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CONFERENCE OF SPIRITUAL ASSISTANTS GENERAL
OFS – YOUFRA (CAS)

KOINONIA

... together on the journey

"CHRIST IS OUR HOPE"

(1 Tm. 1,1- 4)



Fr. Tomas Ginga Panzo SUVA, OFMCap

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Fr. Tomas Ginga Suva Panzo, OFMCap

«Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death,
from whom no one living can escape.
Woe to those who die in mortal sin.
Blessed are those whom death will find in Your most holy will,
for the second death shall do them no harm».

Introduction

We are already in the second stage of the celebration of the Great Franciscan Jubilee, proclaimed by Pope Leo XIV on 10 January 2026, to mark the eight hundred (800) anniversary of the passing or 'Easter' of the Seraphic Father, Saint Francis of Assisi. It is, in fact, a moment of grace and blessing for the whole Church and, in particular, for us Franciscans, as we regard it as an opportunity for 'continuity' with the spiritual journey begun during the Church's Great Ordinary Jubilee of 2025.[1]

This jubilee holds particular significance, given that it brings to a close the cycle of Franciscan centenaries, which began in 2023 with the celebration of the jubilee of Greccio and the Franciscan Rule, and now, in this year, we are faced with the reality of the death of the Seraphic Father; that is, the passage from this earthly life to the eternal life promised by Jesus to those who remain faithful to his commandments and teachings until the end.

In this third edition of our Koinonia newsletter, the sub-theme that will guide our reflection highlights one of the cornerstones of our Christian spirituality and a bedrock of our faith: "Christ our hope", drawing on St Paul's First Letter to Timothy (1 Tim 1:1, 4), where the Apostle Paul reminds us that what he is (an apostle of Christ Jesus) is by the will – or "command" – "of God our Saviour and of Christ Jesus our hope" (1 Tim 1:1). Christ is the centre and foundation of the Christian faith.

St Paul reminds us even today that God is our Saviour and that Jesus Christ is, and must always be, our Hope; in every situation in life, today and tomorrow. Therefore, St Francis's Easter (his bodily death) is an event of hope, for it must lead us to that trust in the living God; hope both in the present time and in God's eschatological future, strengthening our faith and understanding of eternal life and the future resurrection of the flesh. The meaning of death in the Christian view is open to hope in Christ Jesus.

Indeed, St Francis's celebration of Easter, which took place twenty years after his conversion (cf. *1C* 108–109; *FF* 508), crowns a journey of life that was received, lived, shared and handed on. This means: life received from God, as a free gift of His goodness; a life lived with one's brothers and for one's brothers in the love of God, living in penance and simplicity, passing on the supreme values of the Gospel, summed up in the new commandment: "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you also must love one another" (Jn 13:34; *FF* 1241), practising mercy and forgiveness (to move beyond the logic of revenge in order to make way for reconciliation and compassion (cf. Mt 12:7; 18:21–22; Lk 15; 6:36–37), humility and service) – the washing of feet is the fundamental and obvious symbol (cf. John 13:1–15; *LM* XIV,5: *FF* 1242); a life surrendered to God, as St Bonaventure tells us: "When at last the mysteries were fulfilled in him, that most holy soul, having been released from the body, was immersed in the abyss of divine clarity, and the blessed man fell asleep in the Lord" (*LM* XIV,5: *FF* 1243; *1C* 110; *2C* 217).

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[1] Cf. *Decreto della Penitenzieria Apostolica,* in https://www.penitenzieria.va/it/indulgenze/decreti-di-indulgenza/anno-s-francesco-2026.html

St Francis's Easter: "An event of hope"

First and foremost, we must understand and make it clear that the term "event of hope" – or simply "hope" – is a central element in Pauline theology, so that "every statement Paul makes about Christian hope is at the same time a statement about what God has given to the Christian in Christ".[2]



St Francis, as a true Christian, demonstrated this throughout his life following his conversion to Christ, to such an extent that his biographers describe him as an "alter Christus" – that is, another Christ – even though he was not a priest.[3] Furthermore, in the conclusion to Chapter 7 of *The Minor Legend*, St Bonaventure speaks of his passing in these words:

"Whoever has read thoroughly the things above should ponder carefully these final considerations:

the conversion of the blessed father Francis which took place in a marvellous way; efficacy in the divine word; privilege of exalted virtues; spirit of prophecy together with an understanding of the Scriptures; obedience of creatures lacking reason; the impression of the sacred stigmata; and his celebrated passage from this world to heaven. These seven testimonies clearly attest and show to the whole world that he, the glorious herald of Christ, having in himself the seal of the living God, should be venerated by reason of his accomplishments, and for the fact that he was authentic in his teaching and admirable in his holiness" (*Lm* VII: *FF* 1393).

The fact that he bears the seal of the living God makes Saint Francis a reflection of the stigmata of Jesus Christ, a sign of his sharing in God's infinite love, expressed in the Paschal mystery of the Cross, death and Resurrection. And so, Francis shares with Christ: "a seraphic love into God but also thirsted with Christ crucified for the multitude of those to be saved" (*LM* XIV,1: *FF* 1237). Physical death, therefore, is not the end of everything, even for the seraphic soul, but a conscious transition towards the definitive encounter with God and eternal life.

"Christ Jesus, our hope" (1 Tim 1:1)

Jesus Christ is, in fact, our hope as Christians, for it is through him that God fulfilled his promise to Abraham and raised Jesus from the dead. The Resurrection of Christ marks the beginning of a new life and a new existence; of a new era and a new age; rooted in hope and "founded on God's promises in Christ".[4]

Furthermore, just as Saint Paul sought to strengthen his disciple Timothy, so that he might protect the community of Ephesus from the dangers of doctrines differing from the Gospel – doctrines which sought to distort the very heart of the Gospel, namely the Paschal Mystery of 'the death and resurrection of Christ' (cf. 1 Tim 1:3), so too does Saint Francis strengthen his brothers present at that time and those yet to come with these words: "Good bye, all my sons, in the fear of the Lord!

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[2] J. M. Everts, *Speranza, in Dizionario di Paolo e sue lettere,* a cura di G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin, D. G. Reid. Ed. San Paolo, Milano 2000, 1485-1489.

[3] Because, in the Catholic theological tradition, the meaning and context of the term 'priest' are used to describe an ordained minister (presbyter).

[4] *Ibid*., 1487.

Remain in Him always! Because a trial and tribulation is coming in the future, happy are they who will persevere in those things they have begun. I am hurrying to God, to whose grace I entrust all of you." (*LM* XIV, 5: *FF* 1241).

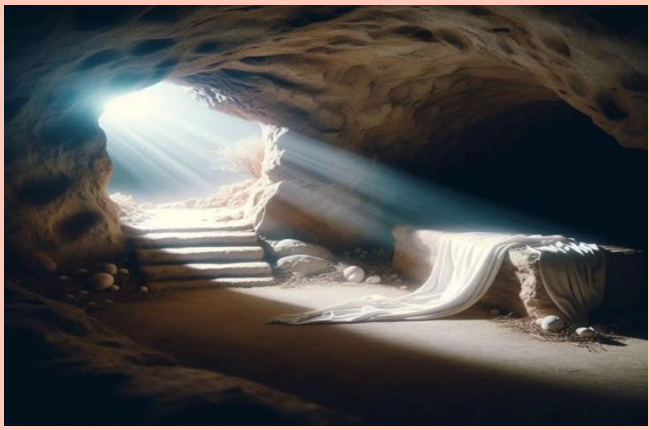
With these words, Saint Francis not only bequeaths to us the legacy of his testament, but also entrusts us entirely to the grace of God, which is realised in us through his Son, Jesus Christ, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, in the sacraments of the Church, as a guarantee of eternal life. God's grace is the only strength on which we can rely to remain steadfast in the fear of the Lord and to persevere in his most holy will.

How is St Francis's Easter a source of hope for us today?

In a world where the culture of death is becoming increasingly widespread and the sacred value of life is being increasingly disregarded, is it worth celebrating death as an 'event of hope'?

The answer to these and other questions is yes: it is worth celebrating the passing (transitus) of Saint Francis as an event of hope regarding the promise of eternal life made by Jesus Christ, as a free gift bestowed by God (John 2:13; 10:28; 1 John 2:25).

St Francis sees death as a passage to eternal life. That is why he regards it and calls it 'sister', for no living person can escape it.



Paul's message on hope is rooted in the very concept of the Old and New Testaments, in which Christian hope consists of trust in God today and trust in God in the future (cf. Col 1:27). It is on the basis of this hope that the "Easter" (death) of St Francis of Assisi can be, for the Church and today's society, a favourable opportunity for a genuine renewal of our commitments: whether at an individual, communal-fraternal or social level, concerning the growth of faith and the building of a more just and fraternal society.

The future (eschatological) dimensions of Christian hope form the comprehensive framework of Paul's thought on the resurrection. The resurrection of Christ, therefore, "marks the beginning of the messianic age and the presence of the Holy Spirit; it makes it clear that the final time has already begun and that Christian hope awaits the full manifestation of the kingdom of God at the Parousia". Thus, St Francis's Easter is for us today a living invitation to ground ourselves in Christian hope, to live by it and in it, taking Christ's resurrection as our starting point, as we journey towards the final fulfilment of the Kingdom of God.

St Francis of Assisi believed in this hope, lived by it and treasured it, making it visible right to the end; therefore, "When the hour of his passing was approaching, he had all the brothers staying in the place called to him and, comforting them about his death with words of consolation, he exhorted them to divine love with fatherly affection" (*LM* XIV,5: *FF* 1241).

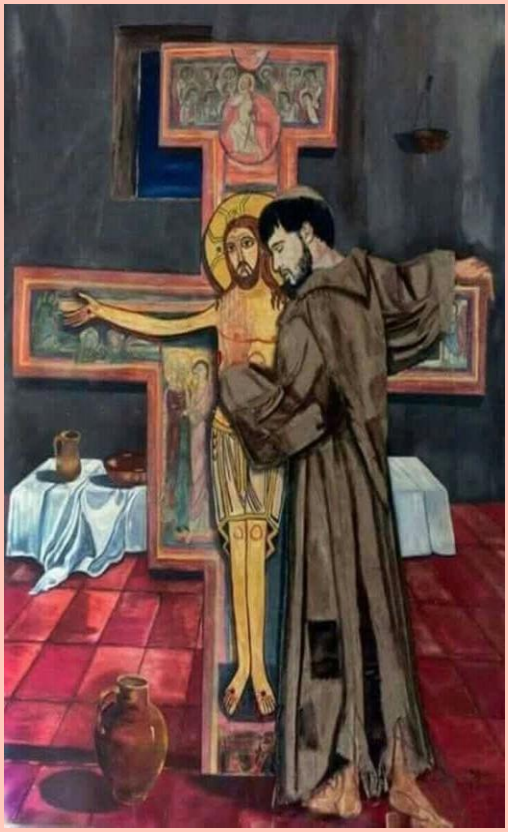
Indeed, for us Franciscans, the Feast of St Francis must be an occasion that strengthens us in the fear of the Lord, inviting us to persevere in it at all times – a fear that is not dread, but rather the strength to overcome and conquer the temptations and tribulations of our journey, as St Bonaventure so aptly highlights in the *Major Legend*: "happy are they who will persevere in those things they have begun" (*LM* XIV,5: *FF* 1241).

Conclusion

In conclusion, let us ask ourselves: what significance does the Easter or 'transitus' of St Francis hold for us today? How can it breathe new life into our existence in this world as individuals and as Christians? What new lessons can it teach us so that we may be a sign of hope for our world and, above all, in the life of our fraternities?

May these and other questions help us to change our perspectives and be visible witnesses to Christian hope – not as a virtue of the past, but as a light that can dispel the darkness and shadows of death which still shroud our hearts, our families and our societies at this moment in history.

The celebration of this Jubilee marking the eighth centenary of the death of our seraphic Father, Saint Francis, can therefore help us to:



- to renew our life in Christ within the Church and in society, in accordance with one's particular state of life; by seeking to remember the past (rediscovering the roots of Franciscan spirituality), to live the present with joy (rediscovering, in this moment in history, the way of life of the Saint of Assisi as a relevant proposal for today) and to look to the future with hope;
- that this Jubilee may be, for all Christians in general and Franciscans in particular, a time of human and spiritual renewal, in keeping with the ideal set out and lived out during the Church's Ordinary Jubilee of 2025; that is, to be "pilgrims of hope, building a better world".[5]

It is on this hope that this event focuses, looking to the example of the passing (death) of Saint Francis of Assisi as a gift that has been given, received and must be given back. An event capable of fostering spiritual growth and renewing our social and civic commitment to the issues afflicting our world, above all to promote justice and peace.

In short, in a world that so often hides or fears death, this act of calling her 'Sister Death' is an invitation to face the end without despair – a message that continues to resonate with those facing illness, bereavement or loss. Finally, Saint Francis teaches us to prepare for physical death by praising the Lord and being mindful that "no living person can escape"[6] it. Death is the passage to "eternal life" (1 John 2:25), and so we must prepare for it by "knowing and following the Lord's will".[7]

[5] Cf. https://www.vaticannews.va/it/vaticano/news/2022-06/giubileo-2025-logo-parolin-ficichella-pellegrini-speranza.html

[6] Cf. *Cantico di frate sole*, FF 263.

[7] *CAss* 6: *FF* 1547.

Meetings, Visits, and Chapters

1. Peru: Northern Regional OFS Extraordinary Elective Chapter

The extraordinary elective chapter of the Regional Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order of Northern Peru held its election from 27 to 28 June at the OFM friary, in the city of Cajamarca.

The National Fraternity of Peru is facing many challenges; consequently, the CIOFS Presidency decided to assist the fraternity in organising regional chapters, which will facilitate the election of the new National Council. It is for this reason that the Presidency and the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants were required to preside over and witness the elective Chapter of the Regional Fraternity of Peru. The Chapter was presided over by Ana Maria Raffo LAOS, delegate of the Minister General Tibor KAUSER, and witnessed by Fr. Marco SARAVIA, OFM, delegate of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants.

Unfortunately, only one regional Chapter could be held – that of Cajamarca – whilst the other region, Southern Arequipa, was unable to hold its Chapter for various other reasons.

Nevertheless, we must thank the Regional Fraternity of Northern Peru for the enthusiasm and fraternal spirit with which it held its Regional Chapter, during which Pedro RISCO, was re-elected Regional Minister.

Let us pray that the challenges currently facing the National Fraternity of Peru may be overcome, so that the election of the National Council may be held in the near future.

2. Indonesia: OFS National Elective Chapter

The 7th Elective National Chapter of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of Indonesia was celebrated from 10 to 12 July 2026, in the city of Pontianak, Kalimantan, at the 'Tirta Ria' spiritual centre of the Capuchin Friars Minor of the Pontianak Province, Indonesia. The theme of the chapter was: "JPIC as the DNA of the application of OFS spirituality". There were present around 150 people, including Secular Franciscans, friars and nuns spiritual assistants at local, regional and national levels. The spiritual assistants from the Capuchin Province of Medan were not present.

The opening Mass was presided over by Monsignor Samuel Oton SIDIN, OFMCap., Titular Bishop of Sintang and currently also Apostolic Administrator of the Metropolitan Archdiocese of Pontianak. The bishop expressed his fraternal affection for the OFS and addressed words of support and encouragement to all the capitulars and all members of the OFS in Indonesia.

The Chapter was attended and celebrated with great enthusiasm by both the Secular Franciscans and the spiritual assistants who accompany and provide spiritual guidance to these brothers and sisters. Special recognition must be given to the collaborative work of the three national spiritual assistants: Fr. Thomas Ferry SUHARTO, OFM, Fr. Gabriel MARCEL, OFMCap and Fr. Fictorium Natanael GINTING, OFMConv.

Fr. Tomas Ginga held a three hours fraternal and formative meeting with the spiritual assistants on the morning of the 11th. There were present around 24 assistants, including 16 friars and 8 nuns from the various Franciscan congregations present in the area, who collaborate with the friars in this ministry of spiritual assistance to the OFS and YouFra. The formation session highlighted the role and importance of assistants within an OFS and YouFra fraternity.

The election took place on Sunday morning, 12 July, in the presence of 44 capitulars with voting rights, as well as observers and members of the local fraternities of Pontianak. Sulastri M. PASARIBU, OFS, from the Medan Region, was elected National Minister; and Ernest MARIYANTO, OFS, was elected International Councillor.

The election was presided over by Dina SHABALINA, OFS, a member of the CIOFS Presidency and delegate of the OFS Minister General, Tibor KAUSER, assisted and witnessed by Fr. Tomas Ginga

Panzo SUVA, OFMCap., general spiritual assistant, representing the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS).
The closing Mass was celebrated on Sunday afternoon (3.30 pm). It was presided over by Fr. Faustus Bagara DARMAWAN, OFMCap., Provincial Minister of the Capuchins of Pontianak, and concelebrated by the various regional and local assistant friars present. During this same Eucharistic celebration, the new OFS National Council of Indonesia was officially installed.

3. Congo Brazzaville: OFS National Elective Chapter

The National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of the Republic of Congo (Congo-Brazzaville) had the joy of holding its elective Chapter from 26 to 28 July at the "Fraternité Sainte Claire d'Assise de Djiri/Brazzaville – Maison d'Accueil Saint Damien."
Thirteen capitulars took part in the Chapter. The theme chosen for the meeting was: 'Being Secular Franciscans in the Church and in a secularized society', an invitation to rediscover the vocation of Secular Franciscans as authentic witnesses to the Gospel in today's world.
The Chapter was presided over by Adolphe ASSAGBA, Member of the CIOFS Presidency for Francophone Africa. Fr. Armel Landry Paterne BADI BILOMBO, OFM, was the representative of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants.
After listening to and voting on the reports presented by the National Minister, the Treasurer and the Formator, the capitulars took part in the election in an atmosphere of prayer, discernment and fraternity. At the end of the voting, Pierre MADINGOU was re-elected as National Minister and International Councillor of the OFS.
The Chapter concluded with a Eucharistic celebration of thanksgiving and the missionary sending-forth of the new leaders of the National Fraternity. The Holy Mass was presided over by His Excellency Monsignor Benvento, Archbishop of Brazzaville, and concelebrated by Fr. Armel Landry Paterne BADI BILOMBO, OFM, and Fr. Guy Patcnel YENGO, OFM, National Spiritual Assistants. The entire Chapter took place in an atmosphere of genuine fraternity, characterised by intense prayer, serene discernment, and a meaningful yet balanced approach.

4. USA: OFS Quinquennial Congress. St. Francis's Easter: Rekindling the flame

From July 29 to August 2, 2026, five hundred members of the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of the United States gathered for a National Congress at the Griffin Gate Marriott Resort in Lexington, Kentucky, U.S.A., to celebrate the 800th anniversary of the *transitus* of St. Francis and to "rekindle the flame" of their vocation. This was a significant turnout, representing nearly 5.3% of the entire National Fraternity, which has approximately 9,300 members divided into thirty regional fraternities.
The Congress began at 4:00 p.m. on Wednesday July 29 with opening remarks from the National Minister of the OFS in the United States., Jane DeROSE-BAMMAN. She highlighted the happy coincidence of the celebration of the 800th anniversary of the *transitus* of St. Francis occurring at the same time as the celebration of this Congress, which is dedicated to prayer, formation, and fraternity. She also welcomed some distinguished guests, including OFS Minister General Tibor KAUSER, OFS Vice Minister General Mary Teresa STRONACH, Area Councilor Anna Maria RAFFO LAOS, and the representative of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS).
At 4:40 p.m., the opening Mass began with the Most Reverend John STOWE, OFM Conv., Bishop of Lexington, Kentucky, presiding.
The program of the Congress was full and well-organized. Each day began with Morning Prayer at 7:30 a.m. and concluded at 9:00 p.m. with post-dinner recreational activities. Eucharistic Adoration took place on Friday evening.

A significant portion of the Congress was dedicated to formation. On Thursday, Friar Bill SHORT, OFM, gave a lecture entitled: *"From Wounds to Glory: The Transitus of St. Francis."* On Friday, Dr. Darleen PRYDS gave a lecture entitled: *"The Spirituality of Presence: Donna Jacopa and the Franciscan Practice of Caring and Being Cared For."* On Saturday, Fr. Wayne HELLMANN, OFM Conv., gave a lecture entitled: *"Franciscan Year 2026: Re-reading Pope Leo's Prayer for Peace Addressed to St. Francis."*

The lectures were followed by group work, discussion sessions with the speakers, and plenary assemblies dedicated to various topics, including *"Living the Gospel"* and *"Service Projects."* Each afternoon at 4:30 p.m., the Congress gathered for Mass, animated by a choir made up of OFS members.

The participation of forty candidates discerning admission to the OFS gave the Congress special significance. The candidates took an active part in the various activities and contributed to the fraternal spirit of the gathering.

One of the most anticipated moments came on Saturday at 1:15 p.m., when the Most Reverend Archbishop Gabriele Giordano CACCIA, Apostolic Nuncio to the United States of America, presented Pope Leo XIV's message to the OFS National Fraternity of the United States, with a particular greeting to the members of the Congress.

At 4:30 p.m., the Apostolic Nuncio himself presided over Mass, with Bishop John STOWE and the OFS Spiritual Assistants concelebrating. The Apostolic Nuncio also took part in the afternoon activities and in the discussion the Congress conducted with the four representatives of the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order (CIOFS), namely the OFS Minister General, the Vice Minister General, the Area Councilor Anna Maria RAFFO LAOS, and the representative of CAS.

The Apostolic Nuncio also attended the day's final recreational event, *"Franciscans Got Talent."*

The Congress concluded on Sunday after five days filled with prayer, formation, and fraternal life. Having rekindled the flame of their Franciscan vocation, the participants returned to their respective fraternities to continue living and bearing witness to the Gospel in their daily lives.

5. El Salvador: Fraternal and Pastoral Visit

The Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) in El Salvador received a fraternal and pastoral visit from the Presidential Council of the Secular Franciscan Order (CIOFS), from 6 to 9 August, led by Ana María Raffo (a member of the Presidency) and Fr. Guadalupe Antonio Hernández Huerta TOR, representatives of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS).

On the first day of the event, we held fraternal meetings with the fraternities of the southern region (OFS-YOUFRA) in San Juan Nonualco and with the fraternities of San Luis Gonzaga in San Luis la Herradura. We met with members of the regional and local councils, who welcomed us with great joy; we shared a meal, listened to their hopes and plans for the region, and prayed together at the tomb of Blessed Cosme Spessotto, entrusting the fruits of this visit to him. We also held meetings with the national council for the relevant review and with the national spiritual assistants of the three orders (OFM, OFMCap., OFMConv.) to discuss the main challenges facing the fraternities. After celebrating Holy Mass in the parish of Our Lord of Mercy, we met with the local fraternities: Mary, Mother of the Redeemer; the Immaculate Conception; and the regional council of the central zone.

The second day began with Morning prayer in St Anthony of Padua friary, together with the Conventual Franciscans who kindly offered us their hospitality. Afterwards, the National Council and the visitors met with Monsignor Oswaldo Escobar, Bishop of Chalatenango, who highlighted the work and evangelical witness of the local confraternities; We also shared a moving and joyful meeting with the Poor Clares of the diocese and, to round off the day, we celebrated Mass at the

shrine of Our Lady of Fatima and met with the fraternities of Planes de Renderos, St Anthony of Padua and Our Lady of the Angels.
On the third day, we travelled to the upper part of Chalatenango to meet representatives from the country's five regions at the evangelisation centre, thereby fully realising the pastoral and fraternal objectives set for this visit. During the day, we were greatly blessed to receive the first-class relics of St Francis of Assisi, which enriched the fruitful exchanges of dialogue and listening between the regions, the National Council and the spiritual assistants. We also held the extraordinary election of the new National Councillor and celebrated Holy Mass before sharing a closing lunch.
The warm hospitality and constant affection shown by the OFS of El Salvador reaffirmed the success of this mission. We left with the immense joy of knowing and truly feeling that we are one family.

6. Ireland: OFS National Elective Chapter

The elective chapter of the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order of Ireland was celebrated on Saturday, August 8, at Merchants Quay Franciscan Centre, Dublin. The chapter was presided over by the area councillor Dina SHABALINA and witnessed by Fr. Colin EDWARDS, OFMConv., as delegate of the Conference of general spiritual assistants (CAS).
The 13 capitulars elected Gabriel COSTELLO as national minister; he is also the International Councillor. At the chapter were present 15 OFS observers, the National Spiritual Assistants Brother Godfrey PEREIRA, OFMCap, Fr. Marius TOMULESEI, OFM Conv, Fr. Albe O' MURCHU, OFM and brother Ronan SHARPLEY OFM, spiritual assistant for Young Franciscans (YouFra).
A Mass was celebrated at noon in the Adam and Eve Franciscan Church in Merchants Quay, Dublin. The Investiture of the national minister and the new national council took place in the aula.
Overall, the chapter was positive. However, having been condensed into one day it limited time for questions and discussions. The new council was advised to consider extending the time frame for the next chapter. Also, it would be helpful to have some spiritual input and to ensure the investiture takes place within a Mass. The chapter was friendly and welcoming, and Dina's input was wonderful. Her calm and encouraging manner enabled the chapter to hear what was needed in a very disarming way.

7. Uganda: Second Pan-African Congress of the Secular Franciscan Order

The National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) in Uganda, recently canonically established, had the great honour and privilege of hosting the Second Pan-African Congress of the Secular Franciscan Order, which took place from 21 to 27 August 2026 and was immediately followed by the National Elective Chapter, held from 28 to 31 August 2026.
We give heartfelt thanks to God for the grace of this fraternal gathering and express our sincere gratitude to the organisers for the courage, dedication and perseverance with which they made the Congress possible, despite the ongoing threat posed by Ebola. Their perseverance is a fine testimony to the Franciscan spirit of fraternity, hope and trust in Divine Providence.
The Congress brought together a total of 91 brothers and sisters of the OFS from national fraternities across Africa, with significant representation from the English-speaking, French-speaking and Portuguese-speaking regions. Among the countries represented were Cameroon, Eritrea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Togo, Tanzania, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. This diversity of languages, cultures and experiences enriched our fraternal communion and reminded us that, although we come from different nations and traditions, we are one Franciscan Family, called to live the Gospel following the example of St Francis of Assisi. The theme of the Congress was 'Be peacemakers'; during the Congress, we therefore reflected on various issues of importance for the life and mission of the Secular Franciscan Order in Africa.

The schedule included the presentation and evaluation of the conclusions of the First Pan-African Congress, presented by Jenny Harrington, OFS, and Eremenciana Chinyama, OFS. It was an opportunity to look back with gratitude on the journey we have undertaken, to evaluate it, and to renew our commitment to putting the fruits of the previous meeting into practice.

Paunga Pulenthiran introduced us to Franciscan International, helping us to deepen our understanding of the Franciscan presence and mission in the world.

The Minister General, Tibor KAUSER, OFS, offered an important reflection on the 'Role and Interpretation of the International Statutes', helping us to appreciate more deeply the rules that guide our Order and the responsibility of every Franciscan to live them faithfully in a spirit of service and communion. He invited the participants to recognise the importance of the Statutes not only as legal norms, but also to appreciate their spiritual dimension.

We were also addressed by Adolph Atsu ASSAGBA, OFS, on the theme 'Be peacemakers'. This reflection spoke directly to the vocation of Franciscans in a world wounded by conflict, division, violence and injustice. As followers of the Poor Man of Assisi, we are called to become instruments of peace, reconciliation and hope wherever we find ourselves.

Fr. John Martin OPIO, OFMCap, guided us in our reflection on the Jubilee Year of St. Francis of Assisi, inviting us to rediscover the grace of our Franciscan vocation and to celebrate, with renewed gratitude, the life and witness of our Seraphic Father.

The Congress also provided an opportunity for dialogue with the members of the Presidency, strengthening communion, mutual understanding and collaboration within the worldwide fraternity.

Particular attention was given to the younger generations through the theme 'Franciscan youth, adolescents and children as instruments of peace in the world', presented by Nicholas KUGONZA, OFS. The reflection reminded us of our responsibility to accompany young people and children and to help them become joyful witnesses to the Gospel and courageous peacemakers in their families, communities, nations and throughout the world.

Tibor KAUSER, OFS, also led a reflection on 'The Easter of St. Francis, 1226–2026', inviting us to contemplate St. Francis's final journey and the enduring fruitfulness of his life, his death and his witness for the Church and for the Franciscan Family today.

The theme 'Living the Franciscan Life in a World Marked by Conflict', presented by Fr Elvis, OFMCap, invited us to examine how we can faithfully live out the Gospel and our Franciscan vocation amidst the many conflicts and wounds afflicting our societies. He reminded us that the Franciscan life is not simply a way of speaking about peace, but a concrete call to live as brothers and sisters, promoting reconciliation, justice, mercy and care for creation.

Another important reflection was offered by Fr. Pedro ZITHA, OFM, on the theme 'Exploring the role of Spiritual Assistants in the African context'. This helped us to appreciate more deeply the valuable contribution of Spiritual Assistants in accompanying the Secular Franciscan Order and in nurturing its spiritual and ecclesial life within the African context.

Subsequently, our Presidential Councillor, Eremenciana CHINYAMA, OFS, guided us in a deeper reflection on the interconnectedness of life within the family, the fraternity and the Church. Her reflection reminded us that the Franciscan vocation cannot be lived in isolation. We are called to recognise that mutual relationships are an essential part of our evangelical vocation. This interconnectedness invites us to move beyond individualism and to embrace a spirituality of communion, mutual care and shared responsibility.

The Congress concluded with a session dedicated to priorities and conclusions, during which the participants reflected together on the path to be taken. These conclusions call upon the Secular Franciscan Order in Africa to renew its commitment to its vocation and mission, calling for greater collaboration and communion amongst the national fraternities, deeper and more systematic

formation, enhanced support for young people, and a more visible and meaningful Franciscan contribution to the promotion of peace, reconciliation and fraternity throughout Africa.
The Second Pan-African Congress was therefore much more than a gathering of representatives from different countries. It was a profound experience of grace, fraternity, communion and spiritual renewal. It offered brothers and sisters from across the continent the opportunity to meet, celebrate the richness of their Franciscan vocation, share joys and challenges, and listen attentively to the inspirations of the Spirit.
In this spirit of synodality and Franciscan communion, the Congress enabled participants to discern together how the Secular Franciscan Order might respond more faithfully and effectively to the realities and needs of the African continent and of the Church. Rooted in the Gospel and inspired by the example of St. Francis of Assisi, participants were encouraged to deepen their commitment to being instruments of peace, reconciliation, fraternity and hope, especially amongst young people and in communities affected by conflict, poverty, divisions and social vulnerability.
The Congress concluded solemnly and in an atmosphere of prayer with the celebration of Holy Mass, presided over by His Most Reverend Excellency Paul SSEMOGERERE, Archbishop of Nairobi. In his homily and concluding remarks, the Archbishop offered words of encouragement and fraternal exhortation, inviting the participants to carry the spirit and fruits of the Congress back to their respective countries, communities and fraternities.

8. Uganda: OFS National Elective Chapter

The National Council of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) in Uganda held its National Elective Chapter immediately following the Pan-African Congress at the Uirika Guest House, Gogonya–Kisubi Enterprise, Gamba, from 28 to 30 August 2026.
The Elective Chapter was chaired by the Presidency Councillor Eremenciana CHINYAMA, OFS. In a joyful and fraternal atmosphere, the eleven capitulars gathered in a spirit of prayer, fraternity and discernment to elect the new National Council.
The capitulars elected Frederick KANYIKE, OFS, as the new National Minister and International Councillor. The Conference of General Spiritual Assistants expresses its sincere gratitude for the generous collaboration and tireless service of the National, Regional and Local Spiritual Assistants in Uganda. Through their faithful accompaniment, they continue to encourage the Secular Franciscan brothers and sisters to remain rooted in the Franciscan charism, to live the Gospel in fraternity, and to embrace more fully their responsibility and mission within the local Church in Uganda.
The Elective Chapter concluded with Holy Mass and the installation of the newly elected National Council. The Eucharistic celebration was presided over by Fr. Gidion Nucagaba TWONGIRIEWE, OFM. The Elective Chapter was characterised by a calm, prayerful and deeply fraternal spirit.

9. Chile: The Second OFS-YouFra Formation School in South America

The National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) in Chile has 360 members divided into thirty-nine local fraternities. From September 3-6, 2026, the Fraternity hosted its second formation course for formators of the OFS and Franciscan Youth (YouFra) in South America, entitled *"From Shared Experience to Fraternal Service."* It was held at the retreat centre run by the sisters of the Missionary Servants of the Holy Spirit in Santiago, Chile.
The course was designed for OFS and YouFra formators, Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) coordinators, fraternal animators, and Spiritual Assistants from across South America. It provided formation and a forum for exchanging experiences and information.
The course officially opened with Mass at 11:00 a.m. on Thursday, September 3, presided over by the OFS General Spiritual Assistant, Fr. Ștefan ACATRINEI, OFMConv. The afternoon session began

at 2:45 p.m. with an update on the implementation of the decisions made during the 2024 formation course in Cochabamba, Bolivia. Representatives of the OFS National Fraternities then shared updates on their fraternities, formation programs, the work of their National Councils, the progress they had made, and the challenges they faced. The first day ended with Night Prayer at 9:00 p.m.

The Friday and Saturday morning sessions focused entirely on formation. Sister Mercedes del Carmen DONATO, SCMR (Capuchin Sisters of Mother Rubatto), addressed the topics *"Forming a Working Group Called a Council"* and *"Conflicts within a Council."* Fr. Ștefan explored the essence of the Spiritual Assistant's service to the OFS and YouFra in a presentation entitled *"Understanding Our Service to the OFS and YouFra."* There were forty-eight participants, including eight Franciscan youth. They formed working groups to explore the various topics. On Friday afternoon, they spent an hour reviewing the formation manuals.

On Saturday afternoon, the entire group travelled to the Church of San Francisco de la Alameda in Santiago, where the Minister Provincial, Fr. Lino MIRANDA CASTAÑEDA, OFM, presided over Mass at 7:30 p.m. After returning to the retreat centre, the day concluded with a cultural evening dedicated to Chile.

On Sunday, September 6, the day began at 8:00 a.m. with prayer, followed by group work and approval of the final document of the formation course, entitled *"Commitments and Challenges."* Among the decisions made was the determination that the next Formation Course for South America will take place from April 27 to May 1, 2029, in Peru. The intensive course concluded at noon with Mass presided over by Fr. Miguel Ángel ESTUPIÑÁN ZAFRA, OFM, National Spiritual Assistant of Colombia. The course provided rich opportunities for formation and sharing that will benefit the life of the OFS National Fraternities.

The Secular Franciscans attending the course came from nine countries—Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia, Brazil, Peru, Ecuador, and Colombia. They were accompanied by nine Spiritual Assistants: three Conventual Franciscans (from Brazil, Argentina, and Bolivia), five Friars Minor (two from Chile, one from Colombia, one from Uruguay, and one from Bolivia), and one diocesan priest from Uruguay. On Saturday morning, the Provincial Delegate, Fr. Fabrizio RESTANTE, OFMConv., joined the group with two other friars.

Most participants departed Sunday at 3:00 p.m., taking with them the abundant fruits of their time together.

10. Peru: OFS National Elective Chapter

The Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of Peru held its National Elective Chapter from 11 to 13 September 2026. The meeting was attended by the Minister General, Tibor Kauser, OFS, and Fr. Guadalupe Antonio Hernández Huerta, TOR, representing the Conference of General Assistants (CAS), who were warmly welcomed. It was an event deeply marked by profound prayer, fraternal communion and collective discernment. From the very outset, the atmosphere was imbued with the warmth and devotion characteristic of the Peruvian people; at the opening celebration, Franciscan hymns and the living memory of generations of lay people resounded strongly, reminding us that the Franciscan vocation is, above all, a joyful journey shared in the following of Christ in the manner of St. Francis of Assisi.

The opening ceremony of this important chapter was graced by the distinguished presence of Monsignor Pascual Benjamín Rivera Montoya, Bishop of the Prelature of Huamachuco, who offered pastoral encouragement to the capitulars, urging them to allow the voice of the Holy Spirit to guide them in discerning what God is asking of the Church through their service. Thirty-four capitulars with voting rights participated in this chapter, accompanied at all times by the spiritual guidance of the national assistants, Fr. Marcos Saravia, OFM, and Fr. Jimmy Joel, OFMCap.

The high point of the Chapter came on voting day, when the assembly enthusiastically proceeded to elect the new National Council that would guide the OFS's activities in Peru over the next three years. In these elections, Paul Zuzunaga Lucen was elected National Minister and also International councillor.

The Chapter concluded in a deeply moving manner with a solemn closing Mass. In the homily, the new leaders were encouraged to live out Franciscan leadership as a humble service of foot-washing, always acting as peacemakers and witnesses of hope within each of their fraternities. Amidst fraternal embraces, songs of joy and the traditional Franciscan blessing, the participants returned to their home communities with hearts ablaze and a renewed commitment to bringing the Holy Gospel to life.