

VOX FRANCISCANA

Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis



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**PUERTO RICO OFS
CELEBRATES REPAIR
OF HURRICANE-HIT
NATIONAL 'CASA'**

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THE TEACHING GARDEN

Care for Mother Earth, natural remedies and environmental education -- that's what Secular Franciscans impart at Brother Simplicius Teaching Garden in Vittoria, Sicily. PAGES 6-10.



CROATIA HONORS OFS VOLUNTEER

Antonija Jušić, OFS, received the Volunteer's Oscar for her dedicated work as a palliative care volunteer in Zagreb. PAGES 11-13.

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WELL4AFRICA BOREHOLE BLESSED IN GHANA

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COVER

For the first time since Hurricane Marie devastated Puerto Rico in 2017, the OFS held its national chapter in its restored headquarters facility, located in a mountainous forest in the central part of the island. Photo by Robert Stronach, OFS. PAGE 20.



CIOFS Presidency's meetings in Rome -- hybrid (above) and entirely video conferencing (below).

Returning to personal encounters

The pandemic period had everyone “longing for personal encounters,” noted Minister General Tibor Kauser, OFS.

But it has been useful. “We can see a lot of things

can be done virtually.”

The CIOFS Presidency has continued to do just that – meet virtually via Zoom video conferencing, as it conducted the business of the Order. Then the

Presidency advanced to hybrid meetings, with members participating both in-person and virtually.

The Presidency started to plan visitations again to national fraternities that

are scheduling chapters in late 2021 and in 2022. Presidency officers and councilors also focused on plans for the General Chapter in November of 2021.





Conference of General Ministers

Conference of general ministers of the Franciscan family got together during a visit to the OFM General Chapter, with the new OFM Minister General, Fr. Massimo Fusarelli. FROM LEFT: Fr. Amando Trujillo Cano,

TOR; Tibor Kauser, OFS; Fr. Massimo Fusarelli, OFM; Fr. Roberto Genuin, OFMCap; Fr. Carlos Trovarelli, OFMConv, and Sr. M. Magdalena Schmitz, representing CFI-TOR.



2 New General Spiritual Assistants Join the OFS Presidency

GENERAL SPIRITUAL ASSISTANTS

Fr. Alfred Parambakathu, OFM Conv; Fr. Carlos Ginés Campos Julve, TOR; Fr. Tomás Ginga Panzo Suva, OFMCap; Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM

It is a time when members of CIOFS Presidency are changing. Before that change occurs in November at the General Chapter, the Presidency welcomed two new general spiritual assistants.

Fr. **Carlos Ginés Campos Julve**, TOR, comes originally from Peru, but was living in Spain the last eight years. He succeeds Fr. Hernán Eguzquiza Rodríguez, TOR. He was ordained a priest in 2007. Friar Carlos has a degree in theology from the Pontifical University of Salamanca, and has completed his studies in pastoral theology and theology of religious life. Furthermore, he did some studies on Franciscanism. He has served in various ministries:

parish vicar, education and youth ministry, including working with YouFra in Lima, Peru and in Madrid, Spain.

Fr. **Tomás Ginga Panzo Suva**, OFMCap, is a native of Angola who has been in Rome, Italy for the past three years, obtaining a license in Church Cultural Heritage from the Pontifical Gregorian University. He succeeds Fr. Francis Dor, OFMCap. Friar Tomás completed his theological studies in Luanda, Angola in 2008 and was ordained to the priesthood in 2009. In addition to serving in a parish and as vice provincial, he was a local spiritual assistant and then a national spiritual assistant for the OFS of Angola.

MEMORIALE PROPOSITI

ORDERS CELEBRATE CLOSING OF 800TH ANNIVERSARY



Fr. Amando



Cardinal Grech

by ATTILIO GALIMBERTI, OFS

As a conclusion to the year celebrating the 800th anniversary of the *Memoriale Propositi* – that scholars consider being the first legislative document of the Order of the Brothers and Sisters of Penance – the friars of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis of Assisi, together with members of the Secular Franciscan Order and the International Franciscan Conference of the Third Order Regular, or-

ganized a Day of Celebration that was held in Rome, in the Basilica of Saints Cosmas and Damian, on Saturday, May 22, 2021.

The celebration enjoyed the presence of **Cardinal Mario Grech**, who had recently been appointed by the Holy Father as Cardinal Deacon for the Basilica.

After a welcome message from Fr. **Amando Trujillo Cano**, TOR minister general, and a greeting

from Cardinal Grech and **Isabella di Paola**, CIOFS general secretary on behalf of Tibor Kauser, OFS minister general, the program proceeded with an historical perspective as well as the contemporary relevance of *Memoriale Propositi*. Fr. **Lino Temperini**, TOR, gave an historical presentation, titled: *A Rule for the Third Franciscan Order, Eighth Centenary of the Memorial Proposals*

(1221), an ancient rule of the Third Order of St. Francis. Other presenters underlined the relevance of *Memoriale Propositi* in their respective orders. They included:

- Nancy Celaschi, OSF.
- Attilio Galimberti, OFS.
- Fr. Amando Trujillo Cano, TOR.

The day ended with brief refreshments that contributed to a more fraternal atmosphere.



Attilio



Fr. Lino

The Teaching Garden

A garden of simples that OFS of Vittoria (Sicily, Italy) offers to the town



View of the plants and herb beds in the Brother Simplicius Teaching Garden.

by ATTILIO GALIMBERTI, OFS

Francis received a great deal of consolation from God's creatures.... "We who were with him saw him always in such joy, inwardly and outwardly, over all creatures, touching and looking at them, so that it seemed his spirit was no longer on earth but in heaven" (The Assisi Compilation, 88 FA:ED 192).

In this beautiful description of Francis' intimate love for creatures, found in the Assisi Compilation, the biographer attributes to the saint of Assisi "the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and

authentically" (Pope Francis, *Laudato si'*, 10). A message that resounds today as an invitation to a more conscious approach in the area of ecology, one aimed at bringing forth a renewed and responsible commitment to take care of our common home, our Mother Earth. It is in this spirit of Francis that some of the brothers and sisters of the OFS fraternity in Vittoria (Sicily) chose to sponsor an innovative project in creating an original *Teaching Garden* that takes its inspiration from the herb-growing and farming of the religious, and in particular the "conventual" gardens

which were traditionally known as "Gardens of simples".

We learn from **Umberto Virgadola**, OFS, director of the Teaching Garden: "And so, just as from the Middle Ages onward, the 'Garden of Simples' where the cultivation of medicinal plants (the simples), horticultural species, aromatic herbs and fruit trees were planted together wisely to create places that evoked paradise lost, today the *Brother Simplicius Teaching Garden of Vittoria* recalls that botanic landscape that was symbolic of fraternal living, and

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View of the plants and herb beds in the Brother Simplicius Teaching Garden.

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the knowledge of the beneficial qualities of the plants creates a ‘unicum’ of most precious anthropological value in today’s world in which humanity’s relationship with Mother Earth is one of conflict.”

Especially with the closing of religious communities, these places have been rarer and those still existing at convents and monasteries that are still accessible should be protected (or restored); they should be made usable, especially by the new generations to whom we must transmit a healthy environmental education.

This is the thinking behind the idea of some the Secular Franciscans of Vittoria who since 2016 have been working together with the parish

priests and pastoral workers of St. Mary Magdalene Parish in Vittoria; there at the location that was once the garden of the Capuchins (also known as the garden of the Little Hospital) they have started a project called *Brother Simplicius Teaching Garden – flowers and herbs for health*.

“The land around the convent in Vittoria”, we are told by Gaetano Bruno, a young Secular Franciscan, researcher in local history and art, “that the Capuchins used was typically divided into two types of land: the former, represented by the Orto (Garden) provided cultivated foods, medicinal herbs and flowers for the Church; the second area, the Selva or woods, was used for wood, domesticated animals, bee-keeping (honey

and wax for lighting) and a place of relaxation for psychological, spiritual and physical rest where the friars could stroll or spend time in silent recollection. The latter space today is occupied by the city’s public garden (Villa Comunale). Now, after about four centuries, we find a portion of that original Orto in today’s Teaching Garden, which respects the ancient traditions described in the Franciscan sources about the cultivated garden and where, in the more recent past, there was a garden maintained for the use of the first hospital in the city at the time of the seizure of religious property at the end of the 19th century.”

In the ancient Capuchin garden,

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Flower bed of aromatic plants.

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the vegetables, fruit trees, grains, and all that was produced by raising small animals was used as food for the community and for the poor, for friars passing through and for the young novices. The aromatic and medicinal herbs were used by the inevitable herbalist (an expert in popular medicine or traditional herbs) who prepared concoctions, salves and medical potions for his sick brothers and which were offered to their neighbors as well; for this reason, Capuchins quickly came to be called, according to the ancient tradition, by the affectionate name of the “people’s friars”.

The Teaching Garden of Vittoria has in this way restored to the city the natural vocation of the ancient Garden of the friars, that characteristic place of spiritual, psychological

and physical refreshment through contemplating nature’s fruits and flowers, through hours spent in cultivating the plants, gathering herbs to be used in the apothecary for treating the sick. Interesting to note, in that regard, is that the graphic art installed on panels along the course of the walkways describes not only the plants that are present but also have quotations from Brother Francis.

Thus, besides this basic activity of caring for and restoring the floral and herbal specialties, various initiatives directed at the local civil and religious society have been planned.

“For about three years now the Brother Simplicius Teaching Garden has been promoting and organizing educational programs in the areas of popular medicine and care for creation for school groups at all levels and for various associations”,

Umberto Virgadola says again.

“One of several initiatives has been the establishment of a prestigious scientific team representing some of our partners in the project, such as the Ecoequo, Prof. Sergio Bellanza (National President of the Academy of Herbal Arts of Rome), Prof. Fiorenza Bellanza (Docent in Herbal Arts for the Association Nature and Health Project) who coordinates the teaching activities in the schools, Gaetano Bruno of the local OFS fraternity. With these friends and other volunteers one day when the pandemic is no more, we can resume the activities planned at the beginning of the project; we will continue to offer teaching tours, meetings and study days for school groups and other groups, sensitivity days to help the citizens or the faithful of the Chris-

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The Teaching Garden conducts a teaching lab for a visiting school group. BELOW: Earth Day presentation.

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tian communities concerning topics of natural remedies inspired by herbal medicine, and the use of aromatic plants that are also useful in the traditional preparation of cosmetics. We can never forget the essence of Francis' instructions to his friars: 'He used to tell the brother who took care of the garden not to cultivate all the ground in the garden for vegetables but to leave a piece of ground that would produce wild plants that in their season would produce Brother Flowers Thus, in their time they would invite all who saw the beautiful flowers to praise God, for every creature announces and proclaims: 'God made me for you, o people!,' and so nurture a contemplative heart filled with gratitude toward the Father of all.

The Brother Simplicius Teaching



Garden competently and lovingly puts at the disposal of the new generations this precious heritage of knowledge, medicinal science, environmental spirituality and floral art, teaching

them to conserve and appreciate it; it offers the witness of a very timely apostolic creativity and can provide an example in this time of how to make better use of religious properties.

The Force Behind the Teaching Garden



The Virgdaula Family. From left: Umberto, Salvatrice, Cristiana, Francesco (born in Romania during their service there) and Stefano.

Umberto Virgdaula and Salvatrice Iacono have been professed Secular Franciscans since the beginning of the 1990s in the fraternity of Vittoria in Sicily. Married since 1997, they have three children (Stefano, Cristiana and Francesco).

Both graduated in Social Sciences. They have a working experience in assisted living facilities for mentally disabled people, severely handicapped people, and immigrants.

In the 1998 they gave the start to the OFS Missionary center of Italy, and collaborated in projects developed in Albania, Cameroon and Venezuela.

From 2005 through 2008 they were in Romania

as lay Franciscans missionaries (Fidei Donum) to collaborate with Capuchins friars.

Upon returning home, in cooperation with several private and public bodies, they gave life to a project of environmental promotion and presently manage the Teaching Garden (Bro. Simplicius Garden – Vittoria Capuchins Convent), didactic workshops on the use of natural remedies and a project of environmental education in the schools.

Umberto is formator in his OFS local Fraternity while Salvatrice is member of the Ragusa diocese missionary team.

-- by Attilio Galimberti, OFS

Zagreb Honors Palliative Care Volunteer

Sometimes people who believe they are unnoticeable become visible.
If only for just a moment. Just enough to be an encouragement and inspiration to others.
This is the case with our sister from the Secular Franciscan Order in Croatia.

by ANA FRUK, OFS

Antonija Jušić is an 80-year-old Secular Franciscan, who received the Volunteer's Oscar lifetime achievement award in December 2020. The Award was given to her by the Zagreb Volunteers' Center in partnership with the City of Zagreb, after being nominated by volunteer members of the La Verna (Palliative Care) Association. This Award is all the more significant as it comes from a civil society organization, allowing Antonija to show the mission of secular Franciscans in society.

For the last 30 years, Antonija Jušić has dedicated herself to serving elderly and sick brothers and sisters. Her volunteering path began in 1992 in the Croatian Friends Hospice Association. There she made her first steps in palliative care. She has attended many educational programs that have influenced her understanding of caring for the sick, but also the need to increase her commitment to this type of volunteering.

Mobile teams fill hospice need

In the last 30 years or so, there have been breakthroughs, enabling people to have dignity at their end-of-life period; however, to this day in the City of Zagreb not one hospice exists, even though there is a great need. Presently, this void is filled by mobile palliative teams; that is, the

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Antonija Jušić, an 80-year-old Secular Franciscan, received the Volunteer's Oscar lifetime achievement Award.



A Model of Secular Franciscan Service in Society

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volunteer members of the Croatian Friends Hospice and the La Verna Association, which are present in many places across Croatia. Likewise, the awareness of palliative care in the last several years has been increasing, so that more people now are seeking help from volunteers in palliative care.

First encouragement

Antonija shared with us her reasons why she started visiting the old and sick.

“The first encouragement came from Fr. Zvezdan Linić. One day after mass at the Kaptol, he asked me ‘What are you waiting for?’. At first, I did not understand why he had asked me that; but then I realized he was referring to entering the Secular Franciscan Order. As I had already had friends who were in the Order, I joined shortly after. At that

time sr. Zorka Kiš, at the request of Fr. Zvezdan, had been visiting two older ladies at Vrhovac. However, as she could not continue and I used to accompany her, she asked me if I could take over visiting Dragica and Fanika. I have felt from the very beginning the need to provide feedback to those that ask me to carry out tasks. So that is how I began keeping records of who I visited and what situation they were. These were my beginnings of visiting our brothers and sisters in 1992.”

Through these encounters Antonija realized the importance of volunteering, and also regularity. As she explained: “Volunteering is one’s free choice; I would like to compare it with an elective subject in school. You can choose the subject, but you don’t have to. However, if you do choose it, then you will have to regularly attend it.”

In many elderly homes, there is a shortage of volunteers who could take care of the elderly. Of course, one needs to be inclined to volunteering and have empathy for others in need. Sr. Antonija already experienced this in her early childhood through her mother’s example of caring for their sick neighbour. This left an impression on her that those who are old and helpless, and those in need, should be helped. She learned that man should be man’s best remedy. A person needs to leave this world reconciled with oneself, with one’s family and with one’s surroundings and be given the opportunity to do this – for oneself and likewise for others. Today she is a mentor for new volunteers and shares happy and difficult moments, but also mistakes from which, she states, “it is important to learn from, not ignore”.

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Antonija Jušić reads a book for listeners at Radio Maria. Photo from radiomarija.hr.

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“A sacred duty is to pray for those that I care for”

When asked which moments as a volunteer in palliative care made the most impact on her, she shared two examples: “Not everyone believes in God; there are people with different beliefs and convictions that we help. One lady, which I visited for the first time, noticed my Franciscan Tau cross on my neck, and she immediately said that I may visit her but that she does not want to talk about God or religion. I replied that I will respect her wishes, as I am there for her. Truly, we spoke about everything. At the moment when I thought her time of departure from this world was near its end, I told her she could not forbid me from praying for her. I am a Franciscan and person of faith who respects her wishes (and truly we never spoke about God and faith), but that it is my sacred duty to pray for every person I care for. In that moment”, Antonija in a trembling voice continues, “the lady did not say a word. Not one word was said in response; however, I saw in her gaze, in her

eyes her deep gratitude. To this day I can still see her gaze and every time it brings me to tears. She was deeply grateful I prayed for her. This gives me the strength to continue being like this – patient with everyone and able to endure all. To pray for those who cannot pray for themselves.”

The second example she carries in her heart concerns a sister in her Fraternity, Marija Martinčević. This 100-year-old lady patiently endured her sickness and Antonija visited her on a regular basis. Together they would pray the Rosary at 3:15 p.m. with Radio Maria. Around Christmas time, nearing her passing away, Antonija sent a Christmas card from the La Verna Association, signed by all the members. The card arrived on the day of her birthday. When she received it, she kissed the card on which was painted Jesus Christ praying on the Mount of Olives. The next day with a smile on her face, she peacefully died. She stated that it is these memories that give her the strength and serenity to continue doing what she is called to do as a Christian and Secular Franciscan.

Reads on Radio Maria

Sr. Antonija, alongside visiting brothers and sisters in nursing homes, has been volunteering for 10 years on Radio Maria as a speaker for the “Reading a book” program. Every Wednesday she reads books for listeners on a live broadcast, and then records the program for Thursday. Many older people listen to Radio Maria, especially those who are sick and homebound.

‘Do Good Anyway’

The award was a surprise, she said, as she rarely spoke of her work in palliative care. She thought the work went unnoticed, although those at the La Verna Association thought otherwise. Receiving the award has given way to media reports and interviews. However, despite the attention, what is dear to her is being beside her patients.

Sr. Antonija’s unselfish service is an example of the Franciscan vocation in society, and it brings to mind Mother Teresa’s words: “The good you do today, people will often forget tomorrow. Do good anyway!”

OFS action around the globe

ARMIDA BARELLI BEATIFIED

Pope Francis on Feb. 20, 2021 recognized a miracle needed for the beatification of **Armida Barelli**, a member of the Secular Franciscan Order and co-founder of the Secular Institute of the Missionaries of the Kingship of Christ. She was born in Milan on 1 December in 1882 and died in Marzio, Italy on 15 August 1952 at the age of 69.

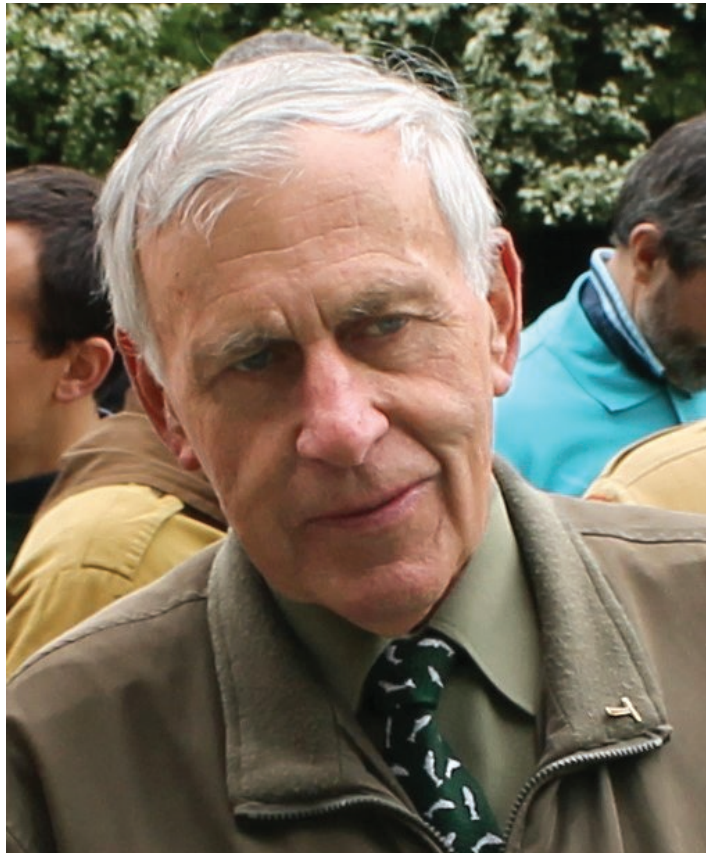


CZECH ANTI-COMMUNIST MINISTER EMBRACES SISTER DEATH

by **MARKÉTA KUBEŠOVÁ**, Czech OFS International Councillor

František Reichel, Czech OFS National Minister, died on November 20, 2020.

He was born on January 27, 1938 in Prague into a Catholic and anti-communist family, which caused him problems during his studies. He eventually graduated from the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine. From the end of the 1960s he worked as a scientist in the field of veterinary pharmaceuticals. He also graduated from the University of Economics. From 1989 he was the director of the Research Institute for Biofactors and Veterinary Drugs. In 1970 he joined politics. At that time he also organized various activities for catholic communities. In 1989 he participated



in preparation for the pilgrimage to Rome for the beatification of Agnes from Bohemia, who was a Franciscan order found-

er in our country. At the end of November 1989, after the anti-communist revolution, he accepted an offer to become a Minis-

ter without portfolio of Czech Republic and held the position of Minister of Science and Technology for about half a year. He was involved in the issue of church restitution.

František, together with others, contributed to the restoration of our Order in the Czech Republic after the end of communist totalitarianism. He was elected OFS National Minister several times. At the age of 82, he was very hardworking, optimistic, with visions for the future; he liked to organize pilgrimages, he liked to meet people, he had an excellent memory. He loved the forest -- he went for his daily prayer walks there ... and during one of them God took him May he rest in peace. Amen.



DR. JOSÉ GREGORIO HERNÁNDEZ IS BEATIFIED

The beatification of Dr. José Gregorio Hernández took place on April 30, 2021. He was a Venezuelan physician (1864-1919) and member of the Secular Franciscan Order since 1899. He had an exemplary medical practice serving patients from all walks of life. He also had a distinguished career as a university professor.

In the Secular Franciscan Order he quenched his thirst for the charism of Saint Francis of Assisi, and

thus, little by little, he deepened his commitment to serve Christ.

He died at the age of 55 in a car accident, while he was going to buy medicines for a poor sick patient.

For his beatification, a cure was admitted in the girl Yaxuri Solórzano, who was shot in the head, victim of an assault in 2017, and miraculously recovered.



The National Council of Italy, flanked by General Spiritual Assistant Fr. Francis Dor, OFM Cap. (left) and Minister General Tibor Kauser, OFS.

LUCA PIRAS LEADS OFS OF ITALY

The National Chapter of the Secular Franciscan Order of Italy met in Assisi in July and elected new leaders. They include: Minister Luca Piras, Vice Minister Donato Mastangelo, and Councilors Stefania Marinetti, Luigi Gravina, Sara Mentzel, Andrea Piccaluga, Cosimo Laudato and Luca Castiglioni.

Generally celebrated every three years, the elective chapter should have been held in May 2020, but was postponed to 2021 due to the containment measures of Covid-19.

The new executive council serves 1,234 local fraternities distributed throughout the national territory, for a total of 18,304 Secular Franciscans.



KOREAN ELECTIVE CHAPTER

Korea National Elective Chapter was celebrated on

May 29. Paul Hong was elected as national minister and Francis Park as international councilor.



THE NETHERLANDS ELECTIVE CHAPTER

The OFS National Fraternity of the Netherlands celebrated its National Elective Chapter on June 11-13,

2021. Theo Reuling was reelected as national minister and Michel Versteegh was elected as international councilor.



ELECTIVE CHAPTER OF GUATEMALA

The National Fraternity of Guatemala held its National Elective Chapter from June 11 to 13, 2021, in the

city of Jalapa. Mariano Rodríguez was elected as national minister and international councilor, and Felipe Vasquez Sánchez as substitute international councilor.



ELECTIVE CHAPTER OF COLOMBIA

The National Fraternity of Colombia celebrated its National Elective Chapter from July 2 to 5, 2021 in the city of Bogotá, with Gloria Eugenia Ribero Suarez being

elected as national minister and international councillor.

Genys Patricia Rodríguez H was elected as vice minister and international councillor substitute.



ELECTIVE CHAPTER IN LATVIA

The OFS emerging National Fraternity of Latvia has its

National Elective Chapter from 16 to 18 July 2021. Gundega Zake Cimza was reelected as national minister.



ELECTIVE CHAPTER IN AUSTRIA

The OFS National Fraternity of Austria celebrated its National Elective Chapter on September 10-12, 2021. Franz

Spanner was reelected as national minister and Alfred Obermair reelected as international councillor.



ELECTIVE CHAPTER IN SPAIN

The OFS National Fraternity of Spain celebrated its National Elective Chapter on September 10-12, 2021.

Antonio Álvarez was elected as national minister and international councilor



ELECTIVE CHAPTER IN LITHUANIA

The OFS National Fraternity of Lithuania celebrated its National Elective Chapter on September 17-19, 2021.

Virginija Mickute was reelected as national minister and international councilor.



ELECTIVE CHAPTER IN CZECH REPUBLIC

The OFS National Fraternity of the Czech Republic celebrated its National Elective Chapter on September 17-19,

2021. Václav Hájek was elected as national minister and Markéta Kubešová reelected as international councilor.



ANGOLA NATIONAL ELECTIVE CHAPTER

The OFS National Fraternity of Angola celebrated its National Elective Chapter on September 19, 2021.

Domingos Calussumi was elected as national minister and international councillor.



BELGIUM ELECTIVE CHAPTER

The OFS Fraternity of Belgium celebrated its National Elective Chapter on September 25, 2021. Jacques Meulkens

was confirmed as national minister and Johan de Ridder as national vice-minister.



PARAGUAY OFS MOURNS EX-MINISTER

In April 2021, the OFS of Paraguay announced the departure to the Father's house of Alcides Martínez, a former national minister and international councillor.



VIETNAM OFS LOSES NATIONAL MINISTER

Joseph Vu Quang Khai, OFS, who served as the national minister of OFS Vietnam, passed away on Sept. 25, 2021.

OFS of Puerto Rico Had Reason to Celebrate



National Spiritual Assistant Fr. José David Maldonado Rivas, OFMCap., blesses the newly elected National Council of Puerto Rico.

The National OFS Fraternity of Puerto Rico had a special reason to celebrate its National Elective Chapter on Sept. 24-26, 2021. It was the first time the OFS was able to use its national headquarters for a chapter since Hurricane Marie badly damaged the facility in September 2017.

Turning over the reins of servant leadership to newly elected National

Minister and International Councilor **José Rafael Hernández Santiago**, OFS, outgoing National Minister **Isabel Lima**, OFS, said that even though there is still work to be done on the facility, she was grateful to leave a legacy that oversaw the restoration of the center known as **La Casa San José de la Portiuncula**.

Located on a hillside in the moun-

tainous rainforest in Utuado, **La Casa** was repaired in several phases, thanks to the labor of the OFS brothers and sisters and thanks to revenue and donations from a number of sources (insurance, a bequest, donations from U.S. Secular Franciscans and a large gift from the Capuchin friars).

The headquarters building, which
Continued on next page.



Guest rooms flank an open courtyard at La Casa. Photos by Robert Stronach, OFS.



Fr. Ramón Negrón, OFM Cap., the pastoral visitor delegated by the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants, blesses the new tabernacle in the restored chapel at La Casa.

Continued from previous page.

was built by the brothers and sisters some 54 years ago after the first national minister donated the property, serves as an event and retreat center. With 34 bedrooms, classrooms and hall, the building is used for the national chapter, formation classes, council meetings and retreats. It also generates income as a location for diocesan events and weddings.

The restored chapel features a new San Damiano cross and a handmade wooden tabernacle, donated by the national minister of Paraguay, Alcides Martínez, OFS, who passed away in April 2021.

Others on the newly elected National Council are:

- Vice Minister **Juan C. Gaston Torres**, OFS, former national minister.

- Treasurer **José L Serrano Vega**, OFS.
- Secretary **Isabel Lima Perez**, OFS, the outgoing national minister.
- Councilor **Efrain Velazquez Castillo**, OFS.
- Councilor **Sonia Ramos Gonzalez**, OFS.
- Formator **Hector L. Diaz Perez**, OFS.



Four stories of La Casa hug the mountain side.

KONGO WATER PROJECT IN GHANA



by VIRGINIA MICKUTE, OFS

Kongo is a village community in the Nabdam district in the northeast region of Ghana with around 150 households and a Spiritual Renewal Centre (SRC) run by Capuchin friars. SRC is comprised of the Immaculate Conception Church, a retreat centre and a Marian Grotto, making it a popular pilgrimage site. Twice a year, during major celebrations (Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes and Feast of the Assumption), it attracts up to 5,000 pilgrims.

Well4Africa water project involved drilling a borehole (over 40 metres deep), installing an electric pump, two large water tanks and a pipe system. The pump room, water storage and water collection centre were built, so that safe drinking water could be conveniently accessible to both the local community and thousands of pilgrims.

On 10 January 2021, the community of Kongo celebrated the blessing of the borehole (*photos above*

and below).

The project was mainly intended for the pilgrims who come to the Spiritual Renewal Centre at Kongo. Before that, there were two water boreholes with hand pumps in the area. However, during summer season, the water supply was not sufficient for the whole community. People had to walk two or more kilometres to fetch water. The problem was even more acute during pilgrimage days: apart from long lines waiting for water, it was

often not enough to meet the daily needs of pilgrims. Now pilgrims have free access to the water facility, which makes the environment cleaner and allows the pilgrims to attend the pilgrimage programme without having to walk long distances to get water.

The borehole serves fifty families living near the Spiritual Renewal Centre to meet their daily water needs. The Capuchin Friars of Kongo are in charge of the maintenance of this borehole.

