

500TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE COMING OF THE FIRST FRIARS MINOR TO MEXICO PENTECOST LETTER 2024

'And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am on my way ...' (Acts 20:22)

FOREWORD

In his address to the elders of Ephesus, the Apostle Paul sums up his life as mission. He recognises that the Spirit of the Crucified and Risen Lord is the central figure in his long journey — the very soul of his mission. It is He who guides Paul, directing him, always pushing him beyond himself and beyond many boundaries.

While Pentecost is always a reminder to listen to the Spirit's gentle breeze, this year's breath of Pentecost has a particular emphasis because we also recall the Stigmata of Saint Francis. Remembering this brings us back to the heart of our charism — to live the Gospel by following in the footprints of the poor and crucified Christ. Today, the 13th of May 2024, we also recall the 500th anniversary of the arrival in Veracruz, Mexico, of the first twelve missionary friars. The Minister General, Fray Francisco de los Ángeles Quiñones, sent these friars in the freedom of the spirit, which is at the heart of every missionary vocation. This event is a singular

and important fact in the Order's history, and one that has received insufficient attention. In fact, although the historical record contains both light and shadows, it became the most comprehensive and important project for the evangelisation of the peoples of America and can be considered a true response to the gift of the Spirit.

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GENERAL CURIA AGENDA

- From 20th to 28th May, the Minister General, Br Massimo Fusarelli, will visit the Holy Gospel Province in Mexico.
- From 20th to 26th May, Br Daniel Rodriguez Blanco and Br Taucen Girsang of the JPIC Office, will participate in the International JPIC Course 2024, entitled "Greccio and La Verna. Sources of Justice, Peace and Reconciliation", which will be held at the Pontifical Antonianum University in Rome.
- On 21st May, the General Secretary, Br Antonio Maria lacona, will meet the Provincial Secretaries of the Conference of St Mary of Guadalupe in Mexico.
- From the 23rd to the 28th May, the General Definitory will be in Mexico for meetings with the Conference of St Mary of Guadalupe and with the Provincial Ministers of UCLAF. Together they will celebrate 500 years of the Order's presence in Mexico and Latin America.
- From 29th May to 2nd June, Br Massimo will visit the Province of St Philip of Jesus (Mexico). From 2nd to 4th June, together with the General Definitors Br Cesar Kulkamp and Br Joaquín Echeverry, he will be in Colombia for the Intermediate Provincial Chapter of the Province of the Holy Faith. From 4th to 11th June, Br Massimo and Br Cesar will visit the Province of St Francis of Quito (Ecuador).
- From 29 May to 2nd June, Br. Cesar and the Vicar General, Br. Ignacio Ceja, will be in Venezuela to visit the Custody of the Immaculate Conception of the BVM and to celebrate 70 years of the new Order's presence in the country.

FUNDRAISER FOR POPULATIONS AFFECTED BY FLOODING
BRAZIL EMERGENCY



The Friars Minor are alongside the populations of the Rio Grande do Sul, in Brazil, victims of four violent floods that have devastated the region in less than a year. The last one, in the first days of May, was the most devastating and brought the already precarious living conditions of the inhabitants to their knees, hard hit by these tragic phenomena which are now uncontrollable. [The *Fondazione OFM Fraternitas* has launched an extraordinary fundraising campaign to help these populations.](#)

The General Curia of the Order of Friars Minor, in the person of the General Definitor of the region, Br. César Kulkamp, is in direct contact with Br. Marino Rhoden, Minister of the Province of San Francesco d’Assisi, which includes the state of Rio Grande do Sul. [Br. Cesar launched an appeal to help Brazil.](#)

Houses were swept away from the power of water and landslides; agricultural products and animals were affected, as were the roads and structures.

The government is working to rescue people and to bring them to safety. More than 120,000 persons are away from their homes,

above the poorest of them. Parish churches opened their doors to receive persons, but many persons were affected by the waters. Likewise, our brothers in Rio Grande do Sul have opened their houses, their churches, and their spaces to welcome people, offering whatever they can, but the situation is one of generalized need.

They lack food, clothing, hygiene products, medicines for the infants and elderly, drinkable water; the brothers are trying offer spiritual help and solidarity to the families suffering from the loss of loved ones, homes and means of subsistence.

The Minister General of the Order, [Br. Massimo Fusarelli, also launched an appeal to help Brazil.](#)

Spiritual and material solidarity has been expressed throughout the Catholic world: Pope Francis has expressed condolences and support in his Regina Coeli of Sunday, May 5; Bishop Aloisio Alberto Dilli OFM, of the diocese of Santa Cruz do Sul, has taped a videomessage of hope and courage for the populations; the Conference of the Franciscan Family of Brazil is also alongside the victims.

In an interview with Vatican Radio of Brazil, Archbishop Jaime Spengler OFM, of Porte Alegre (capital of the state of Rio Grande do Sul), underlined the importance of welcoming and supporting anyone who has lost everything and has need of food, water, clothing and a roof under which one can shelter oneself.

[To support the fundraising of the *Fondazione OFM Fraternitas* click here.](#)

POLAND, APRIL 28-MAY 2
VISIT TO THE PROVINCE OF SANTA EDVIGE

From April 28 to May 2, the fraternal visit of the Minister General, Br. Massimo Fusarelli, accompanied by the General Definitor, Br. Konrad Cholewa, to the Province of Santa Edvige, in Poland, took place. As the theme of the visit, the Minister General chose the words taken from the book of Isaiah: “Behold, I am doing something new” (Is 43:18-19).

On Sunday April 28, Br. Massimo met in Góra św. Anny with members of the Secular Franciscan Order, coming from regions where the friars of the provinces of S. Edvige and of the Assumption BVM are active. Br. Konrad presided at the mass in the basilica, while the Minister General preached the hom-

ily. The meeting with members of the Secular Franciscan Order took place in the pilgrimage house in the afternoon.

On Monday April 29 and Wednesday May 1, two meetings with the friars of the province took place. The first meeting was held at Trzebnica, in the sanctuary of S. Edvige of Silesia, patroness of the province, while the later meeting took place at Prudnik, in the sanctuary of S. Joseph, where there was celebrated the thanksgiving for the brothers who in 2024 are celebrating their jubilees of religious and priestly life. In the biblical text already mentioned, the prophet encourages the chosen people, who found themselves enslaved, to not look to the past, but to continue to- >>

ward the future and to undertake new activities, the fruit of discernment in the Divine Spirit, despite the various current difficulties experienced.

The stay in the Province was the occasion not only to meet the brothers at Wrocław, Nysa, Kłodzko e Prudnik, but also to get to know their work. Br. Massimo visited the Table for the poor and homeless at Wrocław Karłowice, managed by *Fundacja Antoni*. In addition to the distribution of food, activities carried out are aimed at helping the needy and the poor out of their difficult situation. On the territory of the convent there is also a physical therapy laboratory for the disabled. In the city of Nysa the Minister General visited the *Fazenda da Esperança*, the first center of its kind in Poland, which helps people overcome various addictions through the renewal of life.

Br. Massimo also met with the community of the Poor Clares of Perpetual Adoration at Ząbkowice Śląskie and Kłodzko,

surrounded by the assistance of the brothers. Finally, at Jutrzyzna, where the brothers provide their service, he visited the only sanctuary on Polish soil dedicated to St. Francis.

Watch the video of the *Fundacja Antoni*: [English - Polish](#)



MARRAKESH (MOROCCO), 10TH – 12TH MAY 2024

MEETING OF THE FRANCISCAN FAMILY FOR MEDITERRANEAN REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS

From the 10th to 12th May in Marrakesh (Morocco) the first meeting of the Franciscan Family at the service of migrants and refugees in the Mediterranean took place, attended by brothers and sisters from Spain, Italy, Turkey, France, Morocco and Greece. Also present were representatives of Franciscans International, the General Secretariat for Missions and Evangelization (SGME) and the General Office of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC).

The meeting began on Friday, the 10th May, with the Eucharist presided over by Br. Daniel Rodríguez Blanco, OFM, Director of the General Office of JPIC. In his homily, he invited those present to have the courage to build a Franciscan network in the Mediterranean that would become a “drop” of fraternity in this immense sea.

Br. Francisco Gómez Vargas, Secretary General for Missions and Evangelization, presented the objective of the meeting, summarized in the desire to get to know each other, exchange work experiences and create a structure capable of articulating a response for the Mediterranean based on Franciscan charism and spirituality.

The Minister General OFM, Br. Massimo Fusarelli, in his message sent to the participants, highlighted the beauty and at the same time the current tragedy in the Mediterranean. He asked the Franciscan Family to join forces so that no one feels alone in their work, but rather part of a fraternity in the “Mare Nostrum” and that this is not, as Pope Francis said, “a cemetery”, but a home open to all.



After the words of welcome from the Franciscan Custody of Morocco in the person of Br. Jean de Dieu, a day of reflection was held with a historical look at the Mediterranean introduced by Br. Giuseppe Buffon, followed by eyewitness testimony of some migrants and the exposition of good practices by the Jesuit Foundation Migra Studium of Barcelona, in the person of Margarita García, and Saving Humans in the Mediterranean, represented by Luca Casarini.

On Saturday the 11th May, the Franciscan Family gathered at the friary of the Holy Martyrs of Morocco, in the city of Marrakech. In the Eucharistic celebration over which he presided, Br. Francisco emphasized the contradiction of globalization, which concerns more the economy and not the >>

movement of people. The appeal for the Franciscans is to "globalize love" and make transparent the dream of Jesus, centered on the life and dignity of people as daughters of God.

A poignant moment took place whilst listening to the projects that each of the participants carries out at the local level. The Franciscan Family in the Mediterranean has been working for many years with migrants and refugees in reception centres, health care, soup kitchens, psychological assistance, legal and immigration counseling, counseling centres, vocational training, language schools, areas for personal hygiene and washing clothes.

Blair Matheson, executive director of Franciscans International, explained the programmes they develop in different parts of the world and the advocacy they carry out at the United Nations and in various Embassies. The 12th May was marked by the visit of Cardinal Cristóbal López Romero,

SDB, bishop of Rabat, who presented very clearly the identity and mission of the Church in Morocco, "sociologically and theologically migrant," because the majority of the thirty thousand Catholics in Morocco are migrants of at least one hundred nationalities. For the cardinal, migration is neither a problem nor a misfortune, but in many places, migrants are not welcomed because they are poor. It is a migrant Church because it seeks to become incarnate and to have a Moroccan face, which desires to build the Kingdom of God based on the values of justice, peace, freedom, life, truth and, most fundamentally, love.

The Bishop of Rabat also maintained that dialogue is the centre of the mission: the Moroccan experience testifies that "Christians and Muslims can live as brothers and sisters", he stressed, defining the Church of Morocco as "small" perhaps because of the numbers, but authentic, exciting and passionate, thanks to its members.

15 – 25 APRIL

VISITS OF THE GENERAL SECRETARIAT FOR MISSIONS AND EVANGELIZATION IN ASIA

VIETNAM

On April 15 to 19, Br Francisco Gomez Vargas and Br Dennis Tayo, respectively Secretary and Animator of the General Secretariat for Missions and Evangelization, visited Vietnam to meet the friars involved in "New Forms" as part of the preparation for the 2025 Conference Assembly for New Forms of Presence and Missionary Evangelization in Asia. Aware of this goal, Br John Nguyen Phuoc, Minister Provincial of St Francis of Vietnam, and Br Peter Binh accompanied them to these presences. Br John Phuoc explained that "as a Provincial Chapter decision, friars are to assist ethnic groups and indigents in the aspects of education, basic health services and the promotion of culture." Hence, their first destination was the mountainous Province of Lang Son in North Vietnam. Headed towards the borders of China, they met the four friars ministering to ethnic groups in this region for their sacramental needs and other pastoral assistance in providing water systems and the like. They then went to Hanoi Friary to meet the five brothers, who shared their work in caring for the poor ethnic peoples who migrated to Hanoi City for better opportunities in life.

They next flew to the central highlands in Vietnam where most vulnerable and disadvantaged ethnic groups live. In the "Mit Garden" Community in Pleiku Province, they met the 21 brothers ministering to these ethnic groups who shared their experiences and aspirations. The friars were affirmed and encouraged to know that the Order advocates opening "new

forms" such as these presences, as concrete expressions of our charism. Br Peter Phat, the community guardian, thereafter, accompanied them to visit the villages of O, Nú, Bang Ut, and Dunde to meet the ethnic people. The friars established 3 parishes and assisted them with their educational, economic, and health needs while safeguarding their culture.

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LAOS

Last April 20 to 22, Br Francisco and Br Dennis, along with Br John Phuoc, the Minister Provincial of Vietnam, and Br Peter Binh, came to visit the friars in Laos.

Laos is an independent communist country in Southeast Asia with a total of 7,749,595 predominantly Buddhist inhabitants. Only 46,500 are Catholics, present in the four dioceses in Laos. In December 2012, the Vietnamese Franciscan brothers came to the Diocese of Pakse, with Br Joseph Santisouk being among the first missionaries. Today he is joined by Bro Paul Hiring, who is also a priest, and Br Peter Mau, the guardian in this community along with Br John Hâu on his Franciscan year of experience.

Br Joseph and the brothers shared some of the threats and opportunities they experienced, after more than 10 years of mission in this country. "Being a communist and poor country



that is not so open to Christianity, we started our presence, quiet, slow, and humble. Despite the lack of personnel and financial resources over time, the local authorities in some places accepted the Franciscans, especially in our participation in educational and social activities. We established strong support and collaborations with the local Church authorities and the Laotian people, which enabled us to train catechists and missionary personnel while helping 65 poor scholars from remote areas, to have primary to high school education, accommodating them respectively in Saint Francis Boarding House in Paksong and St. Anthony Boarding House in Pakse. So we had 4 university graduates; 5 vocational trade graduates; 3 university students; and 4 Laotian seminarians. Moreover, in the summers, we organized courses for rural children to study English, human values, and catechism. We renovated and/ or built our present friaries and churches while taking care of Vietnamese immigrants in Pakse, Paksong, and Attapeu. Since the brothers have introduced the Franciscan spirit, we have some students now who may want to enter our Franciscan vocation. At this time, we hope to finish the ongoing construction of the Church in Muongkhay village, a predominantly Catholic-inhabited rural locality as well as some of the needed boarding house structures to accommodate these students.”

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CAMBODIA

From April 22 to 25 Br Francisco and Br Dennis visited the mission in Cambodia fraternally, accompanied by the Provincial Minister of Vietnam and Br. Michael Nguyen Xuan Duc, Guardian of the Cambodian community of Tuolkrasang. [...]

This reality represents a great challenge, especially for the Vietnamese friars who work for the pastoral care of 3 parishes that mainly (99%) serve Vietnamese faithful. According to Br. G.B Dau Tien Dung, parish priest, “due to this tension, the local ordinary people tend not to be very welcoming towards us Vietnamese priests, for fear that we can only take care of the Vietnamese people, but in reality we take care of

everyone. Another challenge is learning the Khmer dialect. From the experience of other non-Vietnamese congregations in Cambodia, this does not appear to be a problem. We would greatly appreciate non-Vietnamese brother priests from other entities joining us here in Cambodia.”

Together with Anthony Tran Van Bien, Joseph Paul Roda Tuan and Joseph Nguyen Xuan The (who are living their Franciscan year), the friars worked mainly for the pastoral care of two groups: first, that of Vietnamese immigrants who were not have been granted Cambodian citizenship and are therefore not allowed to work in offices or factories, and who have children born in Cambodia but who are not allowed to go to school. Second, Cambodian Khmer informal settlers, mainly hired day laborers, who live by fishing in ditches, ponds and lakes, pressing bottles and selling small groceries at home.

These poor populations are catered for by 2 pastoral nursery schools with a total of 50 children (35 Khmer and 15 Vietnamese) and 70 primary students (grades 1 and 2), the majority of whom are poor Khmer children transported to school every day by our Franciscan brothers. Other ongoing ministries for Khmer families include scholarships, home construction, and regular financial assistance to the elderly and sick.

For the Vietnamese friars in Cambodia, we hope for greater collaboration with other Entities, financial support in ongoing pastoral activities and projects. The Friars continue to work silently with evangelization activities among Cambodians, at the same time helping Vietnamese immigrants to integrate into Cambodian nationality and society, creating a bridge of reconciliation between these two peoples, wounded by the past.

Read the full text on www.ofm.org



OFM WORLD

Postulants in the Service of the Elderly, Prov. Holy Faith (Colombia)



Solemnity of the Ascension celebrated at the Mount of Olives, Jerusalem (Custody of the Holy Land)



25th anniversary of perpetual profession of Br. Angel Flores, Br. Trinidad Huertas and Br. Luis M. Rodriguez (Italy)



Solemn Professions, Prov. St. Thomas the Apostle (India)



Singapore, meeting of the Lay Brothers of the SAAOC (Conference of South Asia, Australia and Oceania)



Chapter of Mats, Prov. Sts. Cyril and Methodius (Croatia)

CHAPTERS OF MATS AROUND THE WORLD

ROMAN HOUSES DEPENDENT ON THE MINISTER GENERAL



On the 3rd and 4th May, the Chapter of the Mats of the Roman Houses dependent on the Minister General was held at Sacrofano (Rome). Almost 100 participants from the General Curia, the College of St. Isidore, the College of St. Anthony and the College of the Lateran Penitentiary Fathers, dialogued and reflected on the meaning that the words Charism, Communion and Mission have for the Order today.

The meeting, organized by the General Secretariat of the Order and four members of the Roman houses dependent on the Minister General, was structured by alternating moments of

listening, sharing in group workshops and prayer. After the welcome by Br. Maciej and the greeting of the Minister General, Br. Massimo Fusarelli, the participants (including lay people - men and one woman - and two religious), listened to the intervention of Remo di Pinto, former National Minister for Italy of the OFS, focused on the Franciscan Charism. Remo touched on many themes: vocation, happiness, gratitude, mercy, fraternity, prayer, availability, reconciliation, opportunity, proclamation. All connected to the life of Francis, but also to their own personal experience.

These words and a methodology of practical philosophy helped the participants in the following "World Coffee", a workshop of dialogue – mutual listening – which took place in 10 working groups that involved the participants to reflect on the theme of charism, expressed through 5 key words that at the end each group shared with the others.

During the Eucharistic celebration, taking up the words of the Gospel and how Philip expresses the desire to "see the Father", the Minister General recalled how the centre of faith is

Jesus Christ Himself and how St. Francis emphasizes Him by writing in the Rule of the Friars Minor that he wants to live the Gospel. *"What reality and what words do we receive today to open ourselves to the future? What characterizes our charism today?"*, asked Br. Massimo, recalling how the charism is a dynamic reality, which starts from the relationship with God and opens up to humanity, to relationships with the women and men of the time.

The afternoon session was opened by the report of the spouses Michela Lazzeroni and Andrea Piccaluga, both of the OFS, who dealt with the theme of Generative Communion. A path made up of several stages – dating, style and heart, fidelity, welcoming at home, sharing life, co-design, generativity, desire and hope, daring – which was the foundation of the second workshop of the day, this time based on "aesthetic practice": each working group, starting from the drawing of each individual participant, completed the phrase *"Communion is..."*. The result was full of surprises, both for the written contributions and for the Artistic!

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PORTUGAL AND SPAIN (SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA)



On the 1st May 2024, the Interprovincial Chapter of Mats of the Provinces of the Holy Martyrs of Morocco (Portugal) and St James of Compostela (Spain) was held in Montariol, Braga (Portugal).

The meeting began with Lauds, the presentation of the friars that were present by the Fraternities and the group work on the following questions: Renewing our vision: what characteristics should we open up to today? Walking according to a model: what is the prophetic model of fraternity in minority? Embracing the Future: Testimony and Mission: Who and How Do We Serve?

The morning ended with the Eucharist presided over by the Bishop Emeritus of Bragança-Miranda, Mgr. António Montes

Moreira, OFM. The Archbishop emeritus of Tangier, Msgr. Fr Santiago Agrelo, OFM, also celebrated.

In the afternoon, the Chapter began at 3 p.m. with a musical moment in the friary church, followed by group work for reflection carried out by the confreres in the morning.

At 5 p.m., the work of this Interprovincial Chapter of Mats concluded with the interventions of the Provincial Ministers of both Provinces, Br. Juan Manuel Burján García (Spain) and Br. Fernando Valente da Silva Mota (Portugal).

There were 57 brothers present at this Chapter: 21 from Galicia (Spain) and 36 from Portugal.

MOZAMBIQUE

"We are concluding our Chapter of Mats. I believe that the four days spent in our Chapter of Mats have helped us come closer through fraternal communion. When we met the objective of the Chapter was to look at the situation of our mission in Mozambique as a Franciscan Family." This was affirmed by Fr. Lage Nhampoca Luís Afonso, the Custos of the Custody of St. Clare in Mozambique, at the closing of the Chapter of Mats that took place in Beira, Mozambique from 23rd to 26th April 2024.

The Custos expressed his satisfaction over the climate which characterised the Chapter that it was celebrated in mutual respect, sharing and awareness of the common charism that unites the franciscan family, which has an important part to play both in the Church and Mozambican society. He therefore, exhorted all the friars to collaborate in the formation of formators, the project of missionary evangelization and the ministry of Safeguarding of the Minors and Vulnerable Adults. During the Chapter there was a discussion on the themes that are to do with real life and mission of the Franciscan Family in Mozambique such as: Evangelization and Mission, Justice and Peace and the Integrity of Creation, Safeguarding of the Minor and Vulnerable Adults. As a sign of commitment, the capitulars approved the following proposals that will help them as references in their life and mission:

- Giving priority to prayer, listening, meditation and sharing the World of God in fraternity as the means of evangelization ad intra.
- Reinforcing communication, dialogue and reconciliation in fraternities and in all the franciscan family at all levels.
- Amplifying the testimony of the franciscan charism by adopting the synodal model (communion, mission and participation).
- Strengthening collaboration in Ongoing and Initial formation.



- Adopting ourselves to new forms and means of evangelization (new presence and digital evangelization) such as web site and other means of communication so as to make known the richness of our Franciscan Charism.
- To involve the animators of JPIC as the conjugal ring with the society in which we find ourselves and each member of the franciscan family as a protagonist in this dimension.
- To embrace the ministry of Safeguarding the Minors and Vulnerable Adults.
- To invite the Major Superiors to the programme of Franciscan Centenaries.
- Each year to carry out symposiums and seminars on Franciscan Spirituality and Franciscan Charism.

The Chapter of Mats which was convoked and presided over by the Custos according to the letter and guidelines which the General Definitory of the Order sent to the Franciscan Entities in the world, had 29 representatives from

the Autonomous Custody of St. Clare of Assis in Mozambique who participated, Friars Minors Capuchins, the Institute of the Poor Christ, Franciscan Sisters in Mozambique, the Order of Secular Franciscans and Franciscan Youth. This Chapter of Mats was the first in the Franciscan history of Mozambique.

Br. Evodio João, OFM



MALTA, 29 APRIL – 3 MAY 2024

ONGOING FORMATION FOR MISSIONARY BROTHERS IN LIBYA

Br Magdy Helmy from Egypt, who works in the friary of Tripoli (Apostolic Vicariate of Tripoli, Libya) and Br Shahrukh Bhatti from Pakistan, who works in Benghazi (Apostolic Vicariate of Benghazi) were guests of the Franciscan fraternity of Valletta, Malta, for a short period of fraternal encounters and sharing, as well as for a moment of rest. They were invited by the Minister Provincial Br Anthony Chircop, who has recently conducted two visits to the Libya mission in Tripoli and Benghazi.

The Maltese Province of St. Paul the Apostle has been entrusted by the Order with the juridical responsibility of the Libya mission.

During their stay in Malta the two brothers met Br Noel Muscat, Moderator for Ongoing Formation, for some moments of fraternal sharing. With him they reflected upon the *Instrumentum Laboris* in view of the composition of the *Ratio Evangelisationis*, trying to contextualise the contents in their concrete experience in Libya.

The brothers reflected upon a particular paragraph of the document, which states: “Similarly, we must consider the economization of life, with the dogmas of permanent growth and profit maximization, which creates new forms of slavery,

poverty, and floods of refugees. This situation requires not only first aid intervention for the victims but also evangelization as a prophetic commitment to justice and peace.” [cf. *Instrumentum Laboris* pag. 5].

These words fit perfectly within the mission entrusted to our Order in Libya, where the small communities in Tripoli, Sabha, Benghazi, Derna and Tobruk are made up of

Christian (and Muslim) refugees, mainly hailing from various African and Asian countries. The brothers minister to these persons in search for a better future in Europe. At the same time, they try to dissuade them from undertaking the dangerous crossing across the Mediterranean. The plight of refugees is one of the main problems which we are facing. As Friars Minor we are called to offer our support to them,

on the spiritual and also material level.

The current political divide in Libya has rendered very difficult the evangelizing work of the brothers. Yet the compound of our church and friary in Tripoli provide a safe haven for many Christians and also Muslims. In Benghazi the brothers are still in search for a permanent place >>

where they can welcome the refugees, since the church and friary have been destroyed.

The brothers have voiced their concern over the need to provide a more organized preparation and formation for the missionaries, particularly in such difficult situations as the one in Libya. Missionaries should be helped to learn Arabic before arriving in

Libya. The Order can invest in finding one or two other brothers who can be present as a support for fraternal life, since the two brothers live alone with their respective Vicars Apostolic.

The Maltese Province is also called to continue to support the missionaries with initiatives like this, in order to help them in their ongoing formation.

THE PROJECT OF THE BRAZIL-SOUTHERN CONE CONFERENCE THE AMAZON EXPERIENCE

On Sunday the 28th April 2024 we began the first edition of the "Amazon Experience" project, which will end on the 22nd May 2024. 10 friars under ten from the different Entities that make up the Franciscan Conference of Brazil and the Southern Cone are participating. They are being welcomed by the Custody of St Benedict the Amazonian, based in the city of Santarém.

Our first day was dedicated to listening to each other amongst the friars and sharing: What is each one experiencing? Our hopes, struggles, dreams, challenges, and difficulties.

At the beginning we had the opportunity to reflect on the ecclesiological reality of the Amazon and visit a small community of fishermen who live on the islands of the Amazon River.

We also visited a quilombola community in Arapema, where descendants of slaves live. All of these communities are threatened by major projects that put at risk not only the forest, but also the people who depend on it for survival. On our fourth day of experience we were able to experience moments of coexistence and exchange with the lay members of the Basic Ecclesial Communities (CEB) present in urban and rural areas.

We then traveled down the Amazon River to the town of Monte Alegre, from there we were sent two by two to the rural communities served by the friars who live there. During the visit to the houses we had the opportunity to interact with the local people, to be welcomed in their homes. On Sunday we had the opportunity to participate in the celebration of the Word, led mostly by lay women who work in the communities. On returning to the city, we visited the State Park (PEMA) where there are cave paintings of the first Amazonian inhabitants more than 12 thousand years ago.

Upon returning to Santarem we had a moment of fraternal dialogue and a day of walking in order to prepare the heart for the last stage of the experience with a 3 to 4 day trip along the rivers to the San Francisco del Rio Cururu Mission to get to know

the reality of the villages where the Munduruku Indians live. Currently, the region is considered one of the most threatened by illegal gold mining in the Amazon.

All this experience is being illuminated by the teachings and dreams of Pope Francis present in the post-synodal apostolic exhortation "Querida Amazônia", the encyclicals *Laudato Si'* and *Fratelli Tutti*, and in the apostolic exhortation *Laudate Deum*.

The friars shared that these first days of the Experience were marked by three key words: gratitude, abundance, and fraternity. Gratitude for the opportunity to tread on this sacred ground and to be able to live with different people and cultures that teach us to value our charism and spirituality even more. Abundance, present in the diversity of life, colors and flavours, and in the many gestures of the communities visited; and finally Fraternity, represented by the care and friendship that has been established between the friars and the communities since the beginning of these activities.

*Br. Vagner de Sena Ferreira, OFM
Custody of St. Benedict of the Amazon*



WORLD MEETING FROM 28 APRIL TO 2 MAY IN SACROFANO (ROME)
PARISH PRIESTS FOR THE SYNOD



From 28 April to 2 May at the Fraterna Domus of Sacrofano (Rome), the world meeting “Parish Priests for the Synod” took place, involving almost 200 people from all over the world. We interviewed Br. Pierre Duchame, from the Province of the Holy Spirit, in Canada.

How did the meeting take place?

The event came about from a call in the October Synod Assembly’s Synthesis Report which asked that in this time in between the two ongoing Synod Assemblies the voice of Parish Priests be heard. So, the General Secretariat for the Synod along with the Vatican Dicastery for the Clergy organized an event for Priests from around the world. Each bishop’s conference was asked to elect a certain number of Priests to participate. I was sent, along with two diocesan priests from Canada, as part of the Canadian representation. And I was the only Franciscan Parish Priest at this event. The methodology of the gathering was based on the “Conversations in the Spirit” model from the Synod on Synodality. We were divided into groups of eleven plus a facilitator. I was placed in a French language group, even though my mother tongue is English.

To begin we listened to theological presentations on Synodality itself, and then we discussed. We shared our understanding of Synodality, our experience of supporting a diversity of charisms,

vocations and ministries, and then about how we see synodality supporting local ecclesial structures. Meanwhile, synodal “experts” encouraged us to go deeper in our reflections.

What were your impressions?

I think it went well. At the end of the meeting, Cardinal Grech noted that we have seen how synodality touches flesh.

This may sound strange, but we all knew what he meant. The meeting, which was very fraternal, did not end without real emotions. It did not end without the realization that although we all share the same faith, we do not all share the same sensitivities.

A synodal church is honest about the tension that exists within her, and from there begins to heal.

What do you think of the synodal work that the universal church is taking?

After this experience, I am more convinced than ever that the notion of Spiritual Conversations and the synod methodology of “Conversations in the Spirit” is the way forward. There is so much untapped potential about to be realized. In the not-too-distant future, I can see local churches, and of course Religious communities continuing to “push the envelope”, as we say in English, towards new and creative ways of gathering people for discernment. Synodality is not about deciding, it is about discerning. So in order to assure that our decisions are made by the Spirit, we need to stay on the road with Jesus. Consider that on the road to Emmaus, Jesus did not stop to give advice. He only posed questions. And then, his salvation revealed itself in the breaking of the bread. There is much to be drawn from this experience.

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CELEBRATING THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PASSING OF OUR FORMER MINISTER GENERAL
10 YEARS WITHOUT BR GIACOMO BINI

Br Giacomo Bini returned to the Father’s House on May 9, 2014. He is remembered not only for the beautiful six years of service he offered to the Order as our Minister General (1997-2003) but also for the witness he continually showed to faith, fraternity, and minority. “He was a profoundly human person, an authentic Friar Minor who radically lived out the Gospel. He was a true man of God, a father and guide to both religious and lay people. He was a generous missionary and a prophetic voice with-

in the Franciscan Family.” *Necrologia di Acta Ordinis 2014 vol. II (pagg. 348-364)*, edited by Br Vincenzo Brocanelli, OFM. These words from the Acta Ordinis help us to catch a glimpse of the figure of Br Giacomo who undoubtedly made a significant contribution to our contemporary world.

Born in a little town in the Marches of Ostra Vetere (Ancona, Italy) on the 23rd of August, 1938, Br Giacomo was an infant during the

time of World War II. At 12 years old, he entered the Seraphic College at Potenza Picena and became a Friar Minor for the Picena Province of Saint James of the Marches. He made Solemn Vows on September 17, 1963, and was ordained a priest on March 14, 1964. During the years of the Second Vatican Council, a young Br Giacomo caught the spirit of the Council and entered into the advanced liturgical studies that were offered to the theology students at Jesi and the seminarians from Fano. As Guardian at Saint Bernardino of Urbino Friary, he developed a lifestyle with some brand new activities for that fraternity, which included opening the Friary doors to families in need from the parish, in his attempt to “read the signs of the times.” He had a healthy interior discontent which prompted him to always be seeking something more, searching for ways to go deeper, to be more and more authentic and faithful to the Franciscan charism.

It was at that time that he developed his theory that our Franciscan identity could best be understood as “a journey,” a theory universally embraced today. We are works in progress, continually seeking new ways to respond to the call to evangelize with authenticity. “Our existence is one of living out the same Gospel in changing circumstances. We are never outside of history. We belong to the Church, the Order, and our particular Entity and must change by reading the signs of the times, in response to what the world of today needs from us.” He wrote these words which were adopted and proclaimed by the Conference on Missions that took place May 19-28, 2014. Br Giacomo had a dynamic vocation. He embraced and never turned his back on the “Africa Project” which the General Definitorium had created under Br John Vaughn in 1982. He spent 1983 to 1989 in Rwanda, where his missionary activity reached its peak. A young Rwandan woman, who would go on to become a Poor Clare sister, writes, “At Kivumu, Br Giacomo lived a beautiful Franciscan life that left a profound impact on that area. His life among our people was rich in minority, simplicity, and all the other Franciscan virtues. The Friars there did not believe in



keeping distant. They spoke our language, pursued our interests, ate and drank our food and beverages. They were content with little and helped everyone.”

Br Giacomo had many interests, including that of formation. Always an attentive listener and faithful Friar Minor, he knew that the Friar’s presence on African soil should lead to a *planting* of the

charism of the Order of Friars Minor that would call forth new missionaries and novices from among the local people. In Tanzania from 1989 to 1992, he was nominated Provincial Minister of the neophyte Province of Saint Francis in the capital of Nairobi in 1992. That same year, he revised and published a *Ratio Formationis* for the Province which drew from the Order’s *Ratio Formationis Franciscanae* published in 1991. “Instead of implementing structures that do not fit nor work in the particular culture, the formation we offer must help our candidates to read the signs of the times in light of the Gospel, based on what actually exists

in the circumstances in which they find themselves,” he declared during a Chapter of Mats celebrated in 1993 in Nairobi.

Largely a surprise to all, the Assisi General Chapter of 1997 elected Br Giacomo Bini Minister General. He went on to produce many documents in the next six years that actualized that which he declared in his Pentecost Letter from 2000: “Let us dare! Let us dare to entrust ourselves totally to Him, as Francis did!” We conclude this brief remembrance - admittedly too brief for a figure so important - with Br Giacomo’s own words that were pronounced at the opening of the General Chapter of 2003: “We are called to continually consider who we are and what we do, to ponder the meaning of our life as disciples and apostles sent by Jesus to the ends of the earth. Above all, we must search out with clear vision the seeds of new life, often hidden, and care for them in each context or culture we find ourselves as we move about guided by the breath of the Spirit.”

DECEASED BROTHERS *

- 10th May: Br Lothar Weber, Prov. St Elisabeth (Germany)
- 6th May: Br Damian Heuer, Prov. of St Leopold (Austria)
- 15th March: Br. Paul Seo, Prov. Sts. Martyrs of Korea (Korea)

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

DIOCESE OF COMAYAGUA, HONDURAS
BR ÁNGEL FALZÓN APPOINTED BISHOP

From the bulletin of the Holy See Press Office, 14th May 2024.

The Holy Father has appointed the Reverend Fr. Ángel Falzón, OFM, until now parish priest of Inmaculada Concepción in Aguanqueterique, as bishop of the diocese of Comayagua, Honduras.

Curriculum vitae

Msgr. Ángel Falzón, OFM, was born on 15 October 1957 in Naxxar, Malta, and carried out his studies in philosophy and theology at the National Institute of Religious Ecclesiastical Studies of Malta (INSERM).

He gave his solemn vows on 10 October 1982, and was ordained a priest on 29 June 1984 for the Franciscan province of the Friars Minor of Malta. After ordination he passed to the Province of the Immaculate Conception (New York), entering the Central American Foundation. In 1985 he went to Honduras

as a missionary, where he held the following offices: deputy parish priest of Santa Ana in La Libertad; parish priest of San Antonio of Aguanqueterique (1990-2012) and of Inmaculada Concepción in La Paz.



LUCA PIRAS HAS BEEN RECONFIRMED AS PRESIDENT
THE NEW NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE SFO OF ITALY HAS BEEN ELECTED

On the 4th May, the Secular Franciscan Order of Italy, meeting in Assisi, elected its new National Council: the fraternity of Lay Franciscans will be led by Luca Piras, in his second term as President, Sara Mentzel, Vice-President, and, in the role of councilors, Luca Castiglioni, Cosimo Laudato, Alberto Petracca, Claudia Pecoraro, Enrico Diamanti, Enrica Sarrecchia, Matteo Confente.

The Secular Franciscan Order was born from the heart of St. Francis of Assisi in the thirteenth century and recognizes itself as heir and continuator of the lay dimension of its Founder: its members commit themselves with their profession to live the Gospel in the manner of Francis in their secular state, observing the Rule approved by Pope Paul VI on the 24th June, 1978.

The elected Council will be called to accompany over 1,000 local fraternities distributed throughout the country, for a total of about 17,500 Secular Franciscans. They were repre-

sented during the Chapter in Assisi by about 150 members of the Order, coming from the various regions of Italy.



OFM

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