

LA VERNA, 5th JANUARY 2024

OPENING OF THE VIII CENTENARY OF THE STIGMATA OF ST. FRANCIS

On Friday, 5th January 2024, the Franciscan Family officially opened the VIII Centenary of the Stigmata of St. Francis, at the Sanctuary of La Verna, with an event entitled "From the wounds to new life". The day began at 7:00 a.m. with the Office of Readings, followed by Lauds and the celebration of the Mass presided over by Br. Massimo Fusarelli, Minister General of the Friars Minor.

At 11:00 a.m., in the Basilica of the Sanctuary, the ceremony for the solemn opening of the Centenary was held, which ended in the Chapel of the Stigmata after a short procession.

Present, amongst others, were the Ministers General of the Franciscan Family and representatives of all the Franciscan realities; the Bishop of Arezzo-Cortona-Sansepolcro, Msgr. Andrea Migliavacca; the Mayor of Florence, Dario Nardella, with the banner of the Municipality; the Mayor of Chiusi della Verna, Giampaolo Tellini, and other institutional Authorities.

"Francis," commented Br. Livio Crisci, Minister Provincial of the Friars Minor of Tuscany who have custody of the sanctuary of La Verna, "just as at Christmas 1223 wanted to represent the Nativity scene "to see with the eyes of the body the love of God incarnate in the Child", so in September 1224 he wanted to feel a little of that pain that Christ suffered on the Cross to save humanity. From Bethlehem to Calvary is the itinerary that, as Franciscans, we are preparing to take to celebrate this event, after eight centuries since the first Nativity scene, eight centuries since that prodigious when the impression of the stigmata was formed on the body of the Poverello of Assisi."



The day ended with the singing of First Vespers of the Solemnity of the Epiphany.

Until the 17th September, 2024, the Franciscan Family of Tuscany will promote numerous initiatives between La Verna, Florence and the Tuscan territory, to rediscover and actualize the message that comes from Francis' experience on the sacred mountain: what is wounded and defeated for the world can become an opportunity for a new life and reconciliation with humanity and creation. [Read the full article.](#)

Programme Link: www.laverna.it/centenario/

GENERAL CURIA AGENDA

- From the 8th to 22nd January, the Tempo Forte will be held at the General Curia.
- On the 12th January, the Minister General, Br. Massimo Fusarelli, will have an online meeting with the Province of St. Francis Solano (Peru); on the 15th he will be in the Vatican for the Papal Audience together with the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum of Jerusalem; on the 16th, at the Pontifical University Antonianum in Rome, he will participate in the Feast of the Grand Chancellor; from the 18th to the 22nd he will visit the Province of the Assumption of the BVM (Lecce, Italy).
- On the 20th January, Br. Cesare Vaiani, Definitor General, and Br. Fábio Cesar Gomes, Assistant General pro Monialibus, will have an online meeting with the International Commission for the Revision of the Constitutions of the Poor Clares.
- From the 23rd to 29th January, the Minister General and his Definitor will meet in Nairobi, Kenya, with the Provincial Ministers and Custodes of the African Conference.

1ST JANUARY, WORLD PEACE DAY

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE FOR THE COMMON GOOD

In his message for the 57th World Day of Peace, established by Paul VI in 1968, Pope Francis drew attention to the risks and opportunities that Artificial Intelligence poses to the whole of humanity. The Pontiff wonders about the consequences that digital technologies can have, in the medium and long term, on individuals and society, on international balances and on peace in the world.



If intelligence is an expression of the dignity given to humanity by God, artificial "forms of intelligence" are born from humans to reproduce or imitate their cognitive abilities, but sometimes with objectives and interests that are not directed to the common good. Pope Francis writes: "We cannot presume a priori that its development will make a beneficial contribution to the future of humanity and to peace amongst peoples. Such a positive outcome will only be possible if we demonstrate our ability to act responsibly and respect fundamental human values such as inclusion, transparency, security, fairness, confidentiality and trustworthiness."

The ethical theme of the question is clear to the Holy Father: can algorithms ever replace the merciful love of God, who knows how to forgive unlike a schematic calculation? "Algo-

ritms must not be allowed to determine how we understand human rights, to set aside the essential values of compassion, mercy and forgiveness, or to eliminate the possibility of an individual changing and leaving the past behind," the text reads.

The invitation then is to pay attention to the purposes of the use of scientific and technological knowledge: in a perspective full of Franciscan spirituality, Pope Francis emphasizes the importance of safeguarding fundamental human rights, social justice and the common good: "The rapid development of forms of artificial intelligence does not increase the too many inequalities and injustices already present in the world, but may it help to put an end to wars and conflicts, and to alleviate many forms of suffering that afflict the human family. May the Christian faithful, believers of various religions, and men and women of good will work together in harmony to seize the opportunities and face the challenges posed by the digital revolution, and hand over to future generations a world of greater solidarity, justice and peace," the Pope concludes.

Let us entrust to Mary, Mother of God, whom we celebrate today, our intentions and our works in this New Year for a world of Peace and Goodwill!

[Read the Pope's Message](#)

MASS ON CHRISTMAS EVE

"WE ARE IN DARKNESS, BUT WE SEE THE LIGHT!"

"Where is God in this time of war?". This and other questions were asked by the Minister General, Br. Massimo Fusarelli, at Mass on Christmas Eve, celebrated in the church of Our Lady the Mediatrix at the General Curia of the Order in Rome.

We live in a time in which the shadows seem to overwhelm the lights: darkness of war, death, violence, chaos, indeed, an endless tunnel, which often crushes the faint lights of Hope, Joy, Love.



OFM WORLD

Franciscan Media Centre Christmas Press Briefing (Prov. Assumption of the BVM, Poland)

VIII Centenary of the Christmas at Greccio (Prov. Assumption of the BVM, Italy)

Sending missionary friars (Prov. St. Peter Baptist, Philippines)



Celebrations invoking peace for the New Year in Jerusalem (Custody of the Holy Land)

New novices in the Prov. of the Immaculate Conception (Brazil)

Franciscan Pilgrimage of the OFM Provinces of Mexico

“Christmas - said Br. Massimo - is precisely this hope in the shadows, this light in the darkness, this possibility that we alone could never have received. Yet, a star shines continuously in the darkness of this night.”

Therefore, as believers and Christians, the coming Lord invites us not to lose faith and to look even to the small signs of those lights that can illuminate our lives. On the night of the 800th anniversary of Christmas in Greccio, there was no lack of reference to the great intuition that Francis had in the Rieti Valley: “On that little bit of straw with an ox and a donkey at his side, Francis celebrated the Eucharist, sang the Gospel and

announced the Word of the Gospel to those present. [...] This is how our God makes Himself known: in a mystery of poverty and limitation, which makes us welcome and bless our humanity, which remains humble and small. [...] We are in darkness, but we see the light!”

My wish for everyone, concluded Br. Massimo, is that Christmas may educate people to recognize this Light and to give strength, courage and faith, moreover, to bring it to the whole world, especially in those places overwhelmed by darkness.

[Read the full text of the homily \(Italian\)](#)

“So that where animals once ate the fodder of the hay, there humans henceforth for healing of body and soul would eat the flesh of the immaculate and spotless lamb, our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us with supreme and indescribable love, who lives and rules with the Father and the Holy Spirit as God, eternally glorious forever and ever. Amen” (1Cel 30,87).

With these words Br. Massimo Fusarelli, Minister General, concluded his homily at the Christmas Mass, celebrated in the sanctuary of Greccio.

[Read the full text of the homily \(Italian\)](#)



REFLECTIONS BY BR. MASSIMO - DECEMBER 2023
A NEW ENCHANTMENT

Christmas is a time of wonder and new life. Some 800 years ago, Francis wanted to experience the beauty of this day in Greccio, to see with his own eyes the poverty and hardships into which Jesus wanted to be born. The lights of that night in 1223, the voices of the friars and the local people who arrived at the grotto, the faith and love of Francis for the Child Jesus allowed everyone to live an experience of wonder and renewed faith.

As I pause before this enchanting scene of Christmas, resplendent in its light and listen to the joy of life and vocation enjoyed by many of us, I thank the Lord for it. It is consoling to see how many friars wish to live the enchantment of our way of life, even in new forms. At the same time, I also pause to listen to the sense of tiredness and demotivation of many of our brothers and sisters.

Some signs are the progressive withdrawal from fraternal life, the reduction to their private dimension, closure in a virtual world, the extinction of prayer, even to the point of some forms of dependence.

We bear within us the signs of the change of era, of the fragmentation of society and the individual, of the transformation of our relationship within the religious world. Yet we still stand in solidarity with so many. So, what should we do?

It seems to me that first of all we need to pause a little, to allow ample space and time for revitalization and re-enchantment.



So why not let the Provinces, Custodies, Entities at Conference level think about providing sabbatical times for the friars, in order to allow the friars to have a break from ordinary activities and places? In these spaces, we can learn not to be afraid of our vulnerabilities, including discouragement, apathy, and indifference. We can learn to process things and not undergo the many changes that take place in and around us.

We can learn to take better care of our personal relationship with the Lord, who asks us for more time and space for silence, prayer, reading and personal and fraternal assessment. We can learn to listen better to our emotional, affective, and relational dimensions.

We can also pause and learn more about the time in which we live and where we are called to live and proclaim the Gospel, also with new forms of presence and evangelization.

Certainly, the process of re-enchantment is laborious and asks us above all to overcome the tendency to be settled, but it is worth relaunching our life as a possibility of growth, joy and human, Christian and vocational maturity. The Franciscan charism always questions us, provokes us, and seldom leaves us in peace.

May the enchantment of Christmas still enchant us with the wonder of a full life lived according to the Gospel.

BROTHERS DECEASED *

- 29th December: Br. José Maria da Fonseca Guimarães (Province of the Holy Proto-Martyrs of Morocco, Portugal)
- 18th December: Br. Luciano (Salvatore) Benedetto (Prov. Our Lady of Grace, Italy)
- 15th December: Br. Raúl Encarnación Sánchez García (Prov. Twelve Apostles, Peru)
- 12th December: Br. Michael (Adolf) Seidl (St. Elizabeth's Prov., Germany)
- 8th December: Br. Mariano Joaquín Luna Martínez (Prov. Sts. Peter and Paul, Mexico)

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

CENTENARY CELEBRATION OF GRECCIO FROM THE FRANCISCAN CONFERENCE OF BOLIVIA THE IMPORTANCE OF SIMPLICITY AND PEACE

During the anniversary of the Franciscan Centenary celebrations, the Franciscan Conference of Bolivia, under the direction of Br. José Alirio Urbina Rodríguez, OFM, Minister Provincial of the Province of Holy Faith, in Colombia, organised the event which took place on the evening of 17th December 2023, in order to remember the Greccio event in actuality and in a synodal manner.

The Province of Saint Francis of Solano and twelve Apostles in Perú, together with the Province of Saint Paul the Apostle and the Province of Holy Faith in Colombia, carried out that event with an intention of uniting the friars in a festive meeting and offer a prayer of peace for the whole world.

The principal objective of the meeting was to create a space for fraternal union and raise a prayer in honor of the born child the symbol of hope and peace for the world. "We hope that this spiritual awakening will allow us to concentrate on the essential message of that historical moment, which is re-addressed to



our hearts, the humility of Jesus who was born in a manger, enriching us with his simplicity". This was expressed by Br. José Alirio. This initiative seeks to promote the reflection on the essence of the Franciscan message and remind us on the importance of simplicity and peace in today's world.

Conferencia Franciscana Bolivariana y Dirección de Comunicaciones Provincia de la Santa Fe de Colombia.

KOINONIA N. 120 – 2023.4: YEAR 30

THE NATIVITY SCENE IN THE CHURCH

In this last issue of Koinonia 2023, we would like to present to you "The Nativity Scene in the Church," thus bringing to a close the four themes in which the general topic was developed: "Franciscans in the Celebration of Jubilees."

The Nativity scene is one of the pivotal points for understanding the story of Salvation, which is revealed through the mystery of the incarnation of the Word of God, who „though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men" (Fil 2,7).

It recalls and updates the event that occurred more than two thousand years ago: the birth of the Baby Jesus in the stable in Bethlehem. It is the crib, a word that means manger. "This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger" (Lk 2: 12).

The newly born Jesus is thus placed on a manger, a simple structure used to feed animals, but which symbolizes the pater and the Eucharist, from which our spiritual nourishment is fed. I want to invite you, dear brothers and sisters, to direct your gaze towards the people who make up the Crib, in the light of



what the Holy Scripture and tradition show us, and above all, in the light of the two Jubilees whose anniversary we are celebrating this year: the 800th anniversary of the approval of the Rule and the Crib prepared by St Francis in Greccio.

These two Jubilees challenge us to renew our baptismal commitments, to have more love and truth for our vocation, and to be ever more committed to our mission as Franciscans.

Starting from the Rule to arrive at the Manger of Greccio is the same as saying start from the Gospel to arrive at the Rule.

PDF: [Español](#) - [English](#) - [Italiano](#) - [Français](#)

BR. DENNIS IN ISTANBUL TO PREPARE THE CONFERENCE ON THE *RATIO EVANGELIZATIONIS* OF THE ORDER
JOINT CIME-CEME MEETING IN TURKEY, 26TH MAY – 2ND JUNE 2024

From December 24 to 30, 2023, the General Animator for Missions, Br Dennis Tayo, went to Istanbul, Turkey to prepare for the convoked joint meeting of the International Council for Mission Evangelization (CIME) and the Executive Commission for Missions and Evangelization (CEME).

This joint CIME-CEME meeting will be held from May 26 to June 2, 2024. With a theme “Having the Spirit of the Lord and His holy operations (2Reg 10:8) – an invitation to reflect on the proposed Ratio Evangelization for the Order (REO), given one’s context,” it aims to continue the synodal process of crafting the REO according to Mandate 20 of the 2021 General Chapter.

The joint CIME-CEME meeting will be held in Santa Maria Draperis, Istiklal Caddesi n. 215-P.K.243 34433 Beyoğlu – Istanbul, Turkey. Br Dennis Tayo with Br Eleuthere Makuta, Guardian of this Franciscan International Community, identified and discussed important concerns and needed preparations for this gathering.

Istanbul is ideal because it is located midway from the places of origin of the thirteen Secretaries for Missions and Evangelization of the Conference (SMEC) and CEME members, who will be attending this landmark gathering. Moreover, our presence here being at the service of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, fosters an avenue for the participants to witness dialogue with people of other faiths and religions.

Hence, we agreed to conduct pilgrimages to mosques and churches, and exposure visits to the friars’ existing ministries (as pastoral care in the diocese, ongoing support for prisoners, Caritas, or other church-based charitable organizations, etc.) during this assembly, promoting “dialogue” as a way of doing missionary evangelization.

Likewise, the needed amenities and facilities to accommodate all the participants considering the international nature of this gathering are well provided (due to its existing annual mission-



ary formation courses), particularly with the availability of translators that can facilitate in-depth discussions.

Furthermore, the drafting of the REO is a dynamic, participatory process best expressed by the phrase, “a document in progress on a journey”. From a series of CIME-CEME meetings, and consultations from the different entities, the General Definitory approved the REO working structure drafted by the REO Commission of Experts. A questionnaire was already sent to the SMEC to solicit contributions from the friars in all the entities, based on this working framework.

Therefore, we heed each one’s participation in answering the animation questions that will be forwarded to each entity’s respective Secretary for Missions and Evangelization, through the SMEC. The ultimate goal of the REO is to strengthen our unique charismatic identity by reinforcing shared values and principles, we identify and accept collectively as a universal “evangelizing missionary fraternity.”

In the light of these shared thrusts that we hold important as an Order, each Entity or Conference, in turn, will make a particular statute that embodies them in the distinct contexts of its reality. The REO hopes to strengthen the different dimensions of our missionary evangelization.

It challenges and appeals for a renewed impetus to do evangelizing missions, distinctively in the ways of our Seraphic Father Francis, always dialogical and responsive to the signs of time and the needs of the marginalized. In a milieu where dialogue flourishes, we hope to realize the important elements of the REO in Istanbul, Turkey.



FRATERNAL GATHERING AND CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION ASIAN FRIARS RESIDING IN ROME

On 17th December 2023, brothers of two Asian Conferences (SAAOC and EAC) who reside in Rome came together to the Friars Minor General Curia for a fraternal gathering in the Saint Clare room and to celebrate Christmas and pray together in the Curia's "little grotto."

The gathering was arranged by Asian Friars who serve at the Curia: Br. John Wong, Definitor General responsible for the Conferences, Br. Hieronimus Yoseph Dei Rupa, Vice Secretary for Formation & Studies, Br. Dennis Tayo, Vice Secretary of Missions & Evangelization, Br. Taucen Hotlan Girsang, Vice Director of JPIC, Br. Baptist D'Souza, Vice Director of the Development Office, and Br. Alvin Artemio Paras, Vice Secretary General. As they celebrated brotherhood, they were joined also by Minister General, Br. Massimo Fusarelli, Vicar General, Br. Ignacio Ceja Jiménez, and the Guardian of the Curia, Br. Maciej Olszewski.

The gathering consisted of three main parts: Firstly, Christmas greetings and information about the collaboration of the two conferences were exchanged. Secondly, each office shared what collaborative projects they've been working on individually. Thirdly, there was a festive Christmas dinner, which concluded with an address by the Minister General.

The gathering began, of course, with prayer and a warm welcome offered by the Guardian. Then his remarks, Br. Ignacio reminded those gathered that our life as brothers and as Franciscans is rooted in the Incarnation. He emphasized that fraternal collaboration among the entities emerges from hearts open to mutual fraternal love.

Following this, Br. John Wong spoke about the wonderful collaboration already happening with the two Conferences, especially in the areas of forming the Formators of the Francis-



can Study Centers of Asia, and training missionaries for the Papua New Guinea and Thailand missions. He spoke about some of the challenges that arise when offering ministry to immigrants and, after his remarks, invited a sharing to hear what the brothers thought about these topics.

Then, Br. Dennis described more of the missionary projects of Asia, particularly focusing on Papua New Guinea. In order to maintain this mission, collaboration by the Secretariat of Mission & Evangelization and the Secretariat for Formation & Studies in each entity and within the entire Conference is needed. Friars must be adequately prepared to be sent on mission.

For his part, Br. Hieronimus spoke about the upcoming 2024 formation project for Asian Friars which will take place virtually by Zoom conferences but will begin and end with two weeks in Olas, in the Philippines. Then, Br. Taucen spoke about the "Net of Peace" project in Asia that would begin in 2024. Finally, Br. Baptist spoke of the new Development Office, particularly explaining the scholarship process.

At the Christmas celebration, Minister General, Br. Massimo Fusarelli, spoke about the joyful anniversaries we are celebrating, the 800th anniversary of the Christmas crib experience at Greccio and the writing of the Rule. "As Saint Francis went to Greccio seeking an encounter with the Lord of peace, Friars everywhere should live in profound intimacy with Jesus, who is the source of all peace."

The Christmas meal gave the brothers ample time to wish each other a blessed and merry Christmas. Spontaneous singing and dancing allowed the celebration to conclude with great joy!



CELEBRATING THE GIFT OF THE STIGMATA 1224 - 2024

Remembering and celebrating Francis being touched by the Crucified One inspires us to come out of ourselves and go forth “touching Christ’s suffering flesh in others” (Gaudete et exsultate 37) at the same time, we allow ourselves to be touched and challenged by the dramatic instances of pain and suffering we see afflicting so many of our brothers and sisters around the world.

(Guidelines for celebrating the centenaries of the Franciscan family)

DECEMBER 2023

CTC NO. 62

N 62 of “Communion and Communication” is closed, when we have already celebrated the eighth centenary of the approval of the Regula bullata and not yet that of the Greccio Nativity.

In this issue we will listen and reflect upon the first verse of the Words with melody that Francis addressed to the Sisters of San Damiano: “Audite, poverelle dal Signore vocate / ke de multe parte e provincie sete adunate.” (“Hear, poor women called by the Lord / who have gathered together from many parts and provinces.”)

We have been called by the Lord to live an evangelical Form of Life which finds one of its principal sources in the Regula bullata. As the Minister General wrote to us in the letter for the Solemnity of St. Clare: “The Rules of Francis and Clare have a common charismatic root, which refers to the initial «forma vitæ» given by Francis to Clare and her first companions some-time after landing at San Damiano.” Indeed, those who had the opportunity to follow the celebration in the Basilica of St. John Lateran this past November 29th were able to experience this gift of unity which makes us feel personally challenged by the ‘return’ of the Rule made by the Pope to the Order of Minors, stimulating us to ‘grow more and more in goodness.’

Called by the Lord, we found ourselves together forming communities with Sisters who, most of the time, we did not know before. We often repeat that “we did not choose ourselves,” but “we were chosen.” Thus, in these pages, some Sisters tell the events that made them multicultural communities in Brazil, Italy, and Great Britain. From Uganda, however, a recent experience of ‘updating’ Words with melody comes to us. All this has an authoritative and precious introduction in two parts: the letter of Br. Fábio Gomes, ofm, who invites us to stop and reflect on



the two expressions of Francis: Dal Signore vocate (“Called by the Lord”) and Da molte parti e province (“From many parts and provinces”), and the second and final part of the study on Words with melody by Br. Carlo Paolazzi ofm.

We sincerely thank the Sisters and Brothers who made the publication of this new issue possible. Special thanks to the Sisters of the Monastery of Novaglie, Italy, who sent images of the miniatures of the Codex with the Words with melody.

We invite everyone to send us stories and reflections for the next issue, no. 63, which will be published in June 2024. We remind you of the theme: Vivite sempre en veritate / ke en obediencia moriate. (“Live always in truth / that you may die in obedience.”) It is the next verse of the Words with melody, which calls us to reflect on obedience to the Lord, mediated by the mother, by the community, by history..., and on living in the truth. We gratefully await your stories!

To each and every one of you, happy reading!

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