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The new Conference of North Africa and the Middle East is born
A living sign of dialogue and a culture of peace

On Monday, the 17th March 7, 2025, the erection of the new Conference of North Africa and the Middle East (CONAMO) of the Order of Friars Minor was celebrated in the General Curia, composed of:

- ▶ Province of the Holy Family (Egypt)
- ▶ Custody of the Holy Land
- ▶ Custody of the Protomartyrs of Morocco
- ▶ Istanbul Guardianate (Turkey)
- ▶ Apostolic Vicariates of Tripoli and Benghazi (Libya)

The meeting was moderated by Br. John Wong, General Definitor for Asia and Oceania, who welcomed those present: the members of the General Definitory, the Secretaries and Directors of the Offices of the Curia and the representatives of the Entities of the new Conference: Br. Stéphane Delavelle, Custos of the Custody of the Protomartyrs of Morocco; Br. Ibrahim Faltas, Vicar of the Custody of the Holy



Land; Br. Magdy Helmy, of the Apostolic Vicariate of Tripoli, Libya; Br. Eleuthère Makuta, Guardian of the International Franciscan Community of Istanbul, Turkey; Br. Mourad Mousa, Minister Provincial of the Province of the Holy Family, Egypt.

After a moment of prayer, the Vicar General, Br. Ignacio Ceja, chosen as the representative of CONAMO within the General Definitory, gave a solemn reading of the Decree of erection of the new Conference, which was followed by the message of the Minister General, entitled *Living together as brothers in lands of encounter*.

“You will share bread with the hungry, you will bring the poor and homeless into your home...”: with these words of the prophet Isaiah (Is 58:7), Br. Massimo Fusarelli underlined the importance and essence of the Franciscan presence in the lands of North Africa and the Middle East, lands where different religions meet, where the Mediterranean is a bridge between different cultures.

Addressing the representatives of the Entities involved, Br. Massimo recalled Chapter XVI of the *Regula Non Bullata*, as it is a reality with an Islamic

majority, a characteristic that cannot be seen as a limitation, but rather as an “*extraordinary opportunity*”. The Gospel, in fact, “*invites us to a presence of minors, of brothers and sisters, capable of relationships of friendship and simplicity, avoiding any form that gives us visibility and power. Let us show with facts that living the Gospel is possible even just by learning to be amongst and with the people,*” said the Minister.



Not strategy, therefore, but style: living the Gospel even just by learning to live with the people, amongst the people, through dialogue, speaking their language, offering shelter and help to the needy, of whatever origin and religion they may be, as Pope Francis recalls in the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*.

The hope is that this new Conference will also be a laboratory for the whole Order, “where new forms of animation and collaboration can be experimented, privileging the quality of fraternal life and the authenticity of evangelical witness”, especially in favor of interreligious dialogue, justice, peace and integrity of creation, of migrants, as the Franciscan Mediterranean Network is already doing.

General Curia Agenda



☑ From the 27th- 5th March, Br. John Wong, Definitory General, and Br. Nikola Kozina, of the OFM Fraternitas Foundation, will be in Pakse (Laos) and Vietnam for a fraternal visit. From the 6th to 13th Br. John will visit the Province of the Martyrs of Japan.

☑ From the 31st March-4th April, Br. Jimmy Zammit, Definitory General, will preside over the Elective Chapter of the Province of the Holy Spirit in Canada to be held at the Queen of the Apostles Retreat Centre in Mississauga, Ontario. On the 5th April he will preside over the first part of the Chapter Congress of the Province.

☑ On the 8th April, Br. Cesare Vaiani, Definitory Ge-

neral, will be in Castellammare di Stabia to participate in a day of the Chapter of the Province of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (Italy).

☑ From the 7th-11th April, Br. César Kulkamp will participate in the Elective Assembly of the Bolivarian Conference in Lima, Peru.

☑ On the 14th April, the Minister General, Br. Massimo Fusarelli, will participate in the Conference of the Franciscan Family in Rome; on the 15th April he will preside at Mass at the Agostino Gemelli Polyclinic in Rome; on the 16th April he will preside at Mass in the Prison of Latina (Italy).



The Minister General underlined the importance of being in these lands, for the Order and for the whole Church, for the Christians present, for the custody of the Holy Places, becoming a living and eloquent sign of welcome, fraternal relations, mutual respect, dialogue, and a culture of peace.

The creation of the new Conference was well received by those present. Br. Mourad Mousa (Egypt) said he was happy with this new Entity, which he himself proposed to the 2021 General Chapter, emphasizing the importance of initial and ongoing formation for dialogue: Br. Stéphane Delavelle (Morocco) recalled how, despite the differences between the various realities, common paths are already being made, and emphasized the importance of connecting with the people, starting with learning the Arabic language. Br. Eleuthère Maku-

ta (Turkey), who recently launched the invitation to the [19th Course on Interreligious and Ecumenical Dialogue](#), highlighted the variety of the Islamic world, “*a true richness*”, focusing especially on the importance of welcoming migrants. Br. Ibrahim Faltas (Holy Land) recalled that the friars in the Holy Places interface not only with Muslims, but also with Jews and Druze.

The recitation of the Hail Mary in Arabic concluded the first phase of the meeting.

After the break, those present elected:

- ▶ Br. Francesco Patton (Custos of the Holy Land) *President* of CONAMO;
- ▶ Br. Mourad Mousa *Vice President*;
- ▶ Br. Stéphane Delavelle *Economista*;
- ▶ Br. Magdy Helmy *Segretario*.

After the creation of the new [English-speaking](#) and [French-speaking](#) Conferences of Africa, the birth of CONAMO also responds to the call to renew the structures of the OFM to better serve life and mission, as requested by the 2021 General Chapter. Specifically, this new Conference aims to give space for meeting, collaboration and future to the Mediterranean Entities, showing their specificity.

[Read the Minister General's message](#)





Government of the Order

Reflections by Br. Massimo March 2025



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Last month I lived the experience of being hospitalized at the “Agostino Gemelli” Polyclinic in Rome for neurosurgical surgery. This time of vulnerability allowed me to see a little, from a different perspective, what it means to be “pilgrims of hope”, just as we live the Jubilee.

The hospital is a microcosm of humanity, where stories of suffering and healing meet. I shared corridors and waiting rooms with people tried in body and spirit. I saw in the eyes of some the difficulty of facing difficult diagnoses, in others the resignation that can become abandonment of all hope.

Yet, precisely in this environment marked by pain, I recognized luminous signs of a shared pilgrimage. Small daily gestures become extraordinary: a hand that shakes another hand, a word of comfort whispered between patients, a family member who faithfully keeps watch, a father attentive to his child and another to his bride.

I was struck by the dedication of the health personnel, who are not limited to professional competence but know how to express that humanity that transforms care into an act of authentic mercy, even among the labours that this requires. I've seen doctors who look at the person, not just the pathology, and nurses who always find time for a gesture of tenderness. In these places where pain could have the last word, I have



seen small miracles of solidarity flourish: patients who help each other, family members who, although tried, know how to offer comfort to others too, volunteers who make the time of illness more humane.

I myself have experienced this current of good that has enveloped me in the most difficult days. I received visits, messages, prayers that made me feel part of a greater brotherhood. I have understood that hope is not an abstract feeling, but is nourished by the concreteness of relationships and gestures of proximity.

To be “pilgrims of hope” you don't need great proclamations, but that daily proximity that knows how to transform even the places of pain into spaces of rediscovered humanity. It is that tenderness that does not erase suffering but inhabits it with us.

As I gradually resume my activities, I bring with me this lesson: hope is not the absence of difficulties, but the certainty of not being alone on the way. It's that light that doesn't dazzle but is enough to take the next step.

In this time of Jubilee, let us ask ourselves: how can we be carriers of this concrete hope in situations of suffering? How can we transform our environments into places where tenderness and mercy are experienced?

Christian hope is not a naive optimism, but it is that daily resistance that knows how to recognize the signs of God's presence even in the darkest valleys. It is that trust that allows us to walk together, supporting each other, towards the horizon that He opens in front of us.



Let us pray for peace

I ask again all the friars and contemplative sisters and not only of the Order, together with all our lay people who share the charism and service to the Gospel, to pray unceasingly for peace and to remember our brothers and sisters who live especially in Ukraine, in the Middle East, in Eastern Congo, and in other places wounded by violence and war so that they may be signs of peace and reconciliation. Let us continue to ask for the gift of peace and dialogue!

Br. Massimo Fusarelli

Letter of the Minister General for the Good Friday Collection 2025

A suffering land that asks for our presence



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Dear brothers,
May the Lord give you peace!

I address you with urgency and concern to draw your attention to the vital importance of the Good Friday Collection for the Holy Land this Easter 2025.

This traditional collection, established by the Supreme Pontiffs, takes on an even more dramatic and pressing significance today in light of the situation being experienced in the Holy Places.

Read the full text of the letter:
[Italiano](#) - [English](#) - [Español](#)

Franciscan Centenaries



800 trees for the 800th Anniversary of the “Canticle of the Creatures”

*In Germany, the initiative of the Polish friars of
the Province Our Lady of the Angels*



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In a rather unusual way, namely by planting 800 oak trees, our brothers from the Province of Our Lady of the Angels (Poland) serving in Amberg, Germany, have decided to celebrate the Jubilee of the “Canticle of the Creatures”.

The idea of planting 800 oak trees was carried out in collaboration with the Amberg Forestry Commission, led by Martin Seits, a neighbour of the Maria-Hilf Shrine where the friars live, who took care of all the technical aspects of the event.

It was a unique opportunity to glorify and thank God for the gift of creation on the one hand and, on the other, to do something good and useful for our Mother Earth, which in the words of St. Francis “sustains and governs us: it produces various fruits, with colorful flowers and grass...”.

The event took place on Friday, the 7th March, 2025 in Amberg. At the invitation of the friars of the friary, the Minister Provincial, Br. Krzysztof Bobak, OFM, Br. Lucjusz Wrotniak, OFM, Definitor

and Provincial Coordinator of JPIC, and Br. Mariusz Żychowicz, OFM, Provincial Secretary, arrived in Germany.

The event was also attended by the Mayor of Amberg, Michael Cerny, Councillor Jeans Wein, members of the *Kirchenstiftung Maria-Hilf* Foundation and the management of the Forest Keepers. The local media were also present, who followed the initiative of our friars with great interest and gratitude.



After the explanation of the idea by the Guardian of the fraternity of Amberg, Br. Klemens Świerz, OFM, the Minister Provincial spoke, who emphasized the importance and need to protect the en-



vironment in this particular historical moment, recalling how important creation itself was for St. Francis.

Finally, the Mayor of the city spoke, who with great affection and gratitude spoke of the collaboration between the authorities and the friars emphasizing that without the presence of the Polish friars, such an important and popular place of worship as the Shrine of Maria-Hilf would only be an empty and lifeless building.

The representative of the Forest Keepers, Martin Seits, then explained the technical details and why oak cuttings and not other trees were the best in that particular environment, giving historical and biological reasons, describing how long the cuttings grow, what benefits they bring to the fauna and flora and for what purposes the oaks can be used in the church. Finally, the friars of the fraternity read the text of the Canticle of the Creatures and, immediately after, all together they began to plant an oak forest.



Animation of the Order

Letter to the Secretaries for Formation and Studies of all the Entities

Second letter addressed to those responsible for OFM Formation



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After the [first letter on Formation](#) that the General Minister addressed to all the Ministers and Custodes of the Order on January 25, 2025, we publish the second letter written this time by the General Secretary for Formation and Studies, Br. Darko Tepert, addressed to the Secretaries for Formation and Studies of the Entities.

This process, which involves the publication of seven letters in total, involves all the “actors” of OFM Formation: Moderators of Ongoing Formation, Animators of the Pastoral Care of Vocations, Directors of the Postulancy, Novitiate and Post-Novitiate programs.

The purpose of these letters, always written in collaboration with the General Definitory, is to offer encouragement and some important points for your own ongoing formation.

Download the Letter to the Secretaries for Formation and Studies of the Entities:

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



“Lord, make me an Instrument of Peace”
(*St. Francis of Assisi*)



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Statement of fraternal communion and solidarity with the people of Eastern Congo that the International Council for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (ICJPIC) approved during its last meeting in Assisi (1-7 March 2025).

Download: [Italiano](#) - [English](#) - [Español](#)
[Deutsch](#) - [Français](#) - [Polski](#) - [Português](#)

OFS



**International Council of the
Secular Franciscan Order**
Meeting with the General Defnitory

On the 19th March, the General Defnitory had a fraternal meeting with the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order. During this meeting, experiences were shared on how these two branches of the Order live the Franciscan charism, the challenges and the way to collaborate together in different areas, including Formation and Vocation Ministry, trying to carry out a synodal journey not only as an Order, but as a Franciscan Family.





News from the Entities

“This is how we saved the Portiuncula” *The return of the basilica to the faithful after the restoration*



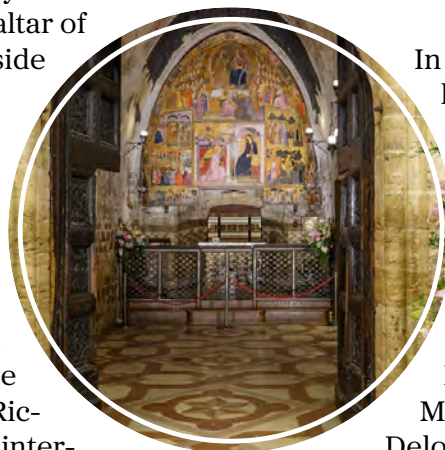
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On the 25th March, the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord and the anniversary of the laying of the first stone in 1569, the friars of the Seraphic Province of St. Francis of Assisi celebrated the return of the Porziuncola to the faithful after the restoration work on the Basilica of Our Lady of the Angels, which began in April 2023.

In the year of the Jubilee and the 800th Anniversary of the Canticle of the Creatures, the Basilica returns to its splendour. The earthquakes of 1832, 1997 and especially that of 2016 had caused extensive damage to the building: it was therefore necessary to carry out a major structural intervention on the Dome overlooking the Porziuncola, as well as the consolidation and safety of the wall paintings of the side chapels, the altar of St Peter in Vincoli and part of the side façade.

In the event that presented the restoration work carried out, the Minister Provincial Br. Francesco Piloni spoke of “an act of love, as delicate as an illuminated restoration, but as solid as the faith that these walls embody”. Of the same opinion is the engineer Mr. Riccardo Vetturini, designer of the inter-



ventions: “A ‘measured’ restoration, calibrated to the real needs of the Basilica, without unnecessary invasiveness. We have listened to every crack, every vibration, like doctors of a venerable body.”

Also present was the Minister General of the OFM, Br. Massimo Fusarelli, who underlined how the Shrine continues to be “a beacon of mercy and forgiveness for countless pilgrims who find renewal and a new beginning in Christian life there. The restoration we are celebrating is not only a material recovery, but the sign of our commitment to preserve this spiritual heritage that belongs to the entire Church, to the Franciscan Family, to the city of Assisi, to the Umbria Region and to all those who seek reconciliation with God”.

In the afternoon, at the event “New lights on the Porziuncola”, the words of the Director of the National Museums of Umbria, Costantino D’Orazio, gave life to the art of the Basilica through an engaging narration of the works contained in it, interspersed with musical interventions by the Porziuncola Choir directed by Br. Matteo Ferraldeschi. Giovanni Luca Delogu, art historian, recalled how the

papal Basilica of Our Lady of the Angels is “a living museum, where each fresco tells a story of faith and creativity”. It “protects” the Porziuncola, the humble chapel where Francis of Assisi founded the Order of Friars Minor in 1209. At the Portiuncula, Christ appeared to Francis and granted through the intercession of the Virgin Mary the extraordinary Indulgence of the Pardon of Assisi (1216). Near the apse of the Basilica is the Chapel of the Transitus, where St. Francis welcomed “Sister death” on the 3rd October 1226.



With the contribution of the Communications Office of the Seraphic Province of St. Francis of Assisi

[Download the Letter of Br. Massimo Fusarelli](#)

Plenary Assembly of the Conference of Our Lady of Guadalupe

Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean



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From the 17th-21st March 2025, the Plenary Assembly of the “Our Lady of Guadalupe” Conference comprising the Region of Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean, was held at the Franciscan friary “San Luis Obispo” in Huamantla, Tlaxcala (Mexico).

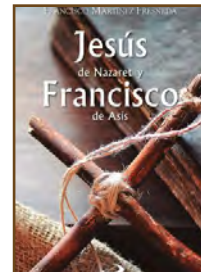
The Provincial Ministers and 2 Vicars Provincial were assembled, namely: Br Ángel Gabino

Gutiérrez Martínez of the Province of Saints Francis and Santiago, Br Enrique Muños Gutierrez of the Province of St. Peter and St. Paul, Br Edgardo Pérez Tejeira of the Province of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Br Gabriel Romero Alamilla of the Province of St. Philip of Jesus, Br Joel Cosme Torres of the Province of the Holy Gospel of Mexico, Br Pascual Núñez Santiago Vicar of the Province of the Holy

Franciscan Bookmark



Jesús de Nazaret y Francisco de Asís



Fr. Francisco Martínez Fresneda, OFM

Editorial San Pablo

¿Qué haces, Francisco? Yo celebro La celebración del Cántico de las criaturas



Fr. Francisco Pérez Hermoso, OFM

Ediciones Franciscanas Arantzazu

Orar a lo largo de la vida con san Francisco de Asís



Fr. Raffaele Ruffo, OFM Cap

Ediciones Franciscanas Arantzazu

Le ménestrel de saint François



Fr. Jacques Jouët, OFM

Éditions Salvator

Gospel of Mexico, Br Felipe de Jesús Santiago Ortega Vicar of the Province of St Juníper Serra. Also present was Br Alexis Ayala Ponce, Executive Secretary of the Conference. In an atmosphere of fraternal dialogue, the Work Sessions began, presenting the Agenda of Activities and reading the Minutes of the previous meeting.

Amongst the topics discussed, the reports of the Secretariat for Formation and Studies, the JPIC Commission, the person in charge of Missions and Evangelization, the Commission of Lay Brothers, the Meeting of Educational Pastoral Care, in addition to reviewing the Economic Report and listening to Br Fausto de Jesús Ramírez, head of COFRAMEX, were made known.

The decision was made to support from the Conference the request of the Bishop of Santander, Monsignor Arturo Ros Murgadas, to make a Collaboration Agreement in the Monastery of Santo Toribio de Liébana in Spain. On various matters, we saw the participation of our Con-

ference in the Chapter of Mats of the Order, in the Meeting of Lay Brothers and in the Plenary Council of the Order, to be held in Assisi, Italy.

During the Assembly, the vote was held to elect the new President of the Conference, as follows: Br Gabriel Romero Alamillo (Prov. St. Philip of Jesús) President; Br Enrique Muñoz Gutiérrez (Prov. Sts. Peter and Paul) Vice-President; Br Alexis Ayala Ponce (Prov. St. Juníper Serra) Executive Secretary. During the Assembly we participated in the Mass of the Canonical Inauguration of Msgr. Juan Maria Huerta Muro, OFM, appointed as II Bishop of Xochimilco, Mexico City.

In conclusion, we raised a prayer of thanksgiving to the Lord in the Eucharist to grant us the gift of collaboration and synodality in the service of our Franciscan Conference.

The next meeting of the Conference will be in Tijuana, Baja California (Mexico) from the 24th-18th November, 2025.

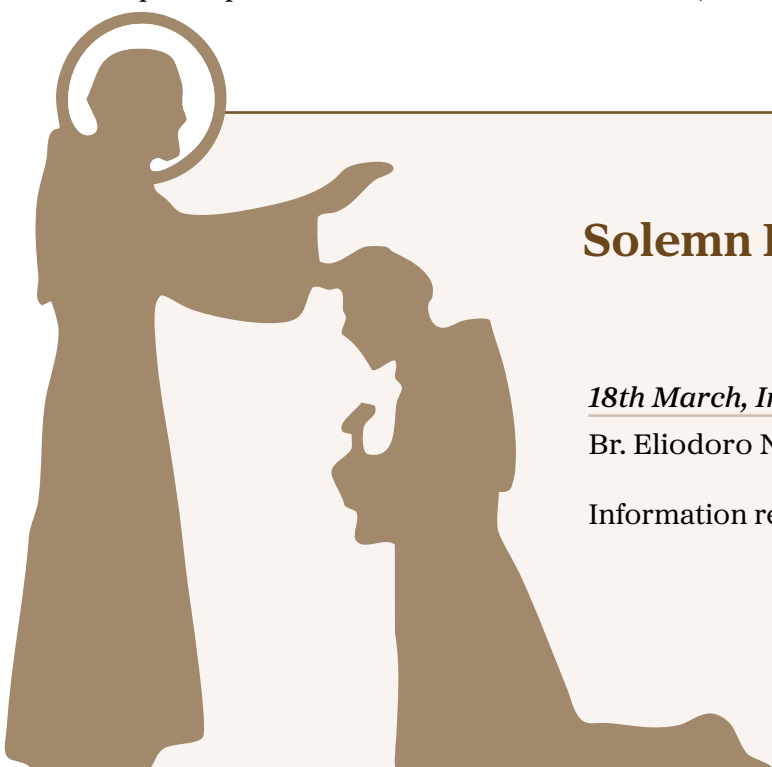
Deceased Brothers



- † 20th March: Br. Alexander Weissenberger, Prov. St. Elisabeth (Germany)
- † 19th March: Br. Erich Renz, Custody of Our Lady of the Seven Joys (Brazil)
- † 16th March: Br. Fernando Gil Martínez, Prov. Immaculate Conception (Spain)
- † 15th March: Br. Fabian Adkins, Prov. Holy Spirit (Australia)
- † 7th March: Br. José Clemente Schafaschek, Prov. Immaculate Conception (Brazil)



Information received from the General Secretariat
secgen@ofm.org



Solemn Professions



18th March, Immaculate Conception Province (Italy)

Br. Eliodoro Nappi.

Information received from the General Secretariat

International Women's Day celebrated in India

Nesakkaram-SEEDS, Franciscan NGO for street children and women



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SEEDS - Street Elbins Education and Development Society (commonly known as Nesakkaram SEEDS) is a non-governmental organization run by the Franciscan (OFM) of St. Thomas the Apostle Province, India. Nesakkaram-SEEDS committed to the growth and development of street and slum children and women in Chennai for past 35 years.

Currently, SEEDS collaborates with approximately 1633 women from various slums, organized into 118 Self-Help Groups (SHGs). SEEDS has been working with these women focusing on women empowerment programs, awareness sessions, and skill development training - Tailoring, Aari works, Chemical product, Garments, Wire works, Chocolate making, Beautician, Soap making, etc. to uplift their socio-economic conditions. They are also organized to celebrate various festivals in their respective groups to find their joy and unity.

Once every two years, preferably on Women's Day (8th March) or another convenient day, all the women are organized to celebrate the Women's Mela, called Magalir Sangamam. Accordingly, Nesakkaram invited the women from 118 SHGs to celebrate it on the 9th of March at Stella Maris College. The stage and the open auditorium were well prepared for the event. A total of 1,290 women gathered, dressed in the colorful uniform sarees of their respective groups. The chief guests - Br. Xavi-

er Durairaj Minister Provincial of St. Thomas the Apostle Province, India; Mrs. Aadhi Lakshmi Logamurthy, Advocate from the Madras High Court; Sr. Usha Rani, FMM, Superior of Stella Maris Convent; and others—were given a warm welcome and honored by the women's groups.

Br. Pushparaj Savarimuthu, the director of SEEDS, welcomed the gatherings and delivered the inaugural address. He was appreciative of the groups that were not taking loans from the banks and yet they have a sound financial footing through their savings. Friar Xavier Durairaj, OFM spoke on



women empowerment and encouraged them to be Sakthi (Power) for transformation of the society. And the Advocate spoke of women's right and their responsibilities from legal viewpoint to play a complementing role in the family and society.

Cultural programs began and the groups entertained the Audience with traditional folk dances – Parai, kaavadi aattam, oyl attam, kuthattam and fusion dances. Prizes for the best dance, best uniform and complements prizes for all the performers were given. It was a great successful

gathering of 1290 women. It motivated and encouraged the women to remain together. Nesakkaram is thankful to the guests, sponsors, college authorities and the staff for their contribution to make this function grand and memorable.

The Communications Staff of the Province of St. Thomas the Apostle



Holy See

Br Marcelo Benítez Martínez, OFM appointed Bishop Diocese of Caazapá in Paraguay



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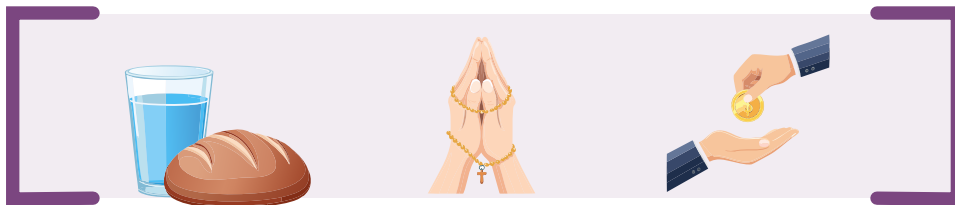


The Holy Father, Pope Francis, has appointed as Bishop of the Diocese of Caazapá in Paraguay

Br Marcelo Benítez Martínez, OFM, member of Province of the Assumption of the BVM of Rio de la Plata in Argentina and Paraguay, and current Provincial Vicar of the same Province. Br Marcelo was born on October 5, 1957, in Gral. H. Morinigo in Paraguay. He vested the Franciscan habit on February 25, 1987. He made his Solemn Profession on April 12, 1993, and was ordained to the priesthood on April 9, 1994. During his ministry, he has held

various positions in the former Custody “Br. Luis Bolaños” and in the Province of the Assumption of the BVM of Rio de la Plata, including Custodian, Counselor of the Custody, Guardian, Parish Priest, Treasurer, Definitor Provincial, and Vicar Provincial.

We extend to our brother, His Excellency Msgr. Marcelo Benítez Martínez, our best wishes for his new ministry in the service of the people of God.



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OFM

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