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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”*



**THE WITNESS OF LIFE**

**AS VOCATIONAL PROMOTION FOR THE OFS**

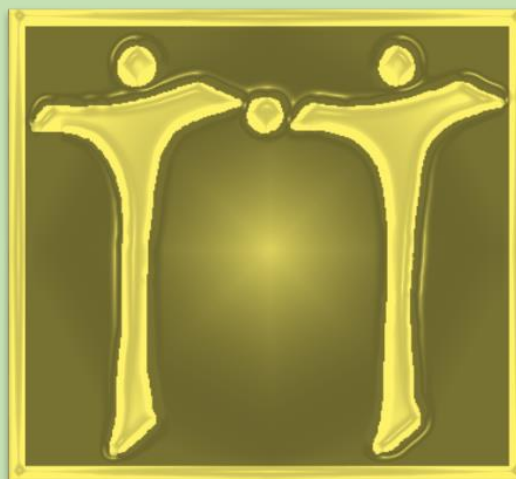
Fr. Tomas Ginga P. Suva, OFMCap

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

## Introduction

With this last issue of Koinonia we conclude our journey on "the Secular Franciscans on the way in the Synodal Church" by dealing with the theme of "Witness of life as vocational promotion for the Secular Franciscans".

Witness of life, that involves the conversion of the heart, attracted, conquered and transformed by the One who is the only Holy One, who is "the good, every good, the highest good".



Conversion of the heart that makes us witnesses of Christ through the charism of Francis of Assisi, who lived the "holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" "sine glossa", that is, taking it as a form and rule of life. We must, therefore, as Pope Francis exhorts<sup>2</sup>, "embrace the Gospel as if we were embracing Jesus," so that it is "Jesus himself who shapes your life. So that you can take on poverty, minority, simplicity as **your particular distinguishing marks before all**".

It is on these particular hallmarks that our witness in the synodal path is based. In fact, it does not annul the difference in charisms, which must be integrated to fully realise the unity of the Mystical Body of Christ (cfr. 1Cor 12,12-13). Charisms whose richness must be recognised and appreciated, as they are freely bestowed by the Spirit for the good of the community and for the benefit of the entire human family.

All Christians have been invited, through the various ecclesial realities scattered throughout the world, to make their contribution to this journey to express the specific *modus vivendi et operandi* of the Church as the People of God (LG 9; CIC 781). The Church that manifests and concretely realises its being communion in walking together, in gathering together in assembly, and in the active participation of all its members in its evangelising mission.

Therefore, we Secular Franciscans are also called to respond to this invitation, reflecting and sharing the challenges proposed to reinvigorate communion, mission, and the presence of the Church in today's world.

### 1. How to live the path of the synodal Church

#### a) Listening

Francis, in front of the Crucifix, hears the voice of Jesus telling him: "Francis, go and repair my house". But which house? Slowly, he realises that it is about making his own contribution to the life of the Church; It is about placing himself at the service of the

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francesco, *Speech to participants in the General Chapter of the Secular Franciscan Order, November 15, 2021.*

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

Church, loving it and working in such a way that the Face of Christ is increasingly reflected in it.

Like Francis of Assisi, we must put ourselves in 'listening', an active listening, which helps us to reflect on the steps that the Spirit invites us to take towards the other in order to accept him or her in his or her human and divine singularity.

Listening that helps us perceive the reasons and feelings of the other, establishing that true contact, which alone can become the basis for enriching and effective relationships; that allows us to connect with him, and to be able to grasp every aspect of his message, verbal or non-verbal, that he wishes to send us.

Listening, however, must be based on a common language. It is therefore necessary to reshape ours in order to learn new ones. We cannot apply the same way of speaking to all the 'worlds' in which each of us lives and works.



### **b) On the Way**

"Francis of Assisi was a wayfarer who never stood still, who walked through countless towns and villages in Italy, never failing to be close to the people and zeroing the distance between the Church and the people"<sup>3</sup>.

St Francis' vocation of going out to meet, rather than of waiting, must be the style of us his followers, that is, the style of a Franciscan community that feels the urgency of being close to others rather than closing in on itself.

Our walking together, however, should not be a 'directing' but an accompaniment that helps other, and ourselves, to discern which is the direction in which we should take our next steps in order to consciously arrive at self-transcendence in God.

This common discernment will avoid conflicts and superficial discussions, and enable us to be in deep harmony in listening to the Spirit.

### **c) In Announcement**

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<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, *Discorso ai membri del Coordinamento Ecclesiale per l'VIII Centenario Franceseano*, 31 October 2022.





Francis of Assisi, by encountering the leper, went to his 'periphery' announcing to him the love of Christ. Our proclamation must also reach the peripheries, but the peripheries are not always distant, extreme. They are often right in front of us and we do not realise it.

We do not notice those who remain silent, those who are unheard in the vast world of poverty, schools, religions, and all those places where justice and love are demanded.

"Only faith restores the breath of the Spirit to a closed, individualistic world. With this breath, the great present challenges, such as peace, care for the common home and a new model of development can be addressed, without surrendering to facts that seem insurmountable"<sup>4</sup>.

## 2. Where to live the path of the synodal Church

The Franciscan experience has a special dimension: fraternity. A place that must not be enclosed and give the illusion of a protected and inaccessible space where one can take refuge, or a comfort zone.

The fraternity is the place of welcome and hospitality: it must have large windows from which to look out and large doors through which to go out so that we can transmit and bear witness to our faith in Jesus Christ through the example of life, through words, gestures and our behaviour.

"Those who follow Francis must learn to stand firm and walking: 'stand firm in contemplation, in prayer, and then moving forward, walking in witness, the witness of Christ'<sup>5</sup>.

We must get out of our fraternity, our 'home', to transmit what we live inside: listening, dialogue, caring for the most fragile, closeness, attention.

And, therefore, go 'on the road', standing firm and walking like Francis of Assisi, with the passion of those who wish to implement paths that welcome all differences, thus giving our brothers and sisters our witness to Christ.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Pope Francis, *Discorso ai membri del Coordinamento Ecclesiale per l'VIII Centenario Franceseano*, 31 October 2022.

### 3. Witnessing Francis of Assisi in the journey of the synodal Church

#### a. The Fraternity

Fraternity lived at all levels is "the point of convergence of the dynamism of mutual listening in the Holy Spirit"<sup>6</sup>; it is the place where listening to the brothers and sisters is made possible and the true participation of all is ensured; each, however, according to his or her abilities and tasks within it (Cfr. 1Cor 12, 4-11).

In the fraternity, the effective quality of community relations and the dynamic tension of going outside must be lived and deepened: a responsible and widespread presence in the territory for the care of the common house.

The fraternity is therefore the place of welcome where one listens with the heart, like Mary, and serves with the body, like Martha (Lc 10,38-42): "two dimensions of hospitality, grafted into each other in a relationship of reciprocity, so that listening is the heart of service and service the expression of listening. A service that does not start with listening creates dispersion, concern, and agitation: it is a pursuit that risks leaving joy on the ground. (...) When, on the other hand, a service hinges on listening and takes its cue from the other, then it gives him time, has the courage to sit down to receive the guest and listen to his word; Mary is the first, namely the dimension of listening, who welcomes Jesus, both in the Lord's shoes and in those of the wayfarer"<sup>7</sup>.

Therefore, it is fundamental listening to the Word, which does not tell us to remain static in our convictions and our places but urges us to be "witnesses and instruments of His mission among people"<sup>8</sup>.

#### b. The road

Being a witness, however, implies not hiding but coming out of ourselves and our 'home' to give reason for the hope that is within us (Cfr. 1Pt 3,15), or the gift of faith that we have received from God.

Faith is to be transmitted, it is an active gift<sup>9</sup>, as bearing witness to the Gospel is not a mere talking, telling of facts, but it is a proclamation that must be lived personally, incarnating it. It is the manifestation of what has taken place in the person since he accepted the Lord's call. Witness has no value, therefore, if it is not passed on as St Francis did. If, like him, we do not set a 'good example'.

<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis, *Discorso nella commemorazione 50° anniversario dell'istituzione del Sinodo dei Vescovi*, 17 October 2015.

<sup>7</sup> CEI, *I cantieri di Betania. Prospettive per il secondo anno del Cammino sinodale*, 11 July 2022, p. 11.

<sup>8</sup> OFS Rule, art. 6,1.

<sup>9</sup> OFS Rule, art. 4,2.

Good example is inextricably linked to our vocation and our profession in the OFS, it is the virtue most cultivated and preached by our Seraphic Father<sup>10</sup>, by which he approached and attracted people to God.



So, our witness of life must be a strong push for others to fall in love with Francis of Assisi and follow him into secularity.

It is a commitment that we cannot delegate, nor can we run away from, as it is at the heart of the spiritual vitality of the individual Secular Franciscan and of the entire OFS.

Our General Constitutions encourage us to do this by stating that "the promotion of vocations to the Order is the duty of all brothers and is a sign of the vitality of the Fraternities themselves. The brothers, convinced of the validity of the Franciscan form of life, pray to God to grant the grace of the Franciscan vocation to new members" and at the same time "the councils must adopt appropriate means to promote the secular Franciscan vocation"<sup>11</sup>.

This commitment, however, must start in the local fraternities and then expand to regional, national, and international ones. Last year's General Chapter approved a motion concerning the urgent need to revitalise the issue of vocations promotion in all fraternities around the world. Reminding all brothers and sisters that this reality is a duty full of love and a sign of vitality of the fraternities themselves.

## Conclusion

We can, therefore, say that for Secular Franciscans, living synodality in and with the universal Church is a great opportunity to deepen our vocation and give it to others.

The journey with the Synodal Church will enable us to revitalise our vocation as *imago Christi* according to the example of St Francis.

It will help us renew our efforts to find new means to attract and accompany vocations.

For this to happen, however, it is necessary to consider the testimony of life as an effective example of vocational promotion.

Testimony that must be supported with prayer, acceptance and active collaboration between brothers and sisters in the fraternities.

<sup>10</sup> Boccali G., "Esempio", voce, in Dizionario Francescano, Edizioni Messaggero Padova, 1983, p. 2135.

<sup>11</sup> General Constitutions OFS, art.45.



## MEETINGS, PRESENCES AND CHAPTERS

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### CROATIA - National Elective Chapter

The National Chapter of the OFS was held on October 7, 8 and 9, 2022 in the city of Samobor, Zagreb. The Order of Croatia reviewed and made new commitments for the next three years.

The Chapter, which went smoothly, was presided over by the Minister General, Tibor Kauser, with the Assistant General, Fr. Carlos Ginés, TOR, acting as witness. Who

encouraged the fraternity and answered some questions about Franciscan life and government.

The capitular friars, gathered at the Tabor House of Spirituality in Samobor, participated in the elections. Thirty-two friars were eligible to vote and elected young Sister Marta Rados as the new National Minister and Sister Suzana Fiorenini as Vice National Minister. The Council was greatly renewed and encouraged to continue to deepen the life of the fraternity and to address the issue of dual membership. At the same time, on the last day, the renewal of the National Council of YouFra Croatia also took place.

Fr. Zvonimir Brusac, TOR, and Fr. Ivica Janjic, OFM, were also present. Also present were some religious spiritual assistants from YouFra.

### USA - National Elective Chapter

The National Elective Chapter of the United States of America was held from October 11-16, 2022. The place chosen was the Sheraton Airport Hotel, Michigan - Detroit.

Bishop Gerard W. Battersby, Auxiliary Bishop of Detroit, opened the National Chapter of the Secular Franciscan Order with a Mass that included a homily reminding the listeners of the hope we have in Jesus Christ.

The new National Executive Council was elected on Saturday, October 15, at the Chapter meeting: Jane DeRose-Bamman, OFS, was elected Minister, Diane Menditto, OFS, was elected Vice Minister and Mary Frances Charsky, OFS, was elected International Councilor.

The chapter developed normally and the good fraternity was maintained. The Assistants of the 4 Orders were present. The current President of the American Conference is Fr. Jerome Wolbert, OFM. Fr. Kevin M. Queally, TOR, was designated as Delegate of the CAS, who acted as ecclesial witness of the election and Sister Silvia Diana, OFS, advisor to the Presidency of the CIOFS, presided over the installation of the new National Executive Council.



## Great Britain - National Elective Chapter

The National Elective Chapter of the OFS national fraternity of Great Britain was held between 14-16 October 2022, at the High Leigh Christian Conference Centre in Hoddesdon, Hertfordshire. It was presided over by Dina Shabalina, OFS, Councillor of the CIOFS Presidency, and assisted by Br. John Cavanagh OFMCap, delegated by Br. Tomas Ginga Suva, OFMCap, General Spiritual Assistant, as the CAS representative for this chapter.

The Chapter began on 14 October at 5pm, with a welcome address of the outgoing National Minister Betsy Hart, who greeted the brothers and sisters who had arrived from the various OFS regions of Great Britain. Afterwards, all participants, including the two National Spiritual Assistants, introduced themselves. After a short presentation in pairs, everyone presented his/her neighbour for the assembly. This helped to create an atmosphere of trust for the fraternal meeting. The Vespers were recited as part of Holy Mass. The Mass was celebrated in the same hall and presided by Brother Donal Walsh, OFM and Brother John Cavanagh, OFMCap.

The election session started on the 15th, at 2pm. The total number of voters was 21, and so the 'quorum' was reached. The brothers and sisters who will animate the fraternity over the next three years were elected. Kathy Maskens is the new National Minister and International Councillor at the same time.

The official inauguration of the new OFS National Council of Great Britain took place the following day, on 16 October, during the celebration of Holy Mass. The chapter officially ended with this celebration.

The National Elective Chapter of Great Britain was conducted according to all norms, analysing the achievements and challenges of the past cadence, and setting priorities for the near future.

## France – National Elective Chapter

The national chapter of the national fraternity of France was held from 14 to 16 October 2022 in the diocesan house in Vannes, region of Brittany. It was presided by Noemi Paola Riccardi, Presidency Councillor, as delegate of the General Minister of the OFS Tibor Kauser and assisted by Brother Tomas Ginga Suva, OFMCap, representing the CAS. The Chapter officially began on Saturday 15 with the opening Mass presided by Brother Jose Kohler, OFM, outgoing national assistant, concelebrated by Brother Tomas Ginga Suva; it was attended by all the capitulars, with the presence of some regional and local OFS assistants. These are brothers, a nun, and lay people (Secular Franciscans) respectively.

On the afternoon of Saturday 15<sup>th</sup>, the work of the Chapter resumed at 2 p.m. with the intervention of the Minister Provincial of France and Belgium, Br Michel Laloux, OFM, and the Custos, Br Jean Marie Auclair, OFMConv, on the theme of assistance. They presented the current problem of the spiritual and pastoral assistance of the OFS in



France, pointing out the situation of not finding a friar available to fulfil the role of national assistant.

The Chapter work was conducted in an atmosphere of tranquillity, respect and fraternal listening. The discussion and approval of the reports of the various commissions took place in the afternoon of that same day.

Among the reports discussed, that of the assistants provoked heated debate because of the current situation which is being experienced by the brothers of the First Order in France, i.e. the lack of new vocations and the ageing of a large part of the brothers; this fact means that in some regions there are already no friars of the first Order to assist and no secular Franciscans. So, it is a concern that the capitulars reflected upon with the Provincial Ministers of the First Order present there. The questions and queries were many, but the answers and the ways out are of a long term, i.e. leaving time for the Holy Spirit to enlighten and raise the best answers to each reality.

The following day, Sunday, elections were held in the morning: of the minister, vice-minister, and councillor(s), as well as the other two deputy offices that are considered important for the life and pastoral action of that national fraternity.

The following sisters were elected National Minister, Deputy Minister and International Councillor/Substitute: Claire Hulot, Catharine Delmas Goyon, Claire Dechenaux, respectively.

The chapter concluded with the celebration of the Holy Mass, presided by Brother Michelle Laloux, Provincial of France/Belgium, and concelebrated by Brother Jose-Kohler, both OFM brothers. Noemi Paola Riccardi, the Chapter President confirmed, during the mass, the new animators of the national fraternity of France, reading the investiture formula, prescribed in the OFS ritual for this occasion. Thus, the brothers and sisters who will animate the national fraternity over the next three years were confirmed and invested in the functions for which they were elected. In short, all in all, we can say that the chapter went well, without anything extraordinary.

### **POLAND - National Elective Chapter**

The Chapter was held in Niepokalanów (City of the Immaculate in Polish), a Catholic Franciscan friary located in Teresin, near Warsaw (Poland). It was founded by St. Maximilian Kolbe in 1927 and housed 800 people, making it the largest monastery at the time.

On the morning of Friday, October 21, 2022, before the Chapter, there was a meeting to get to know each other and share experiences with the National and Regional Spiritual Assistants of the Orders present in the country, with the National Minister Emilia, the International Councilor Dina Shabalina and the General Spiritual Assistant Fr. Carlos Ginés, TOR.

In the afternoon, after the Eucharist and lunch, the National Chapter of Poland began. The first day began with reports from the outgoing Minister and the financial report, followed by requests and clarifications. The first day ended with questions and answers to the International Councilor and the Assistant General.

Saturday the 22nd began with the Eucharist and a good breakfast to start the election day. The 47 members of the Chapter with the right to vote re-elected Sister Emilia Nogaj as National Minister of the OFS in Poland and Sister Joanna Berlowska as Vice National Minister. The Chapter also elected Slawomir Kowalski as International Councilor.

### **Ireland - National Elective Chapter**

The OFS National Elective Chapter of Ireland was held from 28-30 October 2022 at the International Eucharistic and Marian Shrine in Knock, Ireland.

The outgoing OFS Minister in Ireland, Philomena Rooney, made sure that all participants had the necessary materials for the work of the Chapter. The Chapter began informally at 6:00 p.m., with dinner and a meeting of the members present, including CIOFS delegates Kathy Maskens, National Minister of Great Britain delegated by Minister General Tibor Kauser, and Brother Matej Jovanovac, TOR, delegate from the Conference of Spiritual Assistants.

On this occasion, the President of the Chapter, Kathy Maskens, explained the election process to the participants and answered questions, presenting her experience in the work of the OFS in Great Britain. The meeting concluded with the praying of the rosary. Along with the other brothers and sisters of the chapter, two national spiritual assistants of Ireland, Brother Michael Duffy, OFMCap and Brother Ailbe O'Murchu, OFM, also participated in the work.

On Saturday afternoon, the chairmanship of the chapter was handed over to the CIOFS delegates, after thanking the outgoing board, which formally resigned. The election itself began with the invocation of the Holy Spirit. There were elected Conn Mac Cinnamha as National Minister and Philomena Rooney as International Councilor, as well as the other board members.

### **Lebanon - Elective National Chapter**

From 22nd to 23rd October 2022, in the church of Padre Pio - Jal El Dib - Lebanon, the national chapter of the fraternity of Lebanon was held. It was presided by the Councilor of the Presidency, Noemi Paola Riccardi, as delegate of the General Minister of the OFS, Tibor Kauser, and assisted by Brother Tanios Rizk, OFMCap, delegate of the CAS. Both were able to present specific topics that served as a moment of formation and updating for the chapter members. The themes presented were: Noemi "Identity, witnesses and tools, service" and fra Tanios "Responsibility and commitment".

There were 108-chapter members present, a number that facilitated the achievement of a 'quorum', a prerequisite for the elections. The following were elected: Gina Chedid Charbaji as National Minister and Nicole Adi Assaf as International Advisor, as well as the other board members.

All in all, the Chapter work and other related activities took place in a serene and fraternal atmosphere, favouring fraternal listening and sharing among the brothers and sisters.

### **Italy - Fraternal and Pastoral Visit**

The pastoral and fraternal visit to the National Council of the OFS Italy took place on 28, 29 and 30 October 2022 at the OFS Italy national headquarters. The fraternal visit was carried out by Deputy General Minister Mary Stronach and the pastoral visit by General Spiritual Assistant Brother Carlos Ginés, TOR.

The National Council presented the reality of the Order in Italy and expressed itself through two guiding ideas that the Vice-Minister provided: the beauty of the Order in Italy and the main challenges facing the Order in the future.

The visit took place in an atmosphere of fraternity and trust, with a great desire to grow, to achieve the proposed objectives and to better organise the Order in Italy. The Council was delighted and encouraged by this visit.

Br. Lorenzo Scafuro, OFM, Br. Carlo Poloni, OFMConv, and Br. Antonio Morichetti, TOR, are the current national assistants. The OFMConv national assistant has not yet been appointed for more than a year. Despite this, the Conference is constituted and works in a collegial manner.

### **Madagascar - National Elective Chapter**

From 28 October to 3 November 2022, the national fraternity of Madagascar went to Antananarivo to the "Centre spirituel Sainte Thérèse de l'Enfant de Jésus, Itaosy ou Village Aina, Soeurs de la Sagesse, Benasandratra Fenoarivo". Due to complications in obtaining a visa to enter Madagascar, Adolph was unable to attend the Chapter, but Minister General Tibor Kauser delegated Hani Husson of Mauritius, OFS, at the last minute. The Conference of Spiritual Assistants was represented by Br. Pedro Zitha, OFM, who gave two reflections: "Animating and leading as a leadership service" and "presentation of the OFS financial and asset management manual". The first few days were devoted to the presentation of the national minister's report, the financial report, and on Tuesday, 2 November, there was a pilgrimage to the shrine of Our Lady 'ILOT DE LA SAINTE VIERGE MARIE - Itasy'.

There were present 51 voting Chapter members, 3 Assistants and 4 observers, including 2 representatives of the Bishops' Conference. The election was held on the morning of Wednesday, 2 November; Rafaralaha Hermann Ivan was elected as National Minister and

International Councillor. The mass for the inauguration of the new National Council was celebrated on Wednesday evening. Everything took place in an atmosphere of great joy and a spirit of listening and gratitude towards God and our brothers and sisters.

### **CIOFS Presidency**

The Presidency of the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order (CIOFS) held its last meeting of the year from Saturday 05 to Saturday 12 November 2022 in the Seraphicum College of the Conventual Friars. The members of the Presidency had the joy of welcoming the new General Assistant, Fr. Stefan Acatrinei, OFMConv, from Romania; he had already been included in the work of the Formation Commission during the previous week, replacing Fr. Alfred Parambakathu, OFMConv, who had finished his term as General Spiritual Assistant.

The Conference of Spiritual Assistants (CAS) would like to thank Brother Alfred for his work, dedication and commitment during his six years of service, sharing and collegiality. We wish him a good pastoral mission in Siena. All the CAS members were present during the meeting except Br. Tomás Ginga, OFMCap, who is in France for the French course.

The days, as usual, were very busy, with presentations, proposals, suggestions, decisions, and votes. On Monday 7 November in the afternoon, the Presidency interrupted its work to participate in Monsignor Pierbattista Pizzaballa's reflection on the commentary of Pope Francis' Encyclical 'Fratelli Tutti'. After that we went back to work.

After many deliberations and decisions, the Presidency joyfully concluded its work on Saturday, 12 November, and each member returned to their various destinations and missions.

### **Mexico - National Elective Chapter**

The elective chapter of the National Fraternity of Mexico was celebrated from 25 to 27 November 2022 at the "Casa Pastoral S. Juan Pablo, de los Lagos, Jalisco - Mexico. The elective chapter of the National Fraternity of Mexico was celebrated from 25 to 27 November 2022 at the "Casa Pastoral S. Juan Pablo, de los Lagos, Jalisco- Mexico.

The Chapter was presided by Ana Maria Raffo, delegated by Tibor Kauser, OFS General Minister, and assisted by Br. Pedro Zitha, OFM, representative of the OFS-YouFra General Assistants. There were 109 participants from which 79-chapter members were present and many OFM spiritual assistants from different regions. It is a pity, however, that the other obedience's were not fully represented.

After a long elective session, the new National Council was successfully elected, and Griselda Romero was elected as the new Minister of the National and International Council for Mexico. The Chapter culminated with the Eucharistic celebration and inauguration, presided by Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM, followed by a fraternal agape in the Mexican style.