



ORDO FRANCISCANUS SAECULARIS

Consilium Internationale

Via Vittorio Putti, 4/int. 6 - 00152 Roma

Tel. +39 06.45471722 Fax +39 06.45473094

E-mail: ciofs@ciofs.org

www.ciofs.org

Holy Father,

I greet you with great joy, in the name of about 200.000 members of the Secular Franciscan Order, at the presence of the delegates representing the existing seventy National Fraternities at the XVI General Chapter. We come to you with the same spirit that led St. Francis of Assisi to meet Pope Honorius III in 1209 to ask him that his small fraternity continued to advance on the path of the Gospel, respecting and loving the path within the Church.

We, as an Order, have been participating in the life of the Catholic Church since the time of St. Francis. This year we celebrated the 800th anniversary of the *Memoriale Propositi*, an important document for our life, which gave the first guidelines to those penitents who wanted to follow Christ in the manner of St. Francis. We serve the Church and live in the world bearing witness to the Franciscan charism in the world as an Order since 1289, when Pope Nicholas IV approved the Rule with the seal *Supra Montem*, which was renewed by Pope Leo XIII and St. Paul VI in 1978.

Ours is a life lived in the fraternity, with a compromise that takes shape in a solemn Profession that is permanent for all life. As an international fraternity of men and women, of all ages and from all walks of life, we try to live courageously "*passing from the Gospel to life and from life to the Gospel*" (OFS Rule, 4). In this world, which suffers so much from individualism and loneliness, our fraternities offer such human bonding that is often surprisingly lacking, even sometimes in families.

When we are asked what Secular Franciscans do specifically, we always answer that there is nothing special. Our mission is to be present, to be available where no one else is ready to serve. Therefore, our sisters and brothers are present in the hospitals, parishes, on the streets, in the elderly people's houses, helping and serving the poor, even though they too are poor, standing by the side of the sick even though they are sometimes sick too.

With a grateful heart, we want to confirm our commitment "*to live in full communion with the Pope, the Bishops and the Priests in a confident and open dialogue of apostolic creativity*" (OFS Rule, 6). This apostolic creativity calls on us to seek collaboration at all levels with everyone in the Church and also outside, so that the message of the Gospel shall be preached in all the world. As lay people, who have families, work, we cannot go to distant places to proclaim the Gospel, but we have the experience that those places are less and less far from us.

As St. Francis understood, God is a loving Father, who loves all of us, living and non-living creatures, therefore we are brothers, and we have the dignity to say that we are brothers and sisters in Christ. As He respected all creatures, because they bear the imprint of the hand of God, we too are looking for ways to respect and protect the creature, nature, and protect every human life along its entire course.

We are convinced that this way of life, for which God has called on us, is a beautiful life, and our vocation is a grace and a privilege. We must be grateful for this call from God and do our best to live accordingly. For this we must always keep in mind what St. Francis said in the last days: "*Let us begin, brothers, to serve the Lord God, because so far we have made little or no profit!*" (1 Cel. 103).

Therefore I ask you, Holy Father, to pray for us and to give us your blessing, so that we can always be faithful to this vocation and live an exemplary life in conformity with our Rule. We too promise you that we will continue to pray for you, for your apostolic service.



Tibor Kauser
General Minister