

VOX FRANCISCANA

Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis



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'Praise Your Creator'

SITE WHERE FRANCIS
PREACHED TO BIRDS
TO BE A SANCTUARY



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OFS AT VATICAN

Minister General Tibor Kauser spent a week reporting on the Order in meetings at the Holy See, including spending time with Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin. PAGES 6-7.



JPIC IN MADAGASCAR

Franciscan youth bring formation workshop on ecology and climate to Secular Franciscans and others in Madagascar. PAGES 11-13.



**THE TAU
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**OFS ACTION
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CHAPTERS
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COVERS

The Piandarca field where Francis preached to birds will be immortalized as a sanctuary. PAGES 8-10.

Cover: a sparrow sings. *iStockphoto*

Back cover: the field is already equipped with a large Tau that is lit with splendor at night. *Photo provided by Ottaviano Turrioni.*



Minister General Tibor Kauser, OFS, leads Presidency teleconference from his office in Hungary.

CIOFS: pandemic doesn't stop Presidency's business

by ROBERT STRONACH, OFS

Members of the CIOFS Presidency (in effect, the Order's international executive council) were busy doing the Order's business, visiting national fraternities to conduct fraternal and pastoral visitations, and preside over elections.

Then the COVID-19 virus struck, spreading across the globe. Travel came to a halt. Meetings and chapters were canceled. Elections were postponed.

Nevertheless, Secular Franciscans stayed on

mission. When the pandemic forced the cancellation of its semi-annual meeting in Rome in April, the CIOFS Presidency morphed into video meetings (via Zoom). From April to July, the Presidency met twice a month, and then once a month.

"We have never done anything like this before," Minister General Tibor Kauser, OFS, declared at the opening teleconference. "With help of God, we will manage to accomplish something."

They were facing several

challenges. Perhaps one of the biggest was the 2020 General Chapter scheduled for November. They delved into preparations for the chapter. Over the period of several teleconferences, it became clear that the General Chapter would likely have to be postponed. For how long? Six months? A year?

Since it was to be an elective chapter, the current leaders would have to continue in office. The current budget would have to be extended until capitulars could approve

a new three-year budget when the chapter finally convenes.

In the meantime the Presidency was maintaining contact with national fraternities – at one point asking their opinion of rescheduling the General Chapter (with an overwhelming response in favor of postponing). The Presidency continued to plan chapter details, and tackled a host of other topics; among them, revision of Statute of the International Fraternity, *Continued on page 5.*

CIOFS Presidency

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translations of the Rule and General Constitutions, communicating with the Vatican, communications (including launching a new website), finances, YouFra, national fraternities, etc.

“I have extended all the mandates that usually expire during this time,” Tibor noted during the Presidency’s second April teleconference. He said he was communicating with national fraternities who were supposed to have elective chapters to let them

know that current leaders would continue to serve until elections could be scheduled and conducted.

The topic of the General Chapter occupied a place in every teleconference. They discussed the possible theme and logo, the Instrumentum Laboris (the basic working document), roundtable sessions, the inclusive role of Franciscan youth, among other things.

Among various actions taken, the Presidency:

-- agreed to postpone the YouFra International Assembly in Mexico to July 2021.

-- approved new national statutes for the National Fraternity of Brazil.

-- discussed the idea of allowing national fraternities to conduct virtual chapters. Definitely no for elections because of the requirement for voters to be present and for secret balloting. For other chapters it is to be discouraged except in an extraordinary

circumstance – such as the case with the National Fraternity of Romania, which needed to approve changes to its national statutes in order to forward them to the Presidency for approval. “It is not a model for other chapters,” Tibor noted. “In this situation, it’s of the utmost importance to be able to finish changes to national statutes.”

-- postponed the General Chapter to November 13-20, 2021, to be held at



CIOFS Presidency holds teleconference via Zoom, with participants from Italy, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Portugal, Lebanon, Korea, South Africa, Peru, Argentina, Venezuela, and the USA.

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the Seraphicum in Rome, Italy, after discussing “the time required to return to normalcy,” including “the economic recovery of fraternities.”

-- approved a design from Hungary for the General Chapter theme and logo.

-- reviewed draft prayers for the General Chapter submitted by the general spiritual assistants.

-- approved a formation guide dealing with frater-

nity finances.

-- approved producing a short video message to express solidarity with fraternities during the pandemic.

-- heard from Presidency councilors that many national fraternities don't think they will be able to meet in chapter until 2021.

“We need to know at least six months in advance to prepare for elective chapters,” Tibor said.

“Fraternal and pastoral

visits are different. Regulations say they need to be done once every six years, so it's simpler to postpone them. We should contact first those national fraternities who would have elective chapters this year or beginning of next year; and then those who would have elective chapters in the spring and summer of next year.”

There was always some discussion of the impact of the pandemic on fra-

ternities. They expressed solidarity with Secular Franciscans at all levels and the need to strengthen fraternal life.

“It's not so simple to say, use Skype or Zoom,” Tibor said. “Many older members don't have computers, or have problems using technology.”

They encouraged local fraternities to reach out and embrace infirm and elderly members.



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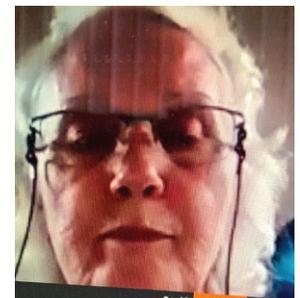
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CIOFS Presidency

Minister General Tibor Kauser, OFS, and CIOFS Secretary Isabella Di Paola, OFS, with Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state.



Minister General Reports on OFS in Week of Meetings at Vatican

ROME -- Minister General Tibor Kauser, OFS, spent a week in February bringing the face of the Secular Franciscan Order to the Vatican as well as to the Order of Friars Minor. In meetings arranged by CIOFS Secretary Isabella Di Paola, OFS, Tibor shared the Order's joys and challenges.

The week began with a visit with **Cardinal Pietro Parolin**, Vatican secre-

tary of state. "It was a very open, sincere meeting that lasted a bit more than an hour," Tibor reported, adding that the cardinal "greeted me as an old friend." (Cardinal Parolin celebrated the opening mass at the 2017 General Chapter and had invited Tibor to visit him at the Vatican.)

The meeting took place in the Apostolic Palace.

"He let me go into details, so I could tell

him many of our joys and challenges. The fruit of this visit was not only a discussion... about the OFS, but also he let me have a deeper understanding of the Church as a whole, to be more aware of the reasons of some actions and how the Vatican 'works'."

Also on Monday Tibor and Isabella visited **Rev. Alexander Awi Mello**, secretary of the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life.

In addition to discussing the OFS, they gained some "insight on the work of this dicastery, which is something very different from the Congregation where we officially belong to," Tibor said. "It is much more loose and has a more spiritual than official bond with those organizations that belong there."

After that meeting, they visited **Archbishop Joseph**

Continued on next page.



Cardinal João Braz de Aviz, as he joined Secular Franciscans during last year's 40th Anniversary of the Rule celebration at the Seraphicum in Rome.

Continued from previous page.
Clemens, “who is an old friend of the OFS, and a friend of pope emeritus Benedict XVI.”

On Tuesday Tibor went to see OFM Minister General **Fr. Michael Perry**, who had been recovering from a bicycle accident. “He is fairly well, walking already without a cane, and in a very good spirit. He confirmed his commitment to come to our General Chapter as a keynote speaker, as president of the elections and as main celebrant of the Holy Mass of the inauguration of the

newly elected Presidency.”

On Wednesday Tibor and Isabella met with **Cardinal João Braz de Aviz**, the prefect of the CIVCSVA (Congregation of the Institutions of the Consecrated Life and of the Societies of Apostolic Life), where OFS officially belongs. During the hour-long meeting, “we discussed our annual report, entering into details of some countries and some cases,” Tibor said. The cardinal offered “some advice” and “accepted our invitation to celebrate the opening Holy Mass of the General Chapter.”

Following that meeting “we went over to the Congregation of the Cause of Saints” to meet with **Archbishop Marcello Bartolucci**, secretary of the congregation. “As this was the very first visit ever at this congregation, it gave us an opportunity to introduce the OFS, who we are, how many and where we are, who are the Youfra, and what is our vocation, the nature of our identity. After this meeting... he guided us around the offices, including the archives of the Congregation, where all the documentations of the

causes are being kept. Beyond the breathtaking moments to have some 400-to-500-year-old documents in hand, it was really touching to open the documents of the canonization of St. Pope John Paul II, or St. Mother Teresa.”

On Friday their last meeting was with **Archbishop José Rodríguez Carballo**, OFM, the secretary of the CIVCSVA. This meeting was marked by “Franciscan openness,” Tibor said, while “reporting our life in the last year, and talking about some really concrete questions.”

Piandarca Project



Illustration from 1982 USA postage stamp.

Site of Francis' Preaching to Birds to Be Outdoor Sanctuary

Nature was in its glory that day in the 1200s when, almost on impulse, Francis entered a field nestled among oaks, poplars and elms, and began preaching to a swarm of birds.

That historic scene took place circa 1220 in Piandarca, near the community of Cannara, where Francis had just been preaching to the people at a castle. In fact, Cannara was where he decided to start the Third Order now known as the Secular Franciscan Order.

So that day of miraculous preaching is associated with the birth of the OFS, and has been dear to local Secular Franciscans

[Editor's note: Thank you to Ottaviano Turrioni, OFS, for providing photos and details of the Piandarca project and press conference.]

ever since.

Thanks to the local OFS Fraternity, Secular Franciscan historian and project leader Ottaviano Turrioni, the Cannara municipality, the Assisi diocese and the Franciscan friars, the Piandarca site will now become an open sanctuary.

A press conference took place June 26 at the Sacred Convent of Assisi to announce the design of the Piandarca Project and launch a fundraising campaign for 120,000 euros.

Moderator **Francesca Romana Elisei** of Italian Television Radio opened

the proceedings by saying: "The Piandarca Project consists in making true a dream for many; that is, creating an outdoor sanctuary in the memorable place where St. Francis preached to the birds."

The press conference introduced the artist who won an international contest to design an outdoor shrine and unveiled models of his artistic vision for a stone altar and a bronze statue of Francis preaching to birds.

The artist is **Antonio De Paoli**, from Pavia (Italy). The contest was sponsored

by the Committee for the Defense and Enhancement of Piandarca, created in 2010 to officially preserve the landscape heritage that had been quietly honored for centuries. An ad hoc commission coordinated by the Academy of Fine Arts of Perugia selected the winner from among 60 artists.

The moderator noted: "The Preaching area has already been equipped with a large TAU -- remember that Pope Francis on a recent visit to Assisi stopped with his helicopter over Piandarca to admire the TAU -- and some native trees. The TAU is also visible at night with
Continued on next page.

The Act of Preaching to Birds

From Saint Bonaventure's *Life of St. Francis*:

"He came to a spot where a large flock of birds of various kinds had come together. When God's saint saw them, he quickly ran to the spot and greeted them as if they were endowed with reason....

"He went right up to them and solicitously urged them to listen to the word of God, saying, 'Oh birds, my brothers and sisters, you have a great obligation to praise your Creator, who clothed you in feathers and gave you wings to fly with, provided you with pure air and cares for you without any worry on your part?... The birds showed their joy in a remarkable fashion: They began to stretch their necks, extend their wings, open their beaks and gaze at him attentively.

"He went through their midst with amazing fervor of spirit, brushing against them with his tunic. Yet none of them moved from the spot until the man of God made the sign of the cross and gave them permission to leave; then they all flew away together. His companions waiting on the road saw all these things. When he returned to them, that pure and simple man began to accuse himself of negligence because he had not preached to the birds before."

At one point along this path Francis spotted a flock of birds and felt compelled to go greet them.

Continued from previous page. lighting that enhances its splendor" (see back cover).

The horizontal TAU is raised above the ground by about 60 cm (nearly two feet). It is perhaps the largest in the world, 40 meters long and 39 wide, and it faces the direction of the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi.

At the press conference, artist De Paoli spoke of his vision:

"I imagined a slender figure with his arms stretched upwards that on tiptoe seems to levitate from the ground and accompany the flight of two larks. The intent is to represent the moment of the Saint's life in complete

ecstasy towards Creation and God, where even the smallest creatures become a means of communicating with the Absolute and symbolically spreading the Gospel message in the world."

Presidency Councilor **Attilio Galimberti**, OFS, represented Minister General Tibor Kauser, OFS, at

the press conference, and said: "The Sacred Hovel of Cannara, where Francis stayed, and the site of the Preaching are symbols of the Franciscan secular tradition ... The Piandarca project represents a new beginning, an important element for the history of Franciscan iconography."

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Piandarca Project *continued from previous page*

Other press conference participants included:

- Assisi Bishop **Domenico Sorrentino**.
- **Fabrizio Gareggia**, Mayor of Cannara.
- **Ottaviano Turrioni**,

scholar of Piandarca and minister of the OFS Fraternity of Cannara.

- **Fr. Francesco Fongo**, parish priest of Cannara.
- **Fr. Antonello Fanelli**, OFM Conv, delegate of

the Custos of the Sacred Convent.

- **Paola Fuciletti**, Vice Minister of OFS Regional Council.
- **Fr. Felice Autieri**, OFM Conv, delegated to

represent the OFS National Council.

- **Florian Castiglione**, Superintendency of Archaeology, Fine Arts and Landscape of Umbria.

Fraternity Publishes Book On Francis & Piandarca

In 2016, after years of research in archives and libraries by Ottaviano Turrioni, the OFS Fraternity of Cannara published a book entitled, “CANNARA: *The birth of the Third Order and the Preaching of St. Francis to the birds*”. It is an anthology of writers who have placed the two events in what was the ancient castle and land of Cannara.

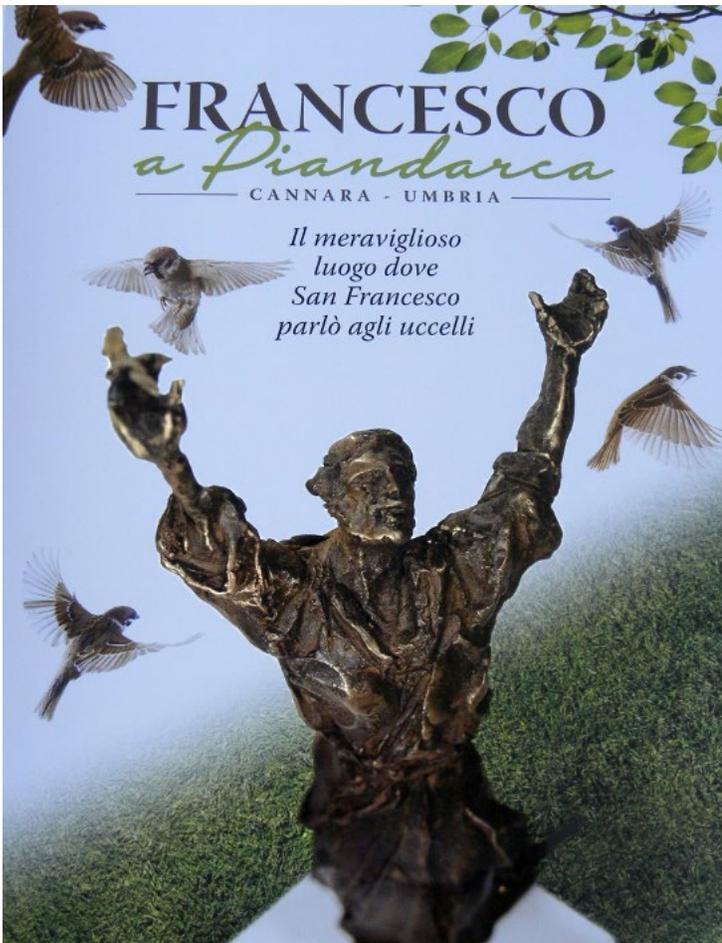
Piandarca Fundraising Campaign

To carry out the Piandarca project, a fundraising campaign aims to raise 120,000 euros.

To make a donation, go to: www.francescoapiandarca.it.

Donations can be of any amount. A special register listing donors will be kept in the Cannara Parish. It will be located

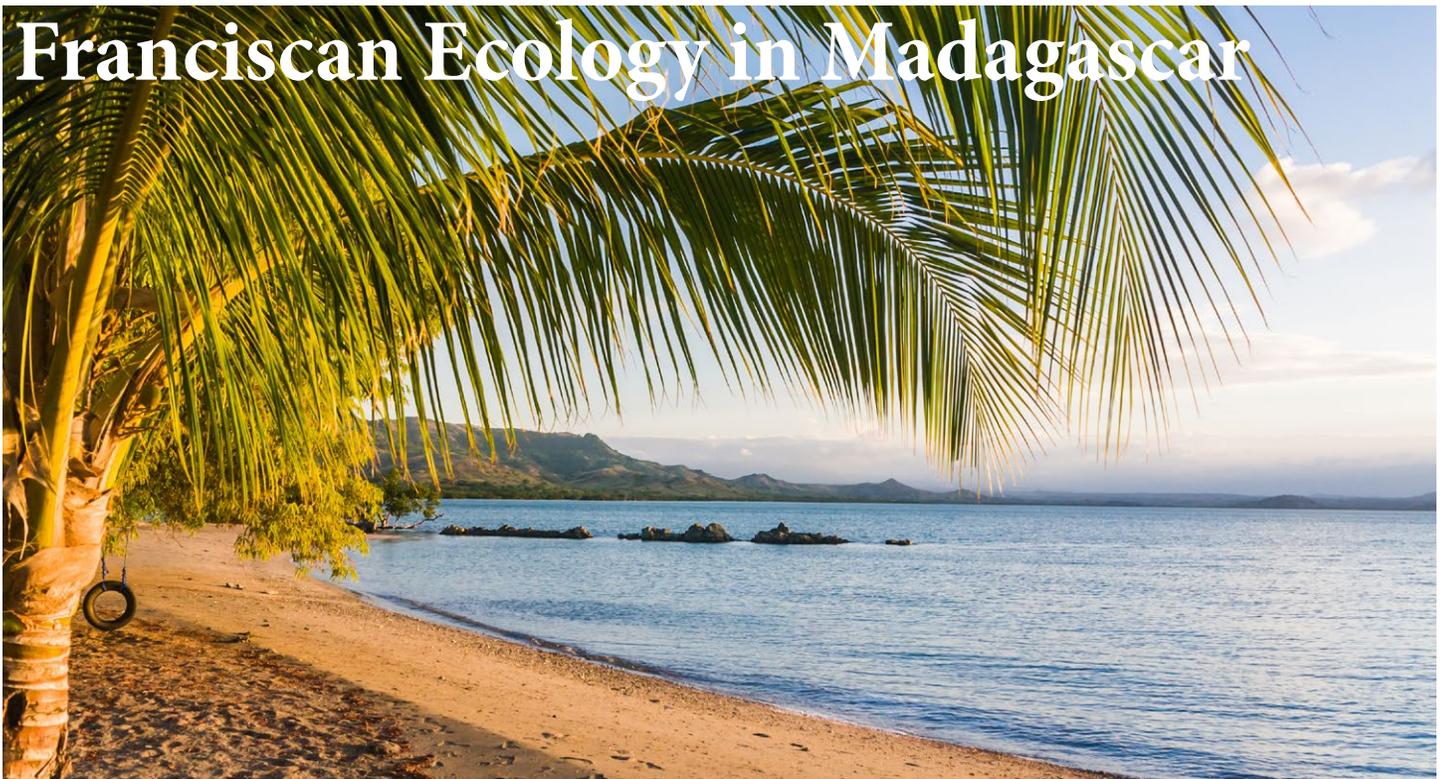
next to the “Tugurio” (hovel) from which St. Francis started the Third Franciscan Order, today the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS). The names of more generous contributors (donating over 1000 euros) will be engraved on a Corten steel column to be built next to the Sanctuary.



ABOVE: Artist Antonio De Paoli.

LEFT: Illustration shows artist's concept for the statue of St. Francis.

Franciscan Ecology in Madagascar



Antsiranana bay (Diego Suarez), northern Madagascar. iStockphoto by pierivb.

Franciscan Youth Spur JPIC Workshop

by SOLONIAINA HARIFETRA RAKOTOARISOA, OFS

After attending a formation session organized by the Union of Young Catholic Movements of Madagascar and the Youth for Climate Madagascar (YouClim), young Franciscans decided to share this same formation with the Franciscan family. With the support of the OFS National Council of Madagascar, the training was held at the Lucien Botovasoa Centre, seat of the OFS Madagascar, from 8 to 9 February 2020. The Franciscan family was invited and some 60 participants attended. Most were Secular Franciscans. There also were Franciscan Friars, Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate of Palagano, Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Our Lady, and Capuchin Sisters. Non-Franciscan participants who heard or saw the announcement were welcomed, too.

The training was intended to raise the awareness of the Franciscan family on the climate change that affects Madagascar a lot, and to think of an alternative that could be adapted to the population and the country.

The programme included an overview of the Encyclical of Pope Francis, “Laudato Si”, the causes of climate change, ecological conversion, practices of urban and rural agriculture, biogas, waste management, nurseries and reforestation. In addition, as Franciscans, a theme on Saint Francis and ecology was on the agenda.

Laudato Si

The national president of Franciscan Youth, Jean de Dieu Rafalimanana, explained that Pope Francis

reminds us that Saint Francis of Assisi is an ideal example concerning the protection of the environment and the vulnerable. The Pope also says that the majority of actions undertaken by man affect current climate change.

The participants deepened the topic workshops. The speaker led the participants to take a closer look, to see what is happening on the Big Island. In Madagascar, bush fires are still very common. The air is ever more polluted because of the waste that is not sorted and remains scattered everywhere. Thus, they have advanced as a solution the strengthening of respect for disciplines and they are aware that the Malagasy need awareness and education.

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Some of the workshop participants at the Lucien Botovasoa Centre in Madagascar.

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Climate change

For this theme, the speaker was Norosoa Christine Razafin-Dramanana. She is a professor at the Graduate School of Agricultural Sciences at the University of Antananarivo. She made it clear that climate change is a persistent modification over a long period (decade to millions of years) of statistical parameters (the average state of the climate or its variability) of the global climate of the Earth or its various regional climates. Climate variability, on the other hand, is the short-term variation in climate (monthly, seasonal, annual, inter-annual, over several years).

The causes of climate change are natural and anthropogenic. However, anthropogenic causes are very important. They are due to the combustion of oil and coal, deforestation, swamps, landfills, dejections

livestock, the use of fertilizers in agriculture, household and industrial solvents, etc. These activities are very frequent in Madagascar.

An estimate is that by 2055, a temperature increase between 1°C and 2.5°C will be perceived compared to the 1961-1990 period in Madagascar. Warming will be very pronounced in the arid regions of the Southwest Island, reaching more than 2.6°C.

Mamy Nirina Randrianarivelo continued topic. She is a Meteorological Research Engineer and Teacher at the École Supérieure Polytechnique d'Antananarivo. She explained that several activities depend on the climate: agriculture, fishing, trade, tourism, etc. Madagascar is a country where the primary sector still dominates. However, peasants ignore, in most cases, the existence of change. They need the support of all those who can help them out of this ignorance.

Agriculture

Rija Rakotobe then spoke about agriculture. He is a rural animator. He presented many of his experiences on the ground. He explained how to make a compost.

It is very practical in the countryside. However, he also talked about urban agriculture. For our garden, we can grow salads, vegetables, etc. This topic was very interesting to the participants because it protects the environment and makes green what surrounds us.

Treatment of wastes

The next day, Mamy Nirina Randrianarivelo spoke about waste management, a project that is not very common in Madagascar. Even in the capital, garbage is scattered everywhere. The municipal sewerage

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Reforestation by the Franciscan Family at Anjomakely.

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service is unable to control the situation. But this project was realised in Fianarantsoa, a province just south of the capital. This is a very concrete example and it created jobs. The impacts are numerous: jobs for 95 employees, a healthy environment, and an increasingly clean city.

This topic also resonated with the participants as they believed in sorting garbage from every household, and then sharing this topic with everyone close to us.

Social entrepreneurship

This training should lead to application by the participants, hence the theme on social entrepreneurship. Rolland Maminaiaina Randrianarivelo is Senior Technical Advisor at GIZ Madagascar. She presented a brief history of social entrepreneurship

from 1900 to 2000. It is an economic activity to solve a social problem. Our country is known as one of the poorest countries in the world, with unresolved socio-economic problems that are increasingly driving people into poverty. Participants are led to reflect on these issues and to think about actions to help the most vulnerable like St Francis and St Clare did in their time. Social entrepreneurship is not a rest that anyone can take, but we must have a vision: aim high, far and big. Sustainable Development Goals pave the way for this vision.

Saint Francis and ecology

This theme ended the formation. The diocesan priest and OFS member, Maminirina Aimé Rakotondriaka shared how St Francis loved nature. In our Order, we made vows, and he asked

the question: How many of these vows do we manage to fulfil? Pope John Paul II named Francis the heavenly patron of ecology. This should lead us to love and preserve nature, and above all to love the human being, those who are close to us, the most vulnerable.

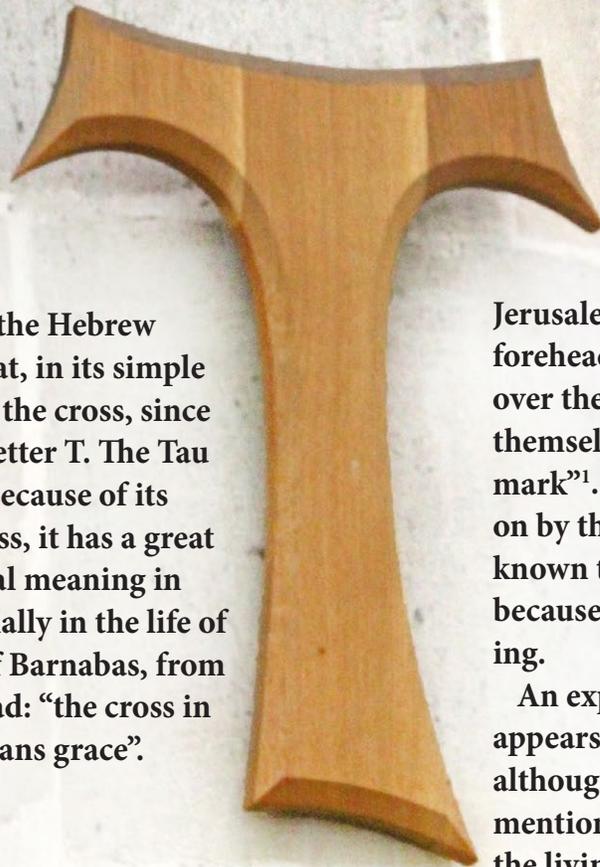
The training was short but intense. This is only the beginning. We were planning to organize more with other themes that relate to those of Franciscan Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC), but also those of Franciscans International. All the sessions were held in a very fraternal atmosphere.

A week after this formation, the Franciscan youth participated in reforestation on a plot of land of the diocese of Antananarivo, at the request of the union of the movements of young Catholics of the diocese. Members of the OFS and the Religious also participated in the project.

Tau

Its Meaning and History

by FR. VALENTÍN REDONDO, OFM CONV



The Tau is a letter of the Hebrew and Greek alphabet that, in its simple form, is confused with the cross, since it corresponds to our letter T. The Tau is a sign of salvation. Because of its resemblance to the cross, it has a great mystical and devotional meaning in the Church, and especially in the life of Francis. In the letter of Barnabas, from the 2nd century, we read: “the cross in the letter of the tau means grace”.

The Tau in the Bible

In the Old Testament the word tau appears in the book of the prophet Ezekiel. When, in the vision of the desecrated temple, the Lord calls a man dressed in linen, with the instruments of a Scribe around his waist, and says to him: “Go through the city, through

Jerusalem and put a mark (a tau) on the forehead of those who sigh and groan over the abomination in which they find themselves...touch no one who has the mark”¹. This text had been commented on by the Fathers of the Church and was known to the faithful of the Middle Ages because it was used in medieval preaching.

An expression similar to that of Ezekiel appears in the Book of the Apocalypse, although the name of the letter is not mentioned. The angel who had the seal of the living God shouts to the four angels who have been entrusted to carry out punishment on earth and sea: “Do not damage the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have marked the servants of our God with a seal on their foreheads”².

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The Tau in ancient Christianity

The tau is a widely used symbol in Jewish mysticism.

The Christians of the first centuries had a great devotion for the preaching of the Fathers of the Church on tau. In the late Middle Ages it was used as a sign of protection against evil and natural ills, particularly against the plague. It was engraved on the ring or hung around the neck, or painted on the column of the door.

It is said that Bishop Gallus I of Clermont³ (France), in 546, organized a solemn procession on the occasion of the plague, and Saint Gregory of Tours says that immediately it appeared on the walls of churches and all houses “a sign that the citizens recognized that it was the Tau”, and thus the plague ceased.

In the so-called Children’s crusade, taking place in 1212 during Francis’ time, the chosen symbol was the Tau.⁴

Francis’ encounters with the Tau

The tau, very popular in Middle Ages, was familiar to Francis. The

sign of tau comes in to the life of Francis in three different ways.

1. The penitential movement

In the penitential movement, its members wore a habit of penance signed with the tau. Francis, after selling the cloths and the horse in Spello and donating that money to the church of San Damiano, becomes part of this movement. After the trial in front of the Bishop of Assisi, Guido II, he gave Francis the outfit of a farmer who worked for the bishop to cover his nakedness. “Francis accepted it gratefully”, says St. Bonaventure, “and, with his own hand, marked a cross on it with a piece of chalk”⁵. After some time, after listening to and understanding the Gospel of the mission, “he prepared a habit in the shape of a cross”⁶.

2. The Anthonian monks

Another way was the Antonian monks, that is to say, the monks of St. Anthony the Abbot⁷, founded in Vienne (France) by the noble

Gaston, in 1095. They wore the tau in blue colour on their habit as a sign of belonging to that Order and their dedication to the sick. These monks lived also in Rome, next to the Basilica of Saint John in the Lateran, in the so-called lazaret of Saint Anthony the Great, where Francis was serving the sick on his visit to Rome waiting for the oral approval of the Rule by Innocent III, as St. Bonaventure writes: “The next morning he (the Vicar of Christ) commanded his servants to search the city for the poor man. When they found him near the Lateran at Saint Anthony’s hospice, he ordered him brought to his presence without delay”⁸.

3. The monks of the tau

Another way of encountering the tau could be the Knights of the Tau or the *Hospital Brothers of San Jaime of Altopascio*, an Order whose members carried the sign of Tau on their cloaks. It must have been founded by twelve “good men” of

Continued on next page

FOOTNOTES

This article was originally written in Spanish and translated into English by Fr. Alfred Parambakathu, OFMConv.

1. Ez 9,4,6. (Notes by the translator: We have put the word Tau in bracket because in New Revised Standard Version of Bible that we have used here, it does not use this word. But see the Latin Vulgata: “Transi per mediam civitatem, in medio Jerusalem, et signa thau super frontes virorum gementium et dolentium super cunctis abominationibus quae fiunt in medio ejus”).

2. Rev 7,3. And the fifth angel with the trumpet is reminded again: “not to damage the grass of the earth or any green growth or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads” (Rev 9,4).

3. St. Gallus I, uncle of St. Gregory of Tours, was the bishop of Clermont from 525/26 until his death on 14 May 551.

4. Cfr. G. MICCOLI, *La Crociata dei fanciulli*, in *Studi Medievali*, II (1961), pp. 407-433.

5. LM 2,4.

6. 1Cel 22.

7. Often St. Anthony the Abbot, in the paintings and in the sculpture, is represented with the sign of a blue tau on the habit or on the hood, and when he has a stick in his hand, its tope is usually shaped into a tau.

8. LM 3,9 (this part of the story was added to the text of St. Bonaventure by the will of Jerome of Ascoli, successor of St. Bonaventure as Minister General, and later becomes Pope with the name Nicholas IV).

Luca, devout and wealthy, around 1065, in the place of Teupascio, and later Altopascio. They vowed to “serve” the pilgrims. They built bridges and hospitals to alleviate suffering of the pilgrims. Pilgrims who walked the *Via Francigena*⁹ were assisted in particular. The Hospital and the place of reception was near the wetlands of Fucecch and Bientina¹⁰, where, when night fell, the fog and the forest made it difficult to travel. Their Rule was similar to that of the Augustinians. They obtained various privileges from the Popes: Urban II, Alexander III, Eugene III, Innocent III, and Honorius III. The sign of Tau always appears on their buildings¹¹.

The IV Lateran Council

Another special encounter with the tau was the Fourth Lateran Council, attended by Francis. In the opening sermon of the Council, on November 11, 1215, Pope Innocent III uses the text of the prophet Ezekiel to ask the Council Fathers for their collaboration in the reform of the Church. The Pope, after recalling the text of the prophet Ezekiel, adds: “The Tau is

the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet and is shaped like a cross, just as the Cross was before Pilate’s inscription was placed. One carries the sign of the tau on his forehead, if he manifests in all his conduct the splendour of the cross; the Tau is carried if the flesh is crucified with its vices and sins; the Tau is carried if one affirms: ‘I do not want to glorify in anything except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ’ ... Whoever wears the tau will find mercy, the sign of a penitent and renewed life in Christ. Be, then, champions of the Tau and of the Cross!”¹².

This invitation that the Pope made to all those who were convoked to the Council, will leave a deep mark on Francis of Assisi, who will manifest it with the use of the sign of the tau and the great space given to penance.

Francis and the Tau

Francis, an attentive listener to the Pope’s proposal, in the same way that he will be a propagator of sacramental reform: Eucharist and Reconciliation, will use the tau, as a signature for his letters. Thomas of Celano refers: “He favoured the sign of the

Tau over all others. With it alone he signed letters he sent, and painted it on the walls of cells everywhere”¹³. This is evidenced in the tau that adorns the Blessing to Brother Leo, which is kept in the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi. According to tradition, the Saint painted in the little church of Magdalena in Fonte Colombo. Here, during the restoration of the Magdalena Chapel, a red painted tau was found on a window frame at the side of the Gospel. The painting is from the 14th century, but the drawing dates back to Francis.

Thomas of Celano in the *Treatise on the Miracles* tells us about one miracle done by the servant of God in the village of Cori in the diocese of Ostia, about a man who had completely lost the use of one leg and invoked the intercession of the Saint of Assisi. Francis responds to the devotee’s call and “touched the source of the pain with a small stick bearing the figure of the ‘Tau’. The abscess healed quickly, his full health was restored, and to this day the sign of the ‘Tau’ remains on the spot”¹⁴.

Continued on next page

FOOTNOTES

9. Francis used to walk through this way to go to Rome from Assisi.
10. St. Francis, according to tradition, was in San Miniato, a city in the western part of Tuscany, in 1211, where he received for his friars a chapel dedicated to San Miniato, founded by the Longobardos. Fucecchio is very close to San Miniato, where the Franciscan Conventuals had a Friary, which now is inhabited by the Urbanist Poor Clares.

11. ENZO FAGIANI, I “Cabaliere” del Tau, in *Luoghi dell’Infinito*, n. 49, anno VI, February 2002, pp. 56-61.
12. PL 217, cols. 673-680.
13. 3C 3. In the *Minor Legend* St. Bonaventure tells us this way: “a certain brother whose name was Pacifico...merited to see a great Tau on Francis’s forehead, which displayed a variety of different colours that caused his face to glow with wonderful beauty. The man of God venerated this symbol

with great affection. He often spoke of it with eloquence and used it at the beginning of any action. In those letters which out of charity he sent, he signed it with his own hand. It was as if his whole desire were, according to the prophetic text, to mark with a Tau the foreheads of those moaning and grieving, of those truly converted to Jesus Christ”. (LMn 2,9).
14. 3C 159.

Spirituality of the Tau or the cross

Jesus invites us to carry the cross; he who does not do it, says Jesus himself, “is not worthy of me”¹⁵. In the fifth admonition, Francis invites us to renew the mystery of the cross every day: “But we can boast in our weakness and in carrying each day the holy cross of our Lord Jesus Christ”¹⁶. On the cross and by the cross we have been reconciled to the Father¹⁷. Jesus reconciled all things to himself “through the blood of his cross”¹⁸. He purified and redeemed us by nailing our charge sheet on the cross: “he canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross”¹⁹.

Francis considers the tau, sign of the cross, as a sign of salvation, and as such he gives it to Brother Leo, as we have seen.

The author of the *Sacrum Commercium* makes Madonna Povertà (Lady Poverty) say she is in favour of Francis being the person in charge of continuing to sign with the tau: “Finally, when he went into heaven, he left you the seal of the kingdom of heaven to mark the elect, so that whoever yearns for the everlasting



kingdom would come to you, ask from you and enter through you. For no one can enter the kingdom except the one signed with your seal”²⁰.

In this spirituality of the tau, the friars minor are invited to preach penance, which Francis begins after listening to the Gospel on the mission; Innocent III entrusts them with this mission and Francis emphasizes it in the Rule of 1221: “Let all the brothers, however, preach by their deeds”²¹. This preaching coincides with the request he makes later in the same Rule: “Do penance, performing worthy fruits of penance”²². This he repeats in the letter to all the faithful: “let us produce worthy fruits of penance”²³.

The tau unites us to Paul’s spirituality of glorifying ourselves only in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ²⁴.

The red colour of the tau recalls the blood of the slain Lamb and invites, as a Franciscan sign, to live in “penance-conversion”, to be missionaries

of “peace and good” and, as a sign of salvation and health, to be close to our sick and poor brothers.

Conclusion

The use of the tau in Francis, as well as his adoration of the cross²⁵, seeing it from afar, has a reason for being, due to his devotion to the cross, which leads him to identify himself with Jesus crucified as St. Bonaventure writes: “and the memory of Christ’s passion was so impressed on the innermost recesses of his heart. From that hour, whenever Christ’s crucifixion came to his mind, he could scarcely contain his tears and sighs...²⁶”

On the other hand, Francis’ use of the tau was, in a silent way, a fight or a crusade against the Cathar or Manichean movements of his time that considered the cross as an unworthy sign of the redemptive work of God.

FOOTNOTES

15. Mt 10,38.

16. Adm 5,8.

17. Cfr. Ef 2,16

18. Col 1,20.

19. Col 2,14.

20. SC 21.

21. Rnb 17, 3.

22. Rnb 21,3.

23. 2LtF 25.

24. Cfr. Gal 6,14.

25. Prostrate on the ground, bowing inwardly and outwardly, they (friars) would adore the Almighty saying, “We adore you, O Christ, in all your churches throughout the whole world, and we bless you, for by your holy

cross you have redeemed the world”... whenever they saw a cross or the sign of a cross, whether on the ground, on a wall, in the trees or roadside hedges they did the same thing. Cfr. 1Cel 45.

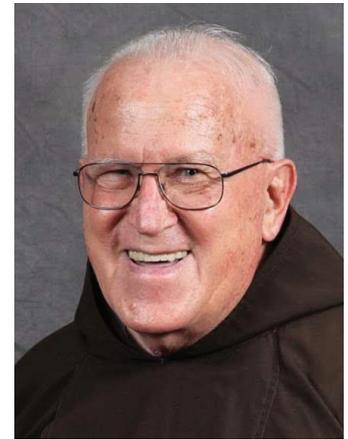
26. LM 1,5.

OFS action around the globe

FR. LESTER EMBRACES SISTER DEATH

Fr. Lester Bach, OFM Cap, former national spiritual assistant for the OFS in the USA, passed away on Feb. 2, 2020.

He was a prolific author of formation and spiritual books for Secular Franciscans and spiritual assistants. On the international level, Fr. Lester was a keynote speaker at the 2005 General Chapter in Assisi.



3 CZECH SECULAR FRANCISCANS HONORED

by *MARKÉTA KUBEŠOVÁ*, Czech OFS International Councillor

In autumn 2019, three Czech Republic Secular Franciscans were honored for their lifelong activities and commitment:

Soňa Míčková, M.D., (from Prague Fraternity) is a laureate of the year's Opitz Prize, which was awarded for her devoted work as a medical doctor. The prize was presented by Brother Martin Macek, OH, at a ceremony in the Church of Sts. Simon and Juda in Prague on Oct. 19. (The whole gala including the concert was broadcast by TV NOE).



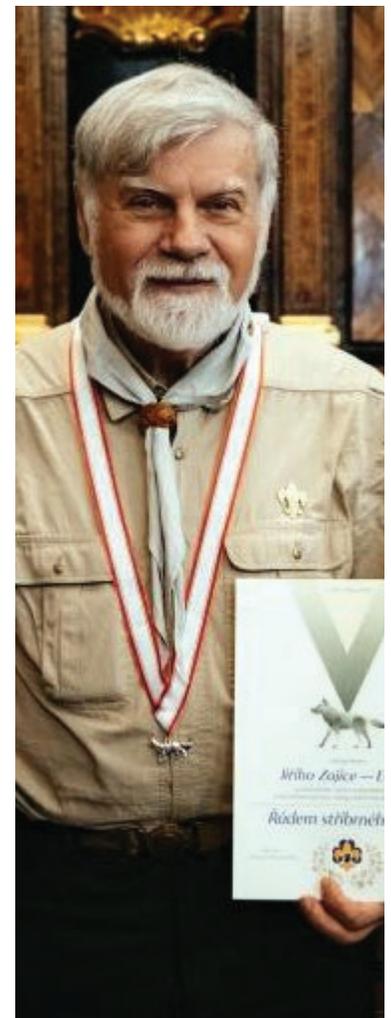
Soňa Míčková, M.D



Jan Smrcina

Jan Smrcina, M.Sc., (from Lysa nad Labem Fraternity) received the Gold Medal of St. Adalbert for the development of free Catholic Charity and the deepening of the memory of Lidice war victims. Cardinal Dominik Duka presented the award in the cathedral of St. Vitus during a ceremonial service in honor of St. Agnes on Nov. 16.

Jiří Zajíc-Edy, M.S., (from Prague Fraternity) received the highest Scouting distinction, the Order of the Silver Wolf, for his extraordinary service. He was honored at Holy Mass in the Church of the Sacred Salvator in Prague on December 2 -- on the day of the thirtieth anniversary of the public announcement of the renewal of the Czech-Slovak Scouting by the Czech Scout Chief Marek Baláš.



Jiří Zajíc-Edy



General Spiritual Assistant Fr. Francis Dor, OFM Cap. (left) and Presidency Councilor Jennifer Harrington (center) with the Nigerian National Council.

NIGERIA HOLDS ELECTIVE CHAPTER

The OFS emerging National Fraternity of Nigeria has celebrated its National Elective Chapter on 29 February 2020. **Lillian-Rita Akudolu** was elected as national minister.

Also elected:

- National Vice Minister – Gabriel John Udofia.
- National Secretary – Appolonia Ochugnu.
- National Treasurer – Victoria Udofia.
- National Formator – Anne Asiegbu.

The newly appointed national spiritual assistant is Fr. Fidelis Pabor, OFM Cap.

‘WELL4AFRICA’ BOREHOLE BLESSED IN GHANA’S VILLAGE OF SIBI

Joyful news in the middle of COVID-19 crisis – water borehole sponsored by “Well4Africa” Secular Franciscan social initiative was blessed and inaugurated on May 9 in Sibi, Ghana. A small group of community representatives took part in the celebration due to safety reasons.

Sibi is a small village in the Nkwanta District in the eastern part of Ghana. The village has 320 households/extended families, who are beneficiaries of this water project. Most of local people are farmers.



Friars bless ‘Well4Africa’ water project in Sibi, Ghana.

The village had only one well before. During the rainy season, people collected rainwater coming

down from their roofs. At other times women and children were forced to fetch water from a small

man-made dam or other sites, where water is stagnant, muddy and not safe to drink.



VENEZUELA CELEBRATES ELECTIONS

The OFS National Fraternity of Venezuela has celebrated its National Elective Chapter from 28 February to

1 March 2020.

Marielide De Lima was elected as national minister and as International councillor.



CHAD CHAPTER ELECTS

The National Fraternity of Chad has celebrated its 2020

elective chapter. **Ange-Gabriel Soulassanger** was elected national minister and international councillor.



ALBANIA HOLDS CHAPTER

The OFS National Chapter of the Emerging Fraternity of

Albania has been celebrated in Bajze. **Pavlin Ndreka** was elected national minister and **Hana Kalj** as vice minister.



IVORY COAST CHAPTER ELECTS

The OFS National Fraternity of Ivory Coast celebrated its National Elective Chapter on January 24-25, 2020.

Christophe Iobognon was elected as national minister and Ludovic Dah as international councilor.



KENYA HOLDS ELECTIVE CHAPTER

The OFS National Fraternity of Kenya celebrated its National Elective Chapter on December 12-15, 2019.

John Mungai was elected as national minister and international councilor.



URUGUAY CHAPTER ELECTS

The OFS National Fraternity of Uruguay celebrated its National Elective Chapter from November 29 to De-

cember 1, 2019. Sergio Rodríguez was elected as national minister and as international councilor.

Friar Marco Tasca Appointed Archbishop of Genoa



Friar Marco Tasca, OFM Conv., the new archbishop of Genoa, is shown participating in the 2017 OFS General Chapter at the Seraphicum in Rome. He is with General Secretary Isabella Di Paola, OFS; Presidency Councilor Michel Janian, OFS (center), and Minister General Tibor Kauser, OFS (right). Photos by Robert Stronach.

Pope Francis has appointed Conventual Franciscan Friar Marco Tasca as archbishop of Genoa, Italy, the Vatican announced May 8.

Friar Marco, who served as minister general of the OFM Conventual friars for 12 years, has been a friend to the Secular Franciscan

Order, participating in OFS general chapters.

“I am a friar and I remain a friar,” Fr. Marco told his fellow Franciscans when his appointment was announced at the friary in Padova, the Jesuit *America Magazine* reported.

“His fellow Franciscans responded with prolonged

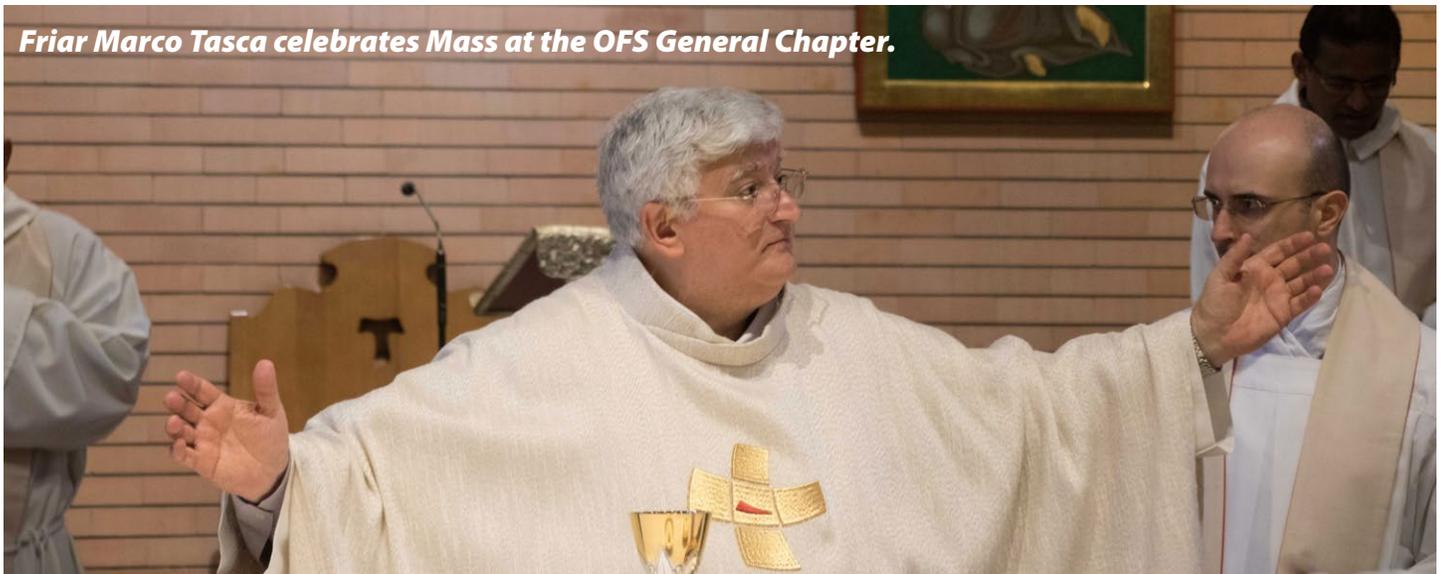
applause.”

“The archbishop-elect greeted his new diocese, which includes 674,000 faithful and 278 priests, with the words of St. Francis of Assisi: ‘May the Lord give you peace.’”

“He promised to be ‘a father and a brother’ to the people of Genoa,

and said he comes to his new diocese ‘with a heart always open to listening and to welcoming all those who knock at my door, including -- and I wish to say, especially -- those who, for whatever reason, have found themselves or feel far from our ecclesial community.’”

Friar Marco Tasca celebrates Mass at the OFS General Chapter.



Secular Franciscan Profiled in St. Anthony Messenger



U.S. Secular Franciscans Kathleen and Michael Carsten run Franciscan Ministries in downtown Detroit, working with the poor and homeless. Mike was profiled in the June 2020 issue of St. Anthony Messenger. Kathleen, a faith community nurse, was honored by the National Fraternity with the 2018 JPIC Award for her work with the elderly. Photo by R. Stronach.

Mike Carsten, a U.S. Secular Franciscan who co-founded Franciscan Ministries of Detroit, Michigan, was profiled in the June issue of *St. Anthony Messenger*.

“Cars and trucks carry

food, water, and winter survival gear into two of the city’s more desperate areas, searching for and serving those trapped in severe poverty,” Carsten says. “Franciscan Ministries’ two warming centers, the Canticle Café

Midtown and the Canticle Café East English Village, serve impoverished seniors; homeless men, women, and children; and the working poor.” The article, penned by David Seitz, OFS, notes that the material goods Francis-

can Ministries delivers come in as fast as volunteers can give them out. Carsten challenges SecularFranciscans to be people of encounter: “We should be fearless in what we do, [in] how we engage the world.”



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The CIOFS Presidency has announced the launch of a new website – CIOFS.info. The design is intended to be attractive, reflecting a dynamic Order, while making it easier to find information and resources.

Piandarca

WHERE FRANCIS
PREACHED TO
THE BIRDS

