

LETTER OF THE MINISTER GENERAL FOR EASTER 2024 THE PASCHAL MYSTERY IN THE WORLD

"Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit."

To the Friars of the Order
To the Poor Clare and Conceptionist Sisters
To the Franciscan Sisters affiliated to the Order
To the Franciscan Laity

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
May the Lord give you peace!

This message for Easter 2024 is being published on the Fifth Sunday of Lent, when John's Gospel is proclaimed: *"Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit. Whoever loves their life loses it, and whoever hates their life in this world will preserve it for eternal life"* (Jn 12:24,25).

Together, then, let us look at this interweaving of death and life as we recall the 800th anniversary of the stigmata of St. Francis — those mysterious signs of his loving communion with Christ.

[Download and read the full text of the Letter of the Minister General](#)



GENERAL CURIA AGENDA

- On the 21st and 22nd March, Br Francisco Gomez Vargas and Br Dennis Tayo, Secretary and Deputy Secretary General for Missions and Evangelization, will participate in the meeting of the Executive Council for Missions and Evangelization (CEME) in Rome. From the 1st to 6th April they will be at the meeting of the New Forms of Life and Evangelization in Indonesia; from the 15th to the 19th they will visit the missions in Vietnam.
- From the 24th to 26th March Br Daniel Rodríguez Blanco, Director of the JPIC General Office, will be in Saluzzo (Italy) to visit the OFM Fraternity's shelter.
- From 25 March to 5 April, Br Massimo Fusarelli, Minister General, will visit some of the Order's Entities in Asia.
- On the 25th March, Br Darko Tepert, Secretary General for Formation and Studies, will participate in the annual meeting at the Franciscan Institute of Spirituality (PUA) on the Diploma of Formation for Consecrated Life. From the 2nd to 4th April he will be at Our Lady of the Angels (Assisi) for the meeting of the Under 7 Friars of COMPI.
- From the 27th March 27 to 4th April, Br Fabio César Gomes, General Delegate pro Monialibus, will visit some monasteries in Apulia (Italy). On the 7th April, at the Monastery of St. Clare in Rome, she will participate in the Solemn Profession of Sr. Maria Pace di Dio fedele, OSC.
- From the 2nd to 7th April, Br Daniel Rodríguez Blanco and Br Taucen Hotlan Girsang, Deputy Director of the JPIC Office, will visit the Province of St. Michael the Archangel (Indonesia); from the 14th to the 18th they will visit the Province of the Holy Korean Martyrs (South Korea).



CENTENARY OF THE STIGMATA IN FLORENCE (ITALY)

“BETWEEN THE GREAT TEMPTATION AND THE NEW SONG: STEPS ON THE JOURNEY”

On Friday, March 1, gathered in the magnificent Hall of the Five Hundred of the Palazzo Vecchio of Florence (Italy) the second major event of the Centenary of the Stigmata unfolded, the first having taken place on January 5 at Mount La Verna. “Between the great temptation and the new song: steps on the journey” was the title of the gathering in which our Minister General, Br Massimo Fusarelli, participated, along with the mayor of Florence, Dario Nardella, and journalist, Agnese Pini, Director of QN-La Nazione, Il Giorno, and Il Resto del Carlino. This three-voice conversation was moderated by Maria Federica Giuliani, Councilor for Religious Confessions from the city of Florence and by Br Matteo Brena OFM, Coordinator of the Regional Commission for the Centenary of the Stigmata.



“The title of the 8th Centenary is From Wounds to New Life,” said Br Matteo Brena, “an inspired title which reveals the conviction that new life often comes about from our woundedness. We would like to celebrate this Centenary by viewing the profound event that took place with Francis of Assisi as a gift for all people, believers and non-believers alike. And so we hoped to provide this moment of dialogue in this place, a place that normally hosts secular gatherings, searching to determine the steps of a common journey for us all, while trying to understand and avoid the most tenacious temptations of our age.”

For his part, Br Massimo explained how Saint Francis, after returning from his time in the Holy Land, renounced the title of Minister General of the Order. This came during a period of deep suffering and personal crisis for him, because the fraternity was changing too quickly and had become quite different than the one he had left behind. “Francis entered into a profound personal crisis after the approval of the Rule and headed up Mount La Verna to pray and retreat. There he faced severe temptations,” said the Minister. He ascended the mountain to make his peace and be reconciled with God and himself. He descended a new man, a true herald of the Gospel, his body becoming a sermon

of peace. “I hope that this year of celebrating the 8th Centenary of the Stigmata affords us the opportunity to change that which we most struggle with, apathy, that we too might become living signs of peace,” Br Massimo concluded. Dario Nardella highlighted how Saint Francis, in his simplicity, is attractive to all, especially the youth. For him, Saint Francis’ life highlights an experience, the experience of renouncing all. “The concept of renouncing all things is compelling and raises a fascination that strikes at the core of the person.” The Mayor of Florence continued, saying that in a world at war, we need to “rehumanize”

all things, as Saint Francis did. “Humanity had forgotten how to be human...How can a society ever humanize war? Today we need to figure out what to do for the suffering and the dying, we must explore the questions raised by the environment crisis and technology,” Nardella concluded.

Director Pini shared her experience visiting Mount La Verna when she was young. “I was taken aback by Francis who spoke with animals and after my experience on La Verna, I wanted to do the same!” For her, the simplicity of Saint Francis is timeless and speaks to everyone. It even spoke to her as a young girl. “He was so very human, with such a colorful personality. It must have been difficult for those who knew him to consider him a saint. I wonder if I lived in his day would I have recognized his sanctity? Or would I have considered him mad? I certainly hope not.”

After this, the conversation turned to Artificial Intelligence, calling it the “great power,” and a change in our world that cannot be ignored. We must determine ways to use it for good. We recall that in order to reform the Church, Francis did not leave the Church, he reformed from within. “We too have an opportunity today to reform things from within.” She concluded saying, “Another thing Saint Francis teaches, that may be applied to Artificial Intelligence, is the importance of having rules. Francis needed a Rule for his Order to follow and so we today need rules that will keep us from losing ourselves.”

- From the 6th to 13th April, the General Definitory and the Officers of the General Curia will meet with the Franciscan Conferences of Asia, Australia and Oceania (FCAO) in Manila, Philippines.
- From April the 14th to 21st, Br Darko and Br Hieronimus Dei Rupa, Deputy Secretary of Formation and Studies, will

visit the friars of Indonesia, in particular those in formation and formators.

- From the 15th to 20th April, Br Massimo and Br Ignacio Ceja, Vicar General, will visit the Custody of the Holy Land.

AN INTERVIEW WITH BR AIDAN McGRATH, OFM

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SAFEGUARDING OF THE MINORS AND VULNERABLE ADULTS

From the 24th of February to the 2nd of March 2024, the International Commission for Safeguarding of the Minors and Vulnerable Adults met in Assisi in order to evaluate on what has been done so far with regard to the question of Safeguarding of the Minors and Vulnerable Adults. We interviewed Br Aidan McGrath who has been involved in this ministry for many years.



Since the establishment of the Commission what have been important steps which the Commission has completed?

First of all, the steps in the world and the approach to the whole question of Safeguarding of the Minors and Vulnerable Adults. In some places it has been taken seriously while in some places it not yet considered as a priority. We have worked together to identify essential elements to be inserted into policies and procedures in the Entities. We wrote a letter to the whole Order about the abuse of power.

According to you, what are the priorities and challenges for the future?

In my view, the priorities and challenges for the immediate future are:

- To ensure that safeguarding is integrated into all sectors of life within the Order, i.e., in initial formation, ongoing formation, in preparation for ministry, in evangelization and in fraternal life.
- To highlight the risks facing the friars in everyday life and in ministry to make them aware of their own vulnerability of others with whom they will come into contact, not only children, but also adults in situations or circumstances that render them particularly vulnerable, e.g., the elderly, the sick and those confined to nursing care.

What would St. Francis say today about Safeguarding of the Minors and Vulnerable Adults?

During these days in Assisi, we have been working as a Commission and also taking time to reflect on our identity as a Commission working on behalf of the Friars Minor. Time and again, we have come back to the name of our fraternity St. Francis wanted us to be called: "Friars Minor" or "Lesser brothers", that title indicates a whole attitude of minority, an attitude of solidarity with the vulnerable, with the little ones in society.

In our visits to various shrines associated with Francis, we have reflected on his own behavior and attitudes before his conversion and how that may have affected his outlook on life afterwards and how he behaved towards others. At the General Chapter, the whole conversation about safeguarding took place under the context of our being "brothers to all": if we are brothers to all others, then abusive behavior or attitudes of any kind are utterly alien to us.

I think that St. Francis would tell us to be poor and humble, admitting our faults and failings, and working to create safe spaces and environments and environments in which for the weakest of the weak and the most vulnerable can share in the joy of the Gospel.

BR KONRAD AND BR NIKOLA IN RUSSIA
VISIT TO THE “SAN FRANCESCO D’ASSISI” FOUNDATION



One of the entities of our Order is the “San Francesco d’Assisi” Foundation in the Russian Federation. It is composed of three presences: at St Petersburg, at Novosibirsk and at Ussuriysk. The Delegate General of this entity is actually the Definitor General, Br Konrad Cholewa, while the President of the Foundation is Br Stefano Invernizzi. Besides him, the Foundation is composed of two Italian Friars, two Russians and one Pole. All three presences are very distant from each other, which means that the brothers do not have the possibility of meeting very often. In each of the three presences, they carry out ordinary pastoral work in the parishes and manage works of charity, such as a Catholic school for poor children in Novosibirsk and a house called “Centro Tau” for the homeless in Ussuriysk. They also support religious women of various institutes. One of the brothers teaches theology in the theological seminary in St Petersburg.

The Catholics in Russia represent only 0.5% of the total population of the country, therefore the Church is a church of small communities. In one of the villages belonging to our parish in Ussuriysk, a 100 km from the Church, only one family is Catholic, so every Saturday the brothers go to them to celebrate the mass in their home. Only one Catholic child attends our school in Novosibirsk. The other children are Orthodox or

Muslim. In this context, the mission of our confreres also involves interreligious dialogue.

From February 6 to 25, the Definitor General, Br Konrad Cholewa, accompanied by the Director of the Development Office, Br Nikola Kozina, visited the Foundation of San Francesco d’Assisi in the Russia Federation.

Br Konrad commented upon his return: “During our visit in Russia, we had the opportunity to meet and to speak with the people of this country of different confessions, with the priests, the religious sisters, the bishops who work there. My sense is that this is a country which has a great need of God, of the Gospel, of priests, of love... Even if the greater part of the population declares itself Orthodox, half of it is not baptized and has never crossed the threshold of a church. Our task was to visit the brothers, in the name of the Minister General, and to encourage them in their difficult mission, to meet the people they serve, to support the pastoral and charitable works carried out by them. It was a long visit, in terms of both its duration and the distances to travel. I thank the Lord for our brothers who serve the people of God in Russia with such dedication.”

Br Konrad concluded by saying, “If anyone feels the missionary vocation to work ‘in the East’, the Church in Russia awaits him with an open heart.”



DECEASED BROTHERS *

- 7th March: Br Paul Guido, Prov. Immaculate Conception (USA)
- 6th March: Br Austen Crapp, Bishop Emeritus of Aitape (Papua New Guinea), Prov. Holy Spirit (Australia)
- 5th March: Br Theobald Stouten, Prov. of the Holy Martyrs of Gorcum (Netherlands)
- 3rd March: Br Anton Hoffmann, Prov. of St. Elizabeth (Germany)
- 1st March: Br Roman Stephen Almagno, Prov. of the Immaculate Conception (USA)
- 13th February: Br Nello C. Bulawan, Prov. St. Anthony of Padua (Philippines)

* Information received from the General Secretariat secgen@ofm.org

GENERAL COMMISSION OF THE ORDER OF THE FRIARS MINOR FOR THE SERVICE FOR DIALOGUE MESSAGE ON THE OCCASION OF THE HOLY MONTH OF RAMADAN

May the Peace of God be upon you all!

This year, God wants Christians and Muslims to live Lent and Ramadan together for almost three weeks. During these days, each in our own way and according to our age-old traditions, we try to get closer to God by following His paths (the “straight paths” mentioned in Surah Al-Fatiha 6) and by reading His Word. We try to reconcile with our brothers and sisters by “forgiving with beautiful forgiveness” (Surah Al-Hijr 85) and to share what we have with those who need it (“for charity covers a multitude of sins” 1st Epistle of Saint Peter 4,8). And we try to submit our bodies to the penance of fasting which makes us discover that without God we can do nothing (Gospel according to Saint John 15,5) and that He is and always will be the one and only God.

Our paths therefore cross mysteriously once again during these days. We would like, as Franciscan brothers also

seeking to conform our lives to the will of God, to assure you of our prayer and our closeness during this month which is so important for everyone. May God, in His infinite mercy, grant us to do more and more every day what pleases Him. In these times when the peace of the world seems so compromised and when so many peoples are experiencing the open wound and scandal of war, we would also like to invite you to pray particularly with us so that the peace of God surpasses all selfishness and all fears, in Gaza, in Ukraine, in the Congo and in so many less publicized places in our world, our societies and our families. May our prayers and our efforts to live better together on this earth unite so that God’s plan for humanity can be achieved.

Happy and holy month of Ramadan to you all!

The General Commission of the Order of the Friars Minor for the service for Dialogue

CUSTODY OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE BVM IN ALBANIA AND MONTENEGRO BR PASHKO GOJCAJ HAS BEEN ELECTED THE NEW CUSTOS



In the context of the celebration of the Chapter of the Franciscan Custody of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Albania and Montenegro, the new Government of this Custody under the Minister General was proclaimed. The proclamation was made by the President of the Chapter, Br Ignacio Ceja, Vicar General, who announced that the General Definitory has appointed Br Pashko Gojcaj to the office of Custos, and Br Aurel Gjerka (Vicar), Br Vitor Demaj, Br Jak Kolgjeraj and Br Landi Jaku as Councilors.

After the publication of the offices entrusted to the friars the Eucharistic celebration took place presided over by the Apostolic Nuncio in Albania, Msgr. Luigi Bonazzi, who

encouraged the friars to allow themselves be provoked by the Word of God written in the flesh of the poorest and to promote the unity of the Custody founded on fidelity to the Gospel through the observance of the Rule of St. Francis. After the celebration, the Chapter continued, which took place in the city of Shkodra in Albania, with the theme “Brothers and Minors at the Service of the Gospel Today”.

May the Lord bless the service of the newly elected brothers and sisters, and may the Virgin Mary, who at the Annunciation opened herself unreservedly to the Holy Spirit, intercede for the friars of the Custody so that they may be a prophecy of communion, reconciliation and peace.

OFM WORLD

The humanitarian commitment of the Custody of the Holy Land for the children of Gaza



Course for OFS and YouFra Spiritual Assistants of the Croatian Provinces



Congress of Franciscan Formators of the Conference of Our Lady of Guadalupe in San Juan de los Lagos, Mexico



Retreat of the Fraternity of St. Mary Mediatrix in La Verna (General Curia)



National Meeting of Franciscan Youth Referents in Córdoba, Province of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin of Rio de la Plata (Argentina)



School Vocation Campaign, Province of S. Pedro Bautista (Philippines)

AGAINST THE EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRY AND THE EXPLOITATION OF THE COMMON HOME PANAMA, THE COMMITMENT OF THE FRIARS IN THE CARE OF CREATION

Panama is one of the places on the Earth where the wonders of Creation can be better appreciated: the richness of the biodiversity accompanied by an abundance of truly surprising ecosystems over an area of approximately 75,000 square kilometers.

A naturalistic heritage, however, put at risk by *extractivism*, a recently coined term that aims to denote the extraction of all the natural resources of a place and their export elsewhere.

When, in October 2023, the Panamanian government entered into an agreement on copper mining with a foreign mining company, the population, supported by the local and continental Church, rebelled, in the name of defending the common home.

In this story the friars minor have also played and continue to play their part courageously.



La Pintada is a territory located in the province of Coclé, in the central area of the country and about 60 kilometers from the Pacific Ocean. Located on one of the entrances to the Mesoamerican rainforest, the parish of Our Lady of Candelaria has hosted the Rivotorto Fraternity since 1987: the friars minor serves around 86 rural communities, in a rainy territory, rich in water, but in which access to drinking water is rather difficult.

From the beginning, the brothers have been committed to caring for and defending the biodiversity, ecosystems and territories, the heritage of the families and of Panama itself. They organized activities to form the awareness and ecological commitment of the population, through formation meetings, patronal celebrations focused on integral ecology, walks in places emblematic of their ecosystem, forums on water and demonstrations against the extractionism and the growing – and unfortunately devastating – mining economy which is “invading” the country.

Against the mining agreement signed by the government, the Episcopal Conference of Latin America and that of Panama also rose up: supported also by the voice of Pope Francis, who with *Laudato si'* first and then *Laudate Deum* launched the cry on the climatic emergency in favor of the defense of the common home, the bishops both local and on the continent have supported the population’s protest.

On November 28 the state’s Supreme Court of Justice declared unconstitutional the law 1100 which regulates the mining contract, annulling it in fact.

The religious communities of Panama heard this sentence with jubilation, hoping that, in the future, the populations will be able to participate in decisions regarding the use of the common heritage and so that a model of development

based on the extractive industry which favors exclusively the most developed countries will not be imposed on them.

In this regard, Br René Flores, of the parish of Our Lady of Candelaria and who for years was involved in the Order’s JPIC (Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation) activities, affirms that development which generates negative environmental effects is not be in reality true development: “The world must face the environmental crisis starting from Christian theology” he said in an interview, “and we Franciscans believe that it is a Christian mandate to protect nature given by God.”

On February 22, at the University of St. Mary, Antigua, the Panamanian Episcopal Conference presented the pastoral letter on integral ecology entitled, “Dear Panama”, in which we read: “In this reflection we do not offer technical solutions, but rather that which comes from our heart and from our faith in Christ Jesus.

We do not want to impose criteria, but to share what arises from our reflection on the current reality in the light of the Gospel. We do not expect anyone to adopt our values and our proposals, but we invite you to reflect on them. As leaders of the Church which journeys in this territory, we present that which our love and sorrow for our beloved Panama tells us about our actions...

We are trying to expose the ecological situation of our country, placing mining as the principal – and not only – sign of devastation. We rely on what we have heard, studied and observed. We will also speak on other situations that impact ecology.” (nn.6-7).

We entrust ourselves to the Lord – and we trust in humanity – so that this is truly a story with a happy ending.



NAIROBI (KENYA), 26 FEBRUARY - 3 MARCH

AFRICAN CONFERENCE -ASSEMBLY OF FRIARS IN NEW FORMS OF LIFE AND EVANGELIZATION

From February 26 to March 03, 2024, fifteen friars gathered in St Magdalene Retreat House, Nairobi Africa for the first African Conference Assembly in New Forms of Life and Evangelization.

Guided by *Ite, Nuntiate*, and challenged by the message of the Minister General, Br Massimo Fusarelli, the friars shared and reflected on how to live the “new forms” in the context of Africa. Br Victor Quematcha graced the gathering with his words of reminder and inspiration. Br Francisco Gómez Vargas and Br Dennis Tayo of the General Secretariat for ME animated this gathering, along with Br Hubert Mfouri Nsampe, and Br Clément Boumekpor.

The participants started on the first day *“to narrate and listen to what the Spirit, is working among them.”* Br Frederick Odhiambo, the Minister Provincial of the host entity in Nairobi welcomed them. Each then shared their existing expressions of “new” life forms in Africa, ranging from helping refugees, caring for lepers, the sick, orphans, street children, youth, and prisons; to a spectrum of communities in urban poor among squatter areas to difficult disadvantaged rural areas in the peripheries. “Conventional ministries” in parishes, schools, and health facilities also involve such forms of social activities. Others shared their experiences running a welcoming house for people in difficulties, and houses of prayers.

Dialogue, social media, spiritual assistance, and environmental care were alternative expressions. Identified existing challenges included socio-political-economic instability being a war-stricken continent resulting in poverty, abuses, security threats, and exploitation of Mother Earth. Also mentioned were cultural diversity and religious pluralism, regionalism, materialism, individualism, and clericalism. Ad-intra, the friars feel the challenge of limited resources: human, financial, structures, and the need for a more integrated formation program. Far distances among entities make animation harder. Some felt the lack of support from the Council or the local church.

The second day was directed *“to seeing and judging what the Spirit has worked among them”* in the light of *Ite, Nuntiate* and the challenges posed by the Minister General.

It emphasized the “fundamentals” of living out this inspiration, as a contemplative fraternity in minority, witnessing the prophetic gifts of the charism in living the gospel in the present context of Africa, by going out, being with, and among the suffering poor.

Finally, the last day is a grace-filled moment for everyone, *“inspired to form a commitment towards a joint journey they can rekindle”* with the following discerned concrete recommendations:

1. That “new forms” be a commitment of every entity, supporting friars inspired in living out this inspiration. The Minister and his Council promote the continued operation of the existing and/or in the opening of new ones, designating a friar as a “New Forms” Coordinator (forming part of its existing organizational structure) to animate the entity in this regard. Moreover, “new forms” should be included in the initial and ongoing formation (IF/OGF). A critical evaluation is urged to know where the entity is now, where it wants to go, and how it can get, as animated by the Council and guided by the GSME;
2. That collaboration at the level of the African Conference, should be held yearly, gathering “New Forms” Coordinators from each entity to form a network of support systems. Inspired friars of an entity, (as part of IF/OGF) can go for emersion in another entity having existing new forms, to experience and learn from. The possibility of establishing a common Hermitage/Prayer House for the Conference should be studied, knowing this is the core of doing new forms of presence. Other specific recommendations include opening an urban poor community in Nairobi and a welcoming house for street children in S. Sudan, in collaboration with the Franciscan sisters. The General Secretariat for ME continues to assist, accompany, and animate the brothers in living out this inspiration; and



3. That a Commission for *New Forms of Life and Evangelization* in Africa be formed to animate the conference, mapping out new forms of realities in Africa. The General Secretariat ME, in consultation with the Ministers of the African Conference, should submit four names (2 English and 2 French-speaking) for approval by the General Council to form the commission. This commission can collaborate in the future with other Conferential Commissions for New Forms to share and learn from.

Finally, the last two days of the gathering were spent visiting the urban poor communities where our student friars do their pastoral works, our two fraternities in Nairobi, and some nearby parks.

May this landmark assembly be an impetus to move further in living out “new forms” in Africa.

[Read the message of the Minister General](#)

QUITO (ECUADOR), 25TH FEBRUARY TO 1ST MARCH MEETING OF LAY BROTHERS OF THE BOLIVARIAN CONFERENCE



From 25th February to 1st March, the Lay Brothers of the Bolivarian Conference met in Quito, Ecuador: “Brother Francis: Contemporary icon of Jesus Crucified.”

The Provinces of Colombia were represented (2 Friars from the Province of São Paulo, 3 from Santa Fe - including Br José Alirio Urbina Rodríguez, President of the Conference), those of Peru (3 Friars from the Province of St. Francis Solano and 5 from the Province of the 12 Apostles), 3 Friars from the Province of St. Anthony of Bolivia and 7 from the host Province “St. Francis of Quito.”

Unfortunately, the friars from Venezuela were not present because of difficulties in obtaining visas.

The meeting was held in accordance with the OFM guidelines for the 2021-2027 sexennium, in which the General Chapter asked us to renew our vision and to embrace the future, inviting us to formation for a renewed identity as Friars Minor.

Br César Kulkamp, General Definitor for Latin America, was also present during the first two days.

FRANCISCAN FAMILY OF ITALY

46TH ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE UNION OF CONFERENCES OF PROVINCIAL MINISTERS

From February 26 to March 1, at Saint Mary of the Angels, the 46th Ordinary General Assembly of the Union of Conferences of Provincial Ministers in the Italian Franciscan family met.



More than 40 Major Superiors from the 4 Franciscan Orders (Friars Minor, Friars Minor Conventual, Friars Minor Capuchin, and Third Order Regular) reflected together on the apostolic exhortation of Pope Francis *“Laudate Deum,”* discussing the path of peace and the integral questions related to ecology raised by the Holy Father in his writing. Economist Leonardo Becchetti, professor at the University of Rome, Tor Vergata, and expert economist, presented his paper, *“Laudate Deum: Civil economy and a sustainable future,”* illustrating the dramatic situation in which we find ourselves today with regard to our ecosystem. “Climate change has led to some extreme phenomena,” said the professor, “such as drought or extremely high temperatures which put our future at risk should these trends continue and possibly get to the point where things are irreparable.”

In the afternoon, Br Francesco Zecca, OFM, offered a reflection that moved all those present, *“The earth cries out while the poor cry out: what hope is there for our future?”* Wednesday, February 28, prof. Simone Morandini, presented his research, *“Integral Ecology: Announcing peace in the Anthropocene.”* After his presentation of the physics and theological reality of creation and the ethics of caring for the environment, he interviewed Card. Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, who joined the group online.

The Eucharist on February 29 was presided over by Mons. Domenico Sorrentino, bishop of Assisi. In his homily, the bishop exhorted the Friars to reopen the hearts of the people of today who have grown up in a world with less faith, using today’s culture, today’s means of communication and today’s

technology, to spread a message of hope. The audience was particularly moved by the bishop’s personal testimony and insights into Francis, who teaches and invites us, especially during these years of centenary celebration, to personal conversion, to always begin by looking within.

Secretary of the Union, Br Marco Bellachioma, OFMConv, commented on the intimate link between ecology and peace, as described by Pope Francis. In view of the centenary celebration of Saint Francis’ *Canticle of the Creatures*, celebrated next year, it seems to be a duty for the Franciscan family to reflect on these questions of ecology, to explore the themes related to the environment, and to determine good practices that we might promote for a sustainable ecology and a more peaceful world.

The gathering also allowed the assembled participants to visit certain important and symbolic places in the city of Assisi and did much to bring the different members of the Conference together as brothers.



BROTHERS OF THE PROVINCE OF SAN FRANCISCO SOLANO (ARGENTINA) FORMATION EXPERIENCE IN THE AMAZON

During the months of January and February, nine friars - formandi and formators - from the Province of St. Francis Solano, Argentina, spent some time with the Mundurukú people in the Brazilian Amazon, a people and territory where the Order is present as the custody of St. Benedict of the Amazon. The following are some echoes taken from www.franciscanos.org.ar

It is very difficult to put into words what we have experienced, even more so when what we want to narrate and share is as unique as in this case. It is however worth trying, keeping in mind that, like God, the Amazon will always be more than what we have been able to capture, and much more than what we can say in these lines.

We are not writing to describe or report. This is not a chronicle. We write as an antidote against oblivion; we write to be able to return (symbolically and literally); we write to honour and so that, through the experience we were granted, others may awake to the desire to "go and see" the hidden treasure of the Mundurukânia, that is worthy of selling all our goods, as in the parable of the Kingdom.

The pedagogy of the territory forces us to enter it little by little. The verb "entering" could faithfully represent what we lived upon arriving. Because that is just it: you do not just arrive, you are getting there. It took us two days of sailing to travel from the last town that can be reached by land to the village of Mission San Francisco, where the brothers live. Two days in the river and the jungle. A time spent in water, clean, calm, or choppy and inhabited, and lush vegetation, abundant, imposing, lively and generous. This endless landscape gradually revealed villages in its midst. On the shores of the river there were houses, a chapel, boys and girls playing, women doing the wash or men returning from fishing. What would soon become our daily routine appeared before our eyes as a picture we saw from our boat.

This pace, these postcards, this time made us feel gratitude, surprise, and respect. After months of picturing it in our minds, we became aware of where and among whom we were. Our desire and state of mind was one of removing our sandals since we were stepping on sacred ground.

Our everyday life focused on simplicity and alternation. These were weeks of intense and joyful fraternal sharing. At the Mission, we usually had Eucharist and housework in the mornings; in the afternoons we played soccer with the young

people and visited homes. We tried to participate to the life of the brothers and the community while experiencing the reality. We cut grass, cooked, made repairs to the house, went fishing, learned crafts and the language, sang, played with the children, visited the sick and families and tasted new foods. Every 5 or 6 days, we went out in small fraternities of 2 or 3 to visit other small and remote villages.

It was striking to hear the story of the encounter between the Mundurukú people and the first friars who arrived years ago. The natives of that land associate the flute to their divinity. The first friars did not know it, but in fact played the flute. Thus, the natives gradually accepted them. Under different circumstances, these bold brothers could have died shortly after disembarking, following a six-month journey, and more than a century later we would have never told this story.

After this first encounter, the bond between the Mundurukú and the "pain" (as they call us) became an alliance. They still do not welcome the "white people", but they have embraced us as their own. Yes, they reject anyone who is not Mundurukú, but made us part of their people, of their culture, their hierarchy and history. And that is how they made us feel, from day one until the last. They welcomed us thanks to the presence of others throughout their history; they welcomed us because we were friars; they welcomed us without knowing us, because they trust us, and because of the significance that our presence had and has for them. They embrace us like this. And we, as an Order... How do we embrace vocationally and charismatically that an Indigenous and Amazonian people, with all they represent, make us part of their identity? We believe that our presence there was, is and must continue being a treasure to care and protect; a treasure worthy of selling comfort, security, structures, and calculations.

Brothers of the Province of St. Francis Solano

To read the full text: www.ofm.org



APPROVAL OF THE DECREE OF VIRTUE

VENERABLE ELISABETTA JACOBUCCI

On 14th of March, the Holy Father Pope Francis received Cardinal Marcello Semeraro, the Prefect of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints in audience, and authorized the promulgation of the Decree concerning the heroic virtues of the Servant of God Elisabetta Jacobucci, a professed religious of the Franciscan Alcantarine Sisters, who was born in Trevi in Lazio, in the Diocese of Anagni, on the 23rd July 1858, and died in Meta di Sorrento, in the Diocese of Sorrento, on the 10th February 1939.

The Venerable Elisabetta Jacobucci, was faithful to her Franciscan vocation amongst the Alcantarine Franciscan Sisters; she spent her entire life in the rather special mission of begging. In this way she actively contributed to the support of orphans, children and elderly people entrusted to the care of the Institute. For about fifty years, she walked the streets of the Sorrento Peninsula; she made her humble service an authentic mission. She had the gift of knowing how to listen and feel compassion towards every situation of those in need. To this end, her word, simple but wise, bore the fruit of consolation and peace.

The Mass was the fulcrum of her day and her life amongst sisters was a comfort to all the efforts she made. Her lifestyle is interwoven with silence, concealment and humility which

characterized her until the end of her days. After her death, her memory remained blessing for those who had approached her, so much so, that in 1965 her beatification process began.



FORMER ASSISTANT GENERAL *PRO MONIALIBUS*

BR ENRIQUE GONZALEZ ARANGO HAS RETURNED TO THE FATHER'S HOUSE

On March the 1st Br Enrique Gonzalez Arango, of the Province of St. Paul the Apostle, in Colombia, after 66 years of religious life and 58 years of priesthood returned to the House of the Father.

Br Enrique was born on the 21st May, 1933 in Manizales, Caldas, Colombia. From his mother, Josefita he inherited tenderness and delicacy in dealing with people. When he turned 12 in 1945, he discovered that he wanted to become a Franciscan friar. He felt this call whilst reading a booklet that a professor lent him at the Institute, when he saw a blurred image of St. Francis of Assisi and where his life and thoughts were recounted in just five lines.

In 1954 he arrived at the Nazareth seminary in Cali. Here he distinguished himself for his cheerfulness, for his gift for singing, as a great orator and a great friend. He was a man

of great faith in Jesus, a lover of the Word of God and a lover of Franciscan spirituality, a true Friar Minor.

On the 6th January, 1958, he professed forever to "live the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, in the style of Francis and Clare of Assisi." On the 4th December, 1965, he was ordained a priest by Monsignor Rubén Isaza Restrepo.

He was appointed professor of philosophy at the Virrey Solís school in Bogotá. Then he was assigned to the education of young novices in the friary of Bogotá. Since then, his passion has been education. In 1966 he was appointed professor at the St. Solano School in the city of Armenia.

In 1967 he was vice-rector of the San Francisco de Asís college in Ubaté, and in 1968 vice-rector of the Agustín Gemelli college in Manizales. In 1979 >>

he left school and continued to work in poor Colombian communities, both in education and social work.

On the 15th July, 1982, the Vicariate of St Paul the Apostle was established, whose option was to live in socially and ecclesiastically marginalized places, and Br Enrique was part of this new Franciscan entity. From 1982 to 1986 he was Vicar Secretary and at the same time Vice-Master in the postulancy of the Vicariate.

He carried out his missionary service in several places on the outskirts of Colombia. Then, from 1996 to 2000 in Cali, he worked as an assistant to the Conceptionist Sisters. Here we find another gift that the Lord had given him: to accompany those in contemplative life. In 1996 he began to be an assistant to the Federation of Conceptionist Monasteries of Colombia. The Conceptionist Sisters of Cartago wrote this about him as follows: *"He was the one who loved us the most, he gave everything without holding back anything, his intelligence, his wisdom, his exquisiteness in sharing knowledge, his overflowing joy and his evangelical poverty, which we always admire amongst the many other virtues, with which the Lord adorned him; For all this, we express our eternal gratitude to him."*

In 2001, Br Schneider, at the end of his service as Assistant General pro Monialibus in Rome, proposed Br Enrique as his successor to the Minister General, stating: *"He is the best assistant for contemplatives in the Franciscan Order."* This service allowed a Franciscan minstrel to arrive at the General Curia. His chivalry, his contagious joy, his songs, his sayings, his Fraternity, his Spirituality, his very human sense filled with Franciscanism the General Curia and all the Monasteries to which he was brought by the spirit of Francis and Clare and their beloved Franciscan Province of St. Paul the Apostle.

Our Minister General, Br Massimo Fusarelli, testifies to this as follows: *"I had the grace to share with him six years in the fraternity of the General Curia and I learned to appreciate his gifts of humanity, joy, serious and profound preparation and love for the Poor Clares and Conceptionists. He was an important point of reference for us for his wisdom and his humour, which was always very lively. In him we have seen fulfilled the words of Saint Francis: Blessed is the religious who finds no joy and happiness except in the most holy words and deeds of the Lord and, through them, leads men to the love of God with joy and happiness. (Adm 20: FF 170)".* He managed to overcome two strokes which, upon waking, he expressed with his good sense of humor by saying that *"God was calling him in installments."* These

incidents encouraged him to write a small book, which he entitled: *Anthology of Life Thoughts*, a collection of phrases, some famous, others by authors not very well known, and some by his own authorship.

On Friday, the 1st March, 2024, he lived his own Passover of the Lord, he was visited by Sister Death, and even though he was not fond of the expression birthday, he liked to celebrate life. That is why he said, *"I am not old, but I have life."* For this reason, by celebrating life, you have found it in its fullness, at the age of 90, in the city where your "Manizales of the soul" was born.

*With the contribution of Br Nelson Tovar Alarcón,
Minister Provincial*

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PHILOLOGIST AND SCHOLAR OF ST. CLARE

THE FUNERAL OF SR. CHIARA AUGUSTA LAINATI, OSC

On March 4 in Matelica (MC, Italy) the funeral of Sister Chiara Augusta Lainati, OSC, esteemed philologist and scholar of the writings of St. Clare and St. Francis, was celebrated.

Born in 1939, she studied and obtained

a doctorate in classical philology at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan, with the thesis "Studies on St. Clare of Assisi", whose supervisor was Professor Ezio Franceschini, Dean of the faculty and an important medievalist. Two weeks later she entered the Protomonastery of St. Clare of Assisi: she took the habit of the Poor Sisters of St. Clare on the 21st January, 1963, made her First Profession on the 19th April, 1964 and her solemn profession on the 20th April, 1967. Sister Chiara Augusta continued her studies and research on Franciscan-Clarian spirituality, so much so that she was invited to numerous conferences and publications on the subject.

Amongst her many works are the *Spiritual Themes from the Writings of the Second Franciscan Order* (1970); she was in charge of the second section of the *Franciscan Sources*, dedicated to the biographies and writings of St. Clare (1977). She was responsible for the creation of a magazine of the Poor Clares, *Forma Sororum*, which she edited for about thirty years, thus achieving and supporting the Franciscan formation of Italian monasteries and the world. In 1977, together with Br Giovanni Boccali, OFM, she discovered the "*Audite Poverelle*," that is, the writing in the vernacular that Francis, on his deathbed, sent to

Clare and her community of San Damiano. She also worked on the drafting of the new General Constitutions of the Order of the Poor Sisters of St. Clare in 1988.

In her religious life she was involved in the animation and formation of young women in various monasteries, including S. Maria di Monteluca in St. Erminio and St. Agnese in Perugia, St. Lucia in Città della Pieve, Buon Gesù in Orvieto, continuing at the same time to devote herself to the reception and vocational orientation of many young people and people, including friars, who recognized in her the gift of a great spiritual motherhood. Since 2001 she had been living in the monastery of Matelica, where she was affected by various illnesses. She returned to the Father's house on the 2nd March, the feast of St. Agnes of Prague, the princess of Bohemia and correspondent of St. Clare. Amongst her numerous studies and publications, the "*Spiritual Themes from the Writings of the Second Franciscan Order*" and a life of St. Clare continuously reprinted and translated into many languages.

We entrust her to the eternal love of the Lord, grateful for having had the precious gift of Sister Chiara Augusta.

*"You have given me a woman's heart, Lord,
A warm and anxious heart,
Made to love and be loved:
A heart that suggests the warmth of a home
And the joyful laughter of children
and deep, brown gazes that rest tenderly on the children."*

(From the "Cloistered Maternity" by Sr. Chiara Augusta Lainati)

With the contribution of Br Pietro Messa, OFM: Those unpublished words of Francis to the 'Poor Ladies', published in L'Osservatore Romano on the 4th March, 2024.

The next issue of Fraternitas will be published on Wednesday 17th April

Happy Easter to all!

OFM

ORDO FRATRUM MINORUM

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