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CONFERENCE OF SPIRITUAL  
ASSISTANTS GENERAL  
OFS – YOUFRA (CAS)

# KOINONIA

... together on the journey

**“ST. FRANCIS' EASTER:**

**An Event of Hope”**



**Fruitful and generative  
fraternal life:**

**“The Lord gave me  
brothers...”**

Fr. Stefan Acatrinei, OFMConv





As he was nearing the end of his life, proud to have made fruitful the gift he had received from the Lord, Francis bore witness to his existence as a brother. Franciscan brotherhood is a pure gift from God, and as such, the Poverello entrusts it to us in his Testament: “the Lord gave me brothers...”<sup>1</sup> Having proven ourselves to be his faithful companions and, in recent years, having joined him in large numbers, physically or virtually, in Rome for the approval of the Rule, in Greccio for Christmas, on La Verna for the impression of the Stigmata, and in San Damiano for the composition of the Canticle of the Creatures, here we are now on our way to the place he loved most: Porziuncola,

Santa Maria degli Angeli. The reason is not so much to bid him a final farewell, but above all to listen to his voice and reflect on his words in order to better understand the fruitfulness of his life and learn to live fully. Since we are “six months before the day of his death”,<sup>2</sup> let us take advantage of this blessed coincidence. “And so now is the time, starting today, to prepare ourselves for everything that it means to remember and celebrate this great, humble, poor Saint who offers so much to the Church. Even today, through your lives and witness, the Church and the world await and seek signs of hope: may we be those signs!”<sup>3</sup>

Thomas of Celano reminds us that Francis, “while in Siena for treatment for his eyes, began to fall seriously ill”<sup>4</sup>; his companions, fearing that his death was imminent, asked him: “Leave your brothers a memorial of your will”.<sup>5</sup> And he did so “in these three words: the friars may always love and respect each other; may they always love and observe our Lady Holy Poverty; may they always remain faithful and subject to the prelates and all the clerics of holy Mother Church”.<sup>6</sup> His is, in brief and very concise form, the secret that made his vocation fruitful, and he entrusts it to us, his brothers and sisters, as his last will and testament.

In that circumstance, it is obvious that Francis did not have time to philosophize or to develop a stylized discourse; rather, with a faint voice but a clear mind, he allowed every word to come from his heart and seek the hearts of his brothers. He had experienced everything; he had seen everything in his life. But it is also true that he was deeply touched and completely won over by love. Therefore, in that delicate situation, he offered a wonderful synthesis of the three loves that were essential to him, that transformed his life and made it fruitful: fraternity, poverty, and ecclesiality. The depth of thought and consistency of language in his dictation<sup>7</sup> are further

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1 Test 14: FF 116.

2 1C 105: FF 502.

3 “Il saluto di papa Leone XIV ai fratti del Sacro Convento”, Thursday, November 20, 2025, in *San Francesco Patrono d'Italia* 12 (2025) 9.

4 1C 105: FF 502.

5 AC 59: FF 1587; cfr 2MP 87: FF 1784.

6 AC 59: FF 1587; cfr 2MP 87: FF 1784.

7 Cfr. 1Test 1-5: FF 132-135.

confirmed in light of his other Writings. This is an essential triad for Franciscan life, indeed the only one capable of generating it and making it fruitful in any society and in any era.

### **1. *May they always love each other***<sup>8</sup>

The importance of mutual love among the friars takes on striking connotations in Francis: a love that has its origin and meaning in Jesus' Gospel mandate, but whose concrete model is the love of a mother for her child. In chapter 9 of the Earlier Rule, Francis uses this beautiful image to indicate to the friars the intensity and measure of mutual love; it is an image that no one could fail to understand because it is familiar to all and certainly experienced by all: "And let each one love and nourish his brother, as a mother loves and nourishes her own child (cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:7), in those things in which God will give him grace".<sup>9</sup>

Francis' warning becomes a requirement in chapter 6 of the Later Rule: "And let each one confidently reveal his needs to the other, for if a mother nourishes and loves her flesh-and-blood child (cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:7), how much more should one love and nourish his spiritual brother?"<sup>10</sup>

Francis' requests regarding the commandment of brotherly love are not limited to juridical texts, but recur in many of his other Writings, almost as if to outline their common thread. In his Letter to a Minister, Brother Francis exhorts — indeed implores — the friar minister to love and forgive without measure, following the example of Jesus who, in response to Peter's question about forgiving offenses, asks his disciples to forgive "seventy times seven times" (Mt 18:21-22), that is, with boundless love. The minister experiences situations of conflict and discomfort because of some of his brothers and wishes to escape from them by retreating to a hermitage. Francis, however, writes to him: "And love those who do these things to you. And expect nothing from them except what the Lord will give you..."<sup>11</sup>

Francis asks of the friars what he himself experiences firsthand, namely love for his brothers. Addressing them, he cannot fail to recall this essential dimension of his religious experience: "To all the friars, to whom I owe reverence and great love".<sup>12</sup> The friars are also asked to love freely and without reserve in two Admonitions whose theme is "true love": "Blessed is the servant who loves his brother as much when he is sick and cannot repay him as when he is well and can repay him"<sup>13</sup>, and "Blessed is the servant who loves and respects his brother as much when he is far away from him as when he is with him, and who would not say anything behind his back that he would not say with charity in his presence".<sup>14</sup>

From Francis' Writings, it appears that brotherly love is an obligation deriving from the evangelical choice. The tone changes, however, when Francis addresses all the faithful: "And let us love our neighbours as ourselves (cf. Mt 22:39). And if anyone does not want to love them as himself, let him at least not do them any harm, but let him do good".<sup>15</sup>

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8 1Test 3: FF 133.

9 ER IX 11: FF 32.

10 LR VI 8: FF 91.

11 LtMin 5-11: FF 234.

12 LtOrd 2: FF 215.

13 Adm XXIV: FF 174.

14 Adm XXV: FF 175.

15 2LtF 26-27: FF 190.



**2. May they always remain faithful and subject to the prelates and all the clerics of the holy Mother Church<sup>16</sup>**

Among the many significant aspects of St. Francis' life, poverty is undoubtedly the most widely recognized and universally acknowledged, to the extent that he is referred to as the Poverello (the poor

man). It is enough to mention this name and everyone knows that it refers to Francis of Assisi. It is important, however, to remember that his choice of poverty stems from his choice of the evangelical life. Francis follows in the footsteps of the Lord who lived poor and humble in this world. It is the Gospel that motivates and justifies his choice to live without anything of his own, as reiterated in his Rule.<sup>17</sup> For Francis, living poorly among the poor was a theological choice, motivated precisely by his choice of Christ who, though the Son of God, stripped himself and humbled himself, becoming like men (cf. Phil 2:5-11), and, though rich, made himself poor so that those who believe in him might become rich through his poverty (cf. 2 Cor 8:9). This idea becomes very clear in one of his letters, namely the one to Brother Leo: "In whatever way it seems better to you to please the Lord God and to follow His footprints and poverty, do it with the blessing of the Lord God and my obedience".<sup>18</sup>

Since following in the footsteps of the Lord and living in poverty are the only goals to be achieved, it becomes clear that Franciscan life is not an ideology or an abstract doctrine, but springs from the life of Jesus and his holy Gospel. Francis understood that fraternal life had to be a following of Christ crucified, founded on self-renunciation: "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mt 16:24).<sup>19</sup> Jesus "descended, touched the depths of our being and sank into its immeasurable abyss. Because he let himself go, abandoning himself into the hands of his Father, he experienced entering into the infinite mystery of this eternal love as sinking anonymously into the darkness of death, into the true state of death".<sup>20</sup>

Self-denial became for Francis the most authentic experience of crucifixion and evangelization in following Christ. In Francis' life, this self-denial began and was expressed first of all in his encounter with lepers — those whose presence aroused disgust and horror, whom society marginalized and excluded. Francis initially recoiled at the sight of the leper's rotting body<sup>21</sup>, but the time has come to show Christ the decisive proof of his willingness to know his will: "And the Lord himself led me among them, and I showed them mercy. And as I departed from them, what had seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of soul and body".<sup>22</sup>

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16 1Test 4: FF 134.

17 Cfr. ER I 1, LR I 1: FF 1. 75.

18 LtL 3: FF 250.

19 K. RAHNER, "Discesa di Cristo nel regno dei morti", in ID., *Nuovi Saggi II*, Paoline, Roma 1968, 187.

20 K. RAHNER, "Discesa di Cristo nel regno dei morti", in ID., *Nuovi Saggi II*, Paoline, Roma 1968, 187.

21 Cf. 1C 17: FF 348; 2C 9: FF 592; L3C 11: FF 1407.

22 Test 2-3: FF 110.

Francis attributes the initiative for this self-denial directly to God. It led him to a profound change, thanks to which everything that seemed bitter to him was transformed into sweetness of soul and body. Renouncing himself is the first step that God asks of Francis, so that His will may be manifested in him: “prefer bitter things to sweet things and despise yourself if you want to know me”.<sup>23</sup> Knowing and serving Christ means welcoming and serving the leper, the marginalised person in whom Christ reveals himself to Francis. By realising this self-denial, St. Francis manages to live a true life of penance, which brings with it the transformation of what was “bitter” into “sweet”.

St. Francis sees a form of self-denial (which is a form of poverty) in loving those who persecute and slander us. Accepting every persecution with its possible consequences, responding to hatred with love and mercy, doing good, becomes for St. Francis the most concrete sign of self-denial and therefore of poverty. A Franciscan cannot help but rejoice when he is despised, persecuted and subjected to any form of torment; that is, when he is associated with the passion of Christ, where the cross is everything that turns out to be different from what had been thought and planned, receiving in exchange for honors, misunderstandings and persecutions for the work accomplished. “Jesus experienced what is not fitting for God, facing and experiencing human death and his condition as a dead man as a condition of rupture, darkness, threat and lack of relationship”.<sup>24</sup> The demands that Jesus made of those who wished to follow him were taken up by Francis, who re-proposed them to all those who wished to follow the Gospel way of life that Christ had revealed to him. For St. Francis, Christ's annihilation became the path that made it possible for man to encounter the fullness of his life.

### **3. Let them always be faithful and submissive to the prelates and to all the clerics of the Holy Mother Church<sup>25</sup>**

Francis indissolubly combines mutual love and love for poverty with fidelity and submission to the prelates and all the clerics of Holy Mother Church. This seems to be the guarantee and condition for living fraternal communion and poverty in a Catholic way. Francis' attitude of submission to clerics has its theological foundation in the words Jesus addresses to his disciples: “He who hears you hears me, he who despises you despises me. And whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me” (Lk 10:16). This is strongly reiterated by Francis in his *Testament*, so that his faith and submission to the clergy would never fail in his heirs.<sup>26</sup>

What could be the reason for such an attitude? Without a doubt, only the Eucharist. Yes, the Eucharist is the central reason for Francis' loyalty and submission to prelates and clerics: “For just as their ministry is greater in its concerns for the most holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which they receive and they alone administer to others”.<sup>27</sup> St. Francis sees in the Eucharist the Jesus who one day descended into the womb of the Virgin to show us the Father's mercy; now, in a certain sense, he repeats the same event every day through the hands of the priest. In this way, Christ humbly remains ever present among his faithful “until the end of the world”, and St. Francis cannot remain silent in front of this immense love. He certainly has before his eyes the daily celebration of the Eucharist, which, for his soul, is as important as daily bread for his body.

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23 2C 9: FF 591.

24 G. COLZANI, *La vita eterna. Inferno, purgatorio, paradiso*, Mondadori, Milano 2001, 116.

25 1Test 5: FF 135.

26 Cfr. *Test* 6-10: FF 112-113.

27 *Adm* XXVI 3: FF 176.

Furthermore, Francis' reverent attitude towards clerics is required not only of friars, but also of lay people:” We must also frequently visit churches and venerate and revere the clergy not so much for themselves, if they are sinners, but because of their office and administration of the most holy Body and Blood of Christ which they sacrifice upon the altar, receive and administer to others. And let all of us know for certain that no one can be saved except through the holy words and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ which the clergy pronounce, proclaim and minister. And they alone must minister and not others”.<sup>28</sup>

“All this is reflected today in the determination to fully embrace the doctrine and teaching of the Church. This becomes an essential requirement of vocational promotion, since the acceptance of new candidates for Franciscan life is conditional upon their being Catholic:” If there are any who wish to accept this life and come to our brothers, let them send them to their provincial ministers, to whom alone and not to others is permission granted to receive the brothers. Let the ministers examine them carefully concerning the Catholic faith and the sacraments of the Church. If they believe all these things, will faithfully profess them, and steadfastly observe them to the end [...].”<sup>29</sup>

If submission to the Roman Church is a necessary condition and guarantee of fidelity to the Franciscan vocation, being Catholic becomes an essential condition for being such:” Let all the brothers be, live, and speak as Catholics. If someone has strayed in word or in deed from Catholic faith and life and has not amended his ways, let him be expelled from our brotherhood. Let us consider all clerics and religious as our masters in all that pertains to the salvation of our soul and does not deviate from our religion, and let us respect their order, office, and administration in the Lord”.<sup>30</sup>

Being in the Church and walking with the Church is the dominant factor in Francis of Assisi's Christian proposal, giving coherence and unity to the contents of his *Writings*. Francis himself reiterates this in his Testament: “that we might observe the Rule we have promised in a more Catholic way”.<sup>31</sup>

“At the end of his life, Francis summarises the gift of gifts he received from the Father: his brothers. His brothers are now seen, with this final and comprehensive gaze, as in a sort of large concentric circle that includes the brother par excellence, Christ (whose Eucharistic body is given by the mystical body that is the Church), the distant brother (the last, the poor, the leper) and the close brother (the brotherhood, the fraternity). A luminous vision in which the relationship with Christ the brother is inscribed in the journey towards the Father in the Spirit<sup>32</sup>, and opens up to brothers near and far. For Francis, Christ is in the Church and is encountered “together” with poor brothers and near brothers; for Francis, fraternity is within the relationship with Christ and with the poor; finally, the poor are within the relationship with Christ/Church and fraternity.<sup>33</sup>

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28 2LtF 33-35: FF 193-194.

29 LR II 1-3: FF 77.

30 ER XIX 1-4: FF 51-52.

31 Test 34: FF 127.

32 Cfr. Adm I: FF 141-145.

33 GIOVANNI SALONIA, “I Testamenti di Francesco d’Assisi. Una originale trasmissione di carisma”, in *Italia Franciscana, La tradizione: una sorgente di vita*, 2008-1, p 50.

## Conclusion

I believe that, after listening to the voice of the Seraphic Father and reflecting on his words, we are better able to understand what made his life fruitful and his brotherhood so effective. Although his voice was weak, his message was unmistakable. The cause of his fruitfulness was clear: his three loves — love for the brother, for poverty, and for the Church.

Now we must ask ourselves: do we wish to continue our journey to Santa Maria degli Angeli, or would we prefer to turn back? Are we ready to stand firm in the face of challenges and remain faithful to our promises? To continue on this path means committing ourselves ever more deeply to his vision, so that the whole world may become one fraternity that cares for its “common home”. It is true that “man has always been caught between his greatness and his misery”<sup>34</sup>, but our Seraphic Father showed that misery can be transformed by embracing fraternity, poverty, and the Church. The Pope is close to us and encourages us, knowing well that “even today, through your lives and witness, the Church and the world await and seek signs of hope: may we be those signs!”<sup>35</sup>.

Peace and good!

## Meetings, Visits and Chapters



### 1. Mozambique: Fraternal and Pastoral Visit (VFP)

On January 11, 2025, the Franciscan Family celebrated the opening of the 8th Centenary of the Canticle of the Creatures, one of the most emblematic works of St. Francis of Assisi. This event marked the beginning of a year dedicated to honoring the spiritual, literary and ecological legacy of the saint of Assisi. The inaugural ceremony took place at two key sites in the life of St. Francis: the Sanctuary of San Damiano, where he composed much of the Canticle of the Creatures, and the Shrine of the Nudity. The event began at 10:00 a.m. (CET) and could be followed live via YouTube.

The celebration was attended by the General Ministers of the Franciscan Family, the president of the Conference of Franciscan Sisters, and Bishop Domenico Sorrentino of the Diocese of Assisi. Planned activities included the reading of the Assisi Compilation on the creation of the Canticle, a short liturgy of the Word and reflections by the Ministers General.

At the end of the celebration, representatives of the Conference of the Franciscan Family went to pay homage to the Saint's mortal remains in the Crypt of the Basilica of St. Francis.

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34 B. PASCAL, *Pensieri*, Rusconi, Milano 2014, n. 506.

35 “Il saluto di papa Leone XIV ai fratti del Sacro Convento”, Thursday, November 20, 2025, in *San Francesco Patrono d'Italia* 12 (2025) 9.

## **2. Mozambique: National Elective Chapter**

On 10 and 11 January 2026, in the Province of Manica, in the city of Chimoio, in the Hall of the Fraternity of the Friars Minor (OFM) “St Anthony of Lisbon of Chimoio,” the headquarters of the local Fraternity of Chimoio, the 4th National Elective Chapter of the Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order of Mozambique “St Margaret of Cortona” was held, attended by around 35 capitulars representing the four regions that make up the National Fraternity.

The election was presided over by the Area Councillor Eremenciana Chinyama, acting as delegate of the OFS General Minister, Tibor Kauser, assisted by Fr. Tomas Ginga Panzo Suva, OFM<sup>Cap.</sup>, representing the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants.

The election resulted in the appointment of the National Minister and Councillors. Sister Maria Catarina ALBINO (National Minister) and Brother Erastro Mortal AMBOSTIQUE (National Vice-Minister) were elected.

With regard to the role of International Councillor, the provisions of the Mozambican National Statute were taken into account, according to which “the elected Minister or National Representative automatically becomes the International Councillor, whilst the Vice-Minister becomes the substitute of the International Councillor.”

The Chapter was held in an atmosphere of celebration and Franciscan gratitude, since the Custody of the Friars Minor of Mozambique was elevated to the status of a Province last August (2025). Being a religious Province is not merely a matter of achieving a certain degree of autonomy at various levels but is above all a recognition of the growth and maturity attained; hence the joy also felt by the Secular Franciscans at this important recognition of the Circumscription of the Order of Friars Minor.

The Chapter concluded on Sunday, 11 January, the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, with a solemn Eucharistic celebration presided over by Fr. Tomas Ginga P. Suva and concelebrated by the spiritual assistants present in the Friary chapel in Chimoio.

## **3. Italy: 26th National Congress of OFS-YouFra Spiritual Assistants in Italy**

The Italian Conference of National Spiritual Assistants of the Secular Franciscan Order and YouFra held its 26th National Congress from 12 to 15 January 2026 at the Domus Pacis in Assisi. This annual national congress aims to strengthen the bonds between the spiritual assistants of the First Order and the TOR by updating their knowledge, sharing experiences, discussing issues, exchanging ideas, and proposing new ways to improve their service.

The congress was enriched by the presence of several speakers who shared their experiences, knowledge, and reflections on various issues concerning the life of the OFS and YouFra, as well as on how to provide meaningful spiritual guidance to the OFS and YouFra. The Conference of General Spiritual Assistants was represented by Fr. Stefan Acatrinei, OFM<sup>Conv.</sup>, and Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM. Their presence was simple yet very significant, as it is always beneficial to come together and emphasise the need to work together as a conference of Spiritual Assistants at all levels, and to strengthen a healthy relationship and collaboration in our service to the OFS and YouFra.

The theme of this year’s conference was “First with life, then with words,” presented by Sara Mentzel. The following day, all the friars went to the Basilica of St Francis for the celebration of Holy Mass at the tomb of St Francis, followed by a brief presentation by Fr. Marco Moroni, guardian and custos of Sacro Convento, and a talk by Fr. Enzo Biemmi on “A new evangelisation of the OFS and YouFra.” Finally, to conclude the day, the Provincial of the Friars Minor, Fr. Francesco Piloni, offered a reflection on “the challenge of a ‘new’ form of assistance.”

Following this, Luca Castiglioni and Brother Marcello Fadda shared some reflections with the participants on the theme “Daring to Hope: the OFS Formation Plan 2025–2028.” It was a week packed with interesting and highly stimulating topics, such as the one presented by Enrico Diamanti and Enrica Sarrecchia on “Being with young people: what does the Franciscan approach look like today?” Finally, Luca Piras and Eleonora Grecu presented the final topic on “Fraternity and hope for a new Franciscan family,” which highlighted certain aspects within the Franciscan family that can help the First Order, the TOR, and the OFS to live out their charism with joy and gratitude. The Conference of General Spiritual Assistants would like to thank the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants of Italy for the dedication shown in organising this annual congress, which helps spiritual assistants to understand the importance of sharing gifts within the Franciscan family and the need to constantly reassess their role as spiritual assistants.

#### **4. Rwanda: National Elective Chapter**

The National Elective Chapter of OFS Rwanda was celebrated from 29 January to 1 February 2026 in the parish hall of Santa Maria degli Angeli in Kivumu, Diocese of Kabgayi. The National Elective Chapter of the aforementioned emerging Fraternity began at 2:30 pm with a welcome address by the National Minister-elect, HAFASHIMANA Valens, OFS, to all the capitulars. A special greeting was addressed to the members of the CIOFS, Eremenciana Chinyama and Fr. Tomas Ginga Panzo Suva, OFMCap.

This was followed by the presentation and vote on the agenda and timetable for the Chapter, and the introduction of the capitulars present, the representatives of the CIOFS, and the national spiritual assistant.

Twenty-three members took part in the Chapter, including 20 with voting rights and three young people from YouFra, who attended as guests and on behalf of the National Committee.

The Chapter began with a spiritual meditation led by Fr. Kizito, OFM, the national spiritual assistant, focusing on the theme: “Love of God and love of neighbour,” based on the Gospel passages from Matthew 22:36, Mark 12:31, and John 13:35. It emphasised the priority of love for God over all the Law and the Prophets.

This reflection sought to explore and contextualise the meaning of this love in the light of fraternal life as Secular Franciscans in a country such as Rwanda, a nation characterised by and in need of reconciliation, peace, and sincere forgiveness among its sons and daughters, highlighting the responsibility of the OFS in promoting this love.

The election was presided over by the delegate of the Minister General of the OFS, Tibor Kauser, Ange Gabriele, OFS, International Councillor and National Minister of the Fraternity of Chad, assisted by Fr. Tomas Ginga Panzo Suva, OFMCap., representing the General CAS.

The election resulted in the following brothers being elected as National Minister and Vice-Minister: HAFASHIMANA Valens, National Minister and International Councillor; KAYONGA Eduard, Vice-Minister and Deputy International Councillor.

The election proceedings concluded at 12:01 pm with words of thanks from the election chair and the general spiritual assistant, followed by the celebration of Holy Mass. The Chapter ended with a pilgrimage to the Marian shrine of KIBEHO, where the elected minister and the council consecrated the National Fraternity of Rwanda to Our Lady of Kibeho.

## **5. Lebanon: Fraternal and Pastoral Visit (VFP)**

The National Fraternity of Secular Franciscans in Lebanon has finally had the opportunity to carry out its fraternal and pastoral visit, which had been postponed three times since the last visit in 2013 due to various political unrests in the country.

On Sunday, 25 January 2026, the Minister General, Tibor Kauser, OFS, and Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM, a representative of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants, arrived in Beirut, where they were welcomed by the National Minister, Gina Chedid, OFS, and the former Presidential Councillor, Michel Janian, OFS, who hosted the visitors at his home and accompanied them to various meetings.

On arrival, the visitors met Sister Marie Makhlouf, Mother Superior of the Sisters of the Cross (a Franciscan order founded by Blessed Father James, a Capuchin friar). The following day, they met with various local fraternities: St Joseph's in Batroun, St Aquilina's in Jbeil, St Elicha's in Amchit, St Rita's in Erdeh, and the YouFra group in Batroun.

The visit continued the following day with a meeting with the fraternities of Beirut: St Georges Dekweneh, St Nohrafurn el Chebbek, Our Lady of Salvation Ain el Rimmeneh, Our Lady Sin el Fil, St Doumit Nabaa, St Maroundaoura, St Joseph Hadith, Our Lady of the Angels Badaro, St Gemmayze, and St Simonsabtieh. They then travelled to another remote region where there is only one fraternity, that of St Francis in Zahle.

They then met with the fraternities of St Francis of Ghazir, Our Lady of the Rosary in Ehmez, Jesus the King in Zoukmosbeh, Our Lady of the Rosary in Hrajel, Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Zouk Mikael, St Anthony in Hariss, St Challita in Faraya, and St Anthony of Padua.

The following day, the visitors met with the fraternities of Saint Joseph Mtayleb, Saint Michael Beit el Chaar, the Ascension in Dbayeh, Padre Pio Jal el Dib, Ste Takla Jal el Dib, Saints Peter and Paul Cornet Chehwen, and YouFra from three fraternities in Baadbat: Padre Pio and Valpere Jacques.

During the pastoral visit, we met with the spiritual assistants, Fr. Josif Florin Petrila, OFMConv., Fr. Antoine Freiha, OFMCap., and Fr. Najib Ibrahim, OFM, followed by His Excellency the Most Reverend Cesar Esseyan, OFMConv., Bishop of the Latin Rite, and finally by the Maronite Patriarch, His Eminence Cardinal Bechara EL RAI, at the episcopal residence in Bkerke. It was a long week of intense visits and listening to each member of the OFS and YouFra regarding their life and mission within a specific fraternity, in the parish, and in society at large.

Although Christians are a minority in Lebanon, OFS fraternities can be found in almost every corner of the country, even in places where the First Order has no presence. All the fraternities are very active and are based in the parishes of all the Christian rites present in Lebanon.

It is encouraging to know that the National Council has a formation team consisting of two OFS members and a spiritual assistant. This formation team has worked tirelessly to improve formation, despite the financial and procedural challenges they have faced.

The National Council has worked hard to revise the national statutes and improve certain procedures relating to the constitution of the National Council. The Conference of Spiritual Assistants, consisting of Fr. Najib Ibrahim, OFM, Fr. Josif Florin Petrila, OFMConv., and Fr. Antoine Freiha, OFMCap., has been actively involved and cooperative in the fraternal, spiritual, and formative life of the Council over the past three years.

The Minister General, Tibor Kauser, OFS, gave the members of the National Council the opportunity to introduce themselves and then discussed a number of issues they had raised, offering recommendations to support the National Council in its spiritual, fraternal, and formative growth.

The General Spiritual Assistant, Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM, held a meeting with the national spiritual assistants and the Major Superior of the Capuchins, Fr. Elias Rahme, OFM Cap. The meeting was fruitful and very fraternal, helping them to understand the importance of following specific criteria on how to conduct the establishment and canonical appointment of the spiritual assistant in each local fraternity, as well as the need to work on cooperation in assistance, despite the specific canonical obligations regarding the number of fraternities, large or small, for which they are responsible.

The fraternal and pastoral visit finally concluded with a meeting with the members of the National Council, to whom the visitors expressed their gratitude for their hard work and fraternal service to the Order in Lebanon.

### **6. Lebanon: National Elective Chapter**

The Lebanese National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order held its Elective Chapter on Saturday, 31 January 2026, at the Padre Pio headquarters of the National Council in Jal El Dib, Beirut. A total of 62 capitulars, together with observers and the three National Spiritual Assistants—Fr. Josif Florin Petrila, OFM Conv., Fr. Antoine Freiha, OFM Cap., and Fr. Najib Ibrahim, OFM—gathered in the chapel for the opening prayers of the Chapter. After the prayers, the participants proceeded to the chapter hall.

The session continued with the presentation of reports by the National Minister, the National Spiritual Assistant, and the National Treasurer, as well as messages from Tibor Kauser, OFS, Minister General, and Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM, representative of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants. Following the presentations, the capitulars voted unanimously in favour of all the reports.

The Chapter then moved on to the election session, during which the nominations were presented. The elections proceeded smoothly and peacefully, resulting in the re-election of Gina Chedid, OFS, as National Minister of Lebanon, and of Juliana Kolanjian as International Councillor.

Following the elections, all the capitulars gathered in the chapel for the closing Mass and the installation of the newly elected National Council. After Mass, the Minister General and the General Spiritual Assistant met with the new Council to outline the key priorities for the coming term. The day concluded with a celebratory dinner.

### **7. Uruguay: National Elective Chapter**

On 7–8 February 2026, the 11th Elective Chapter of the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of Uruguay was conducted at the Fazenda de la Esperanza Monte Carmelo [Farm of Hope, Mount Carmel], a former monastery for cloistered Carmelite Sisters located in the Punta de Rieles neighbourhood of Montevideo, Uruguay.

This former monastery is now one of three rehabilitation centres for drug addiction and other addictions, founded by Fr. Hans STAPEL, OFM, in Uruguay. The facility currently houses twenty-two young people who suffer from various forms of addiction. Their treatment is based on work, community life, and spirituality. There are no psychologists or other professionals involved. The patients are guided solely by three coordinators who are themselves former addicts from the same centre.

Two representatives of the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order (CIOFS), namely Silvia Noemí DIANA, the Delegate of the OFS Minister General Tibor KAUSER, and Fr. Ștefan

ACATRINEI, OFMConv., met with the OFS National Council of Uruguay on Friday, 6 February 2026, at the aforementioned centre.

The Chapter opened on Saturday, 7 February, at 9:00 a.m., with greetings from Matilde BELTRAME, the OFS National Minister. The morning was dedicated to hearing reports and, after discussion, approving them. At 2:30 p.m., two formative lectures were given, the first by Silvia N. DIANA and the second by Fr. Ștefan ACATRINEI. At 5:00 p.m., the elective session began. The fourteen capitulars with voting rights elected Beatriz BARDIER as National Minister and International Councillor.

The first day's work concluded at 7:00 p.m. with Mass presided over by the National Spiritual Assistant, Fr. Juan Manuel FERNÁNDEZ, OFMConv. After dinner, the capitulars enjoyed a fraternal evening together with around twenty-five young people from the rehabilitation centre.

On Sunday morning, 8 February, the capitulars established the priorities for the next three years. At 11:00 a.m., the new Council was installed during Mass presided over by Fr. Ștefan ACATRINEI and animated by the young people of the centre. At the end of the Mass, Fr. Manuel thanked the young people for their service to the OFS during the Chapter. Then, one of the young people from the centre thanked the capitulars for choosing their residence—an eminently Franciscan place—to celebrate the National Chapter.

The National OFS Fraternity of Uruguay has only fifty-three members and six local fraternities. Although it is one of the smaller national fraternities, it has had notable members, among whom I mention Mario CAYOTA, twice Ambassador of Uruguay to the Holy See (2006–2011 and 2018–2020).

The capitulars, after spending two intensive days together and enjoying every moment, departed around 2:30 p.m. and returned to their families.

## **8. South Africa: National Elective Chapter**

The Secular Franciscan Order of the National Fraternity of South Africa gathered at the La Verna Retreat Centre of the Order of Friars Minor, on the banks of the Vaal River in Vanderbijlpark, for its national elective chapter from 26 February to 1 March 2026. The 20 members of the OFS and the four spiritual assistants—two national spiritual assistants, Fr. Dominic Griego, OFMCap., and Fr. Delani Chiliza, TOR; two local spiritual assistants, Fr. Finbar Flanagan, OFM, and Fr. Clement Kholopa, OFM—were joined by a delegation from the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order (CIOFS), represented by Mary Stronach, Vice-Minister General of the OFS; Eremenciana Chinyama, OFS, Area Councillor for English- and Portuguese-speaking Africa; and the representative of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants, Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM.

The Provincial Minister of the Friars Minor, Fr. Ndumiso Khumalo, OFM, officially opened the National Chapter with a prayer, and the outgoing National Minister welcomed the visitors from CIOFS. On Thursday, 26 February, the spiritual assistants held their formation workshop on the theme “Spiritual Assistance and Interdependence of the OFS.” The capitulars arrived at the chapter venue on 27 February, and on Saturday, 28 February, they were joined by a number of observers from the Gauteng region.

The first day of the chapter was dedicated to reports from the National Minister, the Treasurer, the Formator, and the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants. This was followed by a formation session led by Mary and Eremenciana on the theme “Responsibilities and Roles of Office-Bearers and Each Office.” On Saturday, the day began with the Liturgy of the Hours and adoration of the

Blessed Sacrament, and after breakfast, another formation session was led by the General Spiritual Assistant on the theme “Spiritual Assistants and Their Role in the Fraternities.”

This was followed by another training session led by Mary and Eremenciana, who spoke on the “Identity of the OFS – Who Are We? The Need for Proper Formation.” This was followed by a presentation of the international and national statutes, with the aim of raising awareness among all OFS members of the various issues to be taken into account when drafting a national statute for approval. After a busy morning, the election session began with the theme: “I have done what I was supposed to do; Christ will teach you what you are supposed to do.” Prior to the election session, the members of the OFS had unanimously approved the reports of the National Minister, the Treasurer, the Formator, the Spiritual Assistants, and the annual budget for 2026.

The capitulars finally had the great joy of electing a new Council after many years during which this had not been possible, as for some years the CIOFS had appointed the Council due to the lack of a quorum. Thabang SENYAKOE, OFS, was elected as National Minister, and Maetsane MOTHIBE, OFS, as International Councillor for the next three years; then, the other members of the National Council of South Africa were elected.

Immediately following the celebration of Holy Mass for the installation of the new Council, the outgoing and incoming Councils met to draw up a number of priorities aimed at ensuring that the Rule and Constitutions of the OFS are both spiritual and effective, with a view to enhancing the spiritual and pastoral maturity of OFS members and spiritual assistants in South Africa. Despite the long and demanding election session, the Chapter concluded successfully and joyfully with the celebration of Holy Mass presided over by the Provincial Minister, Fr. Ndumiso Khumalo, OFM, during which all those present witnessed the installation of the new National Council of the Secular Franciscan Order in South Africa.

#### **9. Türkiye: Meeting of the CAS-CIOFS with the Bishop of Izmir**

The 800th anniversary of the death of St. Francis offers countless opportunities for spiritual renewal. It also invites the entire Franciscan family to make the Franciscan charism more visible and tangible in today’s world. In other words, it tells us not to delay in “doing what is ours.”

The Most Reverend Martin KMETEC, OFMConv., Archbishop of Izmir (Smirne), Turkey, did not miss such an opportunity. After more than two years of work, dialogue, and planning, he succeeded in hosting a meeting aimed at reviving the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) in his archdiocese and, implicitly, in Turkey. On Wednesday, 4 March 2026, he hosted a meeting at the archbishop’s residence in Izmir. The meeting started at 10:00 a.m. with Midday Prayer. In his opening remarks, the Archbishop emphasized that, although the life of the Roman Rite Catholic Church in Turkey is largely due to the Franciscans, little has been done to involve the laity in our charism. We are called to practice synodality—which is communion, participation, and mission—and to present Christ, in a simple way, as the path to follow.

Next, Noemi Paola RICCARDI, a councillor of the Presidency of the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order (CIOFS), spoke about the process of establishing the OFS in a country. The OFS General Spiritual Assistants, Fr. Ștefan ACATRINEI, OFMConv., and Fr. Pedro ZITHA, OFM, then spoke about the role of an OFS Spiritual Assistant. After the presentations, there was a question-and-answer period conducted in an atmosphere of dialogue and discussion. The questions and answers helped the participants understand the reality experienced in each local Church and highlighted the need to take concrete steps during this jubilee year to revive the OFS, which was present in Turkey until the 1960s. Indeed, the last recorded profession in the OFS

fraternity at the Parish Church of St. Anthony of Padua, in Istanbul, dates back to 19 November 1954.

It is true that the local Church in Turkey is humble and poor, and has “a simple heart,” and these are all Franciscan values, too. It is well known that God often takes pleasure in building and laying the foundations of a “building” on rubble, rather than on well-prepared ground. His most beautiful “masterpieces” have been erected precisely on rubble. Paul did not give up his human ambitions until he found himself with his face in the dust on the road to Damascus. Through such experiences, he came to realize: “When I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor 12:10). The same happened to St. Francis, the son of Pietro Bernardone. Having failed to achieve his human ideals and ambitions, God gave him the mandate: “Go and repair my house...” (2Celano 10: FF 593).

Today, little more than “ruins” remain of the former OFS in Turkey. Nevertheless, its traces are still visible. The OFS can certainly be resurrected if the friars take seriously Francis’ final words: “I have done what is mine; may Christ teach you what is yours!” (LMj XIV 3: FF 1239).

Ten friars of the Franciscan First Order attended the meeting. Seven were from Izmir and three from Istanbul. The meeting concluded at 12:30 p.m. when it was decided that Archbishop KMETEC will send a letter to the three Franciscan Major Superiors of that jurisdiction and ask them to appoint several friars to carry out the task of promoting the OFS in Turkey, because “Francis is alive” and can significantly help the Church and society of Turkey.

All those attending the conference greatly appreciated the Archbishop’s initiative and were very satisfied with the meeting.

#### **10. South Korea: Fraternal and Pastoral Visit**

From 9 to 17 March 2026, a fraternal and pastoral visit took place to the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) in South Korea, in a context marked by the difficulties that arose following the 2024 National Elective Chapter.

The fraternal visit was carried out by the Minister General of the OFS, Tibor Kauser, while the pastoral visit was carried out by Fr. Tomas Ginga Panzo Suva, OFMCap., representing the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS).

##### **General Situation**

The OFS National Fraternity of South Korea is going through a particularly difficult period, mainly due to a lack of understanding and cooperation within the National Council, which led the National Minister and Vice-Minister elected in 2024 to resign after just a few months in office.

These resignations have led to a situation of instability within the National Council and have had repercussions on the entire Fraternity, giving rise to tensions and misunderstandings between the current National Council, some of the brothers and sisters who have resigned, and members of various Regional Councils. This has resulted in a climate of mutual distrust, which complicates the path of fraternal communion and the implementation of a shared vision for life and mission. Furthermore, the vast majority of regional ministers are calling for the immediate dismissal of the current National Council and the convening of an elective National Chapter.

This situation affects the sense of belonging and family, a fundamental element of the OFS’s identity, as expressed in the Rule of the OFS, no. 2, which defines the Secular Franciscan Order as an organic union of fraternities called to live the Gospel in the manner of Saint Francis of Assisi. This results in a prejudice against the very nature of the Secular Franciscan vocation, founded on fraternal communion and evangelical witness.

### **Pastoral Dimension and Spiritual Assistance**

The situation has been further exacerbated by the resignation of the national spiritual assistants of the First Franciscan Order (OFM and OFM<sup>Cap.</sup>), prompted by internal difficulties within the national OFS fraternity. The Visitators have issued an urgent appeal to the Major Superiors to ensure that the Secular Franciscans are not left without spiritual guidance, and have called for a quick resolution to the crisis. The Major Superiors have shown themselves willing to take action and, in the meantime, will proceed to appoint the respective National Assistants (OFM and OFM<sup>Cap.</sup>) once the situation has been clarified.

The only national spiritual assistant remaining today is Brother Francis Yoon Ji-hjung, OFM<sup>Conv.</sup>. Listening and discernment reveal that the conflict is primarily relational and personal in nature, linked to differences in personality and sensitivity. These difficulties prevent progress beyond individual positions in favour of the common vocation, which calls the brothers and sisters of the OFS to live the Gospel in fraternal communion (cf. General Constitutions of the OFS, art. 3.3) and on a continuous journey of conversion and formation (cf. Rule of the OFS, n. 7).

### **Meetings and Listening**

During the visit, the visitors met and spoke with most of the people involved in the matter, either individually or in groups, with the exception of those who were unavailable at the time.

Meetings were also held with:

- Regional ministers (12)
- The Regional Councils of Jeju and Daegu
- The National Spiritual Assistant (Fr. Francis Yoon Ji-hjung, OFM<sup>Conv.</sup>)
- Augustine Yoon – former Zone Councillor and member of the CIOFS Presidency
- Members of the National YouFra
- The two former National Ministers of the OFS
- The Major Superiors of the OFM, OFM<sup>Conv.</sup>, and OFM<sup>Cap.</sup> (Fr. Moses Kim, Fr. Baek Seung-jae, and Fr. Stefano Kim)
- The Poor Clares of the Jeju Monastery
- The Auxiliary Bishop of Seoul, Vicar for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Bishop Paul Lee Kyung-sang
- Bishop Job Guyobi, Auxiliary Bishop of Seoul and head of the organizing committee for World Youth Day 2027, to be held in South Korea

Discussions with this bishop focused in particular on YouFra's participation in World Youth Day and the forthcoming International YouFra Meeting, scheduled to take place in Seoul the week before the World Youth Day event. For the preparations for this event, in which the OFS will take part, the contact person between the Organizing Committee and the OFS will be the current National Minister, Theresa An.

### **Temporary Conclusion of the Visit**

The Visitation came to a provisional conclusion on 17 March 2026 with a meeting between the National Council responsible for the Visitation and the Minister General of the OFS, during which impressions and initial assessments were shared following the eight-day Visitation.

The Visit, however, remains underway, as its final conclusion will be determined following the presentation of the situation to the CIOFS Presidency, which will meet in April 2026. On that

occasion, the situation of the OFS National Fraternity of South Korea will also be examined, awaiting appropriate guidance and decisions.

#### **11. Chile: Fraternal and Pastoral Visit**

From 11 to 15 March 2026, at the Fraternity of San Francisco de la Alameda, within the Provincial Curia of the OFM Province of the Holy Trinity, a fraternal and pastoral visit took place to the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order in Chile. The regional ministers of the OFS and the members of the National Council met with delegates from the International Council of the OFS (CIOFS), namely the Councillor of the International Presidency, Silvia Diana, OFS, and Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM, representative of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants.

The National Fraternity of Chile has 38 fraternities, of which 32 have been canonically erected by the OFM, eight of which receive spiritual assistance from the Franciscan Sisters; two have been canonically erected by the OFM Conventuals, and four have been canonically erected by the OFM Capuchins.

The last Pastoral and Fraternal visit was conducted in 2016, and due to many inconceivable and unpredictable factors, the visitation was postponed several times. Finally, this year, the Presidency of CIOFS and the National Council were able to realize the long-standing visit.

This visitation began with a meeting with the Presidency of the Franciscan Family, the Provincial of Friars Minor, Fr. Lino Mirandas Castañeira, OFM, who reported on different issues regarding how to live together the Franciscan charism, joining hands in building communal projects, such as inter-obediential initiatives of the Franciscan Family, and together finding ways to help the growth of Franciscan Youth. Following this, there was a meeting with the Conference of the Major Superiors, including Fr. Lino Mirandas Castañeira, OFM, Fr. Fabrizio Restante, OFMConv., delegate of the Italian province of OFM Conventuals in Chile, and Felipe Careno, OFMCap., who was representing the delegate of the OFM Capuchins in Chile, Fr. Maycon Ferrazolli, OFMCap.

During this meeting, both the visitors and the Major Superiors had the joy of sharing ideas and proposals for the betterment of the service of spiritual assistance, and at the same time, looked for ways to strengthen the bond within the Franciscan Family.

The visitation continued with the meeting of the Regional Council and the National Council of the YouFra, with the aim of having an open personal dialogue. Then followed the meeting with the Conference of the National Spiritual Assistants, Fr. Nicolas Alfaro, OFM, and Fr. Héctor Valdés, OFMCap., except for the friar from OFMConv. Then, there was a meeting with the National Spiritual Assistant of the YouFra, Fr. Ronald Villalobos, OFM. Although other regional assistants could not be present, the visitors thanked the regional assistants for availing themselves to meet via Zoom to discuss many issues regarding the life of the OFS in relation to their service as assistants.

The visitors met with the Auxiliary Bishop of Santiago, Most Rev. Alberto Lorenzelli, SBD, to whom the CIOFS delegates renewed their commitment to encouraging the OFS in Chile to be faithful to the Church by fostering practical collaboration and fruitful engagement at the parish and diocesan levels. The bishop was most welcoming and encouraging to both the OFS and YouFra.

On Saturday, the CIOFS visitors had the privilege of meeting the regional ministers and receiving a surprise visit from Most Rev. Bishop Isauro Covili, OFM. Then, OFS members joined the pilgrims who came to venerate Fray Andresito, OFM, and together celebrated the official opening of the 800th Jubilee year of the death of St. Francis, celebrated by Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM, at the Franciscan Church at “Recoleta.” Afterward, a convivium followed in the dining room at the “Recoleta” friary,

and the visitors continued with individual colloquia with the OFS National Council and animators for YouFra.

On Sunday, the Pastoral and Fraternal visit concluded with Holy Mass, followed by a meeting with the National Council of Chile to finalize the visitation and propose recommendations that will help the National Fraternity of Chile renew and relive the Franciscan charism with enthusiasm, reconciliation, and dedication to building a strong and united OFS. This was followed by a farewell for the international visitors.

### **12. Albania: National Elective Chapter**

The emerging National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) in Albania currently has seventy-five members in five local fraternities. Four of these fraternities are assisted by the Friars Minor and one by the Capuchin Franciscans.

The people of Albania regained the freedom of religion in 1991, after a long and very difficult period under the communist regime. Unlike other countries, the communist regime in Albania suppressed every form of religion. It also demolished places of worship, with the exception of a few structures that were converted into public buildings (sports halls, cinemas, warehouses, etc.). In fact, Albania was the first country to declare itself atheist.

On Saturday, March 14, 2026, the OFS National Elective Chapter of Albania took place at the St. Francis Friary, belonging to the Friars Minor, located in the Gjuhadol District of Shkodër, Albania.

Fr. Aurel GJERKAJ, OFM, Custodial Vicar, welcomed all the participants, including Noemi Paola RICCARDI, Delegate of the OFS Minister General, Tibor KAUSER, and a member of the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order (CIOFS); Fr. Ștefan ACATRINEI, OFMConv., representing the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS); the Capitulars; and the National Spiritual Assistants, Fr. Kristjan CAMAJ, OFM, and Fr. Giuseppe LANZELLOTTI, OFMCap.

The Chapter proceedings began at 9:00 a.m. under the presidency of the outgoing OFS National Minister, Lazër GEGA. After the reports of the National Minister and the National Econom were presented and approved, Fr. Ștefan ACATRINEI lectured on “The Relevance of the Franciscan Charism after Eight Hundred Years,” while Noemi Paola RICCARDI provided explanations regarding the OFS Statutes.

The elective session began at 2:00 p.m. and was presided over by Noemi Paola RICCARDI. The twenty-one Capitulars present elected Lazër GEGA as the National Minister of Albania and also elected the members of the National Council. During this session, the Capitulars agreed upon the priorities for the next three years and approved the new National Statutes. The Chapter made a serious commitment to vocation promotion and the creation of a Franciscan children’s group. The new National Council was installed during Mass, presided over by the National Spiritual Assistant, Fr. Kristjan CAMAJ, OFM.

Despite their small numbers, the Capitulars showed great vitality and dynamism. Their faith, severely tested during the communist regime, continues to bear fruit. The Chapter was a beautiful and heartfelt expression of fraternity shared by all participants.

### **13. Singapore: National Elective Chapter**

From Saturday, March 21, to Sunday, March 22, 2026, the National Elective Chapter of the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) in Singapore was held at the Catholic Centre in Singapore. Participants included members of the OFS, Spiritual Assistants, and Francis PARK, Delegate of the Minister General of the OFS.

The OFS National Fraternity in Singapore is still emerging, with only four local fraternities. Although the number of professed members remains modest, significant progress has been made over the past three years, growing from thirty-one professed members during the last Elective Chapter in 2023 to forty-two members today (in addition to eight in initial formation). This growth, both numerically and qualitatively, is also due to the Custos of the Friars Minor, Fr. Derrick YAP, OFM, who understands the important role of the OFS within the Franciscan Family and the value of its apostolate in society. He has guided the OFS with great dedication and attention.

Francis PARK, Delegate of the OFS Minister General, Tibor KAUSER, and Fr. Ștefan ACATRINEI, OFMConv., Representative of the Conference of Spiritual Assistants (CAS), met with the National Council on Friday, March 20, at 3:30 p.m. at the Catholic Centre in Singapore. On that occasion, they reviewed the life of the National Fraternity over the past three years and defined the program for the Chapter. At 7:00 p.m., they were joined by the Ministers of the four local OFS fraternities, sharing the joys and challenges of their respective communities.

The Chapter opened on Saturday with a prayer for peace. After a greeting by the National Minister, Janet LIM, the rest of the day was dedicated to hearing reports from the National Minister, the National Econom, the National Formator, and other officials. The Ministers of the local fraternities also presented reports on their communities. The Capitulars then evaluated the life of the National Fraternity, dividing into working groups to discuss their findings, which were later presented to the entire assembly and approved as priorities for the next three-year term. The first day concluded with a recreational session called “Franciscan Joy,” during which the local fraternities presented a cultural program.

The Chapter resumed on Sunday at 9:00 a.m. with a session dedicated to spiritual formation, led by the CAS Representative. The elective session began at 1:30 p.m., presided over by Francis PARK. The twenty-nine Capitulars elected Jennifer Marie SURIYIACALA as National Minister and also elected the members of the new National Council. During Mass at 4:30 p.m., presided over by the National Spiritual Assistant, Fr. Derrick, the new Council was installed.

Also present were two observers (participants without voting rights) and Friar Vernon CHUA, OFM, a local Spiritual Assistant. The Chapter was a truly beautiful celebration, conducted in a fraternal and joyful atmosphere, and concluded with a fraternal dinner.

#### **14. Malaysia: National Elective Chapter**

The Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) is experiencing rapid growth in Malaysia. Its membership has nearly doubled since the previous Chapter in 2023, now reaching 838 members. The national fraternity comprises thirteen established local fraternities, six emerging fraternities in East Malaysia, and eight established fraternities in West Malaysia.

In the lead-up to the National Elective Chapter, Fr. Ștefan ACATRINEI, OFMConv., conducted a Formation Day on Wednesday, March 25, 2026, from 6:00 to 10:00 p.m. He delivered two lectures: the first explored the human journey of St. Francis of Assisi, highlighting his struggles and challenges, while the second focused on key recollections from St. Francis’ Testament. The Formation Day, organized by the local St. Elizabeth of Hungary fraternity in Telipok, was held at St. Catherine’s Parish Centre in Kota Kinabalu. Participants included members of the Telipok fraternity as well as members from two emerging fraternities: the St. Catherine fraternity in Kota Kinabalu and the Good Shepherd fraternity in Menggatal.

The elective Chapter began on Friday, March 27, 2026, at the Pace e Bene (Peace and All Good) Retreat Centre in Papar, run by the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception. The National

Minister, Marina ANJUMAN, delivered the opening address. Attendees included sixty capitulars, thirty-nine observers, and four sisters from the Congregation of the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, serving as local spiritual assistants. Also present were Friar Tony BINGKUAN, OFM Cap., representing the Capuchin National Spiritual Assistant, and Fr. Cruzender ALEK, OFM, National Spiritual Assistant of the Friars Minor.

The first session was dedicated to hearing various reports. At 2:00 p.m., Fr. Ștefan ACATRINEI conducted a formation session. At 3:40 p.m., Francis PARK, Area Councillor of the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order (CIOFS), spoke about the importance of the Chapter and addressed technical matters. At 6:00 p.m., Fr. Ștefan presided over Mass. The first day concluded with a recreational session, “Franciscan Joy,” during which the local fraternities presented a cultural program.

The second day began with Morning Prayer at 6:30 a.m. The elective session started at 9:00 a.m., presided over by Francis PARK, Delegate of the OFS Minister General, Tibor KAUSER. Harry BANGGUAN was elected National Minister. The new National Council was installed during Mass at 11:30 a.m., presided over by the National Spiritual Assistant, Fr. Cruzender ALEK. At 2:30 p.m., the Chapter concluded, followed by a formation meeting for the new National Council with Francis PARK and Fr. Ștefan ACATRINEI.

The Capitulars experienced two days of intensive work, prayer, and formation in an atmosphere of serenity, fraternity, and joy.