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KOINONIA

... together on the journey

“FRANCISCANS IN THE CELEBRATION OF JUBILEES”



THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NATIVITY SCENE IN TODAY'S WORLD

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



Introduction

If we want to meet the God who appeared as a child, we must get off the horse of our 'enlightened' reason. We must lay down our false certainties and intellectual arrogance, preventing us from perceiving God's closeness. We must follow the inner path of St. Francis: the path to that extreme outer and inner simplicity that makes the heart capable of seeing. We must get off, walk spiritually on foot, so to speak, to enter through the portal of faith and meet God, who is different from our prejudices and opinions: the God who is hidden in the humility of a

newborn child. Let us celebrate the liturgy in this way [...] and give up our obsession with what is material, measurable, and tangible. Let us allow ourselves to be made simple by that God who manifests himself to the heart made simple. And we also pray at this hour especially for all those who have to live [...] in poverty, in pain, in the condition of migrants, that a ray of God's goodness may appear before them; that the goodness which God, by the birth of his Son in the stable, wished to bring into the world, may reach them and us”.

Faith in Jesus, who died and rose again for us and for our salvation, finds its most vivid expression in the celebration of the mystery of Christ throughout the year. Although the centre of the celebration revolves around the high solemnity of Easter, it leans first and foremost on the weekly rhythm marked by Sunday. This day is crucial because it commemorates the Lord's resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

If from the very beginning of the Church, the weekly celebration of Sunday and the annual Easter was common to the various communities, gradually, other liturgical feasts appeared. To this first Easter cycle, celebrated from the beginning, was later added the cycle of the Lord's birth or manifestation.

The feasts of Christmas and Epiphany appeared in the Christian calendar in the early fourth century, although in different places. Christmas began to be celebrated in the Church of Rome and Epiphany in the East, almost certainly in Egypt. Both celebrations quickly spread throughout the Church¹.

¹ Cf. JULIÁN LÓPEZ MARTÍN, *La liturgia de la Iglesia. Teología, historia, espiritualidad y pastoral*, BAC, Madrid 2005, págs. 249-253.).

1. The experience of St. Francis

«We should note then, as matter worthy of memory and something to be recalled with reverence, what he did, three years prior to his death, at the town of Greccio, on the birthday of our Lord Jesus Christ. *There was a certain man in that area named John who had a good reputation but an even better manner of life.* Blessed Francis loved him with special affection, since, despite being a noble in the land and very honoured in human society, he had trampled the nobility of the flesh under his feet and pursued instead the nobility of the spirit. As usual, blessed Francis had John summoned to him some fifteen days prior to the birthday of the Lord. „If you desire to celebrate the coming feast of the Lord together at Greccio”, he said to him, „hurry before me and *carefully make ready the things I tell you.* For I wish to enact the memory of that babe who *was born in Bethlehem:* to see as much as is possible with my own bodily eyes the discomfort of his infant needs, how he *lay in a manger,* and how, with an ox and an ass standing by, he rested on hay”. Once the good and faithful man had heard Francis’s words, *he ran quickly* and prepared everything the holy man had requested in that place.



Finally, *the day of joy* has drawn near, and *the time of exultation has come.* From many different places, the brethren have been called. As they could, the men and women of that land, with exultant hearts, prepared candles and torches to light up that night whose shining star has enlightened every day and year. Finally, the holy man of God comes and, finding all things prepared, *he saw them and was glad.* Indeed, the manger is prepared, the hay is carried in, and the ox and the ass are led to the spot. There, simplicity is given a place of honour, poverty is

exalted, humility is commended, and out of Greccio is made a new Bethlehem.

The night is lit up like day, delighting both man and beast. The people arrive, ecstatic at this new mystery of new joy. The forest amplifies the cries, and the boulders echo back the joyful crowd. The brothers sing, praising God, and the night abounds with jubilation. *The holy man of God* stands before the manger, tilled with heartfelt sighs, contrite in his piety, and overcome with wondrous joy. Over the manger, the solemnities of the Mass are celebrated, and the priest enjoys a new consolation»².

² *The Life of Saint Francis* by Thomas of Celano (1Cel XXX, 84-85: FF 468-469), in *Francis of Assisi, Early Documents, The Saint*, volume I, New City Press, New York-London-Manila, 1999, 254-256.

2. Greccio, an invitation to wonder



Pope Benedict XVI, reflecting on the episode of Greccio³, emphasizes what struck Francis in a particular way: Jesus' poverty at his birth and the suffering of the newborn baby. This focus is reiterated by highlighting simplicity, poverty, and humility as characteristic virtues of the scene. But through the description, it is clear that this poverty, before being Francis', is Jesus' poverty. From here, we might reflect:

The mystery of the Incarnation, the announcement that “the Word became flesh” has enormous significance. “The word *flesh*, in the Hebrew language, indicates the whole person, the whole man, but only under the aspect of his transitoriness and temporality, his poverty and contingency”. In this way, God embraces human limitedness „to heal it of all that separates it from Him” and elevates the human condition to that of a child of God. It is essential, then, to recover our amazement before this mystery, to allow ourselves to be embraced by the greatness of this event: „God, the true God, the Creator of everything, walked on our roads as a man, entering human time to communicate his own life to us. And he did so not with the splendour of a ruler, subduing the world with his power, but with the humility of a child. Not from above but from below, not demanding but offering himself”.

³ BENEDICT XVI, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/es/homilies/2011/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20111224_christmas.html

3. Greccio, the cry of the incarnated God

Not surprisingly, Jesus is followed by many public sinners (cf. *Lk.* 3:12; 15:1), among whom publicans and prostitutes stand out. They follow him, no doubt because they are not rejected, but especially because they are welcomed with tenderness, mercy, sympathy, and friendship: “This man is a friend of tax collectors and sinners and eats with them”. It is common in the Gospels to see Jesus sitting at the table with tax collectors and sinners (*Mt* 9:10; *Mk* 2:15-16; *Lk* 5:29) or entering their homes of his own free will (*Lk* 19:5-7). It is a surprising and scandalous attitude that is echoed in the three synoptic Gospels (*Mt* 9:11; *Mk* 2:16; *Lk* 5:30). If these follow him, it is because they accept Jesus' preaching about the Kingdom of God as good news of salvation, and Jesus justifies his friendship with



them because on the road that leads to the Kingdom of God, tax collectors and sinners will overcome their detractors, especially the Pharisees (cf. *Mt* 21:31).

At stake is the justice of the Kingdom of God⁴, so different from what Jesus' contemporary Judaism (in many of its manifestations) expected. In the face of a rigid and stagnant conception of the law, in which man's righteousness is centred on the strict and outward fulfilment of precepts, Jesus sets forth the holiness of God, his Father. In the sight of God, no one is holy; one's works justify no one but by the humble and painful recognition of one's sin and trust in God's merciful love. The person who acknowledges his sins and

⁴ Cf. CASTAÑO ÁNGEL, *El Misterio de Dios revelado en Jesucristo, Teología y Catequesis* 134, (2016) 125-149. Ed. USD, Madrid.

humbly asks God for forgiveness is justified. What may seem normal to many today, in Jesus' time, was rather strange and almost blasphemous: that God could be more pleased with the conversion of a single sinner than with 99 righteous people who need no penance. It is even more extraordinary that God loves sinners as long as they are sinners and bends to their misery by offering His forgiveness in advance, without judging or requiring a prior attitude of conversion, which was incomprehensible to those who lived according to the logic of the Covenant, which was: blessing for the righteous, curse for the wicked.

In this way, Jesus reveals the mystery of God the Father's love as original love, not conditioned by man's justice (cf. *Rom 5*). This is what happens in the case of Zacchaeus. Understanding Jesus' attitude toward Zacchaeus as a strategic asset is impossible. Jesus looks at Zacchaeus, recognizing in him a son of Abraham (*Lk 19:9*) and, therefore a recipient of salvation. Jesus acts this way to reveal the mystery of the Father who always seeks his children and even more when He sees that they are perishing (cf. *Mt 18:14; Jn 3:16; 6:39; 17:12*).

In this way, he can reveal the Father as a love that shows his initiative not in allowing himself to be found by man but in going out to seek him: in Jesus, the sent Son, it is thus revealed - also - that when man seeks God, what he does is to respond to a motion that originates in the call - more or less known to him - of God himself. In short, man's cry throughout history is only a response to the cry of God who calls him. This is, in short, the voice of Jesus, the cry of the incarnated God in history that echoes the initial cry of God seeking Adam (*Gen 3:9*).

4. Greccio, food for eternal life



According to the Franciscan sources, St. Francis wanted to contemplate with his own eyes the poverty with which God chose to take the initiative and became man to redeem us and

manifest his love to the extreme. Let us not forget that his watchword, that of St. Francis, is to live the Holy Gospel without glory.

For I wish to enact the memory of that babe who *was born in Bethlehem*: to see as much as is possible with my own bodily eyes the discomfort of his infant needs, how he *lay in a manger*, and how, with an ox and an ass standing by, he rested on hay (...). Then, the priest solemnly celebrated the Eucharist in front of the Nativity, showing the connection

between the incarnation of the Son of God and the Eucharist. On that occasion, in Greccio, there were no figures: the nativity scene was performed and experienced by everyone present”.

This particular approach to Christmas gave the Christian faith a new dimension. Easter had focused on the power of God overcoming death, unveiling new life, and teaching hope in the world to come. With St. Francis and his nativity scene, God's unfailing love, humility, and goodness, which in the incarnation of the Word is manifested to humans to teach them a new way of living and loving, were brought to the centre of attention⁵.

“By his wounds, we are healed” (cf. 1Pt. 2:24). The foundation of the new community is the love received from God, capable of „healing every wound”. An experience that will mark the conduct of us who believe in Jesus Christ. In Easter, we are urged to seek the light we all need on life's journey. To do so, we are offered a new program: the personal encounter with the Risen One, which St. Francis has lived since the incarnation. For the saint, then, Greccio is the place where he wants to live, contemplate, grow, and be nourished; it is the place where he wants to love and discover that the same God loves him made flesh who came to seek him, reached for him and spoke his name, and became for him the food of eternal life.

Christmas is thus Epiphany: the manifestation of God and his great light in a child born for us. Born in a stable in Bethlehem, not in the palaces of kings. When Francis of Assisi celebrated Christmas in Greccio in 1223 with an ox, a mule, and a manger of straw, a new dimension of the mystery of Christmas became visible (...). Francis celebrated the Holy Eucharist on the manger between the ox and the mule. Later, an altar was built over this manger so that, where previously animals ate straw, now men could receive, for the salvation of soul and body, the flesh of the spotless Lamb, Jesus Christ, as Celano relates.

This is the wonder that St. Francis is living and understanding. The Redeemer has become a hostage in our midst. God is thus revealed not as the one who imposes a price and begins to ask for reparations in order to forgive but as the one who, in his Son, struggles for our salvation: he confronts, faces the power of sin and death, and destroys them. How? Taking them upon Himself. This is why Jesus comes to take upon himself the sin of all and thus to obey. It is this that so moves St. Francis, who, knowing his own sin, marvels at the movement God has made for him and for all. As J. Ratzinger comments: taking on evil, the anti-divine in himself, to destroy it in himself by his permanent obedience to the Father and by his extreme love for his own who were in the world (Jn 13:1): love conquers hate; Life devours death⁶.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ Cf. J. RATZINGER / BENEDICT XVI, *Jesús de Nazaret. Desde la entrada en Jerusalén hasta la resurrección* (Madrid 2011) 183-184.

5. Greccio, the key to inhabiting a Church-home for all⁷



Greccio comes to represent that movement of God to go to the periphery of Himself, to that which is not Him, to that which is far from Him, even to those who are separated and angry with Him. Periphery is everything outside of himself for each person, starting with the nearest, the neighbor. Periphery is for the Church everything that remains outside of itself, and it must go out to find it to embrace it, make it its own, and take it into its mother's womb. The neighbor, especially the suffering, the forsaken, the sinner, is the periphery for every believer and for the Church: an invitation to go out of self and make Jesus Christ, the love that saves, present.

When a people are at war, the periphery is “the front”, and the front is the proper position of the Christian, of the Church, because it is where the Lord has placed Himself. It is clear that this is a particular front because the

enemies are not men but sin - the sin that dwells in me and others - and every evil that oppresses man, which becomes an invitation to show the power of God in concrete love and an invitation to self-denial proper to faith to serve men.

Those who know their place is at the front do not seek „shelters” but „trenches”. In a complex, hostile environment, in combat, the temptation is always to seek security, easy success, quick victory, and support in one's own resources and strength. In this case, they are often experienced as shelters that are not needed to really go where the battle is decided. Those who seek security, who are entrenched in the past they consider glorious or in a utopian idea of the Church of the Pure, actually flee from reality, flee from the battle, because they take it for granted that the fight is lost and have really lost faith and hope. Those who give up in this way have also lost charity.... Jesus is the opposite: the love of God is shown in this loving to the extreme, which seeks only this, to show love, even if there is little hope of success.

I continued with the vocabulary of combat of the trench. It is a place of rest, of fellowship, of sharing fears and anxieties, a place where one prepares oneself and recovers

⁷ *Ibidem.*

strength to maintain the vigor of combat: to remain righteous, not to sin, to fight so that God's love triumphs in one's own history and the history of humanity.

Pope Francis also offered us the image of the „field hospital”. It is widespread in the Tradition to find the figure of the doctor applied to Jesus. The Church is also a source of health because she has been given medicine for every human problem, which is the truth and love of the Lord. For this combat, she has no other strength than that which comes to her from the Lord.

Jesus draws strength for the mission from his being the Son and his living awareness of being of the Father and being for the Father. When Jesus says that he does nothing on his own initiative, but does what he sees the Father does, he is saying in another way what he says when he embraces the child: unless you become like this child, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

The key to understanding Jesus is to see this free, strong, audacious child in him because he lives trusting in the Father and, therefore, is joyful, hopeful, and life-giving. The child who grows up healthy does not build walls around himself, does not live defensively, shows his wounds to the Father (mother) with simplicity, lives open relationships, and always refers back to his parents. Above all, he knows he can do nothing without the Father. Jesus also reveals God by showing himself as Son: in moments of solitude and prayer, when he always refers back to Him.

This is credible love. Speeches, good words, and gestures are credible if they testify to a love that is concrete, selfless, free, sincere ... divine. Only in Jesus is this love perfect and pure. It is not in his disciples, in his Body, which is the Church, but this is the challenge: to show in us, as Church, as Franciscan family, the strength of this love and to show it as a forgiving love. To witness to Jesus Christ, we do not need an immaculate love - that is impossible - but we need a love that transforms, forgives, reconciles, and regenerates us. That is why the witness of Christ cannot be individual; it is always that of a people in which this love-communion (paternal-filial) can be shown. It requires a witness of true brotherhood, true filiation (Mt 23:8-12).

This is the way, and I call for, as Pope Francis reminds us, personal conversion and pastoral conversion, according to the original model, which is always Jesus Christ.

MEETINGS, PRESENCES AND CHAPTERS



Venezuela: National elective Chapter

The National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of Venezuela celebrated its Elective Chapter from June 9th to 11th, 2023, at Casa de Retiros Madre Emilia – Montalbán”, Caracas. The Chapter was presided over by Silvia Diana, a member of the Presidency of the OFS International Council. She is responsible for the South America zone and was a delegate of Minister General OFS, Tibor Kauser. The Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS) was represented by Fr. Tomas Ginga P. Suva, OFMCap. The national assistants were also present, representing the First Order,

respectively: Fr. Antonio Reyes, OFM, Fr. Pedro Briceno, OFMConv., and Fr. Ramon Morillo, OFMCap.

On June 10th, sixteen members of the OFS were present in the chapter hall, including fourteen capitulars and two observers. The presentation of the reports of the regional councils and the national council was followed by group activities. Then, the capitulars began the elective session in which sister Sugheil Sanchez, OFS, was elected as National Minister and International Councillor. The Chapter concluded on Sunday with the celebration of Holy Mass and the installation of the new Council, followed by approval of priorities for the next triennium. The Eucharistic celebration was presided over by Fr. Alfonso Moro, Custodian Minister of the Friars Minor Capuchins of Venezuela. The days spent together were a beautiful experience, interesting and an example of true fraternity. After the chapter, we were able to visit a project of social assistance and be in concrete solidarity with the people of most need in the city of Caracas, namely the pharmacy of the OFS fraternity of Chiquinquirà. The pharmacy is located at the Capuchin friary, where the Capuchins are also participants and benefactors of the same project, along with other OFS national fraternities around the world, such as those of Netherlands and Spain. This project helps many people, especially those who have no possibility of buying medicine. Most of these people are elderly and families without economic resources.

Pakistan: National elective Chapter

The fifth national Chapter of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of Pakistan was held from June 16th to 18th, 2023, at the Custodial House OFM, Karachi, Pakistan.

After the opening Mass, presided over by National Spiritual Assistant of Pakistan, Fr. Saleem Amir, OFM, the National Minister in charge, Albert Nazir, OFS, welcomed all the capitulars. A special welcome was given to Brother Francis Park, OFS, president of the Chapter and to Fr. Clarence Hayat, OFMCap, regional spiritual assistant OFS, and delegate of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS). Francis Park is the International Councillor of the Presidency and in charge of the Zone Asia – Oceania. He was delegated by the Minister General OFS, Tibor Kauser, to preside over this Chapter.

On the 17th, after all the fraternities presented their three-year activity reports and the respective discussions were done, the general ballot took place. The National Minister (OFS) and his council were elected. The YouFra elections were also held on the same day. The following brothers were elected: Inderyas Sardar, National Minister; Younas John, International Councilor, and Yasir Javed, YouFra President.

The Chapter concluded on June 18th with the celebration of the Eucharist, presided over by Fr. Clarence Hayat, OFM^{Cap}. During the same celebration, the installation of the new National Council of Pakistan for the period of 2023 to 2026 was conducted by Francis Park. The Chapter was a great event for the young OFS and YouFra present in Pakistan, and a challenge for the new Minister and Council, as well as the brothers of the First Order (Friars Minor and Capuchins) present in the area, who have been called to assist them spiritually and pastorally. Therefore, the Chapter was also an opportunity to strengthen collegiality among the friars in the service of spiritual and pastoral assistance to the OFS and YouFra.

Porto Rico: fraternal and pastoral Visit

Utuaado, Puerto Rico, June 18th, 2023 – The National Fraternity of Puerto Rico recently celebrated a fraternal and pastoral visit, which took place from June 16th to 18th, 2023, at the headquarters of the National Council in la Porciúncula in the Utuaado area. During this significant event, members of the fraternity had the opportunity to name many problems and try to find solutions to improving communication since the last visit in 1997.

The pastoral visit began with a meeting of the vicar general of the archdiocese, Fr. Tomás González Gonzalez, with the spiritual assistant general, Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM, Mary Stronach, OFS Vice-minister, Fr. Gerardo A. Vargas Cruz, OFM, national assistant and José Rafael Hernández, OFS national minister. Subsequently, all visitors proceeded to the fraternity headquarters, where they engaged with the National Council. The following day was dedicated to active listening, as National Ministers and a few delegates shared valuable suggestions and proposals to enhancing communication within the National Council. Simultaneously, the pastoral aspect of the visit was diligently pursued. Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM, met with esteemed individuals, including the Major Superior of the Capuchin Friars, Fr. Ramón Negron, OFM^{Cap}., as well as National Assistants Fr. David Maldonado Rivas, OFM^{Cap}., Fr. Gerard Vargas, OFM, and local Assistants Fr. Markel Gomez Perez, OFM, and Fr. Fernando Irizary Santana, OFM^{Cap}.

After reviewing the documents, recommendations were given to the National Council, and the visit culminated with Eucharistic Adoration led by permanent deacon, Ivan Dominguez. Notably, he is one of ten diocesan deacons, nine of whom are permanent deacons and one diocesan priest, all of whom are members of the OFS. The National Fraternity of Puerto Rico's recent fraternal and pastoral visit signifies a remarkable step toward strengthening communication and collaboration within the fraternity.

Indonesia: National Elective Chapter

Java, the fifth largest of the 17,500 islands that make up Indonesia, having the highest population density in the world, hosted the sixth elective Chapter of the OFS national fraternity of this nation. The Chapter took place at the Pastoral Centre Sanjaya” in

Muntilan, a town located only 14 km away from Merapi, a 2919m high mountain that has not yet stopped smoking.

The celebration of the Chapter began on Friday, June 30th, at 2 p.m. with a beautiful artistic program which included traditional dances, a beautiful opening ceremony, a greeting addressed to the guests, and celebration of the Eucharist. The Holy Mass was presided over by the vicar general of the Archdiocese of Semarang, Fr. Edy Purwanto. It was animated by the choir of the teachers of Taman Putra Kindergarten, run by the OFS. In addition to the Chapter members (46) and observers (124) there were many guests present. After that, everyone enjoyed a fraternal agape together. The fraternal moment, after dinner, was animated by the regional fraternities. The OFS brothers and sisters from each regional fraternity wore traditional costumes and presented their specific dances.

Saturday, July 1st, included a meditation given by Fr. Thomas Ferry Suharto, OFM, national spiritual Assistant, a presentation of reports by the national minister and treasurer, formation of the 21 spiritual assistants present at the Chapter, and formation of the whole assembly. Fr. Stefan Acatrinei, OFMConv., representative of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS), presented the theme OFS is called to be Church in the midst of the world". Francis Park, OFS, spoke about the specificity of the Asia-Oceania area and the activities of local fraternities.

The elections were carried out in a fraternal atmosphere. Ernest Mariyanto was re-elected national minister, while Ivonna Sri Endah R., international councillor. The installation of the new council was followed by dinner and recreation under the name of "Franciscan Joy". On Sunday, July 2nd, the planned program was carried out and the Chapter concluded with lunch. Joy, serenity, tranquillity and a spirit of brotherhood were abundantly felt during the Chapter.

Gabon: Fraternal and pastoral Visit

The first fraternal and pastoral visit of the presence of the Secular Franciscan Order in Gabon took place from July 12th to 16th. It was carried out by Adolph Atsu Assagba, OFS, Councillor for the area of French-speaking Africa and the Islands, delegate of the Minister General OFS, Tibor Kauser, and by Fr Tomás Ginga Panzo Suva, OFMCap., Assistant Spiritual General representing the Conference of Spiritual Assistants General (CAS). This visit had a specific character of observing „on the spot” the growth of this presence, born in 2011 in the monastery of the Poor Clare Sisters, „Our Lady of the Angels” of Essassa, through the inspiration of Adèle Sabine, OFS. Sabine made her initial formation and profession in France, where she stayed for her studies. Indeed, the seed was sown, was born, grew and bore fruit. Fruit that has reproduced and will reproduce according to the disposition of the earth and of the hearts that have welcomed and will welcome this project of evangelical life.

There are currently three fraternities with a total of about ten perpetually professed members. The three local fraternities are not yet canonically established, but God willing, they will become so in the near future.

During the visit, the visitors personally met with all the brothers and sisters of the three fraternities, whether perpetually or temporarily professed, initiates, candidates or aspirants. They also met with the local ecclesiastical authorities, respectively the Archbishop of Libreville, Mons. Jean Patrick IBA BA, the Business Development Manager of the Apostolic Nunciature, Rev. Fr. Grzegorz Ruekaszka, and the national and local spiritual assistants, respectively the four Friars Minor Capuchins and the two Poor Clare Sisters.

On July 15th, the new interim council was officially appointed and published, replacing the national minister who resigned due to incompatibility with the office, as well as personal reasons. Brother Emmanuel Felix Tonybalepa, OFS, and four councillors were responsible for choosing the new minister and council.

The conclusion of the visit was celebrated in the parish of Sainte Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus et de la Sainte Face, one of the three parishes looked after by the Capuchin friars. In this celebration of thanksgiving, the new Council was also sent on mission.

After Mass, the visitors met the members of YouFra, followed by a fraternal lunch and an afternoon of entertainment.

Lisbon: The fifth extraordinary elective international assembly of YouFra

The fifth Extraordinary Assembly of YouFra was held in Lisbon during the days leading up to WYD 2023, from July 27th to August 1st of 2023, at the College of Enlightenment of the Friars Minor of Portugal.

This extraordinary Assembly brought together more than 120 YouFra members from different countries to approve new statutes and elect new International Councillors. The meeting was presided over by the Minister General OFS, Tibor Kauser. The CIOFS International Councillors Noemi Ricardi and Silvia Diana, Felix Chocojay, International Coordinator of YouFra and Fr. Tomas Ginga, OFMCap. And Fr. Carlos Ginés, TOR, were also present. In addition, more than 15 national, regional, and local Spiritual Assistants accompanied the Assembly.

The title of this international assembly was: *Mary left early for the mountains*. The main formation was given by Fr. Carlos Gines, TOR, Spiritual Assistant General of OFS and YouFra, who reflected on the Mariology of Saint Francis of Assisi. There was also a moment of reflection and dialogue with the Minister General, who attended the event, on the Franciscan Centenary and various festivities for the coming years, followed by a moment of debate and sharing of the work of the JPIC Commission of the various countries present there. Topics on Franciscan childhood and adolescence were also taken into consideration and, above all, the approval of the new Statutes of the International Franciscan Youth. After that, the election of the new International Councillors took place.

The meeting unfolded in a spirit of celebration, joy, generosity and fraternity on the part of all the protagonists of this 5th International Assembly of the YouFra.

Lisbon: World Youth Day 2023 - WYD

WYD took place in Lisbon-Portugal from 1st to 6th of August. The international YouFra took part with joy and great emotion in this Catholic meeting with the young Church from all over the world.

The fifth International Franciscan Youth Assembly was part of WYD 2023, with more than 1.5 million young people coming together to share their faith with Pope Francis. The meeting was a moment of joy and jubilation. YouFra was part of the pilgrimage where the Franciscan spirit and charism were shared with other ministries and charisms of the Church present at this mega-convocation hosted by Pope Francis in Lisbon.

Pope Francis encouraged young people to take risks in service, in solidarity, by going out to meet people who are far away, marginalised, and in need, as our Blessed Mother Mary did when she came to the aid of her cousin Elizabeth. Finally, the venue for the next World Youth Day was revealed, and the country chosen was Seoul, South Korea.

Minister General OFS, Tibor Kauser, International Councillors Silvia Diana and Noemi Ricardi, YouFra International Coordinator Felix Chocojay and General Spiritual Assistant Fr. Carlos Ginés, TOR, accompanied Franciscan Youth to WYD 2023.

USA - Fraternal and Pastoral Visit

The fraternal and pastoral Visit to the Secular Franciscan Order of the USA began with a presentation by National Minister Jane De Rose-Bammanl, her US National Council and the guest friars from the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order, CIOFS: Dina Shabalina and Br Carlos Ginés, TOR. This was followed by the sharing of local and personal experiences in the Order and concerns about the conduct of the meetings and the gift of fraternity. The Visit was held from August 18 to 26, 2023.

Over the next few days, with the brothers and sisters in attendance, formation themes were evaluated, the JPIC Commission was briefed, and there was time for the Visitators to speak with the regional Ministers and the Archbishop of St. Louis, Missouri, who opened the annual Chapter of the SFO in the United States, celebrated at the Pallottine Missionary Sisters' Pallottine Renewal Center Retreat House in Florissant, St. Louis, Missouri.

The Visitators examined the books of the secretariat, the minutes of the meetings and the economic books, and met with the National Spiritual Assistants: Br John De la Riva, OFM Cap, Br Christopher Panagoplos, TOR, Br Marek Stibor, OFM Conv., and Br Jerome Wolbert, OFM., who shared their experience in spiritual assistance and spoke especially of the reality of the shortage of brothers and the vastness of the national territory. A meeting was then held with the Regional Spiritual Assistants present, brothers and lay people; this time the religious sisters did not attend the Chapter. They shared the need for formation of delegates of spiritual Assistants and the shortage that exists. There was an opportunity to greet the Minister Provincial of the Sacred Heart Province, who was present and presided at the Eucharist in the Cathedral Basilica of St. Louis, Missouri, Br. Thomas Nairn, OFM. International Councillor Dina Shabalina, OFS, and General Spiritual Assistant Br. Carlos Ginés, TOR. concluded the Annual Chapter and Fraternal and Pastoral Visit with joy

and satisfaction on Saturday 26th with a fraternal dinner and lively celebration in honour of St. Louis, King of France, Patron of the OFS.

Zambia: National elective Chapter

The national fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of Zambia celebrated its elective Chapter in Ndola from September 7th to 9th, 2023. The Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS) was represented by its delegate, Custos Fr. Augustine Mwape, OFM Cap. The Chapter was presided over by Eremenciana Chinyama, OFS, delegate of Tibor Kauser, Minister General OFS.

Forty-one Chapter members and five observers were present during the Chapter. The elective session was held peacefully, and all Chapter members joyfully expressed their choices by electing John Mutale, OFS, as National Minister, and Rex Mwiinga, OFS as International Councillor for the next three years. The elective Chapter then concluded with celebration of Holy Mass presided by Fr. Augustine Mwaype, OFM Cap, and the installation of the new Council was carried out by Eremenciana Chinyama, OFS.

Mauritius: National elective Chapter

The National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) in Mauritius held its long-awaited elective Chapter from September 9th to 10th, 2023, at the national headquarters “Fraternité Saint Bernardin de Sienne”, Rose-Hill in Plaine Wilhems.

The first day of the Chapter was marked by a joyful atmosphere of praise and adoration, followed by presentation of the following themes: Adolph, OFS, delegate of Minister General, OFS, Tibor Kauser, spoke “on the presence of the OFS in Africa” and Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM, representative of the Conference of Spiritual Assistants (CAS) reflected on the theme “Animating and Guiding, Servant Leadership”.

The outgoing National Minister then presented his report, followed by the Spiritual Assistant and Formator, and the presentation of the financial report. Voting on all reports was held the next day.

The Chapter was attended by fifty-two OFS members, one National Assistant Fr. Krishnah Ramsay, OFM and three Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Mary (FMM). The elective session began at noon. The National Council will be led by the new Council with re-elected Minister and International Council Yanis Husson, OFS, for the next three years.

The elective Chapter culminated with the celebration of Holy Mass presided by Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM, and Adolph confirmed the new council. Held afterwards was the fraternal banquet and everyone took their leave happy and grateful for the success of the Chapter.

Netherlands: Fraternal and Pastoral Visit

The fraternal and pastoral Visit to Netherlands took place between September 20th and 24th, 2023. The Minister General OFS, Tibor Kauser, and the representative of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS), Fr. Stefan Acatrinei, OFM Conv., arrived in Eindhoven on Wednesday afternoon and were taken to the town of 's Hertogenbosch

(Den Bosch) and lodged in San Damiano convent, home to a mixed community (OFM, OFM Cap, cloistered Poor Clares and OFS).

To learn more about the local history and the 800 years of Franciscan presence (the friars arrived in 1228), Michel and Mariette offered the two visitors a walking tour of the city and a boat ride on the Endieze river. Then, the day continued as planned, with a Eucharistic celebration and the first meeting with the national council.

Each day's busy schedule was carried out as it was predetermined, starting at 7:30 a.m. and ending with recreation at 10 p.m. The whole day on Friday was allocated for work with the national council. In the evening of the same day, the visitors and the national council met with the bishop of the Diocese of 's-Hertogenbosch (Den Bosch), Msgr. Dr. Gerard de Korte, who was very generous with his time. The meeting was very helpful and heartfelt by all.

The morning of Saturday, Sept. 23rd, was devoted to formation and inspiration of the OFS national fraternity. Both lectures, the first presented by Tibor Kauser and the second by Fr. Stefan Acatrinei, OFM Conv. were greatly appreciated by the audience. Immediately after lunch, the visitors met with the ministers of the local fraternities, then with the spiritual assistants and finally with the major superior, Fr. Theo van Adrichem, OFM.

The Visit, which was very well organized, was well enjoyed by all participants and bore abundant fruit.

The visitors, grateful for the hospitality, warm welcome, cooperation of the national council and for meeting so many OFS brothers and sisters from the Netherlands, left San Damiano friary on Sunday and returned to their countries.

Taiwan - Fraternal and Pastoral Visit

The Pastoral and Fraternal Visit to the nascent National Fraternity of Taiwan took place at the religious house of the Taishan Convent of the OFM Province of Our Lady Queen of China and began on the morning of October 17, 2023. The visitors were the President Councilor of the Secular Franciscan Order (CIOFS) Byung Ju Francis Park, OFS, and Brother Pedro Zitha, OFM, representing the Conference of General Assistants (CAS). They met with the National Council and National Minister John, S.F. Chuang, OFS who, in his brief introduction, presented the history and journey of the OFS in Taiwan from its beginnings to the present situation in which it finds itself as an emerging Fraternity. After this introduction, the National Secretary and Treasurer presented the documents to the visitors, who examined both the financial books and the archives of the secretariat.

The afternoon was dedicated to a meeting with the OFM Minister Provincial, Br. Michael Sung Hoon Woo, OFM, a meeting that allowed the visitors to thank him for his excellent service of spiritual assistance to all the fraternities. This visit was also an opportunity to review some documents regarding the canonical erection of the fraternities and the letters of appointment of the spiritual assistants. The meeting also allowed him to address other issues related to his service as major superior.

The meeting also allowed him to address other issues related to his service as major superior. The following day was dedicated to a visit to the local fraternity of St. John Mary Vianney (16 Zhongshan-he), followed by a meeting with the local assistant, Friar Claudio Pegoraro, OFM. The last two days of the pastoral and fraternal visit were dedicated to a meeting with the Archbishop of Taipei, Msgr. Thomas Zhongshan An-Zu, and with the President of the Taiwan Bishops' Conference, Msgr. John Baptist Lee Keh-Mean, Bishop of Hsinchu. During these meetings, the OFS National Fraternity of Taiwan renewed its commitment to collaborate with the Church in various fields. Both bishops expressed their great gratitude for this fraternal gesture and guaranteed the recognition of the OFS as an Order in the Church and assured the pastoral leadership of the OFS in Taiwan both in the archdiocese and in the other dioceses where the Order is present.

Taiwan: National Elective Chapter

On the morning of Saturday, October 21, at the end of the fraternal and pastoral visit to the fraternity, which took place from October 17-20, 2023 by the member of the Presidency of the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order (CIOFS), Byung Ju Francis Park, OFS, and by Br. Pedro Zitha, representative of the Conference of Spiritual Assistants (CAS), the nascent National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of Taiwan celebrated its IV Elective Chapter, which was attended by 42 capitulars, 5 observers, the OFM Minister Provincial, Friar Michael Sung Hoon Woo, OFM, and the local Assistant, Friar Pio Winhung, OFM.

The Chapter was presided over by Byung Ju Francis Park, OFS delegate of the OFS Minister General Tibor Kauser, assisted by Br. Pedro Zitha, OFM. As in every elective Chapter, this was also a special opportunity for each member to reflect on personal and collective commitment on how to serve the fraternity in the Church and in society, both by electing and being elected for service on the Council. This was the case for this Chapter in which we reflected on how to find and implement new dynamics and strategies to enhance the deep understanding that each professed member should be available for service to the fraternity, even if, at times, this availability seems to be seen as far-fetched and unrealistic. However, it was a blessing that the Chapter members courageously and wisely chose their servant leadership for the next three years by electing new council members. The National Minister is Robinson Lo, OFS, while the International Councilor is Gloria Lu, OFS.

The elective session concluded with the installation of the new National Council by the Chapter President, which was followed by a joyful and cordial fraternal agape. After the departure of some capitulars, a joint meeting was held between the members of the outgoing Council and those of the new Council.

Tanzania: National Elective Chapter

The Elective Chapter of the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of Tanzania was held at the Retreat House of the Carmelite Sisters of the Child Jesus, Boko, Dar Es Sallam. Some Chapter members travelled more than 24 hours by bus for another two days to attend the Chapter. As the reports were presented at an earlier meeting, the Chapter members met officially on Wednesday evening, 18 October, for dinner. The next day, Thursday, began at 6.30am with morning prayer, led by outgoing National Minister Lucy Nambuo.

The Chapter members met after the collation in the designated election hall at 8.30 am. The Chapter was presided over by the SFO General Minister, Tibor Kauser, while Brother Stefan Acatrinei, OFMConv, was the representative of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants. Tibor Kauser thanked the outgoing National Council for their services.

The national fraternity of Tanzania has about 1,300 members. According to the national statutes, the Chapter is composed of the national councillors and the representatives of the regional fraternities. In order to have a quorum, 29 Chapter members were needed, but only 28 and one observer were present. After the orientation vote, the SFO Minister General, Tibor Kauser, appointed the new National Council. Mulengera Mathayo is the new National Minister and International Councillor, while Lucy Nambuo is acting International Councillor. The installation of the new Council took place during a Eucharistic celebration presided over by Fr James Mwapongo, OFMCap.

The Chapter was attended by 5 Spiritual Assistants (2 OFM Cap., 1 OFM Conv., 1 OFM and a nun). The Conference of National Spiritual Assistants (CAS) was also constituted on this occasion: Fr. James Mwapongo, OFMCap, Fr. Simon Daniel Kessy, OFMConv and Fr Florentius Rutayuga, OFM. The dinner was followed by a recreation, during which the Capitulars thanked the Minister General Tibor Kauser and Br. The Capitulars, joyful and happy for the time spent together, returned home on Friday, October 20, after the celebration of the Eucharist.