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**CONFERENCE OF SPIRITUAL ASSISTANTS GENERAL  
OFS – YOUFRA (CAS)**

# KOINONIA

*... together on the journey*

*“The journey of the Secular Franciscans in the Synodal Church”*



**"REPAIRING MY HOUSE":  
THE CONTINUING MISSION OF THE SECULARS**

Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM

<https://ciofs.info/en/news/koinonia/>



## Introduction

In keeping with the 2021-2023 synodal process, we thought it would be important to call the attention of Secular Franciscans to the importance of living their faith in a spirit of communion, participation, mission and true witness of gospel life in the Church, in the world of work and in the family. The best way to commit oneself to the synodal journey is, first of all, to recognize that each member is part of the Church as an individual and as a community.

Each baptized person has a role to play in the Church and his or her role in the mission of the Church is to build up the whole Church. St. Francis of Assisi, when he heard the call to go and rebuild the Church, thought of a single church of bricks, and only later was he able to understand that it was not simply a question of that particular church of bricks, or of that single leper, but of the spiritual, universal and catholic Church, which needs to rediscover and witness to its true identity by faithfully following Christ, its founder and teacher.

The mission of Secular Franciscans in the Church must be perceived as a personal call, but at the same time as a communitarian mission in which each one is responsible and involved in the success of his specific mission, with a personal awareness of the need for continuous renewal, conversion and openness to new ideas and approaches without compromising evangelical values, those values that sustain the dignity of each Christian despite the differences in the missions entrusted to him.

### 1. The OFS and the mission have entrusted



By the grace of Baptism, all Christians are entrusted with the mission of proclaiming the Gospel: *"Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; he who does not believe will be condemned"* (Mk 16:15). It is clear that participation in the mission is a task entrusted to

each and every one, and not to an isolated elite, as some sometimes think, forgetting that all, from baptism and in baptism, are "incorporated into the Church and made sharers in

her mission... and we have become living stones for the construction of a spiritual edifice<sup>1</sup> where each of the faithful must exercise his baptismal mission in communion with the Church and in the Church, no longer belonging to himself but to Christ".

In our society, where secularism is more widespread, Christians must find ways to live



their baptismal promises, the best ways to interpret the call of Francis "go and repair my house" in such a way that the Gospel is meaningful, attractive and stimulating for all categories of people, from the young to the elderly, from believers to non-believers, building the church in a simple way

and with a witness that knows how to attract people to a deep commitment and renewal of faith in Christ and in the Church. It is not necessary to invent other ways, it is enough to assume what has been entrusted to us in baptism, that is, to let ourselves be "*inhabited by the baptismal seal in such a way that we commit ourselves to the service of God through a living participation in the holy liturgy of the Church, exercising our baptismal priesthood with the witness of a holy life and with a laborious charity.*"<sup>2</sup> In the case of the members of the OFS, this call is also found in the Rule, given at the moment of profession and which emphasizes the need to allow oneself to be guided by the Holy Spirit to live the Holy Gospel according to one's own mission by following Christ, Way, Truth and Life.

It is fundamentally important that each member of the OFS be aware that the mission is precisely the mission of the Church, that is, to evangelize, that is, to bring Christ to a world that no longer knows him, and at the same time to help those who already believe to put Christ at the centre of their lives, striving to give witness to Christ with their own lifestyle.

The Christian life must be nourished by the Word and the Sacraments in order to live in love and communion with God and, at the same time, to be able to undertake the mission entrusted to us, living it with zeal, fidelity and love. It is a mission that constantly demands "a better formation, a deepening of our love and a clearer witness to the Gospel"<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church 1213, 1268

<sup>2</sup> CCC No. 1273

<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, No. 121

## 2. The ongoing restoration of the Church



Undoubtedly, a structure such as the "Church" - the Body of Christ - needs both spiritual renewal or maintenance and material help. Therefore, the missionary activity of the Church is urgent, necessary and imperative so that the mission may always be unceasing and constant, an evangelizing mission which concerns all believers and which, if carried out generation after generation with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, firmly perpetuates the mission of evangelization entrusted by Christ himself to all the baptized. Continuity requires both the collaboration and the willingness of every Christian to bear living witness to the power of the Holy Spirit in the Church and in the

world. This collaboration must always be based on the fact that the mission of evangelization *"is never for anyone an individual and isolated act, but a profoundly ecclesial act, and if each one evangelizes in the name of the Church, which in turn does so in virtue of a mandate from the Lord, no evangelizer should be absolute master of his own evangelizing action, with discretionary power to carry it out according to individualistic criteria and perspectives, but must do so in communion with the Church and its Pastors."*<sup>4</sup>.

The Synod calls us to take up again a communitarian path in order to better carry out and concretize the mission entrusted to us. The evangelizing mission is constantly updated, adapted and never distanced from the concrete situations of human life. The Gospel is always concrete and timeless. Like Christ, who goes out to meet his people and walks together with them, the same is required and expected of all the baptized. A journey together requires not only accompaniment, but also a listening heart, a willingness to enter into the spirit of dialogue, a journey that can also lead one to feel vulnerable to the opinions of others, to threats, to persecution, as happened to the first disciples.

However, the church must be available to unceasingly transmit the gospel, always seeking to reveal Jesus and his gospel in every circumstance. Indeed, *"the Church is not dispensed from an equally untiring attention to those who have received the faith and who often, for generations, have been in contact with the Gospel. In this way, she seeks to deepen, consolidate, nourish and make ever more mature the faith of those who already call themselves faithful and believers, so that they may become more so."*<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n° 60

<sup>5</sup> *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n° 54

### 3. The dynamic and coherent presence of the OFS in the Church



How do we define the dynamic and coherent presence of the Christian in the Church or in the Franciscan Order? Pope Francis in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 24 speaks of the Church going forth, of a Church that

takes initiatives without fear and is ready to go far, to meet the least. The Holy Father speaks of nothing other than reminding or urging us to enter into the dynamism of our discipleship, that of being sent discipleship with a universal and dynamic dimension. For the laity, this discipleship operates in the realities of a vast world and in realities particularly open to the evangelization of the family, where they are deeply committed to the service of building the Kingdom of God, with a hidden and coherent witness of the Gospel.<sup>6</sup>

Our Christian faith teaches us the value and importance of its members, from conception to death. With the awareness of this value, each person seeks to live his or her faith in a dynamic in which work is consistent with Christian, social, cultural and human values. These are the values that generate the desire to do something for the good of others. And the Holy Father, Pope Francis, in his second catechesis dedicated to the elderly, tried to awaken attention to the importance of being human at any stage of life, without evaluating one's life in terms of productivity. The values of life are not only qualified or quantified in terms of their contributions, but acquire value in function of the importance of the human being established as a child of God. Thus, when we speak of a dynamic and coherent presence of the OFS in the Church, we must always consider and remember the value of the members, independently of their dynamism or presence in the fraternity, but with the conscious task of the mission entrusted to them and the different way of participating in the life of the whole fraternity.

If one really understands what Pope Francis means about going far to find the other, then no brother is isolated anymore or should be considered marginalized. What does the good shepherd do when he realizes that one sheep is missing? He goes in search of the lost one, leaving the ninety- nine behind. This is what is called dynamic and consistent presence. A pastor should never complain about the decrease of his faithful, but go with confidence to all those who cannot or do not want to come to church. The same should be for Secular Franciscans, instead of calling other friars "*isolated or inactive*", they should follow the example of the good shepherd, that is, go in search of them, visit them, have a

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 70

fraternal meeting in their homes or simply meet them and invite them to fraternal meetings.

Being a member of the church and of the order requires a lot of dynamism to think and do things like the friends of the paralytic (Mk 2:1-12). These friends could not reach Jesus through the front door because of the crowd inside and outside the house. So they became resourceful and persistent, uncovered the roof of the house and lowered their friend onto a cot, and the paralytic was cured (Mk 2:1-12; Lk 5:17-26; Mt 9:1-8). Jesus himself becomes an admirer and witness of the dynamism of their faith, of its consistency. In the spontaneous act of the paralytic's friends, the characteristic spirit of community that impelled them to find a way to save a sick friend is evident. Their gestures expressed, manifested and concretely realized, the communion in walking together and this is what *"the concept of synodality calls for the involvement and participation of the whole People of God in the life and mission of the Church..."*<sup>7</sup>

Each generation has its own challenges on how to repair the Church and each community must still feel alive that call to *"go and repair my Church that is in ruins"* as a communal task that all feel and sense in order to sustain the Church and at the same time give it new life.

## Conclusion

The OFS, like the Church in general, continually faces an enormous challenge, that of repairing the Church according to its culture and tradition, in a disinterested and suffering world, in a world that, for example, gives little value to marriage and childbearing (totally considered a burden and a nuisance). Even in these situations there is a great possibility and opportunity to offer the world a lifestyle that is dynamic and coherent with the Gospel, a dynamism and coherence that are possible when one is aware of the responsibility of being a Christian, not being afraid to give witness to Christ in any circumstance of life, living the Franciscan charism in a synodal dynamism where all the members are and feel co-responsible for spiritual and fraternal growth and where the priority is always to give witness to Christ with one's own life.

Therefore, one cannot speak of "repairing the Church" or of synodality without taking into account that only together can the Church be better built and communion grow among all its members, at the service of the Church and with the Church, for a world in which all feel responsible for the original reconstruction of human dignity.

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, 6.7.



### CANADA - National Elective Chapter

From July 14 to 17, 2022, the National Fraternity of Canada held its elective Chapter at the "Centre spiritualité Ursulines-Loretteville" in Quebec. The Chapter was attended by 26 capitulars, 5 religious and 4 observers. The Chapter was presided over by Mary Stronach, Assistant Minister General, delegated by Tibor Kauser, OFS Minister General, and by Fr. Henri Ethier, OFM, delegate of the Conference of Spiritual Assistants (CAS).

Jewel Jasmins was elected National Minister for the 2022-2024 triennium, the composition of the new council represents the four main regions of Canada: West, East, Quebec, Central. In addition, there is a balance between new and old council members. The unanimity of the results is a sign of this good understanding, respectful of differences and attentive to meet always around our common vocation, and this attitude brings hope and joy to the national fraternity. The Chapter was lived in a very warm and fraternal atmosphere, with a good coexistence between prayer, personal reflection and sharing.

### HUNGARY - National Elective Chapter

The National Elective Chapter of the OFS-Hungary was held from July 21-23, 2022 at the "Temesvári Pelbárt Franciscan High School" of the Friars Minor - Esztergom. It was presided over by Dina Shabalina, Presidency Councillor delegated by Tibor Kauser, OFS General Minister, and by Fr. Peter Zitha, OFM, representative of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS). The theme of the Chapter was "bearers of peace and conscious of a fraternity that must be built in the transfiguring power of love and forgiveness" (OFS Rule, art. 19). The opening Mass was presided over by the Minister Provincial of the Friars Minor, Friar Piusz Berhidai, OFM, and after Mass, several members who have quietly and humbly dedicated their lives to helping others (with the "Merciful Love of Christ" award) were honoured. On Friday, the day was dedicated to the presentation of the new book, followed by the report of the National Minister, Bursar and Spiritual Assistant, Friar Tihamér, who took the opportunity to thank all the members of the OFS for their years of service, and also introduced the new Spiritual Assistant, Fr. Milan Lukotivis, OFM, to the capitulars.

Imre József Daniel was elected National Minister and Adrienn Bogнар was elected International Councillor. The closing Mass was presided over by Friar Milan Lukovists OFM, during which the newly elected Council was installed by Dina Shabalina. The Chapter concluded with a fraternal lunch and a farewell.

### **PARAGUAY - National elective chapter**

The Secular Franciscan Order of Paraguay had the joy of celebrating its National Elective Chapter from July 29-31, 2022, at the retreat house of the Missionary Friars of St. Francis in "el Bairro Santa Lucia de Coronel Oviedo". In attendance was the member of the CIOFS Presidency, Silva Noemi Diana, OFS, delegate of the Minister General Tibor Kauser, OFS, who presided over the Chapter, and as witness Fr. Marcelo Benitez, OFM, delegate of the Conference of Spiritual Assistants (CAS).

There were 26 Chapter members and 13 observers present, and Silva Diana presented the following theme: "Eight Hundred Years of the Letter to a Minister and Guidelines for Council Members". The election session was conducted in a very fraternal manner and all members were satisfied with the results of the elections. Gustavo Benitez was re-elected National Minister and International Councillor.

On Sunday there was a closing Mass, celebrated by Brother Marcelo, OFM, with which the new Council was inaugurated, followed by a celebratory and farewell lunch.

### **MOZAMBIQUE - National Elective Chapter**

From August 30 to 31, 2022, the national chapter of the national fraternity of Mozambique was held at the catechetical centre of Guiùã, diocese of Inhambene. It was held in a fraternal atmosphere of mutual listening among the delegates that compose the regions of this national fraternity. This fact contributed to the outcome of the work of this chapter, which finally elected a new minister and a new council on August 31. Thus, Manecas Paulo, OFS was elected as National Minister and Sister Rita Francisco Chico, OFS was re-elected as Vice-Minister.

The chapter was presided over by the international councillor, Eremenciana Chinyama, OFS - delegate of the General Minister Tibor Kauser, and international councillor of the area. She was accompanied and assisted by Brother Tomas Ginga Suva, OFM Cap, General Assistant and delegate of the SAC.

The chapter was an important moment for the national fraternity, because beyond all that it represents in the life of the brothers and sisters, after two years, they were able to meet to share, pray and reflect on the challenges that lie ahead.

The closing of the Chapter and the inauguration took place during the Sunday Mass, presided over by Brother Tomas Ginga and concelebrated by the assisting brothers: regional and local present that day; it took place at the Shrine of the Martyrs of Guiùã, that is, on August 31, 2022.

### **PERU - VFP/ National Elective Chapter**

Fr. Alfred Parambakathu, OFM Conv., representing the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants, and Silvia Noemi Diana, member of the CIOFS Presidency. The visits took place



on August 12 and 13, 2022, at the OFM Friars' "St. Francis of Assisi" Retreat House in Lima. The last visit was in 2006. The Visitators met with three National Assistants, Fr. Jorge OFM, Br. Henry OFM and Fr. Raul, OFM Cap. The Conventual Friars and TOR do not assist the OFS at the national level, but only at the regional and local levels. The visitors also met individually with all the members of the National Council and most of the regional ministers.

The elective Chapter began on the thirteenth night. There were 25 participants out of the 44 members of the Chapter convoked. Silvia Diana presented the theme "Priorities of the General Chapter", followed by group discussions. National Minister Maria Vivanco Cardenas presented the report of the National Council. On Sunday, August 14, the elective session was held. Patricia Obregón was elected National Minister and International Councillor and Paul Zuzunaga Vice Minister and Alternate International Councillor. The whole visit and the Chapter went very fraternally, although there were many tensions and personal problems.

### **BRAZIL - National elective chapter**

The National Elective Chapter of the OFS Fraternity of Brazil was held in the former convent of the Dorothea Sisters, now a guest house of the Archdiocese of Recife and Olinda, from August 19-21, 2022. The fraternal moment was lived by the brothers and sisters, delegates who make up the National Fraternity of Brazil, representing the regional and local fraternities. The solemn election of the Minister and Council took place on August 20, presided over by the Minister General Tibor Kauser, assisted by Br. Edmilson de Jesus, OFM Cap, as delegate of the CAS. Fr. Tomas Ginga Suva had missed his plane to Luanda and could not arrive in time for the day of the election.

The vote re-elected Maria Jose Coelho, National Minister and International Councillor, and elected other members of the Council. The Chapter took place in an atmosphere of openness, sincere dialogue, moments of prayer and recollection, as well as debates and the approval of motions and recommendations for the next three years.

The Chapter concluded on Sunday, August 21, with the celebration of Sunday Mass, which in Brazil coincided with the solemnity of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary into Heaven, which is celebrated in other parts of the world on August 15. Fr. Tomas Ginga Suva, Assistant General, presided at the celebration, which was concelebrated by several regional, national and local assistants from Brazil. During the Mass, after the homily, Minister General Tibor Kauser presided over the rite of installation of the new Minister and Council of the Fraternity of Brazil.

### **MÉXICO - International Assembly of YouFra**

The third International Assembly of YouFra was held in Mexico City. The youth event took place August 20-26 at the Verbum Dei Religious Retreat House. The Assembly was

accompanied by the Minister General Tibor Kauser and the International Councillors: Silvia Diana and Felix Chocoyay and the General Assistants Fr, Tomas Ginga, OFM Cap and Fr. Carlos Gines, TOR, as well as the National Spiritual Assistants from Croatia, Mexico, Argentina and Bolivia.

The theme of the Assembly was: *Sanctify yourselves and you will sanctify the world*. They reflected on holiness in the light of Pope Francis and his Exhortation: *Gaudete et Exultate*. They also reflected on the double belonging and shared the social projects that each Fraternity, throughout the world, encourages and strives to realize.

The Assembly also included moments of prayer, celebration, reflection, pilgrimage, dance and sharing the cultural and spiritual riches of each country. A special moment was the pilgrimage to the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe and the elaboration of priorities for the following years.

### **SLOVAKIA - National Elective Chapter**

The OFS Chapter of Slovakia was held in the convent of the Sisters "Sestry Františkánky Premenenia Pána" in the village called "Melice-Lieskove" from September 1-4, 2022 and was presided over by the Minister General Tibor Kauser, OFS. in the presence of Br. Peter Zitha, OFM., representative of the Conference of General Assistants (CAS). The opening Mass of the Chapter was celebrated on Thursday evening by the Minister Provincial of the Friars Minor Capuchin, Fr. Norbert Pšenčík, OFM, and on Friday afternoon the National Assistant, Fr. Josef KONC, OFM Cap. led the Eucharistic Adoration which was followed by recreation and fraternal sharing.

Saturday morning was dedicated to the election of the new National Council, and Damian BEREK was elected National Minister. Juraj ZONNESCHEIN was elected International Councillor. In the afternoon, work was done in the groups, followed by the Holy Mass for the inauguration of the new Council, celebrated by the National Assistant Fr. Robert Josef Chabada, OFM.

The closing Mass was celebrated on Sunday, September 4 by Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM, General Spiritual Assistant. After the Eucharistic celebration, the capitulars went to the refectory for a fraternal agape.

### **NEW ZEALAND - National Elective Chapter**

From September 9-11, 2022, at the St. Francis Retreat Centre, the OFS National Fraternity of New Zealand celebrated its elective Chapter. Twenty-two Chapter members and two Spiritual Assistants were present.

The Chapter was presided over by Mary Stronach, Vice General Minister OFS, and the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants was represented by Fr. Philip Jeffares, OFM. The elective session was held on September 11: Paul Hitchfield was elected National

Minister and Clare McClean was elected International Councillor. It should be noted that the Chapter was lived in an atmosphere of prayer and fraternal joy.

### **AUSTRALIA - NATIONAL CHAPTER**

The National Elective Chapter of Australia was held at St. Joseph's Conference Centre, Baulkham Hills, Sydney, from September 16-18, 2022. Mary Stronach, Vice Minister General, presided over the elective chapter and the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants, and was represented by her delegate Br. Joseph McKay, OFM.

The newly elected National Minister and International Councillor was Maria Ladanza, formerly Vice Minister. According to the participants, the Chapter went very well and all were satisfied with the outcome of the elections, a beautiful elective chapter with much joy and fraternity.

### **ECUADOR - National Elective Chapter**

From September 23-25, 2022, the National Fraternity of Ecuador had the joy of celebrating its National Chapter, presided over by Felix Chocojay, YouFra representative to the OFS International Council, delegated by Tibor Kauser, OFS, while the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants was represented by Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM, who presented a reflection on "The Holy Spirit in the Church and in the community".

The inaugural Mass was presided over by Friar Kyrstof Kurkiewicz, OFM Conv., after a lengthy discussion on how to proceed with the voting on the reports of the National Minister and the National Treasurer. The capitulars elected the new National Council and Martha Osorio was re-elected National Minister and International Councillor of the OFS Ecuador.

Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM, followed by a moment of fraternal sharing in which the 50th wedding anniversary of one of the OFS capitulars was celebrated, as well as the birthdays of two other brothers and sisters. The Chapter concluded with a meeting of the major superiors of the First Order and the national spiritual assistants.

### **CUBA - National Elective Chapter**

The National Fraternity of Cuba held its elective chapter on September 23-25, 2022 at the "Casa de las Hermanas de María Auxiliadora, (Casa María Mazzarello) Peñalver, Guanabacoa, Havana. The theme of the Chapter was "Living the Gospel in fraternal communion".

The Chapter was presided over by Silvia Noemi Diana, delegate of Minister General Tibor Kauser, OFS, and by Fr. Luis Pernas Rodriguez, OFM, delegate of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants. The Chapter was attended by 11 capitulars, 2 religious and 3

observers. José Ángel Miranda Reyes was elected National Minister and International Councillor. The climate of the Chapter was fraternal, helpful and open to learning, with the spirit of going to the sources and priorities as a Secular Franciscan Order present in Cuba, to be a leaven of the Gospel in this land of Cuba, based on the Franciscan charism.

### **MALAWI - National Elective Chapter and Fraternal and Pastoral Visitation**

The National Chapter and the fraternal and pastoral visit of the OFS in Malawi formally began with the celebration of Holy Mass at 06:00 hours on Friday, September 30, 2022. During the VFP we had a moment of dialogue with the Major Superior of the Capuchin Friars, Fr. Misheck Banda, OFMCap, and the National Assistant Fr. Francis Sagwirika, OFMCap, and the Regional Assistant Fr. Themistocles Nyamwihula, OFMCap, and then the visit continued in the school hall where the visitors shared a dialogue with the National Council together with the YouFra and other members of the Regional Council. This was followed by a visit to the Poor Clare nuns where the local fraternity is located and, in the afternoon, a visit to Archbishop Patrick Thawari, the Archbishop's representative. The visit was an opportune moment to affirm the fidelity of the members of the OFS to the Church and its leaders, and also to express concern about the continued insistence of some members to wear the habit.

The elective Chapter was presided over by Eremenciana Chinyama, Councillor of the Presidency of the CIOFS, and by Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM, representative of the Conference of General Assistants to the OFS and YouFra. There were 54 members present, 36 of whom had the right to vote. The electoral session took place on Saturday morning, October 1, beginning with prayer and the presentation of the electoral regulations, the convocation of the chapter members and the explanation of the chapter procedures. Tresco Zakalia, as National Minister, and Teresa Mukatipa, as International Councillor, were elected. The fraternal and pastoral visit, as well as the Chapter, ended with the Holy Mass of installation of the new National Council presided by Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM.