



K O I N Ō N I A

...together on the journey

CONFERENCE OF THE GENERAL SPIRITUAL ASSISTANTS TO THE OFS

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THE YEAR OF FAITH

Benedict XVI and Francis

As this first edition of *Koinonia* 2013 is being put together, events are happening which by now are well known to everyone. I would go so far as to say that these two popes have given us an anticipated taste of the Paschal Mystery (given that Holy Week has not yet begun). The resignation of Pope Benedict XVI has meant that all of us have had to face the cross and death. The election of the new Bishop of Rome, Pope Francis, is a resurrection in the true sense of the word. We know that the Holy Spirit has come to the aid of the entire Church at prayer, assisting the Cardinals in their delicate task of discernment. May the Lord bless all those who contributed to the smooth, serious and joyful unfolding of events during the Conclave, leading to the election of Pope Francis. May He also grant all the graces needed by those who took on the heavy responsibility of keeping us informed of all that was happening: I refer to the 5.600 journalists from all over the world who were accredited to the Vatican. May the Lord also bless the two Bishops of Rome (emeritus and newly elected) for their contribution to the good of the Church and the world.

The four numbers of *Koinonia* this year will obviously be devoted to the theme of Faith, approached from four points of view. First, the biblical vision of faith. Then, we propose to trace the topic of faith in the writings of St Francis. Next, we will look at the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. The last issue will deal with the subject of faith as it appears in the documents of the SFO.

This year's four issues of *Koinonia* mark the 20th anniversary of its existence. We thank all those who have taken any part at all in the production of this valuable formation and information resource over the years. It has been valuable especially for the OFS-Gifra Assistants world-wide, at every level. We thank our established readers for their fidelity and greet our new readers who, we hope, will find this publication stimulating for their service to Secular Franciscans wherever they may be.

ENTERING AND WALKING IN FAITH

Br. Martín Bitzer, OFMConv

Introduction

What is faith? How is it born? How does it grow? Can one resume one's faith journey? These are some of the questions we want to try to answer, starting with a few biblical texts and with reflections from the man who was Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and who is now the emeritus Bishop of Rome: His Holiness Benedict XVI.

A kind of definition of faith

“Only faith can guarantee the blessings we hope for, or **prove** the existence of realities that are unseen” (*Hb.* 11,1).

Benedict XVI says that here we find “a kind of definition of faith which closely links this virtue with hope”.¹

What are the meaning and implications of this verse from Hebrews?

The first part (v. 1a) was translated by the ancient Church in this way: “Faith is the “substance” of the things we hope for”.² We could say that in faith, in its initial stages, the things we hope for are already present in us “in seed form” – therefore “substantially”: the whole is present, true life is present. It is precisely because the reality itself is already present, that this presence of that which is to come also creates certainty: this “thing” that is to come is not yet visible in the external world (it does not “appear”), but because of the fact that we bear it within ourselves as an initial, dynamic reality, a certain perception of it does already arise here and now. It is a reality present within us, which underpins our entire life as its “substance”, in the objective sense of the term.³

It is interesting to note that the Spanish and English translations of the *Jerusalem Bible* use the word “guarantee”, in other words, faith is a down-payment. The one who believes has been given possession, as a first installment or guarantee, of heavenly realities that are unseen but which are already present in the life of a Christian, even if not fully.

Then, as far as the second part (v. 1b) is concerned, the text says: “and proves the existence of realities that are unseen”. Here it is not just a case of “being convinced of something that is not seen”⁴, or of a merely subjective “conviction”. We are dealing here with an objective reality, a “proof”. In fact, faith is not just a personal reaching out for things that are on the way but are as yet totally absent; it gives us something of the reality we are expecting. This present reality constitutes for us a “proof” of things as yet unseen. It draws the future into the present, in such a way that the former is no longer purely that which is “not yet”. The fact that this future exists, changes the present; the present is touched by the future reality, and thus future realities pour into the present and the present into the future.⁵

Faith sustains persecuted Christians

In n. 8 of *Spe salvi*, the pope says: “This explanation is further strengthened and related to daily life if we consider verse 34 of the tenth chapter of the *Letter to the Hebrews*, which is linked by vocabulary and content to this definition of hope-filled faith and prepares the way for it. Here the author speaks to believers who have undergone the experience of persecution and he says to them: “you had compassion on the prisoners, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one”.⁶

“Property” refers to the things we own, which in our earthly life constitute the support or “substance”, for life, on which we rely. This “substance”, the normal security we require for life, was taken away from Christians during persecution. They put up with this, because in any case they considered this material substance as negligible. They were able to abandon it because they had found a better “basis” for their existence – an enduring basis which no-one can take away. We cannot fail to see the link between these two types of “substance”, between support on a material basis and the affirmation of faith as a “foundation” and as “substance” which endures. Faith provides a new foundation for life, which humans can rest upon, and in this way, our habitual foundation, the reliability of material income, becomes relative.⁷

¹ Encyclical Letter *Spe salvi* on Christian hope, 7.

² “Est autem fides sperandum substantia rerum” (*Hb* 11,1a).

³ Cfr. *Spe salvi*, 7.

⁴ As does the ecumenical German translation of the New Testament: “Überzeugtsein von dem, was man nicht sieht”.

⁵ Cf. *Spe salvi*, 7.

⁶ Cf. *Spe salvi*, 8.

⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*

A new freedom is created with regard to this foundation of life, which only has the appearance of being able to sustain us, even if its normal significance is certainly not thereby negated. Martyrdom is not the only instance revealing this new freedom, this awareness of the new “substance” which has been given to us. In martyrdom, people have opposed the tyranny of ideology and of its political organs, and through their death have renewed the world. But this new freedom shows itself above all in the great acts of renunciation, beginning with the monks of antiquity, right up to Francis of Assisi and people in our own day: in the modern Institutes and religious movements, having fallen in love with Christ they have left everything in order to bring faith and love for Christ to all men and women, and to help those suffering in body and soul. Here, the new “substance” has proved to be truly “substantial”; from the hope shown by these people who have been touched by Christ, hope has flowed for others living in darkness and without hope. It has demonstrated that this new life really is “substantial” and really engenders life for others. For us who look at these figures, their way of living and acting is indeed a “proof” that the future realities promised by Christ are not only expected, but are truly present.⁸

In this way the believer is totally future-oriented, and clings to unseen realities and nothing else.⁹ The fact that the realities are unseen does not mean that they do not exist.

A better, abiding possession

For a deeper understanding of these reflections on the two types of substance, – *support for life* (*visible property*) and the better and more abiding possessions (“*invisible things*”) – and the two ways of life which they express, we need to reflect briefly on two more verses on this subject (v. 36 and v. 39), found in chapter ten of the *Letter to the Hebrews*.¹⁰

To persecuted Christians the author of the Letter says: “Do not lose your fearlessness now, since the reward is so great. You will need perseverance if you are to do God’s will and receive what He promised.” (Hb 10, 35-36).

Christians are called to preserve their “fearlessness”, and thus their “freedom of expression” to proclaim their faith and the hope which is their boast (Hb 3, 6), without hiding from people out of fear, without “holding back” as people do when they do not dare to speak frankly and openly a truth which may be dangerous.¹¹ This hiding away leads to “perdition”: “We are not the sort of people who draw back, and are lost for it; we are the sort who keep faith until our souls are saved” (Hb 10, 39)¹².

What do Christians need to succeed in such an enterprise? The text provides the answer: “You will need perseverance” (Hb 10, 36), i.e. constancy and patience. This ability to wait and patiently put up with trials is necessary for a believer to receive “what God has promised” (cfr. 10,36). It is a matter of waiting for future realities on the basis of a present reality that has already been given. It is expectation in the presence of Christ, with Christ who is present, waiting for the completion of His Body, in the light of his final coming.¹³

Entering into faith

How do we have access to faith like this? In the case of adults, access to faith comes in the first place through the preaching of the Church by means of her ministers, and through all those who witness to that preaching by example and word. “Faith comes from hearing, and that means hearing the word of Christ”, says St. Paul (*Rom* 10, 17). Faith enters through hearing, and so you not only need a preacher, but a hearer, someone who receives the word.

⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁹ Cf. Note in the *Biblia de Jerusalén* (Bilbao 1998) on Hb 11,1. Our translation.

¹⁰ Cf. *Spe salvi*, 9.

¹¹ Cf. *Ibid.*

¹² See the CEI Bible, 2008.

¹³ Cf. *Spe salvi*, 9.

The image of the door which we find in Acts 14, 27, and which inspired the Motu Proprio “Porta fidei” of Pope Benedict XVI is very eloquent in this regard. In fact we read: “The “door of faith” (Acts 14:27) is always open for us, ushering us into the life of communion with God and offering entry into his Church. It is possible to cross that threshold when the word of God is proclaimed and the heart allows itself to be shaped by transforming grace. To enter through that door is to set out on a journey that lasts a lifetime. It begins with baptism (cf. Rom 6:4), through which we can address God as Father, and it ends with the passage through death to eternal life, fruit of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, whose will it was, by the gift of the Holy Spirit, to draw those who believe in him into his own glory (cf. Jn 17:22). To profess faith in the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – is to believe in one God who is Love (cf. 1 Jn 4:8): the Father, who in the fullness of time sent his Son for our salvation; Jesus Christ, who in the mystery of his death and resurrection redeemed the world; the Holy Spirit, who leads the Church across the centuries as we await the Lord’s glorious return”¹⁴.

In the midst of the profound crisis of faith that affects many people, knowing that the door of faith is always open means that faith is always accessible, or that it is always possible to resume the journey of faith begun long ago and gradually abandoned almost imperceptibly as the years went by. It is essential to resume the faith journey to have eternal life. “Anyone who believes in me has eternal life” (cf. Jn 6, 47), as Jesus said. His words, preserved in the gospels, can reawaken faith in us and, through it, to give us eternal life. (cf. Jn 20, 30-31).

We are talking about the life we receive in baptism. In the classic baptismal rite, after the question about the name to be given to the newborn, the priest said: “What do you ask of the Church?” The reply: “Faith”. “And what does faith bring you?” “Eternal life”. “Eternal” because it is “of God” and therefore has no comparison with earthly life as we know it. We must admit that “this true life is unknown to us, and yet we know that there must be something that we do not know and towards which we feel attracted”¹⁵.

Abram and Mary of Nazareth

Two examples, one from the *Old Testament* and one from the *New*, can shed light on what we have said so far.

In chapter 12 of the Book of *Genesis* we read: “The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” So Abram set out, as the Lord had commanded, and Lot was with him...” Abram trusts the word of the Lord which is revealed to him. Then comes the request: “Go from your country...to the land I will show you...” Abram responds promptly and generously: “*Abram set out as the Lord had commanded*”.

In the *New Testament* we find the famous account of the calling of Mary: The Annunciation (cf. Lk 1, 26-38). God knocks on Mary’s door, looking for the co-operation of his creature, while fully respecting her freedom: “See, I am standing at the door, knocking. If anyone hears me calling and opens the door, I will come in and share a meal at their side” (Ap 3, 20). God does not break down the door, he asks permission and waits. At the angel’s words Mary feels troubled; her humility enables her to see that the enormity of what the angel is asking of her is out of all proportion to her smallness. The only guarantee Mary has is the angel’s word, and she decides to trust that word and throw herself into the arms of God. Mary actually believes that “nothing is impossible for God” (v. 37), and replies: “I am the Lord’s humble servant, let it be done to me as you have said” (v. 38). She entrusts herself to God’s word, as if to say: “take me wherever you will”. Mary entrusts herself in faith, which is why she is the model of our faith. The account of the annunciation reminds us that for us Christians, too, there is an annunciation; we too have a vocation, a calling. All God asks of us is trust. The saints are

¹⁴ Cf. *Porta Fidei*, 1.

¹⁵ Cf. *Spe salvi*, 11.

not heroes, they are humble people who make themselves totally available for God, and trust Him completely. With people like that, God can do great things (cf. Lk 1, 49).¹⁶

Once the angel has left, Mary looks around her and sees that nothing has changed. Her clothing, for example, is as it was before, the clothing of a poor woman of Nazareth. Mary had only heard a few words: “You will conceive a son, and give birth to him, and you will call him Jesus”. A few words! And Mary responds with her own few simple words: “Here I am”. And so, without being able to tell anyone what had happened to her, Mary sets out for *Ain Karim*, some 120 kms away, to meet her relative Elisabeth, who is also with child. This she does out of charity, trusting in the words of the angel: “See... your kinswoman Elizabeth has herself conceived a son and is now in her sixth month...” Mary knows that is by living in charity that one hears the voice of God. During that tiring journey, Mary must surely have been lost in adoration of the mystery that had come to birth in her womb, and that she had welcomed trusting only in his word. Through faith she surrenders to God without reserve, conceives God’s Son in her heart before conceiving him in her womb: precisely through faith! Finally, of her would be born he who is “Light from Light”, and through whom all men and women would have access to God, who would give them the gift of eternal life.¹⁷

Conclusion

At the end of this brief reflection, we can go back to the “kind of a definition of faith” which we gave at the beginning:

“Only faith can guarantee the blessings we hope for, or prove the existence of realities that are unseen” (*Hb* 11, 1).

Faith comes from listening to the Word; it is the response to a call. It is an invisible reality which the believer has inside him/herself which he receives as a free gift in Baptism, a reality that urges him to set out on a journey, thus becoming a pilgrim disposed to walk in the way of faith. This way requires freedom of spirit, perseverance, constancy and patience. In a word, it requires faith, which means trusting in Him whom the Father has sent into the world: Jesus Christ (cf. Jn 3, 34; 5, 24; 6, 29). He is the *way* to the Father, the *truth* that reveals Him and the life, *eternal life* (cf. Jn 14, 6).

The Word of God reaches men and woman in every age and continent, above all through the Church’s proclamation of the Gospel to the world. Today more than ever, our societies need people of faith, hope and love, who live out the reality of ecclesial communion and who on that basis witness to all the riches and beauty of our faith.

NEWS – CHAPTERS – VISITS – MEETINGS

Holy Land, Visitation and Formation Meetings

At the invitation of the Custody of the Holy Land, Fr. Ivan Matić, OFM, General Assistant for SFO-GiFra, conducted a visitation there (from 24 to 30 November 2012), where he met many brothers and sisters, members of the SFO and young Franciscans in the following towns: Nazareth, Jericho, Bethlehem, Jerusalem and Jaffa. Fr. Marcello Cichinelli, OFM, Director of Ongoing Formation in the Custody, organized and coordinated the program. Together with Fr. Toni Choucri, a student friar who takes care of the SFO Fraternities, he accompanied Fr. Ivan throughout his visit. The first few days were given over to visiting the SFO fraternities and young Franciscan groups. These meetings were very beautiful, very intense, outlining the situation of the various fraternities and groups in the Holy Land at the present time. Fr Ivan presented the state of the SFO and GiFra in the world, emphasizing some features of their identity and mission in the Church and society. Another important point was the topic of spiritual and pastoral assistance. Also, on the evening of November 28 at Holy Savior Friary in Jerusalem, there was a meeting of all the student friars in the Holy Land, together with their Master, Fr. Noel Muscat, and the Vice-Master Fr. John Loche. The students heard about the reality of the SFO and GiFra and the role of the spiritual and pastoral Assistant. On the 29th, Feast of All Franciscan Saints, at the

¹⁶ Cf. ANGELO COMASTRI, *Omelia tenuta in occasione della Novena dell’Immacolata* – Basilica dei Santi XII Apostoli, Roma. Personal recording made on 5.12.2006.

¹⁷ Cfr. *Ibid.*

Custody Curia, there was a formation meeting with the parish priests and spiritual assistants of all the Fraternities present in the Holy Land, on the theme of “Spiritual and pastoral Assistance to the SFO and GiFra”. That same evening, all members of the Franciscan Family were gathered together for the first time ever for sharing on three significant topics: formation, the liturgical celebration and a fraternal evening. The formation session dealt with: “The Secular Franciscan Order: its origins, history and present reality” presented Fr. Ivan, followed by questions and discussion. Also present was Fr. Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Custos of the Holy Land. Afterwards all the participants made their way to the Holy Savior Church for the celebration of solemn Vespers presided over by Fr. Ivan. After Vespers the participants enjoyed a meal with the resident community of friars. On the final day of the visit Fr. Ivan met with the Custos of the Holy Land to share with him his experience of the meetings and visits during the previous week, and to discuss the steps that need to be taken in the future in the different important areas of the life of the SFO and GiFra in the region, especially in the field of spiritual and pastoral assistance. In all these meetings and gatherings what came through was an awareness of the need for renewal and for deeper knowledge of the SFO and GiFra today, and at the same time the great need for closer ongoing communication with the entire international Fraternity. At present in the Holy Land there are about 100 professed members of the SFO and a similar number of young people who live Franciscan spirituality. For more information on the Holy Land, visit the following web page: www.custodia.org

Sardinia (Oristano) – SAC meets

The four General Assistants for OFS-GiFra held their annual five-day meeting at the OFMConv friary at Oristano (Sardinia), from 3 to 8 December 2012. The agenda included items of information and topical news, a review of activities in 2012, the choice of themes for *Koinonia* in 2013, the online publication of the *Manual for Assistance*, the liturgy for the forthcoming meeting of the CIOFS Presidency and planning a number of activities for 2013. The Assistants also visited the Urbanist Poor Clare Monastery of Santa Giusta, an ancient Romanesque cathedral named after the martyrs Justa, Justina and Enedina.

Panama (Chiriquí) - SFO Chapter-

The election chapter of the SFO of Panama took place from 11-13 January 2013, in the province of Chiriquí, some 600 km from Panama City, in a centre run by the Friars Minor. Presiding at the Chapter was the delegate of the OFS General Minister, Alberto Napoleon Zaldaña. The delegate of the CSA was Fr. Franco Brenes OFMConv, from Panama. In the afternoon, the two delegates met with the National Council to review the chapter agenda, which included the timetable and reports to be presented. Mass of the Holy Spirit was celebrated on the Saturday morning before the start of the working sessions, and after ascertaining the presence of a quorum of capitulars, the various chapter offices were assigned. The following brothers and sisters were elected to serve the National Fraternity for the triennium 2013-2016:

- 1- Diógenes Sánchez, as National Minister and International Councillor.
- 2- Francisco Castillo, as Vice- Minister and alternate International Councillor.
- 3- Olga Mata de Angulo, as Secretary.

Participating at this chapter were Fr. Luis Saldaña OFM, Provincial Definitor of the Province of Guadalupe in Central America, and the National Assistant, Fr. Gerard Evans OFM. The National Chapter concluded with Mass of Thanksgiving, celebrated on Sunday, 13 January 2013.

Argentina - SFO Chapter

In the city of San Antonio de Arredondo, Cordoba, the National SFO Fraternity of Argentina held its XI Chapter of elections, from 16 to 17 January 2013. There was a fraternal and prayerful atmosphere throughout the Chapter, whose president was Alonso Acevedo OFS, delegate of Encarnación Del Pozo, SFO General Minister, accompanied by Fr. Federico Galloso TOR, delegate of the Conference of General Assistants. 70 Secular Franciscans with voting rights were present, together with the National Assistants: Fr. Luis Furgoni, OFMConv and Fr. Emilio Andrada, OFM. The Capitulars elected Jorge Jornet as National Minister and International Councillor, and Ricardo Fidel as National Vice-Minister and alternate International Councillor. Principal celebrant at the final Mass was Fr. Federico Galloso and during the Mass Alonso Acevedo installed the duly elected Council.

Hungary – Fraternal and Pastoral Visits

The Fraternal and Pastoral Visits (VFP) of the SFO to the Fraternity of Hungary were conducted by the General Minister, Encarnación Del Pozo, and the General Assistant, Fr. Amanuel Mesgun, OFMConv. (From January 22 to 27 2013). The Visitors were accompanied throughout by members of the National Council, staying with the Friars Minor in Budapest. The first working day (23/01/2013) was taken up with a meeting with the National

Council, when the National Minister sketched out the features of the national fraternity and its activities. All the Council members had an opportunity to meet the Visitors individually for a fraternal exchange of views. On day two (24/01/2013) the guests visited the Museum of Terror, documenting a dark period in Hungary's history: for example, the two-fold occupation (German Nazism and Russian communism). In the afternoon, after a visit to the Minor Basilica of St. Stephen, Emperor and patron of Hungary, the Visitors met the fraternity at Pest. The meeting with the Spiritual Assistants took place on 25/01/2013, when the recently appointed National Assistant introduced the 15 Assistants present and explained their activities. The meeting concluded with Mass celebrated by the Provincial Minister of the Friars Minor, with a homily preached by Fr. Amanuel Mesgun, OFM^{Cap}, General Assistant, who also met the major superiors of the First Order in Hungary together with the National Assistant. This was an opportunity to discuss the exercise of *Altius moderamen*. On the last day, the Visitors had a final meeting with the entire National Council to present their findings, and then went on pilgrimage to the national shrine at Mátaverebèly-Szentkút, where about a hundred Secular Franciscans from various regional fraternities met the Visitors for a fraternal conversation. The concluding Mass was presided over by the Rector of the Shrine, with a homily by the General Assistant. After Mass, the Rector invited all participants to a guided tour of the famous Shrine. The Visitation concluded with a shared fraternal meal. The National Fraternity of Hungary, which was restructured and organized in accordance with the new SFO legislation in 1988, is composed of 47 established fraternities and 5 emerging ones, divided into four regions: Central Budapest, South-East, West and North-East. Hungary has: 534 professed and 26 in initial formation. Unfortunately GiFra does not exist, but they are working well towards establishing a presence. The Secular Franciscans of Hungary are assisted by 16 Assistants of the First Order: 13 OFM., 2 OFM^{Cap}., 1 OFM^{Conv}. There are other Assistants not belonging to the First Order or TOR, including 6 diocesan priests and two Franciscan Sisters.

Italy (Assisi) – Course for Assistants

From 28-31 January 2013, at the Casa Leonori-Cenacolo in Assisi, the XIV Formation Course for Assistants of Italy was held. Approximately 110 Assistants from the First Order and TOR attended. The theme of the Course was "Give me a straightforward Faith. The Assistant and Assistance: A Crisis of Identity?". On the 29th, Sister Elena Bosetti spoke on the topic of: "The Assistant and assistance in the light of the Word: which methodology?". Following this, Fr. Amando Trujillo Cano TOR, General Assistant for SFO-GiFra, gave a paper on: "New Evangelization and the Franciscan Charisma". On the evening of the same day the participants went to the lower Basilica of St. Francis for Mass, presided over by Fr. Giancarlo Corsini, OFM^{Conv}, president of the Union of the Franciscan Families in Italy. A prayer and meeting at the tomb was then held with Fr. Marco Tasca, OFM^{Conv}, General Minister, who had just been re-elected that same day. He invoked God's blessing on all the participants. On the 30th, a round table discussion was held on the subject of: "Spiritual Assistance for the SFO and GiFra today". In the evening, all the participants made their way to the shrine of San Damiano for Mass, celebrated by Fr. Ivan Matić, OFM, General Assistant, in the presence of Encarnación Del Pozo, SFO General Minister. After Mass there was a time of prayerful meditation in front of the San Damiano crucifix. The final day of the course, 31st January, was devoted to testimonies by Eugenio Di Giovine and Fr. Fabio Paciello, OFM^{Conv}, on the theme: CEMIOFS families on mission and by Simona e Paola, of the GiFra National Council, on mission among the people. The course concluded with a plenary assembly at which the results of the sharing groups were presented, all the participants then went to the Portiuncula for Mass, at which Mons. Rodolfo Cetoloni, OFM, Bishop of Montepulciano-Chiusi-Pienza, presided.

Chad – Pastoral Visit

The National Fraternity of Chad was due to hold its election Chapter 2012, but was unable to do so due to a lack of organizational structures. The CIOFS Presidency had suggested a pastoral and fraternal Visit, but that too had to be postponed on account of the political instability in neighboring Mali. Eventually, from 21-28 February 2013, General Assistant Fr. Amanuel Mesgun OFM^{Cap} was able to conduct the pastoral visitation. The National Fraternity in Chad, which was canonically established 2001, today has 35 fraternities, with a total of 325 brothers and sisters (of whom 174 are professed, 56 are novices and 95 postulants). Assistance is provided by the Capuchin friars, Br. Aloys Voide, being national Assistant, and Br. Olivier as national Assistant of GiFra. The Visitor was accompanied from start to finish by Br. Raffaele Maddalena and was a guest of the Capuchins wherever he went. He had two meetings with the National Council: one at Moundou (23-02-2013) and then at the conclusion of the Visit, at Ndjamena (28-02-2013). At Moundou, after hearing from the two SFO and GiFra Assistants, the Visitor met the Bishop of Moundou diocese, who expressed his great satisfaction for the work done in the area of youth apostolate. At Gorè (24-02-2013), where there is no

local SFO fraternity, the Visitor met the diocesan Bishop, the Capuchin Mgr. Rosario Pio Ramolo, and visited two communities of Franciscan sisters at Donia. The local fraternity of Bam, which comprises the secular Franciscans of Manang (22 members), Tura (13 members) and Bedara (17 members) was visited on 25 February. On the same day the visitor met the brothers and sisters of the local fraternity of Baybokoum. This Fraternity comprises all the groups known as "Friends of St. Francis" scattered in 10 villages, which together make up 315 brothers and sisters in formation. The local Fraternity of Bebedja comprises a further two emerging fraternities, at Doba and Kome, and is composed of 28 professed, 21 novices and 6 postulants. A total of 38 young people attended the meeting of Gifra members at Bebedja, who came from three parishes: Bebedja (where there are 38 young people), the Parish of Saint Dominic Savio at Doba, and the cathedral at Doba. The meeting with the spiritual Assistants of SFO-Gifra was held at the St Elizabeth SFO Centre at Moundou on 27-02-2013, with 10 Spiritual Assistants present, who discussed the topic of "Spiritual Assistance for the SFO and Gifra today". After the meeting, the brothers shared a fraternal meal prepared by the local fraternity of Moundou. The last day of the pastoral visit was devoted to the local fraternity at Ndjamen. In conclusion, the Visitor, by authority granted to him by the General Minister, extended the term of office of the National Council until November 2013. In a Memorandum, signed by the National Minister and by the Assistant and countersigned by the Visitor, the remaining steps leading to the next national election Chapter were agreed.

Rome – Thanks to Fr. Ivan

After more than twelve years (2000-2013), Fr. Ivan Matic, OFM, has ended his service as General Spiritual Assistant for the SFO and Franciscan Youth (Gifra). His contribution to the Presidency of CIOFS has been immensely valuable, not only in the area of liturgy but also in terms of his active participation in all the meetings, gatherings, international congresses, national chapters, pastoral visits, etc. and in a particular way in his animation and guidance of (international meetings and Congresses), together with the young people in charge. As a member of the Conference of Spiritual Assistants (CAS) he was able to work collegially with the other three General Assistants (OFMConv, OFMConv and TOR). In thanking Fr. Ivan, both for his fraternal presence and for the hard work he has done, the CAS wishes him every blessing and good wish for the future.

Rome – Welcome to the new General Assistant for OFS-GiFra

With great joy we welcome Fr. José Antônio Cruz Duarte, OFM, the new General Assistant for the SFO and GiFra. Fr. José Antônio was born in Pederneiras, São Paulo (Brazil), on 14 May, 1956 and joined the Friars Minor on January 20, 1975. He was perpetually professed in 1979 and was ordained priest on 12 December 1981. He graduated in Pedagogy at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro in 1988. In 1998 he gained a graduate diploma in Religious Sciences from the Catholic University of São Paulo. From 1977 to 2012 he devoted himself to youth apostolate and university chaplaincy work. He worked in the area of youth formation from 1982 to 2002 in primary schools in the city of Lages (Santa Catarina State) and São Paulo. From 1991 to 2012 he was involved in higher education at the University of São Francisco, Bragança Paulista, São Paulo, as well as teaching various courses in ethics and bioethics. He was Spiritual Assistant to the Secular Institute *Piccola Famiglia Francescana* in the southern tip of South America. He was local assistant to several SFO Fraternities. From 1988 to 2012 he was spiritual director to various Franciscan Congregations. Between 1988 and 2013 he directed retreats for diocesan clergy and religious men and women, Secular Franciscans, couples and Our Lady's Teams. The OFM General Minister, Fr. José Rodríguez Carballo, appointed him General Assistant to the SFO on 21 December 2012.

On March 3, 2013, at 11:30, all the General Assistants met at the OFM General Curia in via Santa Maria Mediatrix, 25, to welcome Fr. José Antônio and to enjoy a festive lunch with all the friars of the General Curia. After lunch they adjourned to the Conventual Friary of St Maximilian Kolbe, where the new OFM General Assistant attended his first meeting, scheduled for March 5, 2013