

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

KOINONIA

... together on the journey

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



**SISTER DEATH: THE LAST
PRAISE TO GOD**

Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM





INTRODUCTION

Death, often regarded as the ultimate enemy, instills fear in the hearts of both believers and non-believers. The uncertainty surrounding death is a persistent source of anxiety, highlighting its mysterious nature that can only be understood through faith.

Francis, like many, initially grappled with anxiety and fear regarding death. However, he eventually came to realize the futility of such worries, recognizing death as an inevitable

part of life. Embracing this reality, Francis embarked on a transformative journey of faith. He began to perceive death not as a dreaded adversary but as a sister—one to be welcomed and embraced, acknowledging her integral role in the human experience.

In moments of profound struggle, particularly during his blindness and experiences of solitude, Francis cultivated a deep connection with creation. He came to see everything, including death, as part of God's creation—each element deserving reverence and praise. This shift in perspective allowed him to appreciate the beauty in life's cycles, ultimately leading to a reverent acknowledgment of death as a vital component of the divine tapestry of existence.

In recognizing Sister Death as a companion rather than an enemy, Francis invites all to embrace the reality of mortality. This perspective fosters a richer understanding of life and death, encouraging a spirit of gratitude for every moment and a recognition of the sacredness within all aspects of creation. By transforming the fear of death into a celebration of life, we too may find peace in the inevitability of our earthly journey.

Francis' conversion as a symbol of death to the world

The conversion experience of Francis, like that of many saints, was marked by the abandonment of self to focus on God's will. This dying to self and dying to the world not only brought Francis to a true freedom to embrace the heavenly Father as his only treasure, but it also led him to a continuous search for the meaning of life and how he could better die to self in order to find true joy in following, loving, and serving Christ. At the very early stage of Francis' conversion, it became clear to him that dying to self could never be an option for Christians, but a radical choice that leads to eternal life. The famous act of stripping off his clothes in front of everyone and then claiming that from now on his true father is the Heavenly Father illustrated how Francis desired to die to self in order to find a more meaningful life in Christ.

In this very episode, we can see that the old self dies in Francis, and the new self comes to life (John 3:3-7; Ephesians 4:22-24). Even before he fully realized that he wanted to embrace a gospel way of life, Francis already understood the meaning of denying oneself for the sake of Christ. In the early stages of his conversion, Francis began a lifelong process

of dying to self. Without a doubt, Francis' act of stripping himself held spiritual, symbolic, and physical meaning in dying to self. It was an act that illustrated the firm conviction Francis had in following Christ. However, the maturation of faith and resolution to follow the gospel way of life ultimately led him to comprehend that to "die to self" means that no one can come to Christ unless he is willing to see his old life "crucified with Christ" and begin to live anew with Him. Francis gradually learns to die to self, embraces the lepers, renounces an extravagant lifestyle, and is reborn to a new life of penance inspired by the Gospel. Reflecting on the Gospel, Francis began to understand what it meant "If you will come after Me, deny yourself, and take up your cross and follow Me." (Mt 16:24 & Lk 9:23).

In a practical way, Francis expressed his praises to God, which was illustrated by his particular and extraordinary affection for God the Creator. St. Bonaventure, in his writings on the life of Saint Francis of Assisi, says, "that after Francis kissed the leper and then put money [in his hand], then, mounting his horse, he looked round him on all sides, and the plain was spread before him unbroken, and no trace of that leper might he see. Then, filled with wonder and joy, he began devoutly to chant praises unto the Lord, purposing from this to rise ever unto greater heights."¹



Francis: From Fear to Embrace of Death

Francis' salutation to Sister Death is rooted in both human and spiritual understanding. The spiritual comprehension of this human reality enabled Francis to reach the point of calling "death" a sister whom he could not fear but rather acknowledge her presence and reality — a sister he considered embracing and being at peace with, for it is through her that one can transition to the fullness of life.

This Christian approach restores hope and provides a new perspective on life. Francis first experienced a near death experience during the war; he feared death, but through his journey of conversion, as he reflected on and meditated on the Scriptures, he began to make peace with mortality, seeing death as a step toward resurrection.

In Francis' earlier exhortations to the brothers and sisters of Penance 2: 14 and

in the later exhortation to the brothers and sisters of Penance 82, his approach is one of

¹ <https://www.ecatholic2000.com/bonaventure/assisi/francis.shtml>, THE LIFE OF SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI, Saint Bonaventure, Translated by E. Gurney Salter 1904 by E.P. Dutton, New York, US.

fear, threat, and inevitability. In these exhortations, Francis' attitude toward death is negative, but as he continues his profound search for meaning in his life, he develops a mature understanding of death as a passage toward eternal life, a view highly influenced by his deeper love of the Scriptures.



As he continued to pray and meditate on the Scriptures, especially on the passion and resurrection of Jesus, his dread and fear of death slowly but surely began to disappear, and he started to give praise to God, saying: "Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death, from whom no one living can escape."² Francis' praises were driven by the full acknowledgment that we are mortals, but most importantly by his inner spiritual awareness and realization that, as human beings, we are connected to our Creator, and to Him we belong. Thus, Francis understood then that neither death nor the tomb would ever hinder us from remaining in relationship with God or separate us from Him (Rom 8:38-39). The Christian belief is centred on this fact: the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Death, like a natural sister from whom we

separate when she gets married and begins a new life, is a bodily death that separates us from earthly life and enables us to enter into heavenly life.

Why praise death?

For Francis, death was a natural phenomenon of life and is part of God's plan for humanity, and such a phenomenon is experienced by all created beings. However, reaching such an understanding requires a maturity of faith, which, in the case of Francis, allowed him to see and find in creation a true manifestation of God's love that will never be cancelled by death. Like a human sister, death can never be avoided or feared because her presence is real and must be embraced. Death is a reality that cannot be denied. How you face it is a different question altogether. For Francis, approaching death with praise was the ultimate act of faith in the risen Lord. It was a journey of faith that enabled Francis to reach the point of even praising the Lord while confronting death.

² *Francis of Assisi* [Francis of Assisi, “The Cantic of the Creatures” 12, in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, ed. Regis J. Armstrong, J.A. Wayne Hellmann, and William Short (New York, NY: New City Press, 1999-2001), 114. Further citations of this source will be noted as *FAED* followed by the page number.]

For Francis, the best way to face death was to acknowledge its presence first, then move from fear to a Christian hope that resulted from a lifelong search for God in his life — a search that developed through attentiveness to what God asked of him. Francis' continuous reflection on the love of God, slowly and yet steadily, enabled him to find new meaning in his life. He encountered God's presence in all creation. In some ways, Francis came to understand that death inevitably cannot be avoided; therefore, he acknowledged it, embraced it, and praised it.

But why praise something that will cut you off from earthly joys and pleasures? Francis, during his conversion, immediately understood that he needed to die to all earthly pleasures and embrace God. The famous episode of stripping himself and boldly embracing the Heavenly Father marked his first death from material wealth and his entry into a new life full of hope for a certain future, which, from a human perspective, is unexplainable. It was clear that later on, Francis could understand that bodily death shouldn't be feared because his conversion had already been marked by "spiritual death," which brought him closer to God.

A "spiritual death" in which he renounced his former way of life and embraced a new existence centred on God. This "death to self" liberated him from worldly attachments and transformed his perspective on physical death, allowing him to live in joyful anticipation of eternal life with God. His dedication to observing the Holy Gospel and embracing poverty exemplified this continuous act of dying to the world. So, awaiting his own physical death, he had nothing to fear or worry about but, rather, to praise and welcome his beloved sister Death, who would enable him to finally be with God, whom he loved and longed to be with.

Praises of Death as a Form of Gratitude for Francis of Assisi

Francis, having embarked on the journey of penitence, immediately grasped the importance of praising God in all circumstances of life, both joyful and sorrowful. Without a doubt, it took him a while to reach such a moment of praise, as we know that the Canticum of Creatures was written almost at the end of his life.

Nevertheless, such praises were the result of a continuous conversion, enticed by his constant contemplation and thanksgiving to God for being the author of the universe. His search for God led him to deep contemplation and a love of creation. St. Francis' acceptance of death can be seen as the ultimate expression of his love for God and creation, as he viewed death as a transition to complete union with God. This understanding arose from his approach to life regarding what God created.

His exemplary lifestyle of poverty and humility, along with his strong relationship with God, creation, and humanity, illustrates a life lived in preparation for eternal union with God. This perspective allows for an interpretation of death as a transition to ultimate fulfilment and a profound expression of gratitude for the gift of life. It is, however, a perspective — a view that can only be comprehended by believers in the God of life. Francis understood that the view of death is deeply intertwined with belief in the God of life. Death merely

marks the conclusion of a person's earthly existence, representing the culmination of their time for either accepting or rejecting divine grace as manifested through Christ. So, why not praise God for such an end to one's transition from earthly pilgrimage to a new entry into a life of joyful union with God?

The whole idea of Francis doing penance had the eschatological view of after death; that



is, that immediately after death, each person faces judgment based on their actions of faith concerning one's state of soul at the time of death. One may enter Heaven, Hell, or Purgatory.³ His fear of death might have been caused by such theological teaching, but his penitential lifestyle helped him to grasp the idea that death is a transformation - the gateway to eternal life and union with God - so it is worthy of praise. Francis' spiritual journey helped him realize that the Christian perspective on death is rooted in hope, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the foundation of this hope, promising that believers will also share in His victory over death.

CONCLUSION

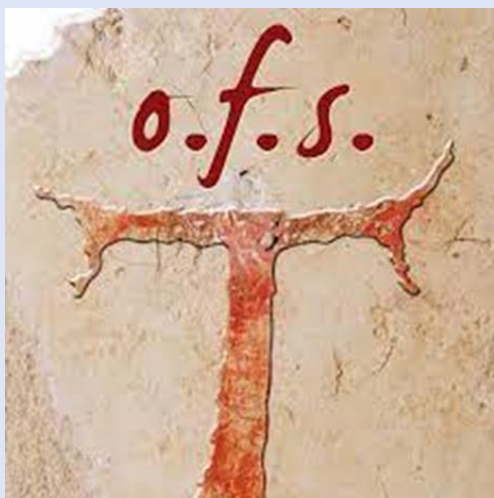
There is no better way to embrace death as part of life than by allowing oneself to have an authentic desire to enter into a personal relationship with God as the source of life. Christians have based their faith understanding of death on the Scriptures, whereby they have realized that death will never separate them from the love of God in Christ (cf. Romans 8:38-39). Amid the reality of death, Christians continuously hold on to the hope of new life.

Francis had to go through a conversion experience to reach the understanding that death could not be a threat or an end to humanity because it has no final say, but rather, God's love has the power to conquer it. However, it requires faith to perceive this reality: that death is definitively defeated through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through his resurrection, Christians are offered hope in eternal life because Jesus has triumphed over sin and death and has given humanity a new approach to life. Francis embraced the Holy Scriptures and allowed them to transform his spiritual life in order to enter into a profound relationship with God and creation, going as far as to change his fearful approach to death into a joyous welcoming of death as a sister who gives all believing humanity the opportunity to enter into the fullness of life.

Peace and good!

³ Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, Encyclical letter to the bishops, priests, and deacons, men and women religious and all the lay Faithfull on Christian Hope., 45

Meetings, Visits and Chapters



Hungary: OFS National Elective Chapter

The National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order in Hungary began its National Elective Chapter on the evening of Thursday, 10 July 2025, at the Franciscan Secondary School Temesvári Pelbárt, located in the OFM convent in Esztergom. The first day began with registration, followed by dinner, evening prayer, Holy Mass and adoration. On Friday morning, the day began with breakfast, followed by morning prayer and a presentation by two FMM sisters, Sister Edit Kobus and Sister Margit Korniluk. They discussed the history of their congregation's

origins and its missionary commitment, particularly in Hungary, as well as its connection and collaboration with the Franciscan family, especially the OFS. After the presentation by the FMM sisters, two brothers from the congregation known as the 'Little Brothers of St. Francis' shared their experiences. They spoke about the challenges they faced regarding their origins and how they continue to grow despite the struggles and fears surrounding their new way of life, both in the present and in the future.

The presentation by the Minister General, Tibor Kauser, OFS, 'On the Election' emphasized the significance and role of the Pontiff - the one who builds bridges - a sign of unity. He reiterated the context, procedures and importance of the election of the Vicar of Christ, the successor of St. Peter, highlighting it in the same context and with the same importance as the election of the Minister General, the National Minister, the Regional Minister and the Local Minister – the importance of allowing the Holy Spirit to guide and inspire us during the elections.

The presentation by National Spiritual Assistant Fr. Milan Lukovits, OFM, who spoke about the joys and challenges of being a spiritual assistant, highlighted the importance of being involved, cooperative, collaborative and effective in the life of the fraternity, contributing to spiritual, personal and fraternal growth. Next, the financial report was presented, which was well detailed and clear. The national minister thanked the treasurer for accepting this responsibility after the former treasurer resigned three months ago. He also thanked each member of the OFS from the 29 active fraternities out of 35 existing ones for their collaboration in putting together a program and project that gave life to the national and regional fraternity.

There were 6 spiritual assistants, 5 OFM and 1 OFMCap, 7 Franciscan sisters, 3 Franciscan religious - 2 FMM and 1 sister from the Congregation of the Little Sisters of St. Francis, and 110 members of the OFS, of whom only 55 capitulars had the right to vote for the National Council. The chapter was presided over by Noemi Paola Riccardi, OFS, presidency council, delegate of the Minister General and representative of the Conference of the General Spiritual Assistant, Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM.

The Chapter members had the joy of voting for the new council for the next three years, in which Imre Dániel was re-elected as National Minister and Adrienne Bognár as International Councillor. Immediately afterwards, the new Council was installed during Holy Mass celebrated by the OFM Provincial Minister, Fr. Piusz Berhidai, OFM, and Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM, gave the homily in which he spoke of the need for the sacrifice of love in discipleship. On Saturday morning, the capitulars and observers went on pilgrimage to the Basilica to enter the Holy Door and celebrate Holy Mass. In the afternoon, a paraliturgical celebration on the 'Canticle of Brother Sun' took place with the participation of other Franciscan religious orders, followed by a presentation by Fr. Ágoston Bagyinski, OFM, on 'The Canticle of Brother Sun.' On Sunday morning, we celebrated the closing Mass of the chapter, followed by the last conference on 'The Jubilee Year' given by Noemi Paola Riccardi, OFS. After lunch, all the participants took their leave.

Spain: 4th European OFS-YouFra Congress

On July 13-19, 2025, the 4th European Congress of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) and Franciscan Youth (YouFra) was held at a Marist facility in Llinars del Vallès, Barcelona, Spain. The theme of the event was: *"Creation and Fraternity: One Family, One Mission. 800 Years of the Canticle of the Creatures."* 130 people from twenty different European countries attended.

The OFS General Minister, Tibor KAUSER, formally opened the Congress at the beginning of Mass at 8:00 p.m. on Sunday, July 13. Which was presided by Fr. Ștefan ACATRINEI, the General Spiritual Assistant for OFS and YouFra. At 10:00 p.m., the National Minister of the OFS in Spain, Maria José PIRIZ, and the Regional Minister of Catalonia, Montserrat LINARES, officially welcomed everyone. Afterwards, the delegations of the twenty national fraternities briefly introduced themselves.

The entire week's program was very full. It harmoniously combined prayer, work, recreation, fraternal and cultural moments, and personal time. Two full days, Tuesday and Thursday, were dedicated specifically to the *Canticle of the Creatures*. Several topics were addressed during the conferences, and subsequently discussed in workshops. They included: *"The Canticle of the Creatures: A Proposal for the People of Today"* (Fr. Salvador JIMÉNEZ DURÁN, OFM); *"The Service of Leadership in the OFS and YouFra"* (Tibor KAUSER, OFS General Minister, and Félix CHOCOJAY, OFS, YouFra International Coordinator), *"OFS-YouFra We Are Church: The Church on a Synodal Journey"* (the Most Reverend Salvador CRISTAU COLL, Bishop of Tarrasa, Spain), and *"Being a Secular Franciscan: A Song of Praise to the Father from the Canticle of the Creatures"* (Manolo SANCHEZ, OFS).

Wednesday, July 16, was entirely dedicated to a pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Montserrat [near Barcelona]. On Thursday evening, July 17, at 8:00 p.m., Fr. Alexandru DÂNCĂ, OFM Conv., with a youth group from the Parish Church of Mare de Déu de Montserrat and one from Sant Antoni de Pàdua in Granollers, Spain, visited the Congress and led a period of Eucharistic adoration. On Friday morning, July 18, the Congress participants were introduced to the culture of the Spanish region of Catalonia through a presentation entitled: *"An Explanation of the Castellars [makers of human towers or pyramids] and Their Techniques"* (Xavi RAMOS and Joan CONTRERAS). Later, the

participants built their own human tower for the first time. This Catalan tradition of building human towers, now 200 years old, is deeply significant because it is based on the value inherent in each person, regardless of their age, social status, or physical strength. Everyone can easily find a place in the human tower. On Friday afternoon, at 6:30 p.m., His Eminence Cardinal Juan José OMELLA, Archbishop of Barcelona, presided over Mass in the crypt of the Basilica of the Sagrada Família [Barcelona]. In his homily, he expressed admiration and appreciation for the fruitful involvement of OFS fraternities in the pastoral activities of his diocese. Afterwards, the entire group toured the Sagrada Família Basilica, and on returning to Llinars del Vallès, enjoyed a special program prepared by the OFS National Fraternity of Spain, featuring traditional music and dance.

Saturday, July 19, began with Morning Prayer at 8:30 a.m. At 10:00 a.m., the icon of the Virgin Mary, Queen of the Franciscan Family, was entrusted to the OFS National Fraternity of Germany. Immediately afterwards, the final plenary assembly was held. At 11:30 a.m., Fr. Ștefan ACATRINEI presided over the closing Mass. The other Spiritual Assistants present concelebrated. They were: Fr. Ivan HRKAĆ, OFM, from Bosnia and Herzegovina; Fr. Andrian ZUDIN, OFM Conv., from Russia; Fr. Ángel Mariano GUZMÁN LUDEÑA, OFM Conv., and Mariano RECÍO RIOJA, OFM Conv., from Spain; and Fr. Fernando VENTURA, OFM Cap., from Portugal. The OFS General Minister officially closed the 4th European OFS-YouFra Congress and gave the final blessing.

The last official activity on of the congressional schedule was lunch at 2:00 p.m. Afterwards, the participants began to say their goodbyes, although some remained until Sunday. Returning to their fraternities, everyone brought back fond memories—but above all, the joy of having prayed, worked, and lived together, inspired by the same Franciscan charism.

Bolivia: OFS National Elective Chapter

The OFS National Elective Chapter of Bolivia was held from 25th to 27th July at the “Municipalidad de Mecapaca, La Paz”. The chapter was presided over by Silvia Noemi Diana, OFS, counsellor to the Presidency and delegate of Tibor Kauser, OFS, Minister General. The Conference of Spiritual Assistants (CAS) delegated Fr. Octavio Huanca Bernal, OFM, to witness the chapter. The theme of the chapter was ‘800 years singing with creation as pilgrims of hope.’ Twenty-nine members with voting rights and six observers were present, along with local assistants and the Master of Postulants, Fr. Eliseo Czwerenko, OFM, who spoke on ‘Francis of Assisi and the conversion of the heart.’ During the chapter, Fr. Octavio gave a presentation on the theme: ‘Pilgrim of Hope Living in Fraternity and Minority’ and Silvia Noemia Diana gave a presentation on the theme: ‘Priorities of the OFS 2025-2028.’

Bernardo Rada, OFS, was elected national minister and international councillor. During the closing Mass, the newly elected council was installed by Silvia Noemi Diana. The chapter took place in a peaceful and fraternal atmosphere.

Malawi: OFS National Elective Chapter

The National Elective Chapter of Malawi was held at "Likuni Parish" from 7th to 10th August 2025. Eremenciana Chinyama, OFS, presided over the elective chapter and the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants and was represented by her delegate Br. Francis Sagwirika, OFMCap.

The new elected National Minister is Teresa Mukatipa and the elected International Councilor is Tobias Shaba. According to the participants, the celebrations of the Chapter went very well and everyone was satisfied with the outcome of the elections, a beautiful elective chapter with a lot of joy and fraternity.

Congo Brazzaville: Formation for the Franciscan Family

The OFS, the Friars and the Poor Clares of Congo Brazzaville had the joy of meeting for ongoing formation at the St. Clare School in Djiri-Brazzaville from August 8th to 9th, 2025, during which the Assistant General, Br. Pedro Zitha, OFM, emphasized the significance of being a Franciscan Family that enriches our mutual vitality that helps us to value the significance of the Spiritual Assistant of the OFS.

The OFS in the Republic of Congo was born in 1958 in "Pointe Noire" and the General Curia of the OFM entrusted pastoral care to the Spiritan Fathers before the arrival of the First Order and the Poor Clares.

The OFS has lived its Franciscan charism despite the absence of the OFM and OFMCap friars and finally, with the arrival of the friars in 1982 in Makoua Boudji and then of the Poor Clares in 2000, the OFS has the joy of living its Franciscan charism within the Franciscan family. This joint formation once again emphasized the importance of living the charism together and being aware of the interdependence between the three families, the First Order, the Poor Clares and the OFS. Each session was followed by a sharing that brought to light many positive and negative aspects that foster growth and strengthen the understanding of the identity of the OFS and the sense of belonging to the Franciscan family. The formation ended with the celebration of Holy Mass presided over by Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM, who urged all members to rediscover the true Franciscan identity in order to witness to the Gospel in today's world that so much needs to live in mutual and unconditional love and thanked each brother and sister for the sacrifice made in dedicating their time to participating in this ongoing formation.

Democratic Republic of Congo: OFS National Elective Chapter

The Elective Chapter of the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of the Democratic Republic of Congo was finally held from August 11 to 17, 2025, in the student residence of the Capuchin Friars, in Kinshasa, the industrial district of Limete. It had been pending since 2017 due to the social, political, and economic situation.

The morning of the first day was dedicated to the report of the transition committee, the explanation of the formalities of the proceedings and structure of the National Council and

Spiritual Assistance to the delegates of the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order (CIOFS). In the afternoon, the Chapter officially began with the opening Mass, presided over by the Bishop Emeritus of the Diocese of Nkolo, His Excellency Stanislas Lukumwena, OFM. Concelebrating with him was the National Assistant's Fr. Polydore Bodibanga Kashala, OFM, Fr. Jean Paul Kilingi Nsomo, OFM, Fr. Emmanuel Galeboe, OFMCap, Fr. Aimé Kungi, OFMCap, and the Custodian Fr. Tharcisse Ngose, OFMCap. The theme of the Chapter was: "The meaning of our belonging to the OFS and the challenges of our framework for the 8th Centenary Jubilee of Franciscan Spirituality."

The Chapter was presided over by the Presidency Councillor Adolph Assagba, OFS, as delegate of the Minister General Tibor Kauser, OFS, and witnessed by the representative of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants, Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM. The work of the Chapter resumed with a welcome greeting to the CIOFS delegates and the 12 capitulars who came from the regions of MBANDAKA, KISANGANI, LUMBASHI, KANANGA, and BUKAVU.

Each capitular gave a report on his/her region, which greatly helped to understand the reality of the fraternities in which the members of the OFS live in the DR Congo. The work of reviewing, examining, adapting, and approving the national statutes took place in an atmosphere of tranquillity, respect, and fraternal listening. The following morning included visits to the Convent of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary (FMM), where the first OFS fraternity in Kinshasa was born.

On Friday, elections were held for the National Minister, Noël NKODIA, OFS, and the four Vice Ministers:

1. Vice Minister – TSHILUBA – Martin BALABEGA
2. Vice Minister – SWAHILI – Pascal BATUMIKE
3. Vice Minister – KIKONGO – Hector SUAMI
4. Vice Minister – LINGALA – Timothée KANDEGE

They will assist in the work and communication at the National level. The elected International Councillor is Felicien KASONGO. Additional members of the National Council were elected to assist in the functioning and pastoral activities of the fraternity and to emphasize the importance of living together as a unified fraternity in a vast nation, addressing social, economic, and political challenges.

The chapter concluded with the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist, presided over by His Excellency Jean Bertin Nadonye, OFMCap, Bishop of the Diocese of Lolo, and concelebrated by the National Assistants. During the Mass, the President of the Chapter, Adolph Assagba, OFS, confirmed the members of the new council of the National Fraternity of DR Congo.

We are grateful to the preparatory commission for their commitment, dedication, and courage in organizing this long-awaited chapter. Despite its challenges, it went well and ended in a spirit of fraternity and optimism. I can also say that we now have a fraternity that will dedicate itself to promoting the true and concrete organic union of the entire Order in the DR Congo.

Paraguay: OFS National elective chapter

The elective Chapter of the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of Paraguay was held from 16 to 17 August 2025, in the city of Itauguá, Paraguay, at the Spirituality Centre ‘Casa de retiro Osais Franciscano’ of the Franciscan Sisters of Mercy. The chapter was attended by 24 capitulars with voting rights and another 15 OFS brothers and sisters, some were members of the local fraternity and some observers. The opening Mass was presided over by the Bishop of the Diocese of Caazapa, His Excellency Marcelo Benitez, OFM, former national assistant of the OFS.

The elective session was presided over by Sister Silvia Noemi Diana, OFS, area councillor and member of the Presidency of the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order (CIOFS), representing the OFS Minister General Tibor Kauser. She was assisted by Fr. Tomas Ginga Panzo Suva, OFMCap., representing the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS). The election for the minister and national council resulted in the election of Mirtha Ferreira as minister and international councillor and Javier Freitas as national vice-minister and substitute international councillor.

The inauguration and commencement of service of the new council took place during the celebration of Holy Mass on the 20th Sunday in Ordinary Time, 17 August 2025. The Eucharistic celebration was presided over by Fr. Tomas Ginga and concelebrated by the national, regional and some local assistants present at the Chapter. The Chapter concluded with a festive lunch, followed by the departure of the capitulars.

Ethiopia: Extraordinary Pastoral and Fraternal Visit

During the 16 to 26 August, the Presidency of the Extraordinary Councillor of English and Portuguese African countries, Eremenciana Chinyama, OFS, and the representative of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants, Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM commenced the Pastoral and Fraternal Visit to the five canonically erected fraternities of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) and YouFra in Ethiopia; each of which still qualified as a “Presence” according to the CIOFS regulations for the establishment of OFS fraternities in the Order.

The visit was meant to verify the conditions in which the Program of Formation, Canonical Erection, and Spiritual Assistance are all properly implemented, and what the CIOFS could do to help become the “Emerging” fraternity. During the visit, the delegates of CIOFS offered formation workshops in different fraternities and took these opportunities to discuss with the Spiritual Assistant how to create more awareness among all the friars of the province about the importance of Spiritual Assistance to the OFS and YouFra.

The Presidency Councillor had the joy of receiving the Profession of nine OFS members of the Sacred Heart Fraternity in Addis Ababa. Following the Profession, we moved to the city of Konto at the Capuchin Friary of Our Lady of Loreto Mariam Parish Church in Wolaita Soddo, where we began our program with the celebration of the Eucharist presided over by the Apostolic Vicariate of Soddo in the Southern Ethiopia Region, Bishop Dejene Hidoto, OFMCap. Following Mass, the CIOFS delegates participated in the Welcoming Ceremony

in the hall by the Bishop, OFS, and Youfra. Before the election of the new Local Council, the fraternity held a formation workshop in the afternoon.

The Visitation then continued to another town called Dubbo, where the delegates met with the OFS and YouFra for a formation workshop, the admission of YouFra members, the profession of OFS members, and the election of the local council. All these celebrations culminated in the celebration of the Eucharist, followed by the departure to the Novitiate House in Meganasse, where we met the Friars and Novices.

We then began the visit to two OFS local fraternities: St. Claire and Kidanemeheret (which means the Arch of the Covenant), and YouFra. It is also worth noting that here at the novitiate is where the OFS formally and structurally began in Ethiopia, at the strong request of then Minister General Mauro Jöhri, OFMCap, during the Provincial Elective Chapter in 2012.

The program of the day continued with the formation workshop of both OFS and YouFra, followed by the election of two local councils. The program of the day concluded with the celebration of the Eucharist presided over by the Vicar General of the Eparchy of Emdibir, Fr Habitesilasse, during which all the parishioners had the joy of witnessing the Profession of the OFS members and the promises of the YouFra.

Finally, the election of the Provisional Council was held in an attempt to establish an “emerging fraternity” that would guide and animate the existing canonically erected fraternities. Most parishioners then gathered in the parish hall for convivial and fraternal sharing.

Brazil: OFS National elective chapter

The 41st National Chapter and 17th Elective Chapter of the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of Brazil was celebrated from 22 to 24 August 2025. The event took place in the city of São Paulo, Brazil, in the Spirituality Centre “Casa de retiro” of the Daughters of St Paul (the Pauline Sisters). Twenty-four capitulars with voting rights were present, along with 15 other OFS brothers and sisters who were members of the local fraternity and some observers. The opening Mass was presided over by the Auxiliary Bishop of São Paulo, His Excellency Monsignor Carlos Silva, OFMCap.

The elective session was presided over by Silvia Noemi Diana, OFS, area councillor and member of the Presidency of the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order (CIOFS), representing the OFS Minister General Tibor Kauser; she was assisted by Fr. Tomas Ginga Panzo Suva, OFMCap., representing the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS). Helmir Jose Soares da Silva was elected as national minister and international councillor and Antonio Julio Martins as national vice-minister and substitute international councillor.

The inauguration of the new OFS National Council took place during the celebration of the Holy Mass on the 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time, August 24, 2025. During the same celebration, the installation of the new president (coordinator of the “collegiate”) of the

national assistants of Brazil also took place: Fr. Fernando Araujo, OFMConv., as president, and Fr. Wellington Buarque, OFM, as the new secretary.

The Eucharistic celebration was presided over by Fr. Tomas Ginga and concelebrated by the national, regional, and some local assistants present at the Chapter. The Chapter concluded with a festive lunch, followed by the departure of the capitulars.

New Zealand: Fraternal and Pastoral Visit; OFS National Elective Chapter

On September 2-5, 2025, the Minister General of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS), Tibor KAUSER, and the OFS General Spiritual Assistant, Friar Ștefan ACATRINEI, OFMConv., conducted a fraternal and pastoral visit to the National OFS Fraternity of New Zealand.

During the first few days, they met with three local fraternities. On Tuesday, they met with the Holy Spirit fraternity in the Hillsborough suburb of Auckland. On Wednesday, they met with the Blessed Virgin Mary Help of Christians fraternity in West Auckland, a particularly active and innovative group, which is attracting numerous vocations. Finally, on Thursday, they met with the Immaculate Conception fraternity in North Auckland. Friday, September 5, was dedicated to a meeting with the Major Superiors, Friar Philip JEFFARES, OFM, and Friar Ephrem TIGGA, OFMCap., along with the members of the National Council.

On September 6-7, the elective Chapter of the OFS National Fraternity was celebrated at the St. Francis Retreat House of the Friars Minor in Auckland. Currently, the 132 members of the national fraternity are distributed across ten local fraternities and one emerging fraternity (eight are on New Zealand's North Island and three on its South Island). The Chapter began on Saturday morning at 9:30 a.m. with Mass presided over by Friar Ștefan ACATRINEI. The first day was dedicated to the presentation of reports, discussion, and evaluation, culminating in the evening with Eucharistic Adoration and some time for fellowship.

On Sunday, September 7, the work of the Chapter resumed with the recitation of Morning Prayer, followed by a lecture: "The Canticle of the Creatures and Its Spiritual Resonances," given by Friar Ștefan ACATRINEI, representing the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS). The OFS Minister General, Tibor KAUSER, presided over the elective session, which was attended by fifteen Capitulars with voting rights and four observers. Shirley MCGINLEY was elected the National Minister and Paul HITCHFIELD the International Councillor. The new Council was installed during a Mass presided over by Friar Ștefan ACATRINEI.

On Sunday, at 2:00 p.m., the Minister General, Tibor KAUSER, gave the Capitulars a reflection on the Secular Franciscan charism. Afterwards, together with Friar Ștefan ACATRINEI, he met with the new OFS National Council. At 4:00 p.m., after two intensive days of prayer and work carried out in a deeply fraternal atmosphere, the Capitulars took their leave.

Slovakia: OFS National Elective Chapter

The National Elective Chapter of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of Slovakia was held from September 4 to 7 2025, at the convent of the Sestry Františkánky Premenenia Pána (Franciscan Sisters of the Transfiguration) in the village of Melice-Lieskove. The chapter was presided over by Dina Shabalina, CIOFS Presidency Councillor, delegated by OFS Minister General Tibor Kauser and witnessed by Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM, representative of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS).

The opening Mass was celebrated on Thursday afternoon by National Assistant Fr. Josef Konc, OFMCap, followed by a meeting of the outgoing Council and presentations by Dina on “Servant Leadership” and Fr. Pedro on “What it means to be a member of the OFS in today's world.” On Friday, September 5, more Capitulars arrived, along with another National Assistant, Fr. Róbert Jozef Chabada, OFM: a total of 27 Capitulars plus 5 Observers. This day was dedicated to presentations by the National Minister and Treasurer, followed by comments and approval. Together, the participants decided to discuss proposals regarding the direction that the OFS in Slovakia could take to enhance its identity as a Secular Order and its commitment to living the Gospel today. Saturday morning was dedicated to the election of the new National Council: Damián Berec was re-elected National Minister and Lucia Spodniaková was re-elected International Councillor. Once the election of the new National Council was completed, the opportunity arose to implement what had been pending for various reasons and recommended during the Pastoral Visit: the inauguration of the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants in Slovakia. Fr. Stanislav Rok, OFMConv, was unanimously appointed as President for a three-year term, and Fr. Róbert Jozef Chabada, OFM, as Secretary of the CAS in Slovakia. In the afternoon, group work was carried out, followed by presentations, and the day concluded with the celebration of the Eucharist—during which the new Council was installed—presided over by the National Assistant, Fr. Stanislav Rok, OFMConv, and concelebrated by the other National Assistant’s already mentioned, Fr. Róbert and Fr. Josef, together with Fr. Pedro.

On Sunday morning, the Closing Mass was presided over by Fr. Róbert, who reminded the Secular Franciscans of the need to put Christ at the centre of their lives, vocation, and mission, and to devote themselves totally to the service of God with all their hearts. After the Eucharistic Celebration, the Chapter members went to the Chapter hall to listen to the speech of the newly elected National Minister and to reflect together on key issues for the next three years. Moreover, to approve the conclusions and resolutions of the Chapter. Finally, before everyone was dismissed, the Chapter ended with a fraternal agape.

Australia: Fraternal and Pastoral Visit to OFS National Fraternity

The National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) in Australia has 509 members. 263 of them are active and 246 are less active due to age and the long distances they must travel. The members are distributed among twenty-two active fraternities, out of forty-eight which were canonically established. The fraternities are grouped into four regions: New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria, and Western Australia.

On September 9-12, 2025, the OFS Minister General, Tibor KAUSER, and the representative of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS), Friar Ștefan ACATRINEI, OFMConv., made a fraternal and pastoral visit to the OFS national fraternity of Australia. The visitors arrived on the evening of Monday, September 8, at the Mary MacKillop Spirituality Center in Baulkham Hills (Sydney). On Tuesday, September 9, after the 8:30 a.m. Mass, they met with the National Council and finalized the schedule for the visit. At 11:30 a.m., met with the Most Reverend Vincent Long Van NGUYEN, OFMConv., Bishop of Parramatta, Australia who stressed the importance and value of the OFS fraternities in his diocese, especially in such a secularized society.

The bishop also recalled how his vocation was influenced by his father who was a Secular Franciscan. At 2:00 p.m., the visitors resumed their meeting with the Council. The Council reported on the activities of the Australian national fraternity and reflected on its future. The day concluded with Evening prayer at 5:45 p.m. On Wednesday at 10:00 a.m., the visitors resumed their discussion with the national council regarding the apostolate and missionary activities of the national fraternity. In the afternoon, they reviewed the OFS documents and archives. At 6:00 p.m., they met with the local Fraternity of St. Francis in Leichhardt (Sydney), which shared its monthly meeting schedule with them. On Thursday morning they made a pilgrimage to the tomb of St. Mary MacKillop, Australia's only canonized saint. In the afternoon, they conducted an online meeting with the members of the various local OFS fraternities across the country using the Zoom Internet platform. On Friday morning, the visitors met with the regional spiritual assistants, who shared the joys and struggles of the work they do. The greatest difficulty is the closure of friaries due to the decreasing numbers of friars and the long distances they must travel to reach the local fraternities. Also, that morning, the regional ministers met with the visitors and reported on their fraternities and current activities. At 11:30 a.m., the visitors shared the conclusions they reached regarding their visit with the national council. The last event of the visit was a meeting with the Major Superiors, namely, the Minister Provincial, Friar Robert STEWART, OFM Cap., the Minister Provincial, Friar Philip MISCAMBLE, OFM, and the Provincial Delegate, Friar David Francis BLOWEY, OFM Conv. The meeting was held at 5:00 p.m. because it was hoped the Major Superiors would stay for dinner and enjoy some fraternal time with the OFS members. At the end, the OFS Minister General, Tibor KAUSER and Friar Ștefan ACATRINEI thanked the Major Superiors for the spiritual and pastoral care they have provided the OFS in Australia.

Australia: OFS National Elective Chapter

From Friday, September 12 to Sunday, September 14, 2025, the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) in Australia conducted an elective Chapter. The event took place at the Mary MacKillop Spirituality Center in Baulkham Hills, Sydney, Australia. The Chapter began at 2:00 p.m. with a greeting from the National Minister, Maria IADANZA, followed by the approval of the Chapter program.

The first session was dedicated to hearing reports from the OFS National Minister, the Formation Director, the Missions Director, the Treasurer, and from the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS). Subsequently, the Capitulars requested a revision of the Statutes of the National Fraternity of Australia. They entrusted this task to the new

National Council. The Capitulars were also informed about the “safeguarding norms” that Secular Franciscans are to observe.

The Major Superiors of the Franciscan First Order in Australia—Friar Philip MISCAMBLE, OFM, Friar Robert STEWART, OFMCap., and the Conventual Franciscan Provincial Delegate, Friar David BLOWEY, OFMConv., attended dinner and a fraternal evening. Saturday, the second day of the Chapter, began with Mass at 7:30 a.m., presided over by Friar Joe McKAY, OFM. The work of the Chapter resumed at 9:30 a.m. with a talk by Friar Ștefan ACATRINEI, OFMConv., representing CAS, entitled “*The Canticle of the Creatures: A Light on the Journey of the Secular Franciscan.*” The OFS Minister General, Tibor KAUSER, then gave a talk entitled: “*The Priorities of the National Chapter.*”

The elective session began at 1:00 p.m. with an hour of adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. At 2:10 p.m., the session presider, Tibor KAUSER, outlined some specific norms and criteria for the Chapter. The twenty-six Capitulars with voting rights re-elected Maria IADANZA as the National Minister and International Councillor.

Others attending the Chapter included eleven OFS observers, the National Spiritual Assistants Friars Joe McKAY, OFM, John COOPER, OFMCap., and Louis Mary SCHMID, OFMConv., the Regional Spiritual Assistant who has replaced Friar Anthony Paul FOX, OFMConv. The second day also concluded with a fraternal evening.

On Sunday, September 14, the new National Council was installed during Mass at 7:30 a.m., presided over by Friar Ștefan ACATRINEI. After breakfast, the National Minister presented the priorities of the National Fraternity for the next three years. The Capitulars then voted on the priorities after some discussion in working groups. Tibor KAUSER and Friar Ștefan spent some time meeting with the members of the new National Council. The Chapter was celebrated in a serene and fraternal atmosphere. It concluded with lunch, after which the Capitulars departed at 2:00 p.m.

USA: OFS National Elective Chapter

The Elective Chapter of the National Fraternity of the United States of America was held from 9 to 14 September 2025, the at the Bon Soucor Sisters' Retreat House in Marriottsville, MD. Nearly fifty people were present, including 38 capitulars with voting rights representing the 30 regions that make up the immense territory of the country, plus the outgoing councillors. The others were observers from the region that hosted the chapter, present for the various services necessary for the smooth running of the chapter.

The opening Mass was presided over by Fr. Gary, OFMConv., provincial vicar, representing the Provincial Minister of the Friars Minor Conventual, with jurisdiction in the territory where the chapter was celebrated. The national assistants and Fr. Tomas Ginga concelebrated. The election was presided over by Ana Maria Raffo Loas, area councillor and delegate of the OFS Minister General Tibor Kauser; she was assisted by Fr. Tomas Ginga Panzo Suva, OFMCap., representing the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS). The elections resulted in the (re)election of Jane De Rose BAMMAN as National Minister for her second term. Mary Frances CHARSKY was elected as International

Councillor, also for her second term. All things considered, the chapter was very well prepared. Due to the work done by the outgoing teams, almost all of them were re-elected, except for two, one of whom was unable to stand due to term limits. All in all, the chapter was a true moment of reunion, celebration, and prayer.

The closing Mass of the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, during which the installation ceremony took place, was presided over by Fr. Tomas Ginga Panzo SUVA, OFMCap., and concelebrated by the three national assistants: Fr. Marek STYBOR, OFMConv., Fr. John DELARIVA, OFMCap., and Fr. Jerome WOLBERT, OFM. On Sunday, September 14, after the meeting between the new Council and the outgoing Council, several recommendations were made, followed by the dismissal of the capitulars.

Lithuania: Fraternal and Pastoral Visit

The National Fraternity of the OFS in Lithuania received a fraternal and pastoral visit from September 18th to September 21st, 2025.

The CIOFS delegation was represented by Dina Shabalina, OFS, and Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM. The visitors began their formal visit with the celebration of Holy Mass presided over by the local and regional spiritual assistant, Fr. Arūnas Peskaitis, OFM, followed by a fraternal meeting with brothers and sisters from various local fraternities in the Vilnius region. In this region, the pastoral visitor met with the regional and local spiritual assistants: Fr. Arūnas Peskaitis, OFM, Sr. Ingrida Kazlauskaite, CSSBVM (Congregation of the Sisters of the Servant of the Immaculate Blessed Virgin Mary) and the other regional spiritual assistant, Fr. Juozapas Marija Zukauskas, OFM.

The following day, the visitors, together with the National Council and the National Spiritual Assistant, Fr. Antanas Grabnickis, OFM, travelled to the Hill of Crosses in the Šiauliai–Panevėžys region, where they met with other members of the Regional Council and their Regional Spiritual Assistant, Fr. Paulius Vainikis, OFM.

The visitors then travelled to Kretinga, where they were joined by the second National Spiritual Assistant, Fr. Piotr Strocen, OFMConv, and the permanent deacon, Rev. Nerijus Čapas, OFS, who is also a member of the National Council. The meeting continued in another region, Klaipėda, where all the members of the OFS visited the parish of St. Bruno and the friary of the OFMConv. Afterwards, everyone moved to the Chapel of St. Francis of Assisi, where they celebrated Holy Mass, followed by another meeting with the brothers and sisters of the Telšiai region and their Regional Spiritual Assistant, Fr. Astijus Kungys, OFM.

This Regional Council has raised some concerns regarding the entire proposal for restructuring the regional levels of the OFS in Lithuania. This is an issue that requires ongoing discussion and listening in order to arrive at appropriate solutions that do not overload the national level but rather facilitate communication and spiritual growth for all members. The following day, the visitors and the National Council met with the Poor Clares with the aim of strengthening ties with the Franciscan Family, especially to highlight the significance of their shared charism and sense of belonging to the Franciscan Order in general. The highlight of the visit was the meeting with the bishop of the diocese of

Panevėžys, Rev. Linas Vodopjanovas, OFM, responsible for consecrated life at the Lithuanian Bishops' Conference. The main objective of this meeting was to renew the commitment and fidelity of the OFS to the local church.

Finally, visitors travelled to the Kaunas-Vilkaviškis region, where they were joined by Fr. Steponas Vaičiūnas, a member of the diocesan clergy of that region. The Regional Council, the Regional Spiritual Assistant Fr. Rolandas Taučius, OFM, and the National Council participated in Holy Mass and a meeting with other members of the OFS.

Upon their return to Vilnius, Fr. Pedro and Dina met with the Provincial Minister of the Province of St. Casimir, Fr. Evaldas Darulis, OFM, to whom the visitors expressed their gratitude for providing spiritual assistance to all the fraternities, despite the shortage of friars. This was an opportunity for both the visitors and each member of the Council to share their experiences of life within the Order and the Church, as well as to share their joys and challenges at both the local and national levels.

During this meeting, visitors were able to see how the National Fraternity of Lithuania has worked tirelessly to strengthen communication between each level and how they still must work hard to ensure that each OFS fraternity collaborates to revive the YouFra, which for some inexplicable reason had ceased to exist. There was a common concern about how to promote vocations, as the age of OFS members is increasing, while numbers are decreasing.

The visitors concluded their intensive four-day meeting with the National Council, during which they outlined recommendations that will contribute to the proper functioning and growth of the Order in all its dimensions.

Burkina Faso: OFS National Elective Chapter

The Secular Franciscan Order of Burkina Faso conducted its National Elective Chapter from September 19th to the 21st in Ouagadougou, at the 'Centre Sainte Famille' in Saaba. The Chapter was presided over by the Councillor for Francophone Africa, Adolph Atsu Assagba, OFS, delegate of the OFS Minister General, Tibor Kauser; the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants was represented by their delegate, Fr. Julien Campaore, OFMCap.

The capitulars elected Alida Siguian Kabore-Sawadogo, OFS, as National Minister and the International Council for the next three years. The OFS in Burkina Faso is still a small community, canonically described as a 'presence,' but its members are very committed and zealous in living their Franciscan charism; there is much optimism for the future!

Poland: OFS National Elective Chapter

The National Elective Chapter of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of Poland was held at the Archdiocesan Formation Centre in Gniezno, ul, Seminaryjna 2, Poland, from September 26th to the 27th, 2025. The motto of the chapter was: "You are beauty." The OFS National Fraternity of Poland has six thousand (6,000) members.

The city of Gniezno is Poland's first capital and also the nation's first diocese, which is why the church and the city are known as the mother (nest/Primate). The year 2025 marks two important anniversaries for the city and church of Gniezno:

- The 1000th anniversary of the coronation of the first King of Poland, held in this city; and
- The 1025th anniversary of the founding of the Diocese of Gniezno, as the first local church.

On the first day, (9/26/2025) at 10:00 a.m., a meeting was held between the Assistant General, Fr. Tomas Ginga Panzo SUVA, OFMCap., and the spiritual assistants present for the Chapter. Immediately after the meeting of the assistants, the opening Holy Mass was celebrated, presided over by Fr. Zdzislaw GOGOLA, OFMConv., national assistant and former provincial of the Province of the Friars Minor Conventual of Poland, concelebrated by thirteen spiritual assistants: three national and ten regional. The celebration of Holy Mass was held in the current parish church and Shrine of St. Jolanda, run by the Conventual Friars, formerly the convent church of the Poor Clares before the suppression of religious orders in Poland.

At 8:00 p.m. on the same day, a formation session was held with all the capitulars and spiritual assistants on the theme: "The Franciscan charism in daily life: levels of formation and the role of spiritual assistants," led by Fr. Tomas Ginga. The opportunity was taken to clarify and ask some questions arising from the theme and others outside the theme.

On the second day, September 27th, at 10:40 a.m., in the chapter hall, before the start of the election process, the Primate Archbishop of Poland, His Excellency Wojciech POLAH, came to greet the chapter assembly. He thanked the capitulars for choosing his archdiocese as the venue for this national OFS chapter and wished all the capitulars fruitful work, especially the two members of the CIOFS presidency, Dina Shabalina, OFS, and Fr. Tomas Ginga, who were visiting Gniezno for the first time.

The elective session was presided over by Dina SHABALINA, area councillor and delegate of the OFS Minister General, Tibor KAUSER, and assisted by Fr. Tomas Ginga Panzo SUVA, OFMCap. representing the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS). Emilia NOGAJ was elected national minister of the OFS Fraternity of Poland for the next three years, in her third term, and Slawomir KOWALSKI was elected international counsellor; Bernadetta PUCHALSKA was elected as substitute international counsellor. The Chapter and the elections were celebrated in an atmosphere of brotherhood and peace.

Mexico: OFS National Elective Chapter

The National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of Mexico has 10,528 members. 7,053 of them are active while 3,475 are inactive due to illness, advanced age, or other reasons. There are 1,250 canonically erected local fraternities. 485 of them are currently inactive. To ensure better organization, the National Fraternity is divided into twenty-five regional fraternities. The Franciscan Youth (YouFra) has 846 members, spread out among twelve regional fraternities.

On Friday, September 26, 2025, at 4:00 p.m., the OFS of Mexico conducted an elective Chapter at the Casa de Oración Valle de la Misericordia of the Friars Minor, located in Guadalajara, State of Jalisco, Mexico. The Chapter began with Mass presided over by the OFS National Spiritual Assistant, Fr. Fausto de Jesús RAMÍREZ ROSARIO, OFMConv. At 5:00 p.m., the reports from the outgoing National Council were presented. After dinner, the Capitulars resumed their work, which concluded at 11:00 p.m.

The second day of the Chapter began at 7:00 a.m. with Morning Prayer and Mass, presided over by the National Spiritual Assistant, Fr. Juan Pablo CABRERA RODRÍGUEZ, OFM. Work resumed at 9:00 a.m. with a speech by the OFS International Councillor (CIOFS), Ana María RAFFO LAOS, who informed the Capitulars of the findings and recommendations of the fraternal visit conducted by the OFS Minister General, Tibor KAUSER. The morning proceedings continued until 1:00 p.m. with group work and the presentation of proposed priorities for the next three years. In the same context, the representative of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS), Fr. Ștefan ACATRINEI, OFMConv., met with the National Spiritual Assistants of the Friars Minor, the Conventual Franciscans and the Capuchin Franciscans along with the five Regional Spiritual Assistants present.

At 3:00 p.m., Fr. Ștefan gave a lecture entitled, “The Role of the Spiritual Assistant.” It served as a prelude to the elective session, which began at 4:00 p.m. and was presided over by Ana María RAFFO LAOS, the Delegate of the OFS Minister General. The eighty-one Capitulars present with voting rights elected Clemente Eduardo IBÁÑEZ PRESTADO as the National Minister and International Councillor. The day concluded with a festive cultural event: a Noche Mexicana (Mexican Evening).

On Sunday morning, the priorities determined for the next three years were approved, and the new National Council was installed during Mass at noon, presided over by Fr. Ștefan. After lunch, Ana María and Friar Ștefan met with the members of the outgoing National Council and the members of the new National Council.

Ninety-four members attended the Chapter which was characterized by intensive work, prayer, and fraternity conducted in an atmosphere of peace and joy. At 3:00 p.m., the Chapter proceedings concluded.