* n.70.

⁹ *Ibid.* n.89.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* n. 92.

¹¹ Pope Francis, *Address to participants in a course sponsored by the Apostolic Penitentiary*, 28 March 2014. http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/march/documents/papa-francesco_20140328_corso-penitenzieria-apostolica.html

¹² Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 11 April 2015, n.8. <http://www.iubilaeummisericordiae.va/content/gdm/en/giubileo/bolla.html>

¹³ Cfr. The explanation of the Coat of Arms of Pope Francis. <http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/elezione/stemma-papa-francesco.html>

¹⁴ Cfr. Pope Francis, *Angelus*, 18 August 2013. http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2013/documents/papa-francesco_angelus_20130818.html

¹⁵ Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 11 April 2015, n.1.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* n.2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* n.8.

In the parable of the merciful father (Lk 15,11-32), Jesus reveals how God acts, how mercy overcomes everything, how it fills the heart with love and consoles with pardon¹⁸.

To Live Mercy in Fraternity

Fraternity promotes mercy, and mercy is only possible in fraternity. Fraternity is the space where mercy is lived. But fraternity brings about mercy and it is not just the social constitution of a human group. More than a juridical form designating a human grouping, fraternity is a way of being for its members.

The parable of the merciful father (Lk 15,11-32), “contains a profound teaching for all of us. Jesus affirms that mercy is not only an action of the Father, it becomes a criterion for ascertaining who his true children are. In short, we are called to show mercy because mercy has first been shown to us... the words of Jesus who made mercy an ideal of life and a criterion for the credibility of our faith: “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (Mt 5:7)”¹⁹.

Mercy shows “God’s action towards us... By its very nature, it indicates something concrete: intentions, attitudes, and behaviors that are shown in daily living. As the Father loves, so do his children. Just as he is merciful, so we are called to be merciful to each other”²⁰.

We are invited open our hearts: “Let us open our eyes and see the misery of the world, the wounds of our brothers and sisters who are denied their dignity, and let us recognize that we are compelled to heed their cry for help! May we reach out to them and support them so they can feel the warmth of our presence, our friendship, and our fraternity”²¹.

Conclusion

The Pope tells us: “At times we are called to gaze even more attentively on mercy so that we may become a more effective sign of the Father’s action in our lives. For this reason, I have proclaimed an Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy as a special time for the Church, a time when the witness of believers might grow stronger and more effective”²².

Jubilee is always an extraordinary time to live what is essential to human life and resize it according to parameters that are not measurable because God has imprinted in men's hearts a mark of his divinity: mercy, another name for love.

NEWS – CHAPTERS – VISITS – MEETINGS

Roma – Seraphicum – CIOFS Presidency

From April 2nd to 9th 2016, the meeting of the CIOFS Presidency was held at the Seraphicum College, Rome. There was a fraternal and respectful atmosphere among the members of the Presidency. A sign of brotherhood was the farewell given to Br. Martin Bitzer, OFMConv, who ends his service after 12 years. In this meeting the rotation of the chairman and secretary of the

¹⁸ cfr. *Ibid.* n.9.

¹⁹ Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 11 April 2015, n.9.

²⁰ *Ibid.* n.9.

²¹ *Ibid.* n.15

²² *Ibid.* n.3.

CAS on duty took place. Br. José Antonio Cruz Duarte OFM outgoing president thanked the members of the CAS for the work done and presented the new President Br. Amando Trujillo Cano, TOR, and the new secretary Br. Francis Bongajum Dor, OFMCap. The liturgy, a sign of union with God, was simple but well attended. With the participation of all we got to finish well all the topics that were proposed in the agenda.

Vietnam – National Elective Chapter

The National Elective Chapter of the OFS in Vietnam was celebrated from May 13th to 15th in Thu Duc - Ho Chi Minh City, at the Retreat House San Damiano. In a fraternal atmosphere, 40 chapter members took part. The Chapter took place with the support of the Vietnamese Province of the Minor Friars of St. Francis of Assisi. Augustine Yoon, Councilor of the CIOFS Presidency, delegated by the OFS General Minister, presided over the Chapter with Br. Luke Young JinYoo, OFM, as delegate of the CAS. On May 15th, as planned, the election of the new Council took place, and Paul Nguyen Van Hoa was elected National Minister, Anton Phung Bai International Councilor and Joseph Vu Van Khai substitute International Councilor. The elected members accepted the election. The new National Executive Council was installed during the Holy Mass of Thanksgiving.

Malta – National Chapter

Between May 20th and 21st, in the "Franciscan Center" of Floriana, the National Elective Chapter of Malta took place presided over by Tibor Kauser, OFS General Minister, together with Br. Martín Bitzer, OFMConv, General Assistant OFS. Anthony Vella was elected National Minister and Godwin Vella Clark, International Councilor.

Ethiopia - Visit and professions

From May 22nd. to 29th. 2016, according to a decision of the CIOFS Presidency, Jenny Harrington, Councilor of the Presidency Br. Francis Bongajum Dor, OFMCap, General Assistant OFS-YouFra made an extraordinary visit to Ethiopia. The purpose of the visit was to hold a moment of formation for the Spiritual Assistants, to evaluate the situation of certain groups of people formed by the Capuchin Friars in different missions with a view to begin again the OFS in Ethiopia, and that Jenny Harrington, according to her assessment, might accept the profession of some, on behalf of the General Minister OFS, Tibor Kauser. After a day of formation for Spiritual Assistants, the visitors met groups in four different locations: Addis Ababa, Kanafa (in Soddo), Bushulo (in Hawassa) and Meganasse, all followed by the Capuchin Friars, although in Bushulo and Kanafa some nearby Franciscan sisters accompany closely these groups. On Sunday 29th. during the Eucharistic celebration presided by Br. Endale OFMCap, vicar of the Custody of Ethiopia, in the Church of San Francesco in Meganasse, Jenny Harrington received the profession of 23 Secular Franciscans, and then appointed a council to animate the nascent fraternity. Other professions are planned in the coming months in other cities according to the availability of the Presidency to send someone to receive them. To be noted is the great commitment of the Capuchin Friars in promoting the OFS in their churches and fraternities.

Quito, Ecuador - IX Latin American Congress OFS-YouFra

In Cumbaya, Quito, Ecuador, in the Retreat House "San Patricio" of the Salesian Fathers, from May 25th to 29th 2016, the "OFS-Youfra IX Latin American Congress" was celebrated. From the Presidency of the OFS International Council (CIOFS) Tibor Kauser, OFS General Minister, Chelito Nuñez, General Vice-Minister OFS, Andrea Odak, Councilor for YouFra, Silvia Diana and Ana María Rafo Laos, both Councilor for Latin America, Portugal, Spain and the Portuguese-speaking nations, Br. Amando Trujillo Cano, TOR, and Br. Martin Bitzer OFMConv, General Assistant OFS-YouFra attended. The event organized by the OFS National Council of Ecuador with the collaboration of the OFS Presidency was attended by 17 national fraternities of the OFS and

Franciscan Youth in Latin America and the Caribbean. The theme of the Congress was: "Secular Franciscans, a family of Christian values in America." Moments of prayer (Mass, Lauds, Vespers, Eucharistic Adoration), fellowship and formation marked the event. The nine working groups examined the different issues presented. The members of the CIOFS Presidency coordinated and animated the three workshops: 1. Guidance and animation of the OFS; 2. The Franciscan Youth and the family in Latin America; 3. The spiritual assistance of the local fraternity. The opening Mass (Wednesday, May 25th.) was presided over by Br. Amando, president of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants, while the closing Mass (Sunday, May 29th.) was presided over by Br. Martin. In this Eucharist Br. Amando made a fraternal acknowledgement of Br. Martin for his 12 years of service as General Assistant OFS-YouFra. The afternoon and evening of Friday, May 27th was devoted to a trip to the "Middle of the World", the historic center of Quito and the Convent of St. Francis, where the participants were welcomed with dances and songs typical of Ecuador and a dinner offered by the national Council and by the OFM Friars. For more information, you can consult the web page www.congresoofsjufra.blmogsport.com .

Italy - Pastoral and Fraternal Visit

The fraternal and pastoral visits of OFS-Italy were made by Tibor Kauser, OFS General Minister and Br. Francis Bongajum Dor, OFM^{Cap}, General Spiritual Assistant OFS-YouFra from June 1st to 5th 2016. The meetings and exchanges were made at the national headquarters in viale delle Mura Aurelia 9, Rome. 12 members from the 13 in total of the National Council were present for the visit - the majority remaining from start to finish (the representative of the Franciscan Youth was absent). The visitors started the visits with a Mass presided by Br. Francis in which he prayed for the success of the visits and reminded all of the main purpose of the visits according to the OFS General Constitutions. Then, after a brief plenary session of introduction, the visitors over the following days listened to each member individually and shared with the four Spiritual Assistants together. Tibor also saw all the registers and archives. A day with the regional ministers was planned and realised. Many came to the meeting, each one giving a very brief presentation of the situation of the OFS in his or her region. On the 3rd day, everyone went to the Monastery of Santa Chiara in via Vitellia for vespers with the sisters, followed by a conference held on Mercy by Sister Elena, Poor Clare. Since everything was well prepared and carried out on time, the visits (fraternal and pastoral) were concluded a little early on the afternoon of the fourth day, with a plenary session in which the visitors presented the conclusions and some recommendations.

It is important to note that the work began every day with Holy Mass and morning prayer in the Chapel of the National Headquarters. Both the visitors were very pleased with what they saw as an experience of fraternal relations and commitment to the service of the Order in the National Council of the OFS-Italy.

San Juan, Puerto Rico - Formation workshop for Spiritual Assistants to OFS

On Thursday, June 2nd. a formation workshop for the spiritual assistants of the OFS in Puerto Rico took place at St. Anthony School, in San Juan Porto Rico. The workshop was organized by the National Council and the OFS National Minister, Isabel Lima Pérez, and was directed by Br. Amando Trujillo Cano, TOR, General Assistant OFS-YouFra. Ten assistants attended the meetings, nine Capuchin brothers and a Friar Minor, including the National Assistant, Br. Luis Gonzalez, OFM^{Cap}, and the former National Assistant Br. Luis Oscar Padilla OFM^{Cap}. The themes presented and discussed were: 1) The Origin, history and mission of the OFS, and 2) The spiritual and pastoral care of OFS. The workshop was a good opportunity to clarify some doubts and look for ways to improve the service of spiritual assistance to the OFS fraternity. The meetings were concluded with a fraternal agape.

Utuaado, Puerto Rico - Formation workshop for Secular Franciscans

From Friday 3rd to Sunday, June 5th a formation workshop was held for the Secular Franciscans of Puerto Rico in the house "San José de la Porciúncula", Utuaado, Puerto Rico, organized by the National Council and the OFS National Minister, Isabel Pérez Lima; it was directed by Br. Amando Trujillo Cano, TOR, General Assistant OFS-YouFra. About 60 Secular Franciscans from various local OFS Fraternities of the Island attended the workshop. The themes were: 1) The Origin, history and mission of the OFS, 2) The identity of the OFS, 3) Active presence of the OFS in the Church and in the world, 4) The spiritual assistance and pastoral care of the OFS, and 5) the sense of brotherhood in the OFS. The workshop took place in an atmosphere of fraternity and active participation. The working groups and plenary sessions were very fruitful. The work was accompanied by liturgical celebrations and fraternal recreation, surrounded by an exuberant nature.

Ukraine - National Elective Chapter

The National Elective Chapter in the Ukraine was held from June 3rd to 5th at the "House of Mary and bread" managed and restored by the OFS National Council, in Starij Ostropil, Khmielnickiy region. The Chapter was presided over by the delegate of the General Minister Tibor Kauser, Attilio Galimberti, member of the CIOFS Presidency and Br. Rufino Maryjka, OFM, Provincial Minister of the Province of Saint Mary of the Angels of Krakow as the Delegate of CAS. In a spirit of prayer, fraternity, service and reception it was attended by 52 representative chapter members of the 1,300 Secular Franciscans of Ukraine. The three National Assistants, and a National Assistant of YouFra, and some local assistants were also present. Natalia Almiz was elected National Minister, Dina Francesca Szabalina was elected International Councilor and Christina Lopaczak Deputy International Director. At the Mass of installation, the National Assistant, Br Krzysztof Pelc, OFMCap presided.

Bulgaria - Sofia Chapter of the fraternity

In Bulgaria there is an OFS fraternity in Sofia, the only fraternity established in Bulgaria, and another in Zhitnitsa, of which nothing is known about the canonical erection. The fraternity of Zhitnitsa consists of older and infirm women. The fraternity of Sofia consists of only 6 brothers. The elective Chapter of the OFS fraternity of Sofia in Bulgaria was celebrated on June 17th at the "Center of the Parish Church of St. Joseph" in Sofia. The Chapter was presided over by the delegate of the General Minister Tibor Kauser, Attilio Galimberti, member of the Presidency CIOFS and Br. José Antonio Cruz Duarte, OFM, General Assistant. The spiritual assistant Br. Marcin Grec, OFMCap, and Br. Jaroslaw Babik Guardian, OFMCap, were present. Vesselin Krastev was elected Minister of the fraternity, and Elizabeta Bosilkova was elected vice-minister.

Dominican Republic - National Elective Chapter

The National Elective Chapter of the OFS of the Dominican Republic was celebrated from June 24th to 26th, in Santo Domingo. The Chapter was presided over by the delegate of the General Minister Tibor Kauser, Isabel Lima Pérez, National Minister of Puerto Rico, and Br. Gerardo A. Vargas Cruz, OFM, Custos of the Franciscan Custody of the Caribbean as a delegate of the CAS. In a spirit of prayer, fraternity, service and reception, 14 regional ministers of the 15 regions attended the chapter. Br Juan Miguel Gutierrez, OFM, and Br Fernando Samaniego, OFM, National Spiritual Assistants were present. María Mejía was elected National Minister, Luismi Diego Ruiz was elected Deputy Minister, Aida López was elected International Councilor. The inaugural Mass was celebrated by Br. Gerardo A. Vargas Cruz, OFM.

Lusaka - Zambia – Formation Course

From June 22nd to 25th, a formation workshop was held at St. Bonaventure's University Institute in Lusaka - Zambia for Spiritual Assistants and members of the OFS National Councils of English-

speaking East African countries. This was the first planned and realized by the coordination of the Africa Project of the CIOFS. It was attended by 90 delegates including 16 Spiritual Assistants from ten different countries including Angola and Mozambique that are Portuguese-speaking. The project was approved and sponsored in part by the CIOFS Presidency and had as the main theme: "let's start again because until now we have done little or nothing." The animators of the workshops, Jenny Harrington, OFS, and Br. Francis Bongajum Dor, OFM^{Cap}, made presentations on the identity and nature of the OFS, guidelines for formation, roles and responsibilities of major superiors and spiritual assistants, and on the social teaching of the Church. A third speaker, Daniel Chidemu from Zimbabwe gave a testimony about the family. All participants were hosted at the three convents of the Friars Minor that make up St. Bonaventure's University Institute. At the end of the work, the participants who were able, made a pilgrimage to the Marian Shrine in Lusaka. The Africa Project Coordinator, Adolph Assagba OFS-Togo did not have a visa for Zambia, and so was absent. But he sent a greeting of encouragement to all the participants. With the grace of God, for next year, members of the Africa Project foresee a forthcoming workshop in French for West and Central Africa. Despite the initial uncertainty and some difficulties in communication and organization, this workshop was a great success, thanks to the support of the Friars Minor of the place.

United States - OFS Quinquennial Congress

From June 30th to July 4th, in the city of Saint Louis, Louisiana, USA, the Quinquennial Congress of the OFS was celebrated. Among the 600 participants were also four members of the Presidency CIOFS: Tibor Kauser, OFS General Minister, Ana Fruk, Jenny Harrington and Br. Martin Bitzer, OFM^{Conv}, who, in addition to presenting the different topics asked of them, made up a round table on Saturday, July 2nd. The speakers were as different as the form of presentation of their reports. Work in small groups made possible the participation of all delegates. Br Martin presided over the Mass of Friday, July 1st. Reflections, moments of celebration and fraternal sharing experienced in a very organized and structured environment meant that this Congress took place with great success. The US National Council together with its national Minister Jan Parker demonstrated a great unity and capacity for work which involved a large number of collaborators, starting with the members of the OFS Regional Council based in Saint Louis. The presence of Secular Franciscans from various regions of the United States is a positive sign that opens up interesting prospects for the OFS recovery in that country. For more information, you can visit the website. <http://www.quinquennial.org/>

Words of Gratitude to Br. Martin Bitzer, OFM^{Conv}

The Conference of General Spiritual Assistants would like to thank Br. Martin Bitzer for his fraternal service to the OFS and CAS carried out during these twelve years, extending to him the best possible wishes for his new assignment. Martin Bitzer, OFM^{Conv}, was appointed General Assistant of the OFS and YouFra on July 2nd, 2004. Thank you, dear Br. Martin, from the heart.