

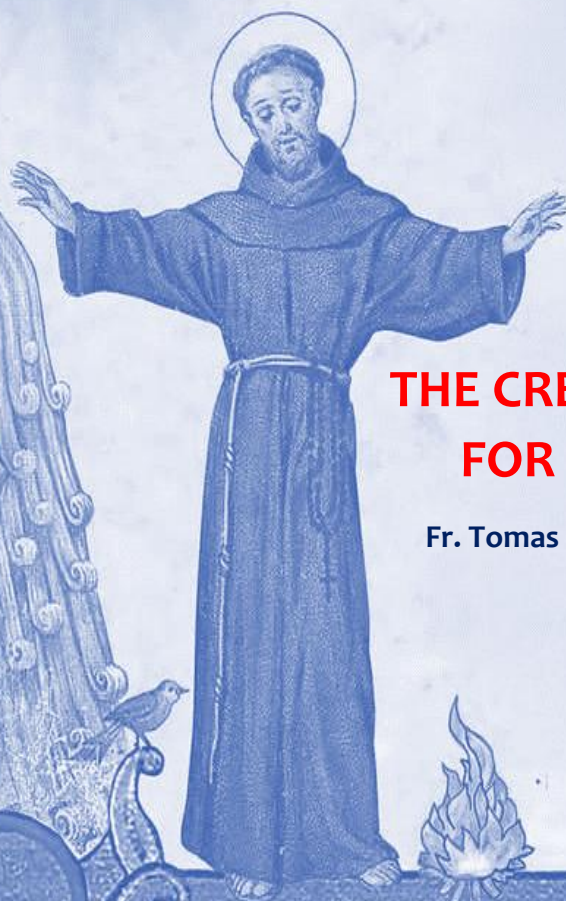
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**CONFERENCE OF SPIRITUAL
ASSISTANTS GENERAL
OFS – YOUFRA (CAS)**

KOINONIA

... together on the journey

***“Francis of Assisi praising and
contemplating the Creator”***



**THE CREATION – REASON
FOR PRAISING GOD**

Fr. Tomas Ginga Panzo Suva, OFMCap





For, although you have no need of our praise, yet our thanksgiving is itself your gift, since our praises add nothing to your greatness but profit us for salvation, through Christ our Lord (Common Preface IV)

INTRODUCTION

Indeed, our praise as humans confers nothing new on God: He does not need man's praise, as the Common Preface IV of the Roman Missal states. Rather, it is man who needs to shout in God's face his joy and satisfaction at what He is and what He has done; equally, man also needs to let other men know what God is to him and has done for him: it corresponds to the dynamic of praise to involve others in the same hymn of exultation.

In this second issue of our formative and informative bulletin, *Koinonia*, we will dwell on the topic "The Creation, Reason for Praising God." It is integrated into the reflection of the main theme of this Franciscan jubilee year (The Canticle of Creatures) and that of the Church's universal jubilee: "Pilgrims of Hope," in which Pope Francis invited the whole Church to live this year of grace, seeking to motivate the faithful to renew their faith and to seek signs of hope in the midst of difficulties, such as peace, openness to life, care for the sick, youth, migrants, the elderly and the poor. It also stresses the importance of pilgrimage as a journey of faith and conversion and invites reflection on reconciliation and forgiveness of sins. The true Christian hope is Christ the Son of the living God, who passed through this world *doing good* (cf. Acts 10,38; 1P 3:18).

Creation is a fundamental reason to praise God, for through it is manifested His greatness, beauty and power. Creation, with its wonders and complexity, is a reflection of the Creator's love, beauty and wisdom, inviting man to recognize and celebrate His work.

Therefore, before going into the different facets of this topic, we will pause on understanding the verb "praise" in its various nuances and perspectives.

Meaning of the verb "to praise"

To deeply understand the meaning and significance of the sub-topic, "The Creation, Reason for Praising God," framed in the main theme of this 8th centenary of the Canticle of Creatures (Canticle of the Brother Sun), it seems important for us to start from the morphological understanding and the syntax of this verb "to praise."

The term “praise” is a transitive verb that comes from Latin [laudare, der. di *laus laudis* «lode»] (io lòdo, ecc.).¹ It corresponds to the following meanings:

1.a. “To express in words one's approval of the qualities, acts, deeds or behavior of a person; or also, to declare, to acknowledge worthy of praise.”

1.b. “More generally, to speak well of someone or something.”²

2. “to celebrate with words or hymns of exaltation and reverent homage: *praise the Lord; And all you who Love laud in rhyme* [PETRARCA Canz. XXVI, 9], *praise be Jesus Christ!*, formula of greeting among religious (which has as its answer: always be praised!) praise heaven! praise be God!, God be praised! exclamations of relief or satisfaction at having obtained what was hoped for.”³

Praise in the religious sense, and its biblical roots

The verb praise in the strictly religious sense is understood as an act of worship or an expression of religiosity: praising God, the saints, extolling their heavenly glory with songs or devout words, or addressing hymns, prayers of thanksgiving to them.

“Praise springs up when the movement of prayer tends to focus on God, though considered in His relationship with man: then the soul of the praying person is seized with a sense of awe, bewilderment, surprise; contact with the mystery astonishes, and from astonishment comes praise.”⁴

In the Bible, praise has a relationship with other forms of prayer, such as thanksgiving and blessing (Ps. 35:18; 69:31; 109:30),⁵ because “God proves himself worthy of praise because of all His benefits to man” and other creatures (cf. 1 kings 8,27).⁶ Praise is a form of prayer that basically consists of acknowledging to God His boundless greatness and love, whereby: “one praises God because He is God.”⁷

The Canticle of Creatures/Canticle of Brother Sun by St. Francis of Assisi, is really a canticle, a hymn with biblical roots, of which references and inspiration can be found in the following biblical texts:

In the Old Testament

In the Old Testament the canticles of praise “multiply words in an attempt to describe God and His greatness. They sing of YHWH's goodness, His righteousness (Ps 145:6-7), His salvation (Ps 71:15), His help (1Sam 2:1), His love and faithfulness (Ps 89:2; 117:2), His glory (Ex 15:21), His power (Ps 29:4), His marvellous design (Is 25:1), His liberating judgments (Ps

¹ <https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/ricerca/iodare/>

² <https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/iodare/>

³ <https://www.garzantilinguistica.it/ricerca/?q=iodare>

⁴ Dante Lafranconi, *La preghiera del Cristiano e della comunità*, in Tullo Goffi, Giannino Piana (a cura di), *Corso di morale*, vol V: Liturgia (Etica della religiosità), Queriniana, Brescia 1986, p. 451-482.

⁵ https://it.cathopedia.org/wiki/Lode#Nella_Bibbia

⁶ Cfr. André Ridouard, *Lode*, in Xavier Léon-Dufour (a cura di), *Dizionario di Teologia Biblica*, Marietti, Casale Monferrato, 1971, c. 613-617.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

146:7); all this, as it shines forth in the wonders of YHWH (Ps 96:3), in His great deeds, in His mighty deeds (Ps 105:1-3; 106:2), in all His works (Ps 92:5-6).”

Therefore, God is the center of praise whereby from works we trace back to the author (cf. 1Kings 8,27). “Great is YHWH and worthy of all praise!” (Ps 145:3). “YHWH, my God, you are so great, clothed with majesty and splendor!” (Ps 104:1; cf. 2 Sam 7:22; Jdt 16:13). Hymns sing the great name of God (Ps 34:4; 145:2; Is 25:1).⁸

- In the book of Exodus 15 - the new canticle;
- The canticle of the three young men in the book of Daniel (Dan 3:8-28), interpreted as an apocalyptic scripture;
- Psalm 104 - praise for the beauty and power of God in creating and governing the universe.

In the New Testament



The New Testament “preserves to the confession this dominant place in praise: to praise God always consists primarily in proclaiming His greatness, solemnly and widely around oneself (Mt. 9:31; Lk. 2:38; Rom. 15:9; Heb. 13:15; Phil. 2:11),” according to the Catholic encyclopedia cathopedia. In line with these various forms of praise, springing from contact with the living God, here are other praises that become canticles:

- Lk 1:46-55; Lk 1:68-79; The canticle of Mary and Zacharias (Magnificat, benedictus);
- Eph 1 - being the hymn of praise to God.

To praise God, then, means to exalt Him, to magnify Him (Lk 1:46; Acts 10:46); again, it means to acknowledge His unique greatness and superiority, for He is the one who dwells in the highest heaven (Lk 1:14), for He is holy (Ps 30:5) He is worthy of all praise.

St. Francis loved and knew the Bible, so the Canticle of Creatures is inspired through it, bringing out a positive view of nature, an

idea of creation and God's goodness. This idea, we find in many passages of the Bible, where God's greatness (Wis 13:5) is affirmed through His works. And, in the Canticle of the Brother Sun, St. Francis confirms this truth, presenting us with the idea of creation as a mirror of God, to which we are called and invited to praise Him (God) through all His

⁸ https://it.cathopedia.org/wiki/Lode#cite_note-1

creatures, which are elements of nature (the sun, moon, wind, water, fire and earth), created for man and his happiness.

The Creation, reason for praising God

Creation is indeed a motive of and to praise God, for through it is manifested His greatness, beauty and power. Creation, with its wonders, complexity and diversity, is a reflection of the Creator's love and wisdom, inviting man to recognize and celebrate His creative and redemptive work. God not only created and saved it but continues to sustain it with His providence.

For St. Francis, nature is God's gift and a means of praising Him. St. Francis invites us through this canticle to recognize and return the divine primacy and power that is revealed in every aspect of creation and to accept with gratitude this goodness of His at every stage of life until death, as a sign of His boundless love. And again, “the sun, moon, stars, wind, seasons, water, fire and earth are presented as transparent manifestations of the Creator's power and goodness, accessible to every man”.⁹ Thus, God accessible to all without any exception, His providence is a universal gift to all men and women.

St. Francis deeply understands that the whole of creation is God's work, so to pay homage to this living God, here he praises and exalts Him in all creatures, such as Psalm 148 solemnly proclaims, inviting all creatures to praise God. The Canticle of the Brother Sun represents a moment of growth and maturation in the spiritual itinerary of the Seraphic of Assisi.

Francis Gioia in his essay, (St. Francis Brother of All and Everything), clearly states that “*the praise of creatures flows from the two initial premises: if God cannot be named, one can glorify Him in the things He created for man.*”

Gratitude

Gratitude is a virtue that the world and societies of all times need to learn and teach, in order to build and sustain relationships that cut across all levels of existence. St. Francis in the Canticle of the Brother Sun, therefore, teaches us that, to praise God is the task of creatures, since through this praise, one exalts God's love, which is manifested in creatures and at the same time “becomes a hymn to life.”¹⁰

If praise is related to thanksgiving and blessing, St. Francis invites and teaches us to enroll ourselves in this school of gratitude and blessing, for we never stop learning to give thanks and to bless.

Regarding the context in which the Canticle of Brother Sun was either born or written, sources say: “shortly before his death,”¹¹ i.e., between the end of the year 1224 and the beginning of 1225. At that time he was at San Damiano, afflicted and stricken by various

⁹ Francesco Gioia, *San Francesco fratello di tutti e di tutto: profilo umano e spirituale*, Ed. Frate Indovino, Perugia, p. 29.

¹⁰ Fausta Speranza, in *L'osservatorio romano*, 15 ottobre 2024.

¹¹ Cass 88 (FF 1623); cf. Spec 118 (FF 1818).



vicissitudes of daily life.

sufferings, including a serious eye disease¹² that prevented him from sustaining the light of the fire sun¹³; it was certainly in winter, “in which the cold morning, after a night of insomnia in which he was tormented by mice that did not allow him even to pray and after having had from the Lord the certainty of eternal salvation.”¹⁴ Francis teaches us to praise God in all circumstances of life: in health, in sickness, in sorrow, in weeping and ultimately even in death, because, *Blessed are those who sustain it in peace, who by You, Most High. They shall be crowned.* How often do we stand more in complaining than in thanking and praising God for all the events in our lives? Francis leaves us with a timely and perhaps helpful teaching for enduring the

The Sense of Brotherhood and Universality in the Canticle of Creatures

St. Francis of Assisi is considered a universal brother because he embodied in his deep desire for conversion to God, seeking to be a brother to everyone and everything; that is, a brother to humans, animals and nature around him and obviously from the Christian point of view, he is a brother to Christ.¹⁵ This universal understanding is justified by his “relationship with others.” These others are the whole universe, Christ, humans, animals, seen as “a harmonious mosaic, though each has its own autonomy,” however, all “have been redeemed by the blood of the Redeemer.”¹⁶

Moreover, it is worth pointing out that, St. Francis of Assisi, is not a pantheist, such as there have been in the history of religions and philosophy, attempts to identify God with the world and the world with God; or God is not conceived just as a transcendent God,

¹² Cf. LegM 5,8 (FF 1090) Legem 3,3 (FF 1350).

¹³ Cf. Ass 86 (FF 1618); Spec 100 (FF 1799).

¹⁴ Cf. 2Cel 213, 217 (FF 802-803;809) Cass 7, 66,83-84 (FF 1547, 1595, 1613-1616, 1624; Spec 100-101 (FF 1799)

¹⁵ Cf. Felice Accrocca, “Prefazione” in San Francesco fratello di tutti e di tutto: Profilo umano e spirituale, Perugia, Edizioni Frate Indovino, 2007, p. 5.

¹⁶ Cf. 2 Cel 172 (FF 758); cf. LegM 9,4 (FF 1168).

separate from the world, but something inherent in the universe and present in all things. Francesco Gioia, in his essay,¹⁷ states, “St. Francis' attitude toward all creatures is not a consequence of a philosophy or mysticism, as is especially the case with those who have an explicit or implicit pantheistic conception of nature for which,” God is everything and everything is God.”¹⁸



The Canticle of Creatures/Canticle of the Brother Sun is clear proof and key to understanding and interpreting why he called all creatures by the name of brother and sister, because he had God as the FATHER of everyone and everything. And again, “his attitude toward everything and everyone lies in his deep conviction that creation is a theophany, a revelation of God”.¹⁹ Hence, “*laudato si, mi'Signore, cum tutte le tue creature (...)*” (v. 5).

CONCLUSION

Considering creation as a reason to praise God from the perspective of the

Canticle of the Brother Sun, here we can highlight some aspects that seem to us essential and that can be keys to understanding and reading this magnificent literary work, for some and for others it is a true “spiritual document.” Here are these aspects:

1. *Manifestation of divine greatness:*

The works of creation, from the stars in the sky to the smallest organisms, testify to the immense power and majesty of God.

2. *Beauty and harmony:*

The beauty of creation, with its colours, shapes and sounds, is an invitation to contemplate the perfection of the divine work and to praise His ability to create beautiful and harmonious things.

3. *Divine Providence:*

Creation is not only beautiful, but also functional, providing for the needs of life and maintaining the balance of the ecosystem. This divine providence is a reason for gratitude and praise.

4. *Invitation to contemplation:*

Observing and admiring creation can lead to a greater awareness of God's presence and a deeper desire to praise Him.

¹⁷ *San Francesco fratello di tutti e di tutto: Profilo umano e spirituale*, p. 225.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*

¹⁹ *Ibidem*

5. Recognition of our dependence:

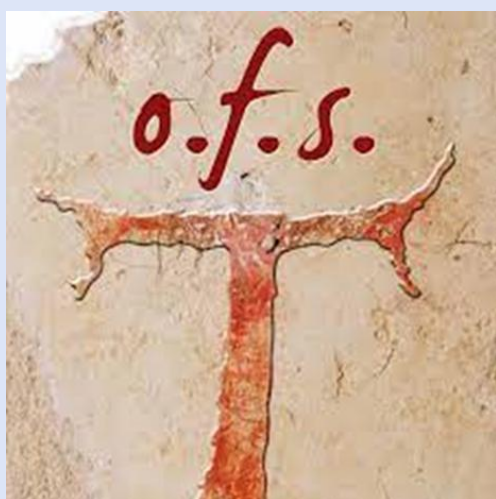
Creation reminds us that we are creatures dependent on God for our existence and well-being, prompting us to recognize Him as the source of all good.

In essence, in these five aspects, we can understand that creation is not just a collection of material things, but an open book that reveals God's glory and inspires man to praise Him for His wonderful and providential works.

Finally, the Canticle of the Brother Sun is "an effective tool for the edification of one's neighbour, so, brothers and sisters, *“laud and bless my Lord and give thanks and serve Him with great humility”*

Pace e bene!

Meetings, Visits and Chapters



Formation course for OFS spiritual assistants from Colombia

After many fruitless attempts, the OFS and YouFra national spiritual assistants of Colombia finally had the joy of being able to participate in a formation course dedicated to them and taught by three of the OFS General Spiritual Assistants. Before the course they had the opportunity to visit the local fraternity in the city of Pereira, meeting there with members of Franciscan children, YouFra and OFS. This was followed by a meeting held in the city of

Bogota with the regional fraternity, during which the participants had the opportunity to dialogue with the three general assistants and share the joys, expectations and challenges that the OFS of Colombia was experiencing. This meeting concluded with Holy Mass celebrated by the general assistant Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM.

Then, from April 28 to 30, 2025, in Chinauta, Cundinamarca, the first formation seminar was held for spiritual assistance for First Order spiritual assistants (OFM, OFMConv and OFMCap) which was organized by the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants of Colombia and attended by 22 friars.

It was opened by the reflection of Fr. Miguel Ángel Estupiñán Zafra, OFM, National Assistant, in which he addressed the theme of our expectations, experiences and difficulties as spiritual assistants. This was followed by Fr. Elkin Soza, OFMConv, who presented a clear and precise diagnosis of the current situation of the OFS and YouFra of Colombia.

The general spiritual assistants, instead, covered the following topics:

- The Role of Spiritual Assistant, held by Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM.
- The OFS / YouFra Statutes, held by Fr. Tomas, Panzo, OFMCap
- Collegiality and Koinonia, held by Fr. Stefan Acatrinei, OFMConv.

Each session was followed by working groups, in which participants developed proposals for the National Conference of Spiritual Assistants.

The working groups greatly helped in formulating the conclusions and the way forward to ensure adequate formation for both spiritual assistants and all brothers who are not yet spiritual assistants.

The seminar then concluded with Holy Mass presided by Minister Provincial Fr. José Alirio Urbina Rodríguez, OFM, who in his homily reminded us that the true treasure of the Order is not in its documents or structures, but in the life shared in fraternity and lived as a witness to the Kingdom of God.

Colombia: OFS and YouFra Congress

On April 30 to May 4, 2025, the 12th Annual Latin American Congress of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) and Franciscan Youth (YouFra) was held in Bogotá, Colombia. This was the second Congress that involved all of Central and South America. The theme of the Congress was “*Somos Hermanos y Hermanas en el Corazón de la Madre Tierra*” (We Are Brothers and Sisters in the Heart of Mother Earth).

Following registration on Wednesday, April 30, at 8:00 a.m., participants gathered at an 18th-century church in Bogotá known as the “Church of the Stigmata” or “Church of the Third Order.” It is historically connected to the current OFS. Next, the participants moved to the Buenos Aires Retreat Center run by the Vicentine Fathers in Chinauta, Cundinamarca Department, Colombia. The OFM Minister Provincial, Fr. José Alirio URBINA RODRÍGUEZ, presided over the opening Mass.

On Thursday, May 1, after review of the previous Congress, focus shifted to the central theme: *Centenary 2025: The Canticle of the Creatures*. On May 1-3, this theme—with its significance for the wider Franciscan Family and its challenges for today’s society—was explored in four lectures given by biologist Mayara Ingrid LIMA SOUZA, OFS. The results of the group discussions, especially regarding practical implications for OFS and YouFra, were compiled into a final document and approved by vote during the Saturday, May 3rd session at 5:00 p.m.

The Congress was characterized by intensive work, fraternal discussion, planning and great joy. Every evening at 8:00 p.m., participants enjoyed moments of fellowship led in turn by representatives of each national fraternity. On Saturday evening, the Colombian national fraternity hosted a cultural celebration featuring traditional music and dance. The presence and contribution of twenty-five participating YouFra members were much appreciated.

There was a total of ninety-two participants from fifteen Central and South American countries, plus two participants from Spain, and eleven Spiritual Assistants. On Sunday,

May 4, at 6:00 a.m., the group returned to Bogotá. At 9:30 a.m., a closing Mass was held at the previously mentioned OFS church, presided over by the Most Reverend Edwin Raúl VANEGAS CUERVO, Auxiliary Bishop of Bogotá, Colombia. After the Mass, the Congress's final document was read aloud, and the OFS Minister General, Tibor KAUSER, officially declared the 12th Annual Latin American Congress closed.

After a brief visit to the historic city center and lunch at the headquarters of the local OFS fraternity in Bogotá, the participants remained in an atmosphere of joy and fraternity as they awaited their departures later that evening.

Romania: OFS National Elective Chapter

The National Elective Chapter of the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of Romania was held from May 09 to 11, 2025, in the locality of Sumuleu-Ciuc, town of Miercurea-Ciuc, Harghita District (Transylvania), in the Jakab Antal Study House. There were present 35 from 42 brothers and sisters, representing the three regions that make up the OFS national fraternity. Two national assistants and one delegate were present, representing the three First Order obediences in the country: OFM, OFMConv., and OFMCap., respectively.

The first and second days were devoted to the presentation and discussion of reports of the outgoing National Council and the economic budget for the triennium. Besides that, the priorities of the Secular Franciscan Order of Romania for the next triennium 2025-2028 were approved.

The elective session was carried out on Saturday, May 10, presided over by Noemi Paola Riccardi the delegate of the OFS Minister General, Tibor Kauser. She was assisted by Fr. Tomas Ginga Panzo Suva, OFMCap. assistant general representing the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS). Dan SLAVU was elected as National Minister. Celina FRANCU was elected as International Councilor and Tibor SZILARD as Alternate International Councilor.

The chapter concluded with the celebration of Holy Mass on the Fourth Sunday of Easter, "Good Shepherd Sunday," at the Marian Basilica of St. Mary of Csíksomlyó/Sumuleu Ciuc, which is pastorally cared for by the Friars Minor. The celebration was presided over by Fr. Cristinel GHIURCA, OFMCap., Custodian Minister of the Capuchin Friars Minor in Romania, and concelebrated by the various assistants present.

In the same celebration the installation of the new National Council was held with the missionary mandate made by Area Councillor and Chapter President Noemi Paola Riccardi, OFS and with the final words of Fr. Tomas Ginga, OFMCap.

Costa Rica: OFS National Elective Chapter

On May 9-11, 2025, the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of Costa Rica celebrated its 14th Elective Chapter. The event took place at a retreat center run by the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, located in Alajuela, Costa Rica.

On Friday, May 9, at 7:00 p.m., after prayer in the chapel led by Friar Emmanuel RODRÍGUEZ SIBAJA, OFM Cap., the National Minister, Ricardo HERRERA SANDI, officially opened the Chapter in the assembly hall.

Most of Saturday morning was devoted to formation. Ana Maria Raffo LAOS, the Chapter President and Representative of OFS Minister General Tibor KAUSER, lectured on the theme: “*You Are Love.*” Next, Fr. Ștefan ACATRINEI, OFMConv, representative of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS), lectured on “Spiritual Care and the OFS.” Group work followed in which different reports were presented and approved. Next, there was Mass presided over by the Capuchin Franciscan Custos, Fr. Cristian Mauricio MONGE RIVERA. At 7:00 p.m., the Capitulars resumed their work.

On Sunday morning, Fanny ROJAS VARGAS was elected National Minister and International Councillor. The installation of the new Council took place during Mass at 11:30 a.m., presided over by the National Spiritual Assistant, Fr. Isidoro de Jesús MEJÍA HERNÁNDEZ, OFMConv.

The two National Spiritual Assistants present, and their respective Superiors, had a fruitful discussion that ended up laying the foundation for the CAS of Costa Rica.

The Chapter was an intensive time of work conducted in an atmosphere of peace and fraternity. At 3:00 p.m., the participants - thirty-five Capitulars and two observers - took their leave. Ana Maria and Fr. Ștefan, on the other hand, stayed on to meet with the new National Council.

The OFS of Costa Rica has only 120 members in ten local fraternities, but it is a well-organized and very vibrant national fraternity.

Bethlehem: Local elective chapter

The presence of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) in the Holy Land is still limited to two small fraternities located mainly in Nazareth and Bethlehem. It is therefore such a small reality that it cannot yet be elevated to a national fraternity. For this reason, it is still up to the International Council of the OFS (CIOFS) to be responsible for the life of the two existing fraternities.

On Sunday, May 11, 2025, the local fraternity of Bethlehem had its elective chapter presided over by the delegate of Minister General Tibor Kauser, OFS Gosyana Karam, OFS, and witnessed by Fr. Sandro Tomašević, OFM, delegate of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS). The chapter was honored by the presence of 27 chapter members, 1 religious and 2 observers. During the chapter, Hanna Zablah was elected as local minister. The Conference of the general spiritual assistants (CAS) congratulated the new council, and at the same time, expressed deep gratitude to Fr. Sandro, OFM, for accepting CAS's request to be its delegate and to witness the Church's presence at the elective chapter that ended with the installation of the new council, followed by the fraternal greeting and farewell.

El Salvador: OFS National Elective Chapter

The national fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of El Salvador has 250 members distributed among five regional fraternities. On Friday, May 16, 2025, at 3:00 p.m., fifty-nine Capitulars and eight auditors gathered at the retreat center of the Friars Minor in Santiago de María, Department of Usulután, El Salvador, to celebrate their 13th National Chapter.

The Chapter opened with Mass presided over by Fr. Ștefan ACATRINEI, OFM Conv., representing the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS).

The second day of the Chapter (May 17) began at 6:00 a.m. with the recitation of the Franciscan Crown. The morning was dedicated to hearing reports and working in groups. At 2:00 p.m., the elective session began, presided over by Ana María RAFFO LAOS, the Delegate of the OFS Minister General, Tibor KAUSER. Sonia Margarita ZALDAÑA FLORES was elected the National Minister and International Councillor. After the elective session, the Capitulars went in procession to the Cathedral church of the city, where they passed through the Holy Door and celebrated Mass at 7:00 p.m. with the National Spiritual Assistant of the Friars Minor, Fr. Ramón DE LA O, presiding. After spending a happy evening together, the participants concluded the day at 10:30 p.m. with the recitation of Compline.

The last day (May 18) began at 6:00 a.m. with Morning Prayer. The participants then began a session to plan for the next three years. The new National Council was installed during Mass at 11:00 a.m., with Fr. Ramón presiding. The Chapter concluded after the Mass. The Capitulars took their leave after lunch, while the representatives of the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order (CIOFS) met with the outgoing Council and with the incoming one.

The Chapter proceedings were conducted in a spirit of peace and joy.

Czech Republic: Fraternal and pastoral visit to OFS National Fraternity

A fraternal and pastoral visit to the National Council of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of the Czech Republic in Prague was held from May 29 to June 1, 2025.

The fraternal visitation was done by area counselor Dina Shabalina, delegate of OFS Minister General Tibor Kauser; the pastoral visitation was conducted by Fr. Tomas Ginga Panzo Suva, OFMCap., representing the Conference of Assistants General of the First Order and TOR.

On the first day in the early afternoon in the provincial curia of the Friars Minor (OFM) in Prague, the visitors' meeting was held with the provincial ministers of the religious families of the First Order, present in the country, respectively: Fr. Jakub František SADILEK, provincial minister OFM, Fr. Petr MACHÁČEK provincial vicar OFMConv. and Fr. Vojtěch Drahomír DVOULETÝ, provincial minister OFMCap.

With the provincials we were able to share various views of the OFS reality in the country and explained to them the purpose and importance of the fraternal and pastoral visit to the OFS National Council of the Czech Republic and the importance of meeting with them.

It was a time of true sharing and the provincials expressed their appreciation and assured us of their support for the OFS and the service of spiritual and pastoral assistance, offering friars to assist OFS fraternities in the territories under their jurisdiction.

We were also able to meet with the Archbishop of Prague, Archbishop Jan Graubner, with whom we discussed the OFS reality in the Metropolitan Archdiocese of Prague and other dioceses in the Czech Republic. The archbishop was happy and encouraged the Franciscan laity to continue their service in the various parishes and communities where they are and also, asked the OFS to help many young people who do not find the meaning of life and are unfortunately victims of ideologies and the pseudo easy life, which leads them to see only the immediate and the easy, without having a goal of the future and the value of sacrifice.

On the last day, after attending the Sunday Mass, the visitors met with the national council for final impressions and recommendations. In the afternoon, at 5 p.m., there was the last meeting with the national spiritual assistants, who represented the three First Order present in the Czech Republic. They are entrusted with the responsibility of animating and promoting spiritual and pastoral care to the OFS and YouFra, despite the fact that there is currently no YouFra in the country. In addition, the assistants agreed with the proposal presented by Fr. Tomas Ginga, that the conference of spiritual assistants be constituted as soon as possible, so that the collegial reality be a concrete fact, for the good of all.

The fraternal dialogue with the spiritual assistants was very fruitful and open, with questions and answers of clarifications about the reality and regarding this useful and valuable service to the OFS and YouFra fraternities.

Nicaragua: National Elective Chapter

The canonically established national fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of Nicaragua held its elective chapter from 6 to 8 June 2025. The chapter was presided over by International Councilor Ana Maria Raffo, OFS, delegate of Minister General Tibor Kauser, OFS. Unfortunately, the members of the conference of general spiritual assistants were unable to attend and delegated Fr. Justo Marvin Guillén, OFM, who spoke about "fraternal service". The reflection brought to light some aspects that enabled the chapter members to understand the meaning of the chapter's theme "we love because he first loved us" (1 Jn. 4:19b).

There were 77 members present during the chapter; 61 members with the right to vote and 16 observers. In the elective session, the chapter members elected the new national council, in which Ana Verónica Palacios Osegueda, OFS, was elected national minister and international councillor.

Argentina: national fraternal and elective chapter

The 25th fraternal chapter and 15th elective chapter of the OFS national fraternity of Argentina was celebrated from June 20th to 22nd. The theme of the chapter was the Cantic of the Creatures framing it in the spirit of the great jubilee of the universal Church,

which invites all the faithful to be “pilgrims of hope.” The fraternal event was carried out in the locality of Santo Antonio Arredondo, in the retreat house (Franciscan residence) of the Friars Minor (OFM), with the presence of almost all the local and regional OFS Ministers of Argentina and some observers.

Considering the importance of the event not only for secular Franciscans but also for the whole Franciscan family, the opening Mass was presided over by Fr. Jose Luis, OFM Cap., current president of the Franciscan Family of Argentina, who represented all the major superiors who make up the respective conference. He wished the capitulars well and expressed his desire that brothers and sisters of authentic Franciscan values in daily life would be chosen for various services.

They were intense days of work, formation and fraternal sharing, because in the end it was the goal of the celebration of the two instances: the fraternal chapter and the elective ones. The elective chapter was celebrated on Saturday afternoon and Santiago NEGRO was elected as national minister for a second triennium. He is also the international councillor while the substitute International Councillor is the Vice-Minister, Liliana VALENTE.

The chapter concluded on Sunday. The installation of the new council and missionary sending took place during the Eucharistic celebration. Then, the motions and priorities for the next three years (2025-2028) were approved; at the end followed the festive lunch and dismissal.

Vietnam: Fraternal and Pastoral Visit to the OFS National Fraternity

On June 13-27, 2025, the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order (CIOFS) made a fraternal and pastoral visit to the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of Vietnam.

The visit was conducted by Francis PARK, Councillor for the Asia-Oceania area and Delegate of the OFS General Minister Tibor KAUSER. He was joined by the OFS General Spiritual Assistant, Fr. Ștefan ACATRINEI, OFM Conv., representing the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS).

The purpose of the visit was to rekindle the evangelical Franciscan spirit, ensure fidelity to the charism and the Rule, help the life of the fraternity and give it greater support to the National Council, strengthen the bond of unity within the Order, and promote the fraternity's more effective integration into the Franciscan Family and the Church.

The first part of the visit (June 13-17) took place in the north of the country, at the OFS Regional Fraternity of Hanoi. It has eleven local fraternities: five are located in Hanoi city and six are in the surrounding area. The visitors met with the Regional Council and visited four local fraternities in Hanoi, as well as the St. Bonaventure fraternity in Trung Hiếu, 120 km [75 mi.] from Hanoi. They listened, shared their joys and difficulties, and spoke encouragingly about the Franciscan journey of the fraternity. This region was severely tested until the early 1990s, having been deprived of the necessary spiritual support by

government authorities. The second part of the visit (June 21-26) was in southern Vietnam, in the Hồ Chí Minh (Sài Gòn) region. The schedule included meetings with:

- Friar Gioan Thiên Chúa NGUYỄN (Phước) Minister Provincial of the Friars Minor (Sunday, June 22).
- The Most Reverend Đức Tổng Giám mục Giuse NGUYỄN (Năng) Archbishop of Thành-Phố Hồ Chí Minh, Vietnam (Monday, June 23).
- The OFS National Minister, the National Secretary and the National Treasurer (Tuesday, June 24).
- The National Formator and the OFS representative for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (Wednesday, June 25).
- The National Vice Minister, vocation promoters, and local fraternities of the Đa Kao district (Thursday, June 26).

Currently, the OFS National Fraternity of Vietnam has almost 6,315 members, of which: 1,214 are in formation for profession, 604 are temporarily professed, and 4,497 are perpetually professed. They are distributed across 259 local fraternities, which are organized into twenty regional fraternities.

The Franciscan Youth (YouFra) organization has 1,965 members, distributed across seventy local fraternities, which are organized into thirteen regional fraternities.

There are eighty-two Spiritual Assistants, exclusively Friars Minor, with the support of some sisters of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, and some diocesan priests. To ensure there is adequate guidance, the Minister Provincial of the Friars Minor has generously assigned three friars to serve the OFS: an OFS National Assistant, a YouFra National Assistant and an OFS Formation Officer.

During the visit, each day began with Mass and Morning Prayer at 5:00 a.m. in the friary chapel. It ended at 6:30 p.m. with dinner.

The visit concluded on Friday, June 27. The visitors thanked the members of the National Council for their hospitality, openness, and willingness to provide access to their records, which were verified and signed.

Vietnam: National elective chapter

On June 27-29, 2025, the Friars Minor Friary of St. Francis of Assisi in Đa Kao, District 1 of Hồ Chí Minh City, hosted the elective Chapter of the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) in Vietnam.

The chapter members were welcomed and greeted by the OFS national minister on Friday at 3 p.m. in the chapter hall; then followed organizing matters. The opening Mass was presided over by the Friary's Guardian Fr. Dominique Pham Van Dong, OFM, at 5:30 p.m., followed by dinner.

At 7:30 p.m., Fr. Ștefan ACATRINEI, OFM Conv., presented a reflection entitled: *"The Canticle of the Creatures: Praises Francis Sang to the Lord While He Was Ill."* Immediately after the reflection, the participants took part in a fraternal evening together.

The second day of the Chapter began with Mass at 5:00 a.m. The National Assistant, Friar Anthony NGUYỄN (Trung Trữc), OFM, presided. The Chapter proceedings resumed at 7:30 a.m. and continued until lunch at 11:30 a.m. During that session, all the reports were presented. At 1:30 p.m. the elective session began. Francis PARK, the Delegate of the OFS Minister General, Tibor KAUSER, presided. Fr. Ștefan ACATRINEI was also present, representing the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS). The fifty-one Capitulars with voting rights elected Joseph TRẦN (Như Kiên) as the National Minister for a second term, and Jerome NGUYỄN (Vĩnh Phát) as the International Councillor. Next, they elected the members of the National Council.

The last day of the Chapter, Sunday, June 29, began with Morning Prayer at 5:45 a.m. At 7:30 a.m., Friar Peter TRẦN (Ngọc Phú) OFM, the Spiritual Assistant for OFS Formation, presented the results of a study on the National OFS Fraternity in Vietnam. Building on the information provided, the Capitulars established priorities for the next three years. At 11:30 a.m., the OFM Minister Provincial, Fr. Gioan Thiên Chúa NGUYỄN (Phước), presided over the closing Mass of the Chapter. During the Mass, a ceremony was conducted to install the members of the new National Council.

After three days of intense work and sharing their joys and challenges, the Capitulars left for their local fraternities after lunch.

The Chapter was celebrated in an atmosphere of peace and joy. The two representatives of the OFS International Council, Francis PARK and Fr. Ștefan ACATRINEI, enjoyed the beautiful simplicity that characterized the Chapter. Simplicity is a strong trait of this OFS fraternity.

Canada: Fraternal and pastoral visitation & National Elective Chapter

From June 24th to 26th, the fraternal and pastoral visitation to the national fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order of Canada took place. The two visits were carried out in accordance with what the OFS General Constitutions prescribes in its Articles 92.1; 92 and 95 respectively.

The fraternal visit was made by OFS Minister General Tibor Kauser and the pastoral visit made by Fr. Tomas Ginga Panzo Suva, OFMCap. general spiritual assistant. The two visits were carried out simultaneously.

Thus, on the first day, the visitors were able to meet the entire national council, consisting of six Secular Franciscans and three spiritual assistants of the First Order (OFMConv., OFMCap. and OFM), with whom they were able to see together the reality of the Secular Franciscan Order and the service provided by the spiritual assistants in the various levels, since the last fraternal and pastoral visit made in the year 2016. The situation of the Covid-19 pandemic had a great influence in the OFS fraternities, considering that, several brothers and sisters have died throughout the country; this fact has greatly affected the return to normal life of the fraternities at all levels, especially regarding fraternal meetings in presence.

In Canada, there is no established YouFra presence for now; so there is no Franciscan youth representative on the national council. Neither have an OFS member, responsible for this youth reality, which is very important for the OFS.

The visitors were able to meet the auxiliary bishop of Québec, the region that welcomed the visit, Bishop Juan Carlo LONDOÑO. who received them in a private audience. They were able to share with him the reality of the OFS as a secular Order recognized by the Church and entrusted to the pastoral and spiritual care of the First Franciscan Order and TOR.

The bishop was very interested and asked the secular Franciscans of Canada to make themselves visible and present in the communities, not only here in Québec, but also in the other dioceses of the big country; because there is a great need for the OFS presence and Franciscan Spirituality, Bishop Juan Carlo said.

After the personal meeting with the members of the national council on June 25th, the fraternal and pastoral visit concluded in the late afternoon of June 26th with some preliminary considerations and observations, the result of what was heard and verified, while the final report that will be sent within the timeframe foreseen by the CIOFS orientation will be awaited.

Finally, it can be concluded with a positive and fruitful assessment of the fraternal and pastoral visit to this OFS national fraternity of Canada, hoping that the recommendations and considerations left behind will serve as help in “reviving the Franciscan evangelical spirit, ensuring fidelity to the charism and the Rule, offering help in fraternity life, strengthening the bond of the Order's unity and promoting its more effective insertion into the Franciscan Family and the Church” in all OFS fraternities in the country.

The elective chapter was celebrated in the same place as the Fraternal and Pastoral visitation, in the house of spirituality of Ursulines Sisters in Quebec City. The chapter began in the afternoon of June 26th and went very well; it was lived in an atmosphere of fraternal serenity and listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit, which resulted in, that the members of the new OFS national council of Canada for the triennium 2025-2028 were elected.

The elective session was presided over by OFS Minister General Tibor Kauser, and assisted/witnessed by Fr. Tomas Ginga Panzo Suva, OFMCap., general spiritual assistant on behalf of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS). Jewel Jasmins, OFS, was thus elected as national minister and international councillor for the second consecutive term; thus, the other members of the national council were also elected.

The installation of the new council took place within the celebration of the evening Mass of the Solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, presided over by Fr. Tomas Ginga, OFMCap. and concelebrated by the national, regional and local spiritual assistants who were present for the chapter.

The chapter concluded on Sunday, June 29th with final evaluations, thanksgiving, and followed by the festive lunch and dismissal of participants.

Athens: Local Chapter

The Athens Local Fraternity celebrated its elective chapter on June 29. Eliona DAMAJ was elected Local Minister and at the same time she is the contact person with CIOFS.

The elective act was presided over by Noemi Paola Riccardi, OFS, area councillor and delegate of the OFS General Minister, Tibor Kauser and assisted by Fr. Giulio GRAMEGNA, OFMCap., Capuchin delegate in Greece. Fr. Giulio represented the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants as a delegate. The chapter went well.