



K O I N Ō N I A

...together on the journey

CONFERENCE OF THE GENERAL SPIRITUAL ASSISTANTS TO THE OFS-YOUFRA

2013 -4

Year 20

n. 80

YEAR OF FAITH

FAITH ACCORDING TO THE DOCUMENTS OF THE OFS

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INTRODUCTION

In this fourth issue of Koinonia of 2013, year dedicated to the theme of *faith*, we will address the specific theme of faith according to the official documents of the OFS, namely, the *Rule* of Paul VI (1978), the *General Constitutions* (GG.CC., 2001) and the *Ritual* (1984). We hope that these reflections contribute to deepening the knowledge and the applications of the dimensions of the faith that derive from the identity and the mission of Secular Franciscans, as it was crystallized in these documents that gather the fruits of the Second Vatican Council and the post-conciliar period.

1. FAITH ACCORDING TO THE RULE OF THE OFS

The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order, approved by Pope Paul VI on June 24, 1978 with the apostolic brief *Seraphicus Patriarcha*, uses the only one time the term “faith,” namely in number 5, which affirms:

*Secular Franciscans, therefore, should seek to encounter the living and active person of Christ in their brothers and sisters, in Sacred Scripture, in the Church, and in liturgical activity. The **faith** of St. Francis, who often said, "I see nothing bodily of the Most High Son of God in this world except His most holy body and blood," should be the inspiration and pattern of their Eucharistic life.*

The phrase cited in this number of the Rule is taken from the *Testament* of St. Francis (n. 10). In this work the saint makes a synthesis of his experience of faith, indicating, among other things, the generous and constant initiative of God in his life. Indirectly, the Testament offers the explanation that shows the way in which the Lord had responded to the supplications that the saint had turned toward him in the prayer before the Crucifix of *San Damiano*: “...give me a right faith...” It interests us, particularly, to indicate here how Francis recognized the various gifts of the Lord: “The Lord gave me, Brother Francis, thus to begin doing penance in this way (v. 1)...such faith in churches (v. 4)...such faith in priests who live according to the rite of holy Roman church” (v. 6), etc. It is in this context that we find the affirmation of the Rule of the Eucharistic faith of Francis and this as a gift of God that the Church presents to Secular Franciscans as inspired and as a model to follow. The Eucharistic life of the brothers and sisters finds its foundation in this living and ardent faith of the saint, which recognized the sublime holiness of the body and blood of the *Most High Son of God* in the humility of the consecrated species. This consideration helps us to begin this reflection on faith with a Christological angle and in a concrete and experiential way, by way of the invitation to participate in the central sacrament of the Church with the disposition of faith, full of the thanksgiving and awe that the saint of Assisi had.

2. FAITH ACCORDING TO THE GENERAL CONSTITUTIONS OF THE OFS

Before analyzing the texts of the General Constitutions of the OFS, approved and confirmed by Decree of the Congregation ICLSAL on December 8, 2000, let us linger briefly on the letter of promulgation, signed by then General Minister of the OFS, Emanuela De Nunzio, and published on February 6, 2001. In it, Emanuela refers to **faith** as an anchor that has allowed the different brothers and sisters of the OFS who lived in past ages to be faithful to their baptismal consecration and to resist evil to the point of sacrificing their own lives.

In the same paragraph, Emanuela cites John Paul II, who had attributed the survival of the faith in the life of whole peoples to the witness of lay faithful, not seldom to the point of martyrdom. It is very meaningful that the letter mentions faith in relation to the exalted witness of Christ on the part of many seculars. These two citations present complementary aspects of the faith, one as cause and the other as effect. In the first case the faith is seen as an anchor that guides the life of the believer, to which he agrees to be faithful and to resist the assaults of evil. In the second case, the same courageous witness of the laity has made possible the historical and cultural endurance of the faith in countries in which clergy or religious were not present for a long time.

The first time the word *faith* appears in the Constitutions of the OFS is in article **8.2**, in which it is presented as the light that helps Secular Franciscans to deepen their identity and mission: *the values and the choices of the evangelical life according to the Rule of the OFS*. The rest of this article makes more precise the means, the attitudes, and the areas of this development *in the light of faith*. It treats, therefore, of a dynamic and very meaningful *faith*, in that it is linked to the deepening of the understanding and experience of the Secular Franciscan life.

The word *faith* then appears in article **12.1**. The article says: *each day the brothers and sisters faithfully live the great gift which Christ has given: the revelation of the Father*. Here is recognized, in the first place, the sublime gift that Christ has given us, the knowledge of God, our Father. This gift can be recognized and experienced daily only by means of the faith; otherwise it will be impossible to appreciate it and conform life to it. To live this gift, the Rule proposes various means to Secular Franciscans: the example and the writings of St. Francis and the grace of the Holy Spirit. This article also exhorts the brothers and sisters to bear *witness to this faith* before others. The article proposes various areas and circumstances in which this faith can be manifested: *in their family life; in their work; in their joys and sufferings; in their associations with all men and women, brothers and sisters of the same Father; in their presence and participation in the life of society; in their fraternal relationships with all creatures*. It can be affirmed that this list of situations and human spaces represents the totality of interpersonal relationships of Secular Franciscans, reaching even the whole of creation. For a true Christian, no area of life can remain outside of the bearing witness to the faith.

For its part, article **14.1** of the Constitutions turns to the call to Secular Franciscans that they *should commit themselves to a faith-inspired reflection on the Church*, based on the teaching of Vatican II, which presents the Church as the People of God (LG 1, 2; 48, 2; 59, 1; GS 45, 1; AG 1, 1; 5, 1). The conciliar and post-conciliar teaching calls all the members of the Church to co-responsibility in her life and mission. However, this is not a reflection made with simply human criteria, but those of faith, that is, with a believing heart and with the purpose of a living commitment, *taking up the challenges and accept[ing] the responsibilities that this reflection will lead them to discover*. It would be hoped that every Fraternity of the OFS would encourage regularly a serene and profound dialogue on this theme in order to constantly renew its participation in the ecclesial mission.

Speaking of the Virgin Mary as model of the evangelical life, article **16.1** of the Constitutions calls Secular Franciscans to love her intensely and to *manifest their own devotion with expressions of genuine faith, in forms accepted by the Church*. This criterion is of great relevance because for many brothers and sisters the devotional dimension of the faith is of great importance, and therefore it is necessary that this dimension be anchored in a true experience and in ecclesial communion.

Article **17.1** offers various means that give form to the heart and life of the brothers and sisters of the OFS that are called to participate directly in a ministry in the Church. Said means are: *the love of Francis for the word of God [...], as well as his faith in those who announce it, and the great fervor with which he received the mission of preaching penance from the Pope*. In this case, *faith in those who announce the Word of God*, seems to refer to the great faith that the Lord granted to St. Francis *in priests who live according to the rite of the holy Roman Church because of their orders that, were they to persecute me, I would still want to have recourse to them...* (cf. *Test*, 6-10). It could also refer indirectly to the *theologians and those who minister the most holy divine words* (*Test*, 13). In any case, Secular Franciscans who share in any ecclesial ministry are asked to make their own these three mediations of the Word of God, including that ecclesial sense of collaboration with those who announce it, especially priests and theologians. The personal journey of humility and ecclesiastical obedience of the saint was not possible without suffering and without the help of his faith.

This fundamental attitude is an indispensable condition for the brothers and sisters called to share the evangelical mission of the Church, with all the challenges and possibilities of our current age.

Article **26.1** speaks of the *invincible faith of rising with Christ to eternal life* as one of the pillars that supported Francis' journey of faith. A path full of moments of joy, but not free of many sorrows which were endured through an invincible hope. In the context of contemporary culture, in which the human being often lives overpowered by many sufferings and injustices, by the lack of a sense of life, by the insatiable search for immediate gratification that doesn't give him true happiness, it is necessary to recover the ultimate sense of our existence and to place, with trust, our security and our joy in the God revealed by Jesus Christ.

Developing this theme, article **27.2** calls Secular Franciscans to commit *themselves to create in their environment and, above all, in their fraternities, a climate of faith and hope so that "Sister Death" may be regarded as a passage to the Father, and all may prepare themselves with serenity*. This climate of faith and of hope in the face of bodily death will be a great support for the growing number of brothers and sisters who approach the end of their existence and a sign and a witness for other persons who are concluding their lives in desperation, abandonment or without a sense of faith in the resurrection.

Article **39.2** lists the condition for admission of candidates to the OFS: *to profess the Catholic faith, to live in communion with the Church, to be of good moral standing, and to show clear signs of a vocation*.¹ These canonical requirements, which a candidate for the fraternal and evangelical life of the OFS must satisfy, have the fundamental dimensions of Christian and Franciscan experience in view. To profess the Catholic faith is not a simply exterior deed, but a confession of faith that signifies a personal adherence to Christ living and risen, according to the teaching of the Catholic community and in full communion with it. It is interesting to note that in some National Fraternities of the OFS, there is a significant number of brothers and sisters having come from Protestantism and converted to Catholicism, have entered the OFS after the necessary course of formation. In addition, we must not forget that there are various Franciscan communities outside of the Catholic Church, as, for example, in the Anglican Church, with which there are various affinities but not a formal and full communion.

Article **44.3** is about the various objectives for ongoing formation in its different forms. Among those purposes mentioned is that of helping Seculars to reflect *on events in the Church and in society in the light of faith and with the help of the documents of the teaching Church, consequently taking consistent positions*. This instruction is directly linked with article **14.1**, which invites the realization of an ecclesiological reflection oriented toward a vital commitment. Number **44.3** amplifies the object of ecclesiological reflection to embrace also the circumstantial moments and the signs of the times present in the society of today. It is necessary to assure ourselves that said reflection in fraternity does not limit itself to diagnosing of reality or to an intellectual project, but reaches decisions consistent with its discoveries.

Article **58.3** reminds us that the faith is a treasure that can be lost or rejected, with grave and formal consequences. By the abandonment of the faith, among other things, a person excludes himself from the Order. The gravity of the case calls for an opportune and fraternal intervention on the part of the Council of the local Fraternity and the Council of the superior level. Unfortunately, certain cases have already been verified within the OFS, and this is due to the lack of an opportune intervention that could have avoided a sad ending. In other cases, the right procedures were not applied at the moment in which a member had already abandoned the faith or had excluded himself automatically from ecclesial communion because of his actions.

Finally, article **99.1** asks that Secular Franciscans *should seek to know and deepen the doctrine proposed by the teaching Church through its more important documents and they should be attentive to the presence of the Holy Spirit who vivifies the faith and charity of the people of God*,² in the context of the full communion with the Pope and with the bishops. If you lose view of the action of the Spirit, you fall into stagnation of the faith and of ecclesial structures, and lose evangelical vitality and block the evangelical mission in the world. We must always remember that for the saint of Assisi, the Holy Spirit is the General Minister of the Order (cf. 2 Cel 193). Even more, the same Constitutions identify the Holy Spirit as the source of the vocation of Secular Franciscans, the animator of the fraternal life and of mission. Therefore, the brothers and the sisters must imitate the fidelity of Francis and his inspirations and must desire above all things, "the Spirit of God at work within them." (cf. GG.CC. 11).

3. FAITH ACCORDING TO THE RITUAL OF THE OFS

¹ Cf. c. 316

² *Lumen gentium*, 12.

The first mention of faith in the Ritual of the OFS is found in the opening admonition of the *Rite of Admission* (n. 5) This is an invitation to the members of the Fraternity to renew *their faith in the Holy Spirit* and to invoke him in the celebration of the rite, that it might be him that guides and brings to fulfillment the process of formation of the candidates about to be admitted. Faith in the Holy Spirit is seen, then, not as something already completed, but as a gift to be renewed constantly and that brings one to turn to him in common prayer and in the process of formation of candidates.

Further along, in the *The Rite of Commitment to the Gospel Life or Profession*, at the end of the *Questioning* (n. 29), the Minister of the Fraternity recalls to the candidates that the local Fraternity that welcomes them is a *visible sign of the Church, a community of faith and love*. At the same time it is recalled and explained to them that, at the moment of admission to the Order, they commit themselves, *together with all the members you now pledge yourselves to spend your efforts to make the fraternity a genuine ecclesial assembly and a living Franciscan community*. These affirmations take up again the centrality of faith and charity in the life and mission of the Church and of the local Fraternity of the OFS. The candidates are called to appreciate the gift that they receive and to collaborate that it might be lived faithfully.

The word *faith* appears, then, in the *Opening and Closing Prayers for Fraternity Meetings* (n. 2) which cites not less that the prayer of St. Francis before the Crucifix of *San Damiano: Most High, glorious God, enlighten the darkness of my heart and give me true faith...* Francis asked not only the gift of faith, but a faith that didn't distance itself from the revelation kept by the Church. Finally, the word appears in the rite of the *Celebration of the Chapter of the Fraternity*, in the prayer carried out by the priest while he lays hands on the newly elected (n. 8): *May the God of hope bring you such joy and peace in your faith that the power of the Holy Spirit will remove all bounds to hope* (Rom 15:13). This is one of many of the blessings that Paul the Apostle wrote to the Christian community in Rome, in which *hope* stands out as a gift of God in the Spirit. The Apostle recognizes that the mediation of the faith is necessary for the Christian community to be able to experience the consolation and the hope that God willed for them, especially in the midst of the adversities and persecutions that they would have to face.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the preceding considerations, we can draw out some general conclusions about the experience of faith by Secular Franciscans, according to the official documents.

In the first place, faith is seen as *a gift of God* in which we recognize Christ as Son of God, present in a special way in the Eucharist, but also *in the brothers and sisters, in the sacred Scriptures, in the Church and in the celebration of the liturgy* (Cf. *Rule* 5). In addition, faith helps to deepen the various aspects of the evangelical experience professed by Secular Franciscans, working in their lives as a light that illuminates (*Cost.* 8.2). This faith is also that which allows one to welcome and live *the gift of the revelation of the Father* (*Cost.* 12.1) Faith leads us into the Trinitarian life! Second, based on the documents analyzed, Secular Franciscans have received the faith to *witness it with courage*, incarnating it in all the sectors of their secular state.

In the third place, this faith is also of an *ecclesial nature*, because it is lived in faithful and complete communion with the Church, in particular with the pastors. This also moves the brothers and sisters to reflect constantly on the mission that they are called to carry out both in the Church and the world. This reflection brings a permanent renewal of their life-commitment. This ecclesial dimension will have to be lived also in the personal devotion the brothers and sisters express toward Mary; devotion that will have to correspond to an authentic faith. (*Cost.* 16.1)

In the fourth place, as *the invincible faith of rising with Christ to eternal life* (*Cost.* 26.1) was one of the sources of *trust and joy* for St. Francis, so it is proposed also to Secular Franciscans as an eschatological hope that gives us courage on the hard path of life, until we reach its fullness in eternity.

Finally, *living and renewed faith in the presence and action of the Holy Spirit within the Fraternity* allows us to rejoice abundantly in *hope* through the gifts of joy and peace.

In this final issue of the year we want to express our hope that the call launched by Pope Benedict XVI to the Church to renew the sense and the life of faith should produce in the whole Franciscan family abundant fruits for the Kingdom of God. We hope that these four articles that the Conference of General Assistants to the OFS-YouFra has offered, by means of this bulletin, can serve as an encouragement to live more intensely and generously the gift of faith in Christ.

Next year we will reflect on certain themes that Pope Francis has offered to the Church in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* (on the proclamation of the Gospel in today's world), hoping to provide another small contribution to the ongoing formation of readers of Koinonia. Thank you!

NEWS – CHAPTERS – VISITATIONS – MEETINGS

Mexico – Fraternal and Pastoral Visitation

The fraternal and pastoral visitation (FPV) to the OFS National Council of Mexico was held from September 19-21 at the John Paul II pastoral house in San Juan de los Lagos, Jalisco. Maria Consuelo Núñez de Queremel OFS (Chelito), International Councilor of the Presidency of CIOFS, was the fraternal Visitor and Br. Amando Trujillo Cano, TOR, General Assistant to the OFS, was the pastoral Visitor. More than 70 Secular Franciscans were gathered and present, together with members of the Franciscan Youth, a dozen spiritual Assistants and some observers. The activities of the FPV included meetings with the National executive (JEN), the presentation of reports, work in small groups and plenary sessions. Br. Eusebio Hernández Mendoza OFM Cap, Minister of the Vice province of Our Lady of Guadalupe, was present for a couple of days and two provincial Vicars of the OFM were invited to celebrate the Eucharist.

Mexico – National Elective Chapter

The National elective Chapter began on Saturday, September 21, and concluded on Sunday the 22th. The activities included two conferences, the discussion and approval of the 2013-2014 budget, the development of goals for the next triennium, a meeting with the representatives of the regions and another with the spiritual Assistants. At the end of the Chapter, Martha Estela Avila Garcia was elected National Minister and International Councilor, and Angel Guadalupe de la Rosa vice National Minister. The liturgy included every day the celebration of the Eucharist, the Liturgy of the Hours, and a holy hour of Eucharistic adoration. Other events were a Mexican feast and recreational activities.

Poland – Fraternal and Pastoral Visitation

The fraternal and pastoral visitation to the OFS of Poland began on September 18, with the votive Mass of St. Stanislaus Kostka, patron of Polish youth. After the Eucharistic celebration, the Visitors met the National Directive Council (CDN). Joanna Belowska, National Minister, welcomed the Visitors, Tibor Kauser, Councilor of the Presidency of OFS English zone 1 (North American and Europe) and delegate of the General Minister, and Br. José Antonio Cruz Duarte OFM, General Assistant. Tibor made a brief presentation on the fraternal and pastoral visitation. The CDN meets four times a year for a whole day. Also on this day, the members of the Regional Councils met. These meetings are a time of formation for which reports are published on the web site. The OFS in Poland is composed of eighteen regional Fraternities and 587 local Fraternities with a total of 10,859 brothers and sisters, of which the median age is 65 years. 80% are women. Among the significant activities of National Fraternity of Poland there is the annual pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa, with a participation of 60% of the Secular Franciscans coming from the whole of Poland. In Poland, Franciscan Youth is a Federation of five provincial Fraternities of the OFM and OFM Cap. With 40 local Fraternities and 460 members. The Conference of the Assistants (CAS) is composed of Br. Marian Jarzabek OFM Conv, President, Br. Alojzy Panczak OFM, and Br. Andrzej Romanowski OFM Cap. All the regional Fraternities are assisted by the First Order. 256 of 587 fraternities are assisted by diocesan clergy who are appointed by Major Superiors of the First Order or TOR. On September 20, the fraternal and pastoral visitation concluded with a meeting of the Provincials and Assistants.

Poland – National Elective Chapter

The National Fraternity of Poland celebrated the National elective Chapter from September 20 to 22. Tibor Kauser, Councilor of the Presidency – English Area I, presided at the Chapter as delegate of the General Minister of the OFS and was assisted by Br. José Cruz Duarte OFM, General Assistant. 40 Capitulars were present, representing 19 regions. Joanna Berlowska was reelected as National Minister and Emilia Nogaj was reelected as International Councilor.

Fort Worth, USA – Youth Retreat at All Saints Parish

This past September 7, Saturday, Br. Amando Trujillo Cano guided a spiritual retreat for young people in the parish of All Saints in Fort Worth, TX. The participants were young people of two emerging fraternities of YouFra: of All Saints and of St. Francis parish in Waco. The theme of the retreat was Conversion, fraternity, and Franciscan Youth in the world. The retreat concluded with a Eucharistic celebration in the parish church.

Assisi, Meeting with the 4 General Ministers

The annual meeting of General Assistants and the four General Ministers of the First Order and TOR took place in the friary of Christ the King (Cremlino) in Assisi. The work began at 11 a.m. with an introduction by Br. Michael Perry, President in turn of the Conference. The Assistants asked comment on three documents that they had submitted to the General Ministers for examination. The three documents were on: (1) Animation within each Order;

(2) The Office of the “*altius moderamen*” and (3) the personal evaluation of the Assistants on their own responsibilities. A propos the documents submitted to their attention, the General Ministers made the decision, for this year, to study the second point, namely regarding the application of the “*altius moderamen*,” specifying the autonomy of the OFS, the vital and reciprocal communion between two autonomous Orders as well as the economic aspect of the travel of the General Assistants that their respective Curias have to cover. Another point of discussion was the Report of Michael Higgins after the pastoral Visitation that he made of CIOFS. Before speaking on it, the General Ministers await feedback from the General and Vice General Minister of the OFS, who will meet in the coming days in Assisi. Finally, the problem of little awareness on the part of friars of the OFS was discussed. To solve this it was proposed to organize a meeting of the CAS and of the Commission of the First Order and the TOR for formation, in order to be able to integrate the knowledge of the OFS beginning in the initial formation of all the Orders. CAS recommended in the end that these meetings be tighter in both timing and content. The meeting concluded at 12:45 with a message of thanks to CAS from the President in turn, Br. Michael Perry.

Croatia – Fraternal and Pastoral Visitation

As foreseen by the schedule, the fraternal and pastoral Visitation (FPV) was carried out from October 9 to 11 by two members of CIOFS: Benedetto Lino, International Councilor for the Italian language and Br. Martin Bitzer, OFM Conv, General Assistant to OFS-YouFra. The Visitors were guests at the friary of the OFM, Kaptol 9 of Zagreb. This Visitation was opened with a meeting with the Conference of the National Assistants of OFS and YouFra. Then, the Visitors also met with the Major Superiors of the First Order and TOR of Croatia. In meeting with the members of the executive Group of the National Council of the OFS one by one, the Visitors found time for the revision of documents, records, and other books of the archive of the above-mentioned Council. The celebrations of the Eucharist articulated the movement of the meetings with the individual persons and various groups, among which were the members of the National Council of YouFra. Even though it was brief, the meeting with the archbishop of Zagreb, Cardinal Josip Bozanić, was very meaningful. Br. Martin also meet the members of YouFra of the local Fraternity of Zagreb-Sveti Duh who were celebrating 20 years of existence, as also were the Conventual Friars. The meetings with the regional Ministers of the OFS and then the final meeting with the National Council of the OFS were very important.

Croatia –National Elective Chapter

The V National elective Chapter of the OFS in Croatia was held from October 11 to 13 at the “Tabor” house in Samobor, near Zagreb. 30 capitulars with the right to vote participated and the National spiritual Assistants were present. Benedetto Lino presided at the Chapter, accompanied by Br. Martin Pablo Bitzer, OFM Conv. Stjepan Kelčić was reelected National Minister, Martina Subotić was elected International Councilor, and Mihaela Rajić was elected International Councilor in substitution.

Tanzania – National Elective Chapter

Bennet Matela, as delegate of the General Minister, presided at the National elective Chapter of the National Fraternity of Tanzania. Br. Felician Kavishe OFM Cap witnessed the Chapter as delegate of CAS. The 35 brother and sister capitulars, on October 1 at Dar es Salaam (Tanzania), elected: National Minister: Felix Masha; the International Councilor and substitute are the National Minister and Vice Minister. The two National Councilors elected are: Sospiter Mwita and Benedict Msangi.

France – National Elective Chapter

The National Fraternity of France celebrated the National elective Chapter from October 12 to 13 in the *Lycée Technique et Professionnel Privé* Saint Louis, Clos Soubeyran in Crest. Tibor Kauser, Councilor of the Presidency – English Area I, presided as delegate of the General Minister of the OFS and was assisted by Br. José Antonio Cruz Duarte OFM, General Assistant. 40 capitulars were present, representing 19 regions. Chantal Auvray was elected National Minister and Marie Hélène Barousseau was elected International Councilor.

India – Course for Spiritual Assistants

Br. Amanuel Mesgun, General Assistant, began his trip to India early in order to give a formation course to the National and regional Assistants in that nation. Said course of formation was organized by the National Assistant, Br. Antonysamy OFM Cap, in the friary of the Capuchins of Tamil Nadu, where there the Superior is Br. Irudaya Sami OFM Cap, former General Assistant. The themes present and discussed by the General Assistant were various. The regional Assistants presented the current situation of their regional Fraternities, which are: Kerala (Syro Malabar), Kerala (Latin), Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Mumbai, Maharashtra, Goa, Bihar-Jiharkanda, etc. In addition to the succinct presentations, the two study days were useful also for a useful sharing of experiences between the General and local Assistants. The work concluded on Tuesday, October 15 at 1 p.m., with a solemn Mass in honor of St. Anthony of Padua at which all the Assistants participated as well as about 400 devoted to this miracle-worker. On

October 16, the General Assistant, accompanied by Br. Irudaya Sami, visited the city of Tanjуври, where he also met the regional representatives of YouFra in Tamil Nadu and ten of the Seculars from the local fraternity.

India – National Elective Chapter

The Vice General Minister, Doug Clorey, and the General Assistant, Br. Amanuel Mesgun OFM Cap., met on October 17 at the International airport of Chochin, Kerala. In the afternoon of the same day the election was carried out with the following result from the balloting: Francis Albert, National Minister; Oliver Fernando, vice National Minister. The Minister and Vice Minister are respectively the International Councilor and substitute. The National Fraternity of the OFS in India is distributed in 85 regions and made up of 715 local Fraternities. There are 17, 782 members (of which 845 are candidates, 1,447 simply professed, and 15,480 solemnly professed.) 44 friars are committed to assure their spiritual assistance.

Uruguay – Fraternal and Pastoral Visitation

The fraternal and pastoral Visitation to the National Fraternity of the OFS in Uruguay began on October 25. Alonso Acevedo, National Minister of Chile and delegate of the General Minister and Br. José Antonio Cruz Duarte OFM, General Assistant, were the Visitors. The Visitation opened with a meeting with the National Directive Council. The Council meets three times a year with the name of Extended Assembly. This Council has undergone various changes during its mandate. The National Fraternity of Uruguay is made up of seven local Fraternities, of which three are in a restructuring phase and one is emerging. The OFS in Uruguay has 97 professed, with a median age of 77 years. The major part is women (85%). The Fraternity of Uruguay makes a great work of sensitizing on environmental problems and on human rights with Franciscans International, developing various actions and maintaining records in the Archdiocese of Montevideo. Spiritual care is given by three Franciscan friars and two sisters. The Visitors recommended that the National Directive Council of the OFS begin to work with young people towards the end of forming a fraternity of YouFra. They also asked the assistance of the Provincial of the Conventual Friars to help organize YouFra in Uruguay. The Visitation concluded with the beginning of the elective Chapter.

Uruguay – National Elective Chapter

The National Fraternity of Uruguay celebrated the National elective Chapter from October 26 to 27 in Nazareth House, Montevideo. The assembly was composed of 23 representatives of 7 fraternities. The Chapter began with the welcome to the representatives of the OFS and of CAS: Alonso Acevedo, National Minister of Chile, delegate of the General Minister, and Br. Fr. José Antonio Cruz Duarte OFM, General Assistant. María Matilde Beltrame was reelected as National Minister and International Councilor. Mario Cayota was elected Vice Minister.

Jerusalem – Annual Meeting of CIOFS and Pilgrimage to the Holy Land

The Presidency of CIOFS held its second session of the year from November 2 to 9 in Jerusalem, Israel, in the friary of the Capuchin friars. The meeting had a climate of fraternal sharing, prayer, and work. The session of ongoing formation was centered on the meaning of being Christian in the Middle East in this historical moment. The order of the day included the five priorities of the Order (formation, communication, YouFra, presence in the world, and emerging Fraternities), the work of the other commissions of the Presidency (economic, juridical, and patrimony), the checking and scheduling on the fraternal and pastoral Visitations, National Chapters, meetings and courses of formation, the 8th centenary of the birth of St. Louis IX, and in particular, preparations for the general elective Chapter on 2014. This meeting was marked by the opportunity to visit various shrines of the Custody of the Holy Land and to meet two fraternities of OFS (Jerusalem and Bethlehem). There was also a formative and fraternal meeting with Br. Pizzaballa, Custos of the Holy Land, and another with His Beatitude Fouad Twal, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem. The days 10 to 13 were dedicated to visiting various historical sites outside of Jerusalem linked to events described in the Bible.

Beirut, Lebanon – Fraternal and Pastoral Visitation

The National Council of the OFS in Lebanon received the fraternal and pastoral Visitation from November 16 to 24. Encarnación del Pozo, General Minister of the OFS, made the Visitation with Michèle Altmeyer OFS, International Councilor of Presidency of CIOFS, and, at the same time, the pastoral Visitor was Br. Amando Trujillo Cano TOR, General Assistant to the OFS-YouFra and representative of the Conference of General Assistants to the OFS-YouFra. The Visitations took place in Beirut and in other places, according to the program that the Visitors and the National Council had agreed on together. In addition to the meeting with the departing National Council (together and individually), the program included meetings with all the local Fraternities of Lebanon, distributed in groups or individually, both in moments of fraternity and formation and in celebrations of profession or anniversaries. These meetings allowed the Visitors to know the most relevant aspects of the local Fraternities, their successes and their challenges. The Visitors also had an official meeting with His Excellency Paul Dahdah, Latin Apostolic Vicar for

Lebanon, at Riad el Solh. They also visited a Syrian refugee camp at Zahle. On the morning of Friday the 22 there was a joyful meeting with the members of the local Councils and with the fraternities of YouFra at the National headquarters of the OFS-YouFra, the Padre Pio Center. The following day, there was a formation meeting with the spiritual Assistants of the OFS and some of YouFra, among which were two from Damascus (Syria). The Visitors also had a meeting with the Major Superiors of the First Franciscan Order of which some religious provide the service of assistance to the OFS and YouFra in Lebanon: Br. Tanios Rizk OFM Cap, Br. Simon Peter Herro OFM, and Br. Cesar Essayan OFM Conv.

Beirut, Lebanon – National Elective Chapter

The National Fraternity of the OFS in Lebanon celebrated its National elective Chapter from November 23 to 24 at the Padre Pio Center in Beirut. Encarnación del Pozo, General Minister of the OFS, presided, accompanied by Br. Amando Trujillo Cano TOR, General Assistant to the OFS-YouFra. The following brothers and sisters were elected by the Capitulars: National Minister, Slaiby Noufaily; Vice Minister, Aida Zgheib; International Councilor, Michel Janin; International Councilor in substitution, Chantal Raad. The Chapter concluded with the Eucharistic celebration at which the new Minister and National Council were installed by the General Minister with the blessing of the General Assistant. Following, the Visitors had a meeting with the members of the new National Council.

Austria – Fraternal and Pastoral Visitation

The fraternal and pastoral Visitations of the OFS in Austria were held simultaneously from November 22 to 24 in Brixen-Bressanone. In reality we speak of the first part of this Visitation, since the Visitors were welcomed in Italian territory (Alto Adige – South Tyrol) and not at the headquarters of the National Fraternity in Vienna. Br. Tibor Kauser, was delegated by the General Minister of the OFS for the fraternal Visitation and Br. Martin Bitzer, General Assistant to the OFS-YouFra, for the pastoral. They met the members of the National Council of the OFS in Austria, among them Alfred Obermair, National Minister, Joachim Stuefer, International Councilor, and the National Assistants from the OFM and OFM Cap. The purpose of this first part of the meeting was to understand the situation of the local Fraternities that live in the region, with their long history and recent experience. The second part of the Visitation is planned for the month of June 2014.

Nigeria – National Elective Chapter

The National elective Chapter of Nigeria was opened, with prayer, on the Thursday evening this past November 28. 44 brother and sister Seculars participated, with 2 spiritual Assistants and the Custos of the Capuchins in Nigeria, Br. Charles Chigbata. The election had the following result: National Minister – Jude Obibuzor; Vice Minister – Michael Edem. The elective Chapter was declared concluded during the celebration of Holy Mass in the afternoon, at which the General Assistant, Br. Amanuel Mesgun, presided. He also, as delegate of CAS (Conference of the General Assistants of the OFS-YouFra) confirmed the regularity of the results of the election.

Kenya – National Elective Chapter

The elective Chapter of the National Fraternity of the OFS-YouFra was celebrated in Nairobi from December 5 to 8. The Vice General Minister, Doug Clorey, was delegated to preside at the Chapter. CAS delegated Br. Arnold Shirima OFM Cap. The results of the election were as follows: National Minister and International Councilor: John Mungai; Vice National Minister and International Councilor in substitution: Patrick Macharia.

***Tempo Forte* of the Conference of the General Assistants to the OFS**

The Conference of the General Assistants of the OFS and of YouFra (CAS) held its annual meeting of *Tempo Forte* at the St. Francis Xavier friary of the TOR in Zagreb, Croatia, from December 9 to 15, 2013. All the friars of the local Fraternity, in a particular way, Fr. Zvonimir Brusac, National Assistant to the OFS-YouFra, offered generous hospitality to the General Assistants, who contributed to the coordination of both the sojourn and the meetings with the Assistants and the other friars of the different Orders and with some local Fraternities of the OFS and YouFra. Fr. Nicola Barun, Provincial Minister of the TOR, shared time fraternally with the General Assistants. The agenda of the meeting included current information, checking on the participation of the Assistants at Chapters, pastoral Visitations, Courses, Conferences, the International Meeting of Franciscan Youth and the World Youth Day in Brazil. There was also reflection on their collaboration in the commissions and projects of Presidency of CIOFS and the publication of the Koinonia bulletin. In addition, responsibilities for the various activities of 2014 were distributed.