

## UNION OF FRIARS MINOR OF EUROPE (UFME) 15TH ASSEMBLY IN MEDJUGORJE (BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA)

From 27 February to 3 March, the 15th Assembly of UFME was held in Medjugorje (Bosnia-Herzegovina), entitled "The future of UFME: where we started from, where we have arrived and what we want to be", which was attended by about 40 Ministers Provincial and Custodes from the continent, the General Definitory of the Order and Br Massimo Fusarelli, Minister General.

UFME (Union of Friars Minor of Europe) brings together several Conferences on the European continent: the Conference of Minister Provincials of Italy and Albania (COMPI), the Conference of the Provinces of Spain and Portugal (CONFRES), the Transalpine Franciscan Conference (COTAF), the North Slavic Conference (SLAN) and the South Slavic Conference (SLAS).



## CURIA OFM AGENDA

- March 6-17, the General Definitory is in Rome for the "Tempo Forte".
- On March 13-14, 2023, the Office of the General Procurator participated in the 11th Intensive Course on Crimes Reserved for the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, organized by the Faculty of Canon Law of the Pontifical Urbanian University.
- On March 17-19, Br Massimo, Minister General, and Br Fabio César Gomez, Assistant General for Nuns, will participate in the meeting with the Assistants and Presidents of the OSC Federations in Spain.
- On March 18, Br John Wong, Definitory General, will chair the meeting, via Zoom, of the Commission for the Service of Dialogue.
- March 20-25 will see the visit of St. Mary of the Angels Province, in Poland, on the occasion of the 400th anniversary of its founding. The Minister General and the Definitory General for the North-Slavic Conference, Br Konrad Cholewa, will participate.
- March 21-24, Br Daniel Rodríguez Blanco, director of the JPIC Office will participate in the meeting of the Franciscan Network of the Mediterranean Committee, which will be held at the General Curia.
- On March 24 and 25, General Secretary for Formation and Studies, Br Darko Tepert, will be visiting the United States. He will visit the Franciscan School of Theology in San Diego and the Novitiate of the country's six provinces.
- From March 27 to April 1, the General Definitory will do spiritual exercises in Montelucio.

UFME ASSEMBLY - INAUGURATION

On Monday 27 February the assembly opened with the Eucharistic celebration presided over by Br Miljenko Šteko, OFM, president of UFME. In his homily he spoke of Lent, a time in which the Church, through the liturgy, invites the faithful to live their faith more strongly and to perform penance and acts of mercy more intensely.

“The world is full of people who don't know what joy is,” said Br. Miljenko. “There are many who go around with a gloomy face, whose smile hasn't been seen for years [...] Yet the Holy Scripture often tells us "Rejoice!". Already at the beginning of mankind, God asked Cain: Why are you angry? Why is your face frowning? Because if you do the right thing, you shine with joy” (Genesis 4, 6-7). Here [in Medjugorje], with the sacrament of confession, millions of human sins have been cleansed and disappeared forever. Here, millions of souls wept in front of something that transcends them as human beings”, said Br Miljenko Šteko, who concluded his reflection speaking of the UFME Assembly: “We Franciscans begin our convocation this evening at the refuge of Our Lady: we need her heavenly intercession for life amidst the challenges of our



world. Among the concerns and anxieties of Europe and the world today. We have come to our Mother Mary, who is the mediatrix of all graces!”

SECOND DAY

A short film on the history of the parish of Medjugorje and the Canticle of the Creatures sung by the parish priest, Br Zvonimir Pavičić, opened the second day of the 15th UFME Assembly.

This was followed by greetings from Archbishop Francis Assisi Chullikatt, Apostolic Nuncio in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Archbishop Aldo Cavalli, Apostolic

Visitor in Medjugorje, Bishop Peter Palić, Bishop of Mostar, and Br Massimo Fusarelli, Minister General.

Archbishop Cavalli wished to emphasise the grace of the Marian place where the Assembly is taking place: "This is a place of grace and faith; [...] the Virgin Mary has "found grace with God", and so Francis of Assisi too, by grace, was chosen by the Lord. Through his free and creative

response, he proclaimed the Gospel to the people of his time. In the same way, we, by grace, have received the vocation and mission to proclaim the Gospel to the people of today's world”.

Br Massimo Fusarelli recalled how, over the past month, he had met personally with the fraternities of South America and now of Europe: "Last month, all the provincials of Latin America gathered in Sao Paulo, Brazil; now we are holding this European Assembly: in a short time, almost half of the Ministers Provincial and Custodes of the whole Order have gathered in different parts of the world. For us in the General Definitory, it is a precious opportunity to see and meet the Order not only in the many papers that arrive at the General Curia but through the faces of the friars and to get to know better the many different situations that our international fraternity experiences". He added: "Here we are in a borderland between different cultures, historical



experiences and worlds; when we meet together, we are obliged to cross borders and to have a greater outlook".

In the following round table discussion entitled "History and Life of UFME: where we started from and where we have arrived", the speakers were Br. Miljenko Šteko, President of UFME and organiser of the meeting, Br. Vitor Melicias, who remotely described the history of UFME, Archbishop José Rodríguez Carballo, for-

mer Minister General of the Order, and Bishop Sabino Iannuzzi, former President of UFME.

In the afternoon, the Assembly listened to the Minister General's report: "The Future of the Order in Europe and the Future of UFME: Where we are and what we want to be on the European continent today and tomorrow". The day ended with a Eucharistic celebration presided over by Bishop Sabino Iannuzzi.

## UFME NEW PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT

On March 2, Br Alard Krzysztof Maliszewski, Minister Provincial of the Province of St Hedwig (Poland), was elected as the new President of UFME. The Assembly also elected a new Vice President in the person of Br Mario Chiarello, Minister Provincial of the Province of the VII Martyrs of Calabria (Italy).



## FINAL DAY

On the final day, the new UFME Councillors were elected. Together with the new President (Br Alard Krzysztof Maliszewski) and the new Vice-President (Br Mario Chiarello), they will make up the new permanent Council, which will remain in office until 2025, the date of the next Assembly. The final approved document gathers some proposals from the group work, such as making a European "mapping" of significant situations already operating in the context of the poor and excluded where projects of insertion experiences should be developed. Furthermore, it is suggested that new forms of "twinning" between Provinces should be encouraged, involving an exchange of experiences or significant occasions (Franciscan marches, missions to the people, integral ecology initiatives, etc.). It also recommended promoting Italian, English and Spanish language courses in collaboration with the Secretaries of Formation and Studies. Furthermore, we would like

to encourage awareness of existing vocations pastoral experiences within Europe to develop shared proposals for the proclamation of vocation and charism.

"This meeting was first and foremost an opportunity to be together, to experience fraternity together with all the Ministers Provincial and Custodes of the continent, to get to know each other in person and to exchange views and ideas on how the Order should continue its journey on the European continent," said Br Konrad Cholewa, Definitor General, at the end of the meeting. "It was important to experience fraternity in a place like this, which is very important for our Order and the whole of Europe. In Medjugorje, many faithful come to pray for peace: we also prayed for peace, which the world needs so much today". The Assembly ended with a Eucharistic celebration presided over by Br Alard and the Minister General's blessing on all the Provinces and Custodies of Europe.

"SEEKERS OF  
THE SPIRIT"

### The Minister General's message to the UFME Assembly



A message ranging from the concept of "frontier" to that of "crisis", from the meaning of being friars and minors today to the presence of the Faith and the Spirit in one's life; from climate change to the need for dialogue, from borders reinforced by nationalism to "building bridges".

"Recognising the dynamic and continuous presence of the Spirit of the Risen Christ in us and around us in an ongoing discernment: this is a way to walk as "seekers of the Spirit" in a change of epoch that requires us to review our paradigms of thought and action", said Br Massimo.

He continued: "The world is changing, and this is nothing new. Facing change in a reasoned manner, with a long-term vision, on the contrary, is. Those who will have to face it are not the generations that lived through the roaring '60s and '70s; for us, the Council and the hopes that followed amid lights and clouds. Instead, the new generations will have to face the consequences of choices fashioned for an eternal present and lacking imagination for the future".

Read the Minister General's Message:

[Español](#) – [Italiano](#) – [English](#)

## UNION OF FRIARS MINOR OF EUROPE

**U**FME is an organisation created to promote knowledge and collaboration between the Conferences and Provinces of Europe; to develop a shared Franciscan identity, and to support the presence, witness and mission of the Order in the European context; to carry out joint formation projects, especially for young friars, studies, evangelisation, JPIC.

UFME is not a "Conference of Conferences" but a genuine "Union" that embraces all the presences of the Order in Europe. It is represented by the Ministers Provincial, the Custodes, the General Definitors competent for the European Continent, and eventually by other delegates, such as that of the ESC, which is a "transversal" Conference since it is constituted on a linguistic rather than geographical basis. At present, the Conferences of COMPI (Conference of Minister Provincials of Italy and Albania), CONFRES (Conference of the Provinces of Spain and Portugal), COTAF (Transalpine Franciscan Conference), SLAN (North Slavic Conference), SLAS (South Slavic Conference) and the ESC Delegate (English Speaking Conference) are part of UFME.

UFME consists of two fundamental bodies: the Assembly, which meets every two years, and the permanent Council, consisting of the President, Vice-President and Conferences delegates. Each time the Assembly meets, it explores a topic of common interest at European, social, cultural and ecclesial levels, possibly related to the host country. It also takes possible initiatives, elects the President and Vice-President and gives guidelines

for the permanent Council.

For its part, the Permanent Council sees to the implementation of the Assembly's decisions and prepares the next one. It maintains contact with the Conferences and promotes collaboration between the Conferences themselves. Furthermore, it looks after relations with the Franciscan Family and Europe's various ecclesial and religious realities.

Finally, it elects a Secretary and appoints a Bursar from among the members of the Council.

The President convenes and presides over the Assembly and is assisted by a Vice-President; both remain in office for two years.

The reality of UFME is based on the following Article of the Order's General Statutes:

**Art. 209 §2** The institution of some permanent organisation between the Conferences of the same Continent (e.g., Presidency, Secretariat, along with the General Definitors of each Continent) is recommended for the animation of common activities, i.e., formation, studies, evangelisation, justice, peace and the integrity of creation. These entities are to meet at determined intervals of time.

Edited by Br Claudio Durighetto, OFM Procurator General

### SOUTH SLAVIC CONFERENCE

## VISIT OF THE MINISTER GENERAL AND HIS DEFINITORY

**A**t the end of the 15th UFME Assembly, from 3 to 5 March, the Minister General and his Definitory met the Minister Provincials of the South Slavic Conference (SLAS). We publish the account of Br Konrad Chole-

wa, Definitory General of the South-Slavic and North-Slavic Conferences (SLAN).

The SLAS Conference comprises the Provinces of the Holy Cross and the Assumption in Bosnia-Herzegovina; the

Provinces of the Most Holy Redeemer, Saints Cyril and Methodius and Saint Jerome in Croatia; and the Province of the Holy Cross in Slovenia. This meeting was an opportunity to get to know each other and experience the realities of



### DECEASED BROTHERS

- 7 March: Fr. Jorge Iván Robledo Velásquez, Province Santa Fe – Medellín, Colombia
- 25 February: Fr. Anthonius Peters, Province of the Martyrs of Gorcum – Nijmegen, The Netherlands
- 19 February: Fr. Maurizio Albano, Province Salernitano-Lucana dell'Immacolata Concezione – Sarno, Italy

# OFM WORLD

Ongoing formation meeting on the Rule of the Friars Minor with brothers from Portugal



Entrance into aspirancy of six candidates to Franciscan life in Três Passos, Brasil



Penitential walk of the Franciscan Family in Guatemala



Meeting of new guardians in Jakarta, Indonesia



Meeting of Young Adults of Franciscan Chapel Center - Tokyo, Japan



Donation to the Escuela Gabriela Mistral de Montegrande, Chile

the Brothers' life in this part of Europe through shared dialogue, exchange of experiences, ideas and challenges for the future.

The programme allowed the Definitory not only to meet the Minister Provincials of the six entities that make up the SLAS

but also to meet and dialogue with the young friars in initial formation, to listen with them to the world of today and our mission in it. We met the student friars of Split and went to Humac, where twelve young friars from the two Provinces of Bosnia-Herzegovina and that of the Most Holy Redeemer in Croatia are carrying

out their novitiate.

At Humac, we also celebrated the Eucharist, presided over by the Minister General, together with the brothers and parishioners, sharing a very special moment with them.

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Br. Konrad Cholewa, Definitory General



## REFLECTION ON NEW FORMS OF FRANCISCAN LIFE IN EUROPE

The meeting of the animators of New Forms of Life and Evangelisation from the European continent was held in Rome from 21 to 22 February 2023. Br Francisco Gomez Vargas, General Secretary for Mission and Evangelisation of the Order, explained that "after the meeting of the New Forms in Rome in October 2022, the General Definitory was asked to appoint a Commission of Animators of the New Forms for Europe".

Br Bernardo Ondrai Mlecka, a commission member, summarised the work accomplished: "Over these two days, we discussed the identity and objective of this commission and what we can do in the future for the animation of these new forms of Franciscan life in Europe".

Br Ferdinand Van Der Reiken also shared the planned activities: "For the future, we would like to bring the friars together, to bring about new initiatives, new forms of life through sharing; we would like to bring more fraternal joy to the world. The next meeting will take place in October".

The Minister General, in agreement with the General Definitory, on 11 November 2022, created the Commission to coordinate new forms of presence, life and evangelisation in Europe.

This Commission has the task of evaluating, encouraging



and accompanying appropriate initiatives and new experiences of life emerging in the Order at the European level. The members of the Commission are Br Francisco Gomez Vargas, General Secretary for Mission and Evangelisation, Br Gabriele Dall'Acqua, from the Santo Antonio Province of the Friars Minor in Northern Italy, Br Bernard Ondrai Mlecka, from the Province of St Wenceslas in the Czech Republic, Br Andraz Arko, Holy Cross Province in Slovenia and Br Ferdinand Van der Reiken, from the HH. Martyrs of Gorkum Province in the Netherlands.

### BR. GIANMARIA POLIDORO'S INVITATION TO PEACE

## "WE INVITE PUTIN AND ZELENSKY TO ASSISI TO RESTORE PEACE"

At the end of the first EcuFilm Fest, Cinema for Interreligious Dialogue, in Maenza February 23-25, Br. Gianmaria Polidoro - who met Reagan at the White House in '84 and also went to the Kremlin to plead for an end to the Cold

War - sent letters to the Russian and Ukrainian presidents, and the patriarchs of Moscow and Kyiv to invite them to the Umbrian city.



Nearly forty years ago, in February 1984, Br. Gianmaria, with three other Franciscans, also Conventuals and Capuchins, from the International Center for Peace Among Peoples of Assisi, made a pilgrimage to Washington and Moscow to ask in God's name for an end to the Cold War. They met at the White House the President Ronald Reagan and at the Kremlin with the then acting head of state Vasily Kuznestov (Andropov had recently died and his successor Chernenko had not yet been named). Today Father Gianmaria, a 90-year-old still animated by the spirit of Assisi, who founded the Assisi Pax International Association in 1997, during the first EcuFilm Fest, Cinema for Interreligious Dialogue, held in Mae- >>

nza, Latina, February 23-25, 2023, wrote to the presidents of Russia and Ukraine, Putin and Zelenski, and also to Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia and the Patriarch of Kyiv, to invite them to Assisi to "restore peace in the world," as St. Francis did with the Portiuncula and the church of San Damiano.

"I ask that they come to Assisi to meet," is how Father Polidoro summarized his message to Vatican Radio - Vatican News, "to be able to say to the world: we dream of a peace that can be extended to all of Europe, to the whole world. And Father Polidoro, who in Geneva, in November 1985, with the group of four friars also met the delegations of Reagan and Gorbačëv, and with his Association awards every year personalities from all over the world committed to peace with the Golden Palm

of Assisi pax, asks the Italian president that he guarantee the reception of the political and religious leaders of Russia and Ukraine in Assisi so that "they can find that peace that the whole world is waiting for at this moment."

And as a man of faith, he turns to the representatives of the Churches of Moscow and Kyiv "so that they may be of help in prayer and exhortation, so that all of us may obtain that peace that our Lord Jesus Christ preached, when he said, 'I give you my peace, not as the world gives peace, but as God gives peace'".

From [www.vaticannews.it](http://www.vaticannews.it)

## BR. MASSIMO FUSARELLI AND BR. CÉSAR KÜLKAMP VISIT TO SOUTH AMERICA CONCLUDED



With the Celebration of Ashes, the Minister General, Br Massimo Fusarelli, accompanied by the General Definitor for Latin America, Br César Kulkamp, concluded their visit to the Franciscan entities of Brazil, Colombia and Peru.

The last stage of the visit was to the Custody of the Sacred Heart in Brazil between 18 and 21 February, where the Minister General met the friars in Bebedouro/SP, Olimpia/SP, the International Joint Novitiate in Catalão/GO and the

friary of St Mary of the Angels in Franca/SP.

Br Fernando Aparecido dos Santos, OFM, Custos of the Custody of the Sacred Heart, shared the joy his fraternity experienced with the presence of the Minister General: "Blessed is he who has come in the name of the Lord. In analogy with this quotation, I want to highlight the presence of the Minister General during these four days that he has been with us. It was a significant moment that we welcomed as a gift from God as we cele-

brate the jubilee of the Custody, the 75th anniversary of the arrival of the friars, and the first missionaries in this interior region of São Paulo. The visit of the Minister is a great gift for us".

One of the most memorable moments of the Minister General's presence was his visit to the Joint International Novitiate on the St Bonaventure Farm in Catalão. In this novitiate, the Minister conversed with the novices, formators, and Ministers Provincial and Custodes of the entities in the area: the Province of the Most

Holy Name of Jesus of Brazil, the Franciscan Custody of the Seven Joys of Our Lady of Brazil, the Franciscan Custody of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Brazil, the Province of the Most Holy Trinity of Chile, and the Province of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin of the Rio de la Plata of Argentina and Paraguay.

"We had a fruitful and emotional meeting. The Minister shared his concern about all of us novices and the Order, emphasising his desire to see the Order become lighter

in terms of structures," shared Br Lucas Souza of the Most Holy Name of Jesus. For Br Rafael Meza, a novice of the Chilean Franciscan Province, the Minister General emphasised fraternal life: "It was a fruitful meeting that motivated us, as an Order, to have hope and fraternal life, stressing that what is important is not structures but fraternal and vocational life".

In addition to visiting the friars, the Minister General met with the Franciscan

Family at the Shrine of Our Lady of Aparecida in Olympia. During the meeting and the Mass, the Minister reflected on communion in the work of the whole Franciscan Family, emphasising the terminology of "synodality" that Pope Francis uses in his reflections, stressing the importance of listening to everyone.

After the visit to the Custody, the Minister and Definitor went to São Paulo, where they celebrated Ash Wednesday, and then returned to Rome.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY  
**THE FRANCISCAN SISTERS' COMMITMENT TO MARGINALISED WOMEN**

On International Women's Day, celebrated on March 8th, we collected the testimonies of Sr Miriam Oyarzo, Franciscan Missionary Sister of the Sacred Heart (FMSC), and Sr. Stella Balthasar, Franciscan Missionary of Mary (FMM), both of whom are committed to serving the most marginalised women.

**HNA. MIRIAM OYARZO, TURCHIA**



Since 2015, Sr Miriam has worked with women in Bakirkoy prison, Istanbul, Turkey. "I would like to say that these women are not criminals: they are just victims of a very powerful criminal system, which exploits their poverty and vulnerability," she says on the phone in a voice full of love for them.

In fact, in 80-90% of the cases, these women were arrested at the airport for drug trafficking. "I am Chilean, and when asked to join this service to assist South American and Spanish-speaking female prisoners, I admit I had many doubts. But when I met these women, these mothers, these desperate and lonely old ladies, I thought it was a discernment of my

whole life. So I trusted in Providence and said yes".

The team of which Sr Miriam is a member is called to "be presence" in the Bakirkoy maximum security prison: "We must first of all listen. Ours is a community of presence, our missionary congregation has an international charism, and this is an ecumenical service. Therefore, a Franciscan friar, Brother Eleuthere Makuta, a Protestant pastor, Ali Kalkandelen, and an Armenian nun, Sr Kayiane Dulkadiryan, also accompany us to the prison. Our task is to be close to the women and to help them practically inside and outside prison".

The project started about 15 years ago, when the then Director of the prison, showing a genuinely open mind, decided to allow spiritual assistance not only to Turkish or Islamic women but also to foreign women and women of other religions. The Apostolic Vicariate of Istanbul seized this opportunity and, after some refusals by other churches, turned to the Latin Church, particularly the Franciscans.

"It sounds like a platitude, but the first thing that struck me was the loneliness of these women: they are in a high-security prison in a foreign country, and their families can neither see nor hear them. A letter written to their loved ones takes a long time to reach their destination. So they send it to us [in prison, it is forbidden to pass items to visitors], we scan it

and email it to their families. In this way, we create a bridge with their families of origin, a more direct dialogue, and we can also show photos of family members, perhaps of their children, to the women prisoners".

The support does not stop within the prison walls because when the sentence has been served, there is uncertainty about the future.

"Behind us is a big network of benefactors: thanks to them, we have managed to get many women back home, or we can assist them here in Istanbul. We welcome them in our convent, and my superior, Sr Zita Gutang, who works in Caritas, greatly helps us. Rehabilitating a person who has come out of

prison is very difficult, also because charity cannot be improvised: if a woman ended up in the drug racket or prostitution, it was only out of "need", out of poverty, out of vulnerability".

"Often pregnant women are taken because they cannot pass under the scanner, but very often, at the end of a very long journey in which they can neither drink nor eat, they are intercepted anyway, and their freedom stops as soon as they land in Turkey. At the end of their sentence, they have to recreate a new life for themselves, starting with their documents, and we are not afraid to welcome them into our convent, to live with them, to be a living presence at their side because by now they are part of us, and we are part of them".

### STELLA BALTHAZAR, INDIA

Sr. Stella lives in the province of Ooty (state of Tamil Nadu), where she is involved with her sisters in the "Empowering Widows" project, which aims to support and help widows, otherwise stigmatised by society because they are considered the bearers of misfortune.

"Indian society regards widows as bad omens: it sees them as ridden with a curse from God. So a widow has to swim through the current of prejudice and overcome obstacles to establish her identity and claim her dignity," writes Sr Stella.

The project started in 2016 and, in a short time, has involved over 1,500 people in western Tamil Nadu. Supported by the Missionaries of Mary, the widows first became aware of their condition, which was certainly not their fault. They began to oppose the unjust practices to which they were subjected.

"On 23 June 2017, International Widows' Day of the United Nations, a ceremony was organised by the Nazareth Neela Widows' Association. During a ceremony at her husband's funeral, the lady mayor of the city of Ooty gave back to the women what

had been taken away from them because of their widowhood. As a result, the people there began to see her no longer as a widow but as a person with full human potential and wealth to contribute to the growth of humanity. This sense of freedom brought great self-confidence and enabled many women to take initiatives to improve their economic condition through small trades, savings for the future, courage to defy harassment in the workplace, and collective strength and mutual support. They also performed

communal services such as cleaning the streets, planting trees in public places and spreading ecological awareness among the public. The movement is gradually and steadily growing".

