



**Letter of the Minister General
 to all the friars of the Order**
Brothers & Minors Today
The State of the Order in These Times

It has been nearly three and a half years since the General Chapter of 2021, so I thought it was an appropriate time to offer the brothers of the Order a look at our situation today. Though I have been entrusted with service until Pentecost of 2027, I thought I would take on this challenging task now because I feel it is good for the brothers to reflect together on how we are doing, how we are listening as a brotherhood in the world, as the General Definitory offers a ministry of animation from the Curia, trying to implement and develop the tasks that the General Chapter has entrusted to us.

It was a blessing to peacefully reread the Pentecost Letter of 2000, *The Order Today*, written by Br. Giacomo Bini, the Minister General at the time, as it still feels timely even today. Now, I find myself wondering, after listening to so many of you, where we are today and what is there that is still needed for us to accomplish.

First of all, I give thanks to the Most High good Lord for all of you, dear brothers, for the good you are doing that sometimes goes unseen and is under-appreciated. I am so grateful for the perseverance I have seen in our elderly brothers, for the enthusiasm of the younger brothers, for the zeal to begin again even among our more mature friars, for the battles that many of you have fought to remain faithful, and for the great work so many of you are doing in caring for the poor. I am also grateful for the “synodal” journey we have been on in the Order thanks to the many Chapters of Mats that took place in our Entities throughout the world, a journey that will reach completion at the International Chapter of Mats and Plenary Council taking place at the Portiuncola June 1-8, 2025. We listened well to the laity and to our sister Franciscans for what the Spirit wants to say to us through them in these gatherings which have already borne much fruit and will continue to do so.

Read the full text of the Letter:
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Government of the Order

Meeting of the General Definitory with the Bolivarian Conference

Bolivia, 14th-28th November 2024



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In the Spiritual Retreat House of the friary of St. Anthony, in the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, the meeting of the General Government with the Provincial Ministers of the Bolivarian Franciscan Conference (CFB) was held, with the aim of addressing aspects related to the moment that the Order is going through in the world and, in particular, in the CFB.

The generalized situation that the Franciscan Provinces of the CFB are going through, as explained by the Provincial Ministers who have presented challenges of each Provincial Entity, is linked to the decrease in the number of friars and the many works that are still preserved. However, these effects, according to the judgment of the Definitors General and of the Minister General himself, are present throughout the Order in the world.

The words of the Minister General, Br. Massimo Fusarelli, in his invitation to “*Open the doors*” therefore acquire a transcendent meaning. It is a question of *opening the doors* of the Order to fraternal relations with the People of God and with the world, to a renewed quality of life based on the awareness of the condition of brothers and minors, to a lifestyle freed from the power of domi-



nation and possessions, which passes through the opening of the doors between the Provinces of the Conference, of UCLAF and the Order in the world, taking into account the evangelizing figure of Peter, one of the most important icons of the Church.

All this necessarily implies that we stop being self-referential, and instead have the courage to go out to the peripheries, to go out to meet everyone, no one excluded, to detach ourselves from ourselves, instead of defending the comforts we have, in order to renew our way of life by making evangelization an authentic form of life for the present times.

Similarly, referring to previous ideas, the Definitor General for Latin America, Br. César Külkamp,

General Curia Agenda



- ☑ From the 16th-20th December in the General Curia there will be *Tempo Forte*.
- ☑ On December 19, the Minister General, Br. Massimo Fusarelli, will meet the Fraternity of the Lateran Penitentiaries for the Christmas greeting; on the 21st he will meet the Franciscan Ministers General. From the 21st to 23rd, accompanied by the Definitor General Br. Jimmy Zammit, he will be in Lithuania at the Hill of Crosses, for the installation of the Cross on the occasion of the Centenary of the Stigmata. On the 25th he will celebrate the

Christmas Mass in Greccio; on the 5th January he will be in Cortona (Italy) for the Jubilee Holy Mass at the shrine of St. Margaret of Cortona; on the 6th he will celebrate the Solemnity of the Epiphany at the Ara Coeli in Rome. On the 11th he will be at San Damiano (Assisi) for the opening of the Centenary of the Canticle of the Creatures with the Franciscan Family. On the 13th he will participate online in the meeting of the JPIC animators of the Order.

- ☑ From the 7th-11th January in the General Curia the *Tempo Forte* meeting will take place.

emphasized: *“It is very important to grow in the awareness that we are the Order of Friars Minor in these Bolivarian realities. Although we have our presences and works that mark the history of our entities, we must take very concrete steps towards openness to collaboration, both in initial and ongoing formation, and in missionary evangelization. We must not do this only when we lack our brothers and sisters, but to strengthen ourselves as brothers of the same Order.”*

Similarly, the host Minister Provincial, that is, of the Missionary Province of St. Anthony in Bolivia, Br. René Bustamante, said: *“This meeting between the CFB and the General Government is something historic, of great importance in the animation of our Conference, also in the context of the celebration of the different centenary of the Order, reflecting on issues that have to do with our life and mission as brothers and minors.”*

Thanks to the contribution of all the participants, the speakers and the moderator of each session of the meeting, (Br. José Alirio Urbina, President of the CFB, together with the Minister General), some problems that directly or indirectly affect the daily life of the friars in each of the provincial fraternities of the CFB were highlighted.

We must insist on the need to open the doors to new realities and spaces, with the aim of providing – for the Provincial and Custodial Entity itself and for the Order in general – new forms of presence,

life and evangelization, starting with the condition of brothers and minors inserted into the world.

It is in this perspective that the present times and their complexities will be understood not as a catastrophic situation, but as an opportunity to renew the Order’s presence in all regions of the world, especially in the Provinces of the CFB.

Provincial Secretariat of the Missionary Province of St. Anthony in Bolivia

Visit to the Province of St. Anthony



After the meeting with the Bolivarian Conference, from the 29th November to the 6th December, the Minister General visited the Missionary Province of St. Anthony in Bolivia.

Opening of the doors and Divine Liturgy at St. Mary’s in Izmir

A concrete sign of ecumenical fraternity in Turkey



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On the 8th December, 2024 in the Church of St. Mary in Izmir, Turkey, Br. John Wong, General Delegate for the Guardianate of Istanbul, participated in the official Rite of the Opening of the Doors (*Thyranoixia*) and the Divine Liturgy in the presence of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople and Metropolitan Bartholomew of Smyrna. The official delegation of the General Curia was also composed of Br. Nikola Kozina, Director of the Development Office, and Br. Saulo Duarte, Vice-Bursar General.

In his greeting message, Br. John emphasized how the celebration is an important visible sign of fraternal solidarity, a concrete expression of ecu-



menical fraternity and a powerful witness of Christian unity. In fact, he recalled when, during the visit in 2023 of the Minister General of the OFM, Br. Massimo Fusarelli, a ten-year agreement was signed together with His Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople to share ownership of the Franciscan parish church of St. Mary in Izmir for the Divine Liturgies of the Orthodox Church. “An enduring symbol of our continued fraternal collaboration and practical ecumenism,” commented Br. John, who, as President of the General Commission for the Service of Dialogue, addressed the gratitude of the whole Order to the Patriarch “for his firm commitment to promoting dialogue and mutual understanding amongst

Christians, as well as for his defense of religious tolerance amongst people of all faiths.”

The General Delegate concluded his speech by emphasizing “the importance of unity, dialogue and collaboration in our witness to the Gospel,” inviting all those present to “*work together, in the spirit of love and peace, to build a world that reflects the compassion and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.*”

Read the full text of [Br. John Wong's speech](#)

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Deceased Brothers



- † 9th December: Br. Bogdan Cvetković, Prov. Sts. Cyril and Methodius (Croatia)
- † 4th December: Br. Anzelm Janusz Szeinke, Prov. Our Lady of the Angels (Poland); Br. Claudio Heinrich Krämer, Prov. St. Elizabeth (Germany); Br. Silvestro Ollano, Prov. Seraphic St. Francis of Assisi (Italy)
- † 3rd December: Br. Giambattista Montorsi, Prov. St. Anthony of the Friars Minor (Italy)
- † 1st December: Br. Jacek Szymczyk, Prov. Immaculate Conception (Poland)
- † 30th November: Br. Thomas Courtney, Custody of the Holy Land
- † 29th November: Br. Francisco Cabrera Montero, Prov. Sts. Peter and Paul (Mexico)

- † 28th November: Br. José Guadalupe Rodríguez Silva, Prov. Sts. Peter and Paul (Mexico)
- † 27th November: Br. José Prandina, Prov. Our Lady of Guadalupe (Guatemala); Br. Blane Grein, Prov. Our Lady of Guadeloupe (USA).
- † 9th November: Br. Cornelius Leonard, Prov. Our Lady of Guadalupe (USA)
- † 23rd October: Br. Alfonso Ramírez Ramírez, Prov. St Juniper Serra (Mexico)
- † 28th September: Br. Metody Piotr Duda, Prov. Immaculate Conception (Poland)

Information received from the General Secretariat

Franciscan Centenaries



**Living the Canticle:
A Franciscan Call from Velankanni**
General Assembly of the Association of Franciscan Family in India



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The Association of Franciscan Family in India (AFFI), comprising Franciscan congregations ministering in India, gathered in Velankanni, the “Lourdes of the East,” for its Annual General Assembly on 6–7 December 2024.

The 60 participants included Major Superiors and Delegates from various Franciscan congregations, including Franciscan Bon Secours Sisters (FBS), Clarist Franciscan Missionaries of the Most Blessed Sacrament (CFMSS), Assisi Sisters of Mary Immaculate (ASMI), Franciscan Sisters of Dillingen (DM), Congregation of the Sisters of St. Ann (CSSA), Franciscan Clarist Congregation (FCC), Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (FIHM), Franciscan Sisters of the Presentation of Mary (FSPM), Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph (FSJ), Medical Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi (MSSFA), Congregation of the Missionary Brothers of St. Francis of Assisi (CMSF), the Order of Friars Minor (OFM), the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin (OFM Cap), and the Third Order Regular (TOR).

Held under the banner “Canticle of Creatures,” the assembly set in motion the celebration of its 800th Anniversary in 2025. Inputs from Br. John

Sekar, OFM, on the Canticle’s history and Mr. David Amalanathan, an eco-activist, inspired region-wise groups to propose action plans for communities and society. Br. Aloysius, CMSF, presented AFFI’s efforts in rebuilding lives in Manipur.

Leadership transitioned as Br. Xavier Durairaj, OFM, succeeded Br. Lawrence Soosainathan, OFM Cap, as AFFI President. Br. Xavier envisions uniting all Franciscan congregations in India under AFFI while spearheading actionable plans to commemorate the Franciscan Centenaries and the Jubilee Year 2025.

The Eucharist, celebrated by Rt. Rev. Dr. Sahayaraj, DD, Bishop of Tanjore, inspired participants to embody St. Francis’s spirit in facing today’s challenges. A candlelit rosary procession to the Apparition Chapel added a sacred dimension to the event.

The gathering fostered a sense of Franciscan brotherhood and sisterhood, with participants committed to celebrating the Canticle’s anniversary through liturgy and concrete actions in their ministries.



News from the Entities

“Franciscan Christmas” in Ecuador 100 Nativity scenes on display until February 2025



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On the 29th November in Quito, Ecuador, the “Fray Pedro Gocial” Museum of Colonial Art inaugurated the XVIII “Franciscan Christmas” Nativity Scene Exhibition. Until February 2025, almost 100 Nativity scenes in different artistic techniques will be exhibited: ceramics, wood, bees wax, crocheted, and recycled materials.

Br. Sandro Luzuriaga, OFM, director of the Museum, together with a team of twenty nativity scene artists, worked nine months to inaugurate this exhibition that is already a tradition in Quito. In this way, we Franciscans seek to evangelize through art, announcing God’s love to the world and sharing with those who visit us St. Francis’ devotion to the mystery of the Incarnation.



Photos of the nativity scenes of the OFM Fraternities



Please send photographs of the **Nativity Scenes** made in your fraternities **by the 22nd December** to comgen@ofm.org to be published in the special issue of Fraternitas on the 24th December, 2024.

Please do not forget to write the name, the city and the town of the Fraternity! Thank you!

43rd Anniversary of the Apparitions of Our Lady of Kibeho *Patroness of the Custody of Our Lady of Kibeho*



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On the 28th November 2024, at the Shrine of Kibeho, known as the “City of Mary” in Rwanda, the 43rd anniversary of the apparitions of Kibeho was celebrated.

In 1981, in fact, the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to three Rwandan girls revealing herself as “*Nyina*

wa Jambo” (the Mother of the Word), giving them the message to pray incessantly for the conversion of sinners and to recite the Rosary frequently, in particular the Rosary of her Seven Sorrows.

The newborn Custody of Rwanda and Burundi was entrusted to the patronage of Our Lady of

Kibeho, so the celebration, which was attended by many people from all over the world, was a celebration for the whole Custody: many faithful flocked from the Franciscan parishes, some even on foot, accompanied by the friars and guided by the Custos, Br. Théoneste Twahirwa.

The celebration began with the recitation of the Rosary; Afterwards, Mgr. John Bosco Ntangukira, Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Butare, shared a reflection on the apparitions, recalling that the “Yes” of our Mother Mary to the holy will of God should be our daily “password” to know better, serve better and get closer to his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour.

Subsequently, during the Mass, Cardinal Anthony Kambanda invited us to reflect deeply on the name that the Blessed Virgin Mary revealed to the three women in her apparitions: “Mother of



the Word”, a name that carries within itself the entire message of God’s unfathomable love for humanity. May Our Lady of Kibeho always intercede for our Custody and for the whole world!

With the contribution of the Secretariat of the Autonomous Custody of Our Lady of Kibeho (Burundi-Rwanda)

cTc n. 64 – December 2024

The new issue of Communion and Communication



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Communion and Communication 64 is being released on the threshold of the eighth centenary of the *Canticle of Brother Sun* and of *Audite Poverelle*, the two vernacular texts by Francis of Assisi and set to music by him, both written in San Damiano for the consolation of himself and the poor ladies who lived there.

In this issue, the ‘song’ of vv. 5-8 is made for us to listen to in depth by Br. Fábio Gomes, OFM, our General Delegate, who again urges us to bring the words of exhortation that Francis addresses to us into dialogue with each other and to verify the authenticity of our living by their light.



Stories of life and reflections follow: listening to them, we realize how that consoling experience continues today, in different latitudes, which springs from the certainty of faith that “the kingdom of God is among us” (cf. Lk 17:21); we are simultaneously participants and collaborators, as Holy Mother Clare sees us: “I judge you to be a coworker of God Himself and a support for the weak members of His ineffably Body (3LAg, 8; CA:ED, 50).”

From Central America (Mexico and Nicaragua) to West Africa (Togo), from Central-Eastern Europe (Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina) to North America (United States), from Mediterranean Africa (Morocco) to Northern Italy (Trentino-Alto Adige), the words of our sisters communicate “the better life of the spirit,” strengthening in us the awareness that supports our vocational response, that of the primacy of the Spirit of the Lord and of his holy manner of working.

Could not this also be the contribution we offer to the people of God, to every man and woman that the Holy Year calls to become pilgrims of hope? At the conclusion of this issue, and of the centenary year of the Stigmata of Francis, we linger again to look at that event, with the gaze of St. Clare.

Finally, we accept the invitation of Br. Pietro Messa, OFM to remember Isabella of France, the eighth centenary of whose birth will be celebrated in 2025. Happy reading!

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Pope Francis has created 21 new Cardinals “Take heed to walk the way of Jesus”



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On Saturday, December 7, the Holy Father held the Ordinary Public Consistory in St. Peter's Basilica to create 21 new Cardinals, including two of our brothers: Archbishop Luis Gerardo Cabrera Herrera, OFM, of Guayaquil, Ecuador, and Archbishop Jaime Spengler, OFM, Archbishop of Porto Alegre, Brazil. The Pope read the formula of creation and then made the proclamation of the new cardinals. After the profession of faith, the oath of fidelity and obedience to Pope Francis and his successors, the cardinals received from the Pope the Bull of Creation of Cardinals, the zucchetto, the cap and the cardinal's ring.

During his homily, Pope Francis invited the cardinals to walk together on the path of Jesus. “To return to the heart to get back on the same path as Jesus, this is what we need. And today, in particular to you, dear Brothers who receive the Cardinalate, I would like to say: take care to *walk the path of Jesus*. And what does this mean? *To follow the path of Jesus* means first of all *to return to him and to put him back at the center of everything*. In the spiritual life as in the pastoral life, we sometimes risk con-

centrating on the contours, forgetting the essential... Instead, we always need to return to the centre, to recover the foundation, to strip ourselves of what is superfluous in order to clothe ourselves in Christ (cf. *Rom 13:14*). Even the word “hinge” reminds us of this, indicating the pivot on which the leaf of a door is inserted: it is a firm point of support, of support. Here, dear brothers: Jesus is the fundamental point of support, the center of gravity of our service, the ‘cardinal point’ that guides our whole life.”



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