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“ST. FRANCIS' EASTER: An Event of Hope”



The beauty and appeal of
the Christian life: “Praise
and bless my Lord...”

Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM



THE BEAUTY AND APPEAL OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

"PRAISE AND BLESS MY LORD..."

Introduction

When it comes to the beauty and appeal of the Christian life, it is crucial to try not to be biased; Or rather, it is essential to understand that if such a subject were dealt with by a non-Christian, we would certainly have an interpretation that, starting from another point of view, could lead to conclusions that can be positive but also negative. However, it should never be forgotten that *"Beauty exists only through the perception of the observer."* This, of course, says a lot about how beauty should be defined. Perception, affection, admiration, experiences, and love will always influence



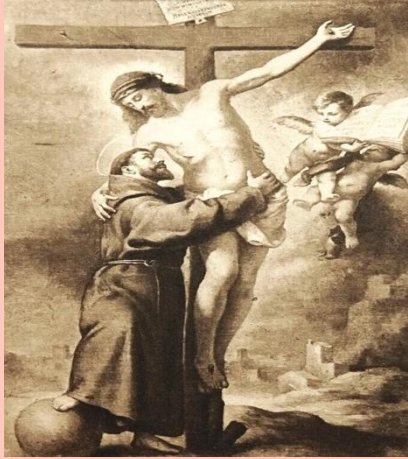
everyone's view of beauty. Christian beauty is inseparable from the paradox of the cross that unites death and resurrection. Francis of Assisi, a man of prayer, nurtured a deep love for Christ and this love led him to observe, to be attracted, to embrace but also to listen to the Crucifix of San Damiano, of which he not only heard the voice that spoke to him, but in which he also contemplated the beauty of God in suffering. In this reflection, Francis began to see a reality about God and learned to live the gospel to the letter, which led him to sing God's praises and see God's blessings in all creation.

In the testimony of St. Francis of Assisi, there is a luminous pattern of authentic contemplation—where the soul, purified by grace, contemplates the splendour of God reflected in all creation. For Francis, this contemplative vision was not abstract but profoundly incarnate, awakening in him an uninterrupted hymn of praise. In each creature he was able to discern a sacramental sign of divine beauty, which led him to a life of continual adoration and joyful gratitude to the Creator, whose glory permeates all that exists.

I hope that this reflection, inspired by the example of St. Francis of Assisi, will involve all who read it in that same contemplative horizon in which, with our hearts attuned by grace, we learn anew to recognize the beauty of God who is manifested in creation. By reclaiming this vision, we are invited not only to praise, but also to take on the responsibility that each of us requires to protect and protect what God has created, so that our Christian life may become, like Francis', a living hymn of reverence, gratitude, and faithful stewardship.

The Beauty of the Christian Life

As the holiness of St. Francis of Assisi attests, the beauty of the Christian life is not defined by comfort, success, or outward perfection, but by conformity to Christ—especially through the paradox of the Cross and the glory of the Resurrection. This beauty transcends what is pleasing to the physical eye and unfolds before the gaze of the spirit. It is a beauty that reveals the inner harmony of truth, goodness and love, radiating from a soul transformed by grace and drawn to communion with God.



The most beautiful life, when evaluated exclusively on the basis of external and physical measurements, can seem fractured and diminished; however, when contemplated in the light of faith, it reveals itself to be radiant and profoundly attractive because it participates in the very life of Christ.

As St. Paul the Apostle writes in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 4:7-9), "We have this treasure in earthen vessels"—fragile vessels that manifest not human perfection but the extraordinary power of divine grace. In this way, what seems weak becomes the place where God's glory shines most brightly.

On the Cross, the eyes of faith are opened to perceive, receive and encounter the mystery of God's extraordinary love. There, in the self-offering of Jesus Christ, we contemplate the fullness of divine charity made visible in the mystery of the Cross. Jesus gives himself completely for the salvation of humanity, freely embracing the Cross, enduring suffering and humiliation, and renouncing his own life. However, this renunciation is not marked by despair but filled with an abiding love—for it is love that sustains him, the love that redeems, the love that reveals the deepest beauty of God.

Franciscan sources usually describe St. Francis of Assisi as a man consumed by a deep thirst for God, whose search was genuine and total. His life was characterized by a single desire that ordered everything else: "His highest aim, foremost desire, and greatest intention was to pay heed to the holy Gospel in all things and through all things, to follow the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ and to retrace His footsteps completely with all vigilance and all zeal, all the desired of his soul and all the fervour of his heart."¹ In this total conformity to Christ, Francis reveals the essence of the Christian life as a continuous movement of love, always in search of a deeper union with God.

The modern world tends to measure beauty by visibility, success, comfort, and autonomy—standards that can make a life shaped by the Cross unattractive or even incomprehensible. A culture of constant distraction, consumerism, and immediacy can cloud the contemplative gaze, making it difficult to recognize the silent, sacrificial, and interior beauty that arises from communion with God.

Francis of Assisi did not discover something inaccessible to us; he saw with eyes purified by conversion. His radical simplicity, love for creation, and total conformity to Jesus Christ allowed him to perceive beauty where others saw poverty, suffering, or nothing. The question, then, is less about what our generation lacks in terms of skills and more about what viewing habits we are cultivating.² The same beauty can still be found where there is room for silence, prayer and authentic witness. The present moment can not only be a moment of crisis, but also an invitation: an invitation to recover a contemplative way of seeing, to live the Gospel with integrity and to reveal, once again and through concrete choices, that the Christian life, even in its simplicity and sacrifice, is profoundly and harshly beautiful.

¹ 1Cel 84 FF 466

² cf. Testament, FF 110; GNI IX, FF29-30

Francis' praise of God

St. Francis' conversion and love for the Gospel led him to a deeper understanding and recognition that everything begins and ends with God and not with human success, power, prestige, or control. In his famous words, "Praise be with me, my Lord,"³ he expresses his high esteem and gratitude to God, whom he places in the position of a mere creature who, recognizing that he has been created by him, must give an adequate response of gratitude to his Creator. Thus, the life of St. Francis became



a melody of praise, expressed not only in words but also in actions, through simplicity, mercy, joy and love for God and neighbour. St. Francis' life of prayer and penance helped him overcome a simple and obvious appearance of the cosmos and led him to a deeper discovery: that all creatures come from the same loving, living Father, and that humanity is not the owner of creation, but is in a position of fraternity with all areas of creation.

Francis' praise of God reveals how much his prayer life, his radical humility, his gratitude, and his vision of God become a melody of true praise. Thomas of Celano describes Francis as a saint who, "when he looked at the sun, the moon, the stars in the firmament, his soul was filled with joy... just as the three young men thrown into the fiery furnace invited all the elements to glorify and bless the Creator of the universe, so this man, filled with the spirit of God, never tired of glorifying, praising, and blessing, in all the elements and in all creatures, the Creator and Sovereign of all things."⁴

Francis of Assisi experienced the beauty of God even in the most difficult moments of his fragile body. Until the last moments of his life, he continued to invite his brothers to sing the praises of the Lord.⁵ A spontaneous prayer of praise that neither illness, nor frailty, nor imminent death could temper reflected Francis' love and his deep connection to God and creation.

Franciscans as promoters of the beauty of the Christian life

The Franciscans, following the example of St. Francis of Assisi, have long been witnesses and promoters of a beauty that does not merely please the senses, but plunges the human heart into the depths of the Christian mystery. Rooted in poverty, humility and joyful fraternity, their way of life reveals that the Gospel itself is beautiful when lived with simplicity and love.⁶

In the embrace of creation, seen as a reflection of God's goodness, in respect for the poor and marginalized, and in the joyful proclamation of the crucified and risen Christ, the Franciscan tradition offers a living icon of what the Christian life can be. This beauty is neither decorative nor superficial; it is the beauty of a life transformed by grace, where detachment becomes freedom, service becomes joy, and poverty becomes a space of communion with God.

In a world often attracted by external splendour but characterized by interior restlessness, the Franciscan witness gently awakens a different vision: that according to which the most captivating

³ Cf. Canticle of the Creatures FF 263

⁴ 1Cel 80 FF458; 459

⁵ 2Cel 217 FF 809-810

⁶ Cfr RB I, FF 75

beauty is found in a heart conformed to Jesus Christ, radiant in its simplicity and open to love. In this way, the Franciscans continue to invite Christians not only to admire the Gospel, but to live it as the most beautiful way of life.

During the celebrations of the Jubilee of St. Francis of Assisi, the Franciscan family once again tried



to remind the Christian world and, indeed, all humanity, that the spirit of Francis continues to call each person to a renewed contemplation of the beauty of creation, the work of God. The life of St. Francis remains an invitation to see the world not as property to be exploited, but as a gift to be received with gratitude and respect, as it reflects the goodness of the Creator.

In continuity with this vision, Pope Francis, in his encyclicals *Laudato Si'* and *Fratelli Tutti*, launched a

heartfelt appeal to all humanity to rediscover the value of creation and the dignity of every person. In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis calls for an integral ecology⁷ that combines care for the environment with care for the human family, while in *Fratelli Tutti* he calls for a renewed sense of fraternity and universal solidarity.⁸

A renewed sense of universal brotherhood for Franciscans, in the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi, would not begin with structures or redefinitions of identity, but with a deeper evangelical conversion, learning anew to see each person and all creation as God-given brothers and sisters. Such a renewal would mean recovering fraternity as a way of life and not as a form of organization. Francis was not the first to build a system of fraternity; he began his journey of conversion by becoming a brother to all, conforming his life to Jesus Christ, especially in humility, minority and self-giving. From that Christ-centered conversion, a new relationship with others naturally emerged, characterized by reverence, simplicity, and peace.

For St. Francis of Assisi, fraternity was never an abstraction or simply a sociological ideal; rather, it is a way of lived evangelical life, rooted in conversion to Christ. His vision of fraternity extended to the whole of creation and to each person and was always expressed within a concrete ecclesial communion and a disciplined lifestyle. For the Franciscan family today, this balance between the universality of the spirit and the concreteness of the form is very important.

The call to fraternity and solidarity – so central to the Franciscan spirit – is precisely what allows communion through structures, which must not be erased but whose way of life must be transfigured. The different Franciscan families remain different gifts within the Church, in which they are destined to recognize themselves as participants in the same evangelical inspiration: to follow Jesus Christ in poverty, in a minority and in joyful fraternity.

In the Franciscan family, in fact, differences are not a problem to be overcome, but a gift to be received. The different expressions of the Franciscan charism are not competing versions of the same identity, but different ways in which the individual way of living the Gospel has taken root in history.⁹ When lived faithfully, this diversity itself becomes a sign of ecclesial beauty: a unity that does not erase difference but transfigures it.

⁷ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, n.11

⁸ Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, pp. 6-8; 9; 114

⁹ Cf. Manual of Spiritual Assistance to the OFS and YouFra n.1.4 p. 64

Seen from this perspective, the beauty of Franciscan uniqueness can play a pivotal role in awakening contemporary society to the beauty of the Christian life. In a world often characterized by fragmentation and uniformity imposed from without, the Franciscan tradition bears witness to another possibility: that of communion in diversity, of simplicity without homogeneity and of unity based not on a structure, but on a shared conformity to Jesus Christ.

When each branch of the Franciscan family authentically lives its own charism—whether in contemplation or mission, in service to the poor, or in the care of creation—different facets of the Gospel's own beauty are revealed. Together, these distinct expressions form a kind of spiritual harmony: not uniform notes, but a single melody played in different keys.

In this sense, Franciscan identity is most fruitful for the Church and for the world not when it seeks to reduce differences, but when it allows these differences to become transparent to the Gospel. Thus, the Franciscan family becomes not only a reminder of the beauty of the Christian life, but also a living sign that such beauty is still possible, still visible, and capable of transforming the way the world perceives God, creation, and others.

Conclusion

Each of the baptized has been given the mandate to go into the whole world and proclaim the Good News.¹⁰ Although this mission is demanding, in order to carry it out Jesus has assured us of the presence of the Holy Spirit who accompanies and strengthens us. Therefore, all Franciscans have a double responsibility. Having professed to observe the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, they are called not only to evangelize, but also to live in harmony with all creation. In this sense, "they must respect all creatures, animate and inanimate, who bear the footprint of the Most High, and they must strive to move away from the temptation to exploit creation in order to arrive at the Franciscan concept of universal kinship."¹¹

Franciscans are called to strive to become authentic teachers, whose lives serve as formative witnesses, enabling others to contemplate the beauty and integrity of creation. This vocation is manifested through an exemplary commitment to caring for the environment and promoting justice and peace in a torn world. Such witness is not only ethical, but profoundly evangelical, reflecting the Franciscan charism of living the Gospel *sine glossa*—without compromise.

In this sense, it is important to remember that "the Church is rebuilt with the same tools with which it was built: evangelization and witness of life."¹² These two dimensions remain inseparable within the Franciscan mission. Through their participation, coordinated in the salvific mission of Christ, Franciscans enter into a concrete and "bodily" communion, rooted in their shared identity as members of the same body.

This lived communion requires practical expression in a spirit of co-responsibility between the First, Second, and Third Orders. Whenever the entire Franciscan Family participates in its mission, this unity must be made visible through collaborative service, mutual support, and a common commitment to the restoration of creation and the proclamation of the Kingdom of God. It is therefore crucial to cultivate an awareness of the beauty of the Christian life as a joyful and incarnate witness to the Gospel.

¹⁰ Mk 16:15

¹¹ Cf. Manual for Spiritual Assistance to the OFS and YouFra n.1.5 p. 66

¹² Ibid n.1.5 p. 67

Meetings, Visits, and Chapters



1. Japan: Fraternal Visit and National Elective Chapter

From March 27 to 29, 2026 in Kanagawa, at the Lector Hayama facility, located in the Shonan International Village, the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order of Japan held the National Elective Chapter. The work of the chapter was chaired by Mary Stronach, OFS, as a delegate of Minister General Tibor Kauser. The Conference of General Spiritual Assistants was represented by the delegate Fr. Juan Hasegawa, OFM.

The Fraternity of the OFS in Japan is going through a serious vocational crisis. Another critical problem is the advanced age of the members, a condition that leads to the consequent inactivity of some fraternities. Out of a total of 427 members belonging to canonically erected fraternities, there are 249 inactive members, whose inactivity is mainly due to aging and health problems.

Despite the difficulties mentioned above, the fraternities, although few in number of members, were represented by eleven capitulants, who lived their time shared during the Chapter with participation and a spirit of communion. This spirit has fostered comparison, the exchange of ideas and experiences, as well as the strengthening of the sense of fraternal belonging. Towards the end of the Chapter, the new National Council was elected; it has been entrusted with the task of guiding and leading the National Fraternity over the next three years. Fuhimiko Francis Takeda was elected National Minister and re-elected as an International Councillor.

The Chapter concluded with the installation of the new Council. This took place in the afternoon, during the Eucharistic celebration of Palm Sunday, and was followed by a Japanese-style agape, during which members also celebrated the birthday of the General Vice minister, Mary Stronach. The next day, members of the outgoing Council and the new Council, along with others belonging to the National Fraternity, met to identify programmatic priorities for the next three years. Later, the fraternal visit began; however, the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants was unable to conduct the pastoral visit due to obvious obstacles related to the trip.

2. Hong Kong-Macau: Fraternal and Pastoral Visit and Elective Chapter

The Regional Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of Hong Kong-Macau has 129 members, of whom 79 are active. It is divided into four local fraternities: one on Hong Kong Island, two in Kowloon, and one in the area called New Territories.

On Thursday afternoon, April 9, 2026, two representatives of the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order (CIOFS), Francis PARK and Fr. Ștefan ACATRINEI, OFMConv, met with the Regional Minister Lucia LAU, the Vice Minister, Teresa TANG, and several other OFS members with special roles.

On Friday morning, the visitors met with friar William NG, OFM, President of the Hong Kong Foundation. The Foundation belongs to the Friars Minor Province of *Our Lady Queen of China*, based in Taiwan. As the representative of the Minister Provincial, friar William is deeply committed to supporting the OFS and has also guided the Regional Fraternity of Hong Kong as its Spiritual Assistant.

At 2:15 p.m. on Friday, the visitors were received by His Eminence Cardinal Stephen CHOW SAU-YAN, S.J., Bishop of Hong Kong. The meeting was very cordial and productive. It gave the visitors an opportunity to better understand the current situation. They also assured the cardinal that the OFS fraternity is eager to be fully involved in the life of the local Church. The visitors also got to meet with the Most Reverend Joseph HA CHI-SHING, OFM, Auxiliary Bishop of Hong Kong.

At 10:00 a.m. on Saturday, everyone took part in a Mass celebrating the 80th anniversary of the diocese. In the afternoon, the visitors met with the Regional Council. The day concluded with a fraternal recreational event called “Franciscan Joy.”

On Sunday, the Elective Chapter was conducted. Fr. Ștefan ACATRINEI gave the Capitulars a lecture on several important themes taken from the Testament of St. Francis. The lecture helped them better understand the relevance of the Franciscan charism today.

The elective session was presided over by Francis PARK, delegate of the OFS Minister General, Tibor KAUSER. Those present included sixty-three Capitulars with voting rights and twenty observers. Teresa TANG was elected Regional Minister. The new Regional Council was installed immediately after the election, and the priorities for the next three-year term were approved. The Chapter concluded with a Mass at 6:00 p.m., presided over by the Regional Spiritual Assistant, Fr. Matthias CHOI, OFM.

3. Meeting of the Secretariat for Formation and the Presidency Council of the CIOFS

In a quiet corner of Rome, within the familiar walls of the *Seraphicum* Complex, two important events in the life of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) recently took place. One was the meeting of the OFS Secretariat for Formation and the other was the Meeting of the OFS Presidency Council. The OFS Secretariat for Formation is a permanent structure within the Secular Franciscan Order and is tasked with providing guidelines for the ongoing formation of the entire Order. Its seven members come from around the world. Over the course of the six-year term, they meet several times via the Zoom Internet platform and three times in person. Their latest in-person meeting was held Sunday to Friday, April 12-17, 2026. The members discussed a report on experiences gained during meetings with national formators, the Africa project, the virtual library, formation courses, the “Concordance”, and various other materials that were already prepared or are currently being developed.

On Saturday, April 18, at 5:00 p.m., the OFS Presidency Council met for its ordinary spring session. The agenda turned out to be particularly involved, with over a hundred items, each of which received the time needed for discussion. The main priority was the report from the Minister General of the Conventual Franciscan Order, Fr. Carlos TROVARELLI, on the pastoral visit he made in November of 2025 to the OFS Presidency Council on behalf of the Conference of Ministers General of the Franciscan First Order and the Third Order Regular (TOR). The members of the Presidency Council seriously analysed Fr. Carlos’s report, point by point, in order to be able to improve their service to the Order. On Tuesday afternoon, April 21, Blair MATHESON, an Anglican Franciscan, who attended the meeting in person, and Carolyn TOWNES (OFS) who attended the meeting online via Zoom, reported on their work for Franciscan International, giving updates on projects just completed and those currently underway. On Wednesday, April 22, at 12:30 p.m., the Presidency Council had a fraternal discussion with the Minister General of the TOR, Fr. Amando TRUJILLO CANO, and his Definitory. After lunch at the General Curia of the TOR, the Presidency Council made a brief visit to the Capuchin Franciscan San Lorenzo da Brindisi International College

to assess the conditions of the venue selected for the upcoming OFS General Elective Chapter. Work then resumed at 5:00 p.m. at the *Seraphicum*.

Each day, from 7:15 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., the Presidency Council met together to pray, work, discern, and share the joy and effort of every single moment. The intensive week concluded on Saturday, April 25, 2026.

4. Central African Republic: National Elective Chapter

From 8 to 10 May 2026, the brothers and sisters of the national fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order of the Central African Republic, from six Regional Councils of the OFS, had the joy of gathering at the Parish of St. Anthony of Padua, in the suburb of Bimbo, Bangui, to celebrate their Elective Chapter.

On Friday, May 8, the official opening of the Chapter took place with the Holy Mass presided over by Fr. Saturnin Shadrac Langba Zounga, OFM, and concelebrated by Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM, General Spiritual Assistant, and Fr. Boris Guessikane, OFMCap, Regional Spiritual Assistant, who also inaugurated the assembly of the Chapter.

Subsequently, Adolph Assagba, delegate of the Minister General Tibor Kauser, OFS, requested a minute of silence in memory of the members of the OFS who have passed away in the last three years. At the same time, the local spiritual assistant of the Western Region in the Diocese of Bouar, Fr. Tomasz Switala, OFMCap, arrived.

The presentation of the program by the Secretary of the Chapter was unanimously approved by all the members of the assembly. Those present then followed the speech of the outgoing National Minister, Magloire Malissaba, OFS, who welcomed the CIOFS delegates and all the participants, reminding them of the joy of living together as brothers and sisters in Christ and in St. Francis.

The Elective Chapter was presided over by Adolph Assagba, OFS, and witnessed by Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM, who represented the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS). The Chapter was attended by 40 capitulants, 7 observers and 6 members of YouFra.

In the afternoon, the report of the outgoing National Minister was presented, who expressed his gratitude to each outgoing Council member for their collaborative and fraternal spirit and creativity, making the work of the Council easy and fruitful. Subsequently, the Treasurer's report was presented.

On Saturday, May 9, the capitulars began the day very early, with the celebration of Holy Mass in preparation for the elective session. The capitulars re-elected Magloire Malissaba as National Minister and Guy Alain Segoroye as International Councillor for the next three years.

On Sunday, the installation of the new Council took place during the parish Mass, in which all parishioners joined the Franciscan Family to celebrate the official opening of the jubilee year of the death of St. Francis of Assisi.

After Holy Mass, everyone gathered for a moment of compassion, characterized by great joy and thanksgiving for the gift of the Franciscan charism. Finally, the time has come to welcome the CIOFS delegates and wish each one a safe journey back to the various regions, bringing with them the Chapter's message of working for the unity of the Franciscan Family.

5. Peru: Fraternal and Pastoral Visit to the OFS

A pastoral visit is a privileged time of communion between the First Order, the Third Order Regular (TOR), and the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS). The Church also entrusts this visit with the mission of renewing the Franciscan evangelical spirit, ensuring fidelity to the charism and the Rule,

supporting fraternal life, strengthening the bond of unity within the OFS, and promoting its more effective integration into the Franciscan Family and the Church.

In May of 2026, Silvia Noemí DIANA, a member of the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order (CIOFS), and Fr. Ștefan ACATRINEI, OFMConv, the General Spiritual Assistant, carried out a fraternal and pastoral visit to the OFS of Peru.

The first visit took place on Thursday, May 14, 2026, at the San Francisco Solano Retreat House in Lima. The visitors were joined by Fr. Alfredo PERALES, OFM, who is guiding the animation team of the national fraternity of Peru, since the OFS currently does not have a National Council there. Later that evening, the visitors travelled to Arequipa, where over the following days they met with the Regional Assistant, Fr. Fisher VILELA HUANCAS, OFM, and all the local OFS Ministers of the region. The visitors prepared the OFS Ministers for their upcoming Regional Elective Chapter, scheduled for July 11-12, 2026. On Sunday, May 17, the visitors celebrated the Elective Chapter of the Cusco Region, and on Tuesday, May 19, they met with the newly elected Regional Council.

On Wednesday, May 20, the visitors returned once again to the San Francisco Solano Retreat House in Lima, where they held meetings until Friday evening with the National Spiritual Assistants, the Major Superiors and their respective Delegates, the OFS members who had requested a meeting, the Commission for the Revision of the National Statutes, the Franciscan Youth animation team of Peru, and the Regional Council of the Sur-Medio Ica Region.

Saturday, May 23, was entirely dedicated to listening to the members of the five Regional Councils (Chavín, Centro Peru, Lima-Callao, Norte, and Altiplano) and having discussions with them.

Of the eight regional OFS fraternities in Peru, Lima-Callao has the largest number of local fraternities: thirty-five in total, including twenty-five active fraternities, eight experiencing difficulties, and two emerging fraternities. In addition, there are three groups of supporters, seven established Franciscan Youth fraternities, and two emerging ones. Saturday's activities concluded at 6:00 p.m., after the visitors established a commission responsible for preparing the OFS National Elective Chapter, scheduled for September 11–12, 2026. They finalized all the details to ensure that the Chapter can take place under the best possible conditions.

The fraternal and pastoral visit concluded with the rite of admission of four young people into the local Nuestra Señora de la Piedad OFS fraternity in Lima. The admission rite took place on Sunday, May 24, the Solemnity of Pentecost, during Mass presided over by the Spiritual Assistant of the local fraternity, Fr. Lucian SZCZEPAŃSKI, OFMConv.

Throughout this period, the visitors welcomed all the OFS brothers and sisters who wished to meet with them. They listened to them, encouraged them, offered guidance, and took note of their challenges and difficulties. They also helped them get prepared for the celebration of their National Chapter. The members of the five Regional Councils showed remarkable commitment by traveling overnight by bus for six to nine hours to meet the visitors. Their dedication clearly reflects their strong desire to continue journeying together with the other national OFS fraternities.

6. Panama: Fraternal and Pastoral Visit to the OFS Fraternity and the National Elective Chapter

Panama, like any other country, holds many wonders. Some of them, such as its famous Canal or the view of both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans that can be seen with the naked eye from the heights of Cerro Ancón, are known throughout the world. Others, however, are known only to a few. Among these is the newest local fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS), San Padre Pío de Pietrelcina Fraternity, which was canonically erected on May 17, 2026.

The National OFS Fraternity of Panama has seventy-nine members organized into seven local fraternities. During May 27-31, 2026, the National Fraternity received a fraternal and pastoral visit from the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order (CIOFS). On Wednesday, May 27, the Council visited the San Maximiliano Kolbe local fraternity. On Thursday, visitors Ana María RAFFO LAOS and Fr. Ștefan ACATRINEI, OFMConv, met with the National Spiritual Assistant for Panama, friar Ignacio IZAGUIRRE, OFMCap, several members of the National Council, the Provincial Custos of Costa Rica, Panama, and Nicaragua, Fr. Mauricio MONGE RIVERA, OFMCap, and Fr. José OLMOS, OFM, the Delegate of the Minister Provincial of the Province of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Central America, Panama, and the Caribbean, Fr. Edgardo PÉREZ, OFM. The day concluded with a visit to the local Santa Clara fraternity.

On Friday, May 29, at 12:30 p.m., the visitors met with the Most Reverend José Domingo ULLOA, Archbishop of Panama. During the meeting, they discussed several topics with the archbishop and welcomed his recommendations. Archbishop ULLOA stressed that the OFS of Panama must overcome the temptation to act like a mere parish group and instead become more visible within society.

On May 29-31 the National Elective Chapter of the OFS of Panama was conducted at the Casa de Oración Asís run by the Franciscan Sisters of Mary Immaculate, in Cermeño, Capiira District, Panama. The first day began at 5:30 p.m. with the opening Mass and concluded with Eucharistic adoration at 10:00 p.m. The second day focused on the presentation of reports, formation sessions led by Fr. Ștefan ACATRINEI and Ana María RAFFO LAOS, and the election of the new National Council. The thirty-two Capitulars present elected Edgardo Antonio PÉREZ ÁGUILA as National Minister. The new National Council was installed on Sunday, during the 7:00 a.m. Mass. The Chapter work then continued with group activities.

Throughout the visit, the two CIOFS representatives held private meetings with all members of the outgoing Council and with anyone else who wished to meet them. Finally, Fr. Ștefan ACATRINEI and Ana María RAFFO LAOS held a joint meeting with the outgoing and newly elected National Councils and offered a formation session for the new Council.

The Chapter took place in an atmosphere of profound fraternity and concluded on Sunday afternoon. The Capitulars returned home happy that they got to share time together as brothers and sisters.

7. The Philippines: National Elective Chapter

From May 29 to 31, 2026, the 14th National Elective Chapter of the Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order of the Philippines was held at the "Good Shepherd Formation and Spirituality Centre" in Banawa Hills, Cebu City. There were 49 delegates representing the 13 regions that make up the national reality of the OFS.

The OFS National Fraternity of the Philippines is one of the most numerous and important OFS realities in Asia and the Pacific, so it obviously deserves special attention, both in animation and in spiritual and pastoral assistance.

The election ceremony was presided over by Sister Mary Stronach, as Deputy Minister General, as delegate of the Minister General of the OFS, Tibor Kauser; assisted by Fr. Ronald Samson, OFMCap, as a delegate of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS). The elected act resulted in the election of the Minister and the Council, who will animate and guide this national fraternity in the next three years (2026-2029).

Thus, Sister Garlene Grace Jose was elected national minister, who at the same time automatically assumes the service of International Councillor of the Fraternity of the Philippines on the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order (CIOFS), in fulfilment of the National Statute of the Philippines and, ultimately, of FIOFS.

The Chapter was truly a time of celebration, evaluation and planning of vital actions and fraternal, pastoral and social projects for the next three years. Thus, with the installation and missionary mandate of the newly elected Council, celebrated during the celebration of the Holy Mass of the Solemnity of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary to her cousin Elizabeth, the capitulars will define the priorities for the three-year period and will renew the commitment to continue with the objectives assumed in this Chapter and beyond.

8. Ecuador: Fraternal and Pastoral Visit to the OFS Fraternity and National Chapter

The National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of Ecuador has 507 professed members (366 of whom are active) and 108 members in initial formation. To provide more effective pastoral care, the national fraternity is divided into six regional fraternities and fifty-one established local fraternities, thirty-eight of which are active. In addition, there are five emerging local OFS fraternities. There are also ninety-eight members of Franciscan Youth (YouFra), organized into one emerging and six established fraternities.

On June 2-5, 2026, the Presidency Council of the Secular Franciscan Order (CIOFS) made a fraternal and pastoral visit to the OFS of Ecuador. The visit was conducted by Area Councillor Silvia Noemí DIANA and Fr. Ștefan ACATRINEI, OFMConv. YouFra President Miguel TOAPANTA was the first to meet the visitors. Later, the visitors met with the Major Superiors and their respective delegates: Fr. Leandro DELGADO VÉLEZ, OFMCap. (Custos), Fr. Mirosław DUBIELA, OFMConv (Delegate of Minister Provincial Fr. Wojciech KULIG, OFMConv) and Fr. Ángel MONTOYA, OFM (Minister Provincial), together with all members of the National Council. The visitors also travelled to the headquarters of the OFS Regional Fraternity of Ecuador Central, in the city of Latacunga, where the local fraternity owns a beautiful church and a house that regularly hosts up to thirty OFS members for regional activities.

On Friday, June 5, at 2:00 p.m., after the final meeting of the National Council—during which the work of the commission for the revision of the National Statutes was approved—the visitors presented the conclusions of their visit and offered recommendations.

At 3:00 p.m. that day, the elective National Chapter began. The Chapter took place at the “Nuestra Señora de Fátima” Spirituality Centre in Riobamba, Ecuador, operated by the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate. The Chapter participants began with the recitation of the Chaplet of Divine Mercy. After initial greetings, the National Minister and the National Treasurer presented their reports. The first day of the Chapter concluded at 10:00 p.m.

Each day of the Chapter began at 6:30 a.m. with the recitation of the Franciscan Crown [Rosary]. On Saturday morning, the participants heard the remaining reports, worked in groups, and attended a formation session led by Silvia DIANA on the theme: “Challenges for Today’s Secular Franciscan.” At the same time, Fr. Ștefan conducted a formation meeting with the National Spiritual Assistants. During this meeting, the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants was officially established, with Fr. Galo FLOR, OFMCap, serving as President and Fr. José Antonio JIMA, OFM, serving as Acting Secretary. At 2:00 p.m., Fr. Ștefan ACATRINEI led an in-depth spiritual formation session on the theme: “St. Francis, a Man of Adoration and Encounter.”

Silvia Noemí DIANA presided over the elective session of the National Chapter. The fifty-four Capitulars present elected Manuel MOREIRA as the new National Minister. After a fraternal evening organized by the YouFra fraternity of Riobamba, the second day came to a close.

During Mass on Sunday, June 7, the new National Council was installed. Approximately 80 % of the members come from the Coast Region (even though there are 6 regional fraternities). Later, Silvia Noemí DIANA and Fr. Ștefan offered a formation session to the newly elected Council members. Despite its challenges and shortcomings, the Chapter was conducted in a peaceful atmosphere. After the closing session at 2:00 p.m., the Capitulars returned home, facing journeys lasting between four and ten hours.

9. Belgium: National Elective Chapter

The fledgling National Fraternity of Belgium held its Elective Chapter on June 6, 2026, at its historic headquarters, located in the Convent of the Friars Minor, Avenue du Chant d'Oiseau, 2, 1150 Brussels.

About 28 brothers and sisters were present at the Chapter, including 20 with passive and active voices, and the rest were observers and members of the local fraternity that organized the event. Three (3) friars of the First Order were also present, representing the assistants of the three obediences: a conventual, a capuchin and a friar minor.

As usual, the first part of the Chapter was therefore devoted to formation and other aspects of the programme. In the early afternoon, the report of the outgoing Minister and Council was presented, where the outgoing minister, among other things, underlined the growth of members after the covid period. Therefore, from 2023 to 2026 the number of admitted, in the training phase and professed is growing; the fact must be recognized as a sign of God's grace and of the witness of the brothers and sisters already professed in the various ecclesial realities where they bear witness that he is a Franciscan with commitment and joy.

After the report of the deceased minister, the preparation of the elective act was immediately carried out, presided over by the Minister General of the OFS, Tibor Kauser, assisted by the Fr. Tomas Ginga Panzo Suva, OFMCap, as a witness on behalf of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS). As a result of the elections, the National Minister and Councillors were elected. Joel DOMINGOS, from one of the local fraternities in Brussels, was elected National Minister and Luisa GAIAO, also from one of the local fraternities in Brussels, was elected International Councillor.

All the councillors elected were confirmed; the Chapter concluded with the Eucharistic celebration of the Sunday of the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ "Corpus Dei", celebrated in one of the rooms of the Friary of the friars "Chant d'Oiseau". The celebration was presided over by Fr. Bart De Paepe, OFMConv, National Spiritual Assistant, and concelebrated by Fr. Roger Marchal, OFM, also National Spiritual Assistant, and Fr. Tomas Ginga P. Suva, OFMCap, General Spiritual Assistant. At the same celebration, the Minister General of the OFS presided over the installation rite, as an official act of the beginning of the functions of the elected minister and the council.

The Chapter was celebrated in an atmosphere of mutual listening and with that joy proper to brothers and sisters who seek the evangelical perfection of life through secular and Franciscan life.

10. Venezuela: Fraternal and Pastoral Visit to the National OFS Fraternity and Elective Chapter

On June 9-12, 2026, the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of Venezuela received a fraternal and pastoral visit from the Presidency Council of the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order (CIOFS).

Over the course of two centuries, this fraternity has made a deeply positive impact on Venezuelan society. Among its most distinguished members one finds the recently canonized physician, St. José Gregorio HERNÁNDEZ CISNEROS; the diplomat, professor, and historian, Dr. Mario BRICEÑO IRAGORRY; the professor and historian, Dr. José Manuel NÚÑEZ PONTE; and the first female Minister General of the OFS Manuela MATTIOLI FRATONI (in office from 1984 to 1990).

The OFS National Fraternity of Venezuela has approximately six hundred members, administratively divided into six regional fraternities and thirty local fraternities. In addition, it includes twelve Franciscan Youth (YouFra) fraternities, two of which are emerging, and five interest groups with a total membership of 245 young people. Eighty-two have made their promise, seventy-two are in formation, and ninety-one are in the initiation period. The YouFra fraternity also includes six fraternities of Franciscan adolescents (plus two undergoing formation) and four fraternities of Franciscan children. Notably, the YouFra fraternity in Zulia has produced six young men who have gone on to become Capuchin Franciscan friars.

The CIOFS visitors, Silvia Noemi DIANA and Fr. Ștefan ACATRINEI, OFMConv, visited two local fraternities in Caracas: Chiquinquirá and La Merced. The Chiquinquirá fraternity operates a charitable community pharmacy, while La Merced is the historic fraternity where Dr. José Gregorio HERNÁNDEZ CISNEROS professed his vows on December 7, 1899. Moreover, it is the current legal headquarters of the OFS of Venezuela.

The Most Reverend Raúl BORD CASTILLO, SDB, Archbishop of Caracas, warmly welcomed the visitors and spent more than an hour speaking with them. He expressed deep concern for the entire Franciscan Family and noted that, during this Franciscan Jubilee Year, he had already presided over Masses in six of Caracas's eight Jubilee churches. He expressed great appreciation for the OFS. However, he hopes its members will increase their presence in society and find the courage to present concrete proposals and initiatives to the Venezuelan Episcopal Conference so that it can officially support them. He also proposed that for the Feast of the Pardon of Assisi (at the Porziuncola, August 2), the Franciscan Family should organize a public event with strong social impact, given the current relevance of the theme of forgiveness. Before concluding the meeting, he expressed regret that the Conventual Franciscans, after thirty years of fruitful service, had withdrawn from Caracas.

The visitors also conducted extended, individual meetings with the YouFra Vice-Minister, the eight members of the OFS National Council, the OFS Regional Ministers, the Major Superiors (including the Conventual Franciscan Custos, Fr. Franklin Antonio DURÁN ZAMBRANO who attended via video call), and the National Spiritual Assistants from the Friars Minor and the Capuchin Franciscans. These meetings gave the CIOFS visitors a deeper understanding of OFS life in Venezuela, including its strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and daily difficulties.

It is important to highlight the specific reality of the Gran Sabana Region, which effectively functions as a mission territory. Located within the Apostolic Vicariate of Caroní, the OFS in this region plays a particularly vital role. Its four local fraternities operate as the Bishop's active pastoral arm. The 121 OFS members play an essential role as catechists and missionaries, actively bringing the Gospel to remote and difficult-to-reach areas. The visit concluded after the visitors shared their

observations with the National Council, praising the significant development achieved over the past three years and offering pastoral recommendations.

On Friday, June 12, at 2:30 p.m., the opening Mass of the OFS National Elective Chapter of Venezuela was conducted. The Friars Minor Custos, Fr. Antonio José REES LÓPEZ, presided. The Chapter took place in Caracas at the retreat centre run by the Dominican Sisters of the Presentation.

After official greetings, the Capitulars read and approved the reports of the National Minister and the National Treasurer.

On Saturday, after reports from the six regions, YouFra, and other national bodies, Fr. Ștefan ACATRINEI and Silvia Noemi DIANA led a formation session, which was followed by more Chapter work. During the elective session, the seventeen Capitulars present re-elected the outgoing National Minister, Sugheil SÁNCHEZ, to another term as National Minister. During the same session, Fr. Ștefan ACATRINEI met with the Spiritual Assistants and formally established the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants (CAS). The Conference then elected Fr. Antonio José REES LÓPEZ, OFM, as President and appointed Fr. Nelson Omar ROSALES ESCALANTE, OFMCap, as rotating Secretary.

On Sunday, June 14, at 10:00 a.m., Archbishop BIODR CASTILLO, personally visited the Chapter venue to greet the Capitulars and encourage them in their service to the OFS and the Church. He was joined by Saritza ROQUE, Director of the Centre for Laity, Family, and Youth of the Archdiocese of Caracas. She also addressed the Capitulars and emphasized that the OFS should not only carry out lots of activities but also communicate them effectively so that the good work and the impact of the Franciscan charism may become more visible in the Church and in society.

The Capitulars then defined and approved the pastoral priorities for the next three-year term. The closing Mass of the Chapter was celebrated in the historic San Francisco de Asís Church, entrusted to the Society of Jesus since 1922.

The Chapter concluded at 2:00 p.m. and the Capitulars began their journey home. While most faced bus journeys lasting four to nine hours, the Capitulars from the Gran Sabana Region had to undertake a journey lasting as long as forty-eight hours.

The dedication shown by all the Capitulars was truly admirable, as was the fraternal, serene, and joyful atmosphere that prevailed throughout the entire Chapter.

11. Switzerland: Regional Chapter

The Regional Fraternity of the German-speaking Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) in Switzerland held its Regional Chapter from June 12 to 14 at the "Mattli Antoniushaus und Bildungszentrum" Seminary, in the village of Morschach, where it has been headquartered since 1967. This facility has a multifunctional function and is used by numerous groups for spiritual retreats, meetings, and conferences.

This German-speaking regional fraternity of the OFS lives a particular reality thanks to the presence of a Franciscan lay community that meets with the OFS to celebrate the Franciscan charism, although in some cases it does not belong to the Secular Franciscan Order.

The CIOFS delegates present at the Chapter are Dina Shabalina, delegate of the Minister General of the OFS, and Fr. Pedro Zitha, representative of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants. They arrived on Friday, June 12, at the headquarters of the German-speaking Swiss Regional Fraternity of the OFS, where they were received at the airport and accompanied on site by the outgoing regional minister, Monika Bosshard, OFS.

After his arrival at the site, the report meeting with the outgoing Council began, followed by a dinner and a moment of fraternal sharing.

The next day began very early with personal meditation, morning prayer, and breakfast. Afterwards, the work of the Chapter opened with a prayer led by Fr. Adrian Müller, OFMCap, who welcomed all the delegates and explained the meaning of the candlelight of the pilgrimage, symbol of an itinerant light that silently and warmly illuminates the fraternities of the OFS in Switzerland. This initiative was inspired by the words of St. Clare of Assisi: "Be mirrors of light" and was followed by the approval of the agenda.

Subsequently, the president of the Franciscan lay community addressed his greetings to the delegates of the CIOFS and then gave them the floor so that they could address the assembly.

Dina Shabalina took the opportunity to illustrate the procedures of the Elective Chapter, while Fr. Pedro Zitha stressed the importance of living this time with the joy of our charism and of being together as brothers and sisters in Christ and in St. Francis.

The president of the Franciscan Lay Community presented her report, which was approved unanimously. He also shared the joy of having a sister celebrating her birthday among those present, inviting all the delegates to sing and offering her their most sincere wishes.

This was followed by the report of the Regional Minister, Monika Bosshard, OFS. Afterwards, the director of the "Mattli, Antoniushaus Seminar und Bildungszentrum" presented his report on the management of the facility, illustrating its challenges, successes, maintenance interventions and some future projects, including the renovation of the reception area of the centre. This was followed by the presentation of the programme of celebrations for the 60th anniversary of the founding of the "Mattli, Antoniushaus Seminar und Bildungszentrum".

This was followed by the Regional Fraternity's reports on different aspects of the life of the OFS in the German-speaking region, including updates on various projects, such as Well4Africa, the annual accounts of the Mattli Antoniushaus house, the financial reports and annual statistics of the members, as well as news from the Inter-Franciscan Communities (INFAG).

Subsequently, all reports were unanimously approved by both the Franciscan Lay Community and the OFS.

The Regional Minister then expressed her gratitude in her farewell speech to the outgoing auditor, Patrick Hächler.

Finally, the election of the new Regional Council of the German-speaking fraternity OFS took place. At the end of the vote, the capitulars unanimously re-elected Monika Bosshard, OFS, to the position of Regional Minister for the next three years.

Immediately afterwards, the installation of the new Regional Council took place, followed by the final greeting addressed to all the capitulars and observers present.

At the end of the chapter, a most sincere thanks were expressed to all those who contributed to the preparation and success of the meeting, in particular to the organizers, the outgoing Regional Council and the management of the Mattli Antoniushaus for the warm hospitality and excellent welcome extended to the participants.

Special thanks were also addressed to the delegates of CIOFS, Dina Shabalina and Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM, for their fraternal presence, their accompaniment and the valuable contribution offered during the work of the chapter. His service represented a concrete sign of communion with the International Fraternity and of support for the journey of the OFS in Switzerland.

12. Madagascar: National Elective Chapter

The National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of Madagascar, after a long wait due to the political situation in the country, finally held its Elected Chapter from 19 to 21 June 2026 in Majunga, a city located about 570 km from the capital, Antananarivo.

To preside over the Chapter, the Presidency of the International Council of the OFS (CIOFS) delegated its Area Councillor, Adolph Atsu Assagba, OFS, while the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants delegated the Minister Provincial of Madagascar, Fr. Jean Pierre Rasolonjanahary, OFM, to participate in the Chapter as a witness.

The President of the Chapter considered it appropriate to reiterate to the capitulars the reasons why the use of the habit or scapular is not permitted. If you wish to adopt a uniform, it must be pre-approved by the CIOFS. However, it remains true that none of these elements can replace the Tau as a distinctive sign of the Secular Franciscan Order. To our surprise, these clarifications have been well received, and we hope that this will lead to a concrete change in future practice.

After the presentation of the reports of the various leaders and the approval of the documents of the Chapter, the election of the new National Council took place. With great joy, the 52 capitulars elected Pascal Jean Elson ANDRIANOMENJANAHARY as National Minister and International Councillor.

Subsequently, during the Holy Mass in the Cathedral of Majunga, presided over by the Vicar General of the Diocese in the absence of the bishop and concelebrated by the Minister Provincial, Fr. Jean Pierre Rasolonjanahary, OFM, the inauguration ceremony of the new National Council took place. It was an intense moment of prayer, fraternal communion and dedication to the Lord for the service that the new leaders are called to carry out in the service of the National Fraternity and the Church in Madagascar.

The Chapter ended in an atmosphere of fraternity, joy and gratitude with the shared lunch and farewell of the capitulars, who returned to their local fraternities with renewed enthusiasm and the desire to continue to bear witness to the Gospel in the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi.