

# International Bulletin

# Fraternitas

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## New Zealand, visit of the Minister General and the General Definitor

### *Intercultural International Fraternity in the Land of the Long White Cloud*

The Minister General, Br Massimo Fusarelli, and the Definitor General for Asia-Oceania, Br John Wong, recently visited the Franciscan presence in New Zealand. In the Māori language, New Zealand is called Aotearoa, which means “the Land of the Long White Cloud”. The Franciscan mission in this country forms part of the Province *ad instar* of Australia–Aotearoa New Zealand. During the visit, the Minister General and the Definitor were accompanied by the Provincial Minister, Br Stephen Bliss.

The Franciscan presence in Aotearoa has a significant history. The first group of friars arrived in 1860 from France and Italy. They served in three missions on the peripheries, two of them among the Māori people. However, around twelve years later, they were obliged to leave the country, as conditions no longer allowed them to maintain adequately their Franciscan fraternal life and mission. In 1938, a new group of Australian-Irish friars arrived to begin a new phase of the mission. Today, the Fran-



ciscan presence in New Zealand is dedicated to St Andrew, the patron saint of the first Māori friar, Br Andrew Young, who died in 1979.

The programme of the visit was both intense and fraternal. At the St Francis Retreat Centre in Puketāpapa (Mount Roskill), the Ministers participated in the Eucharist and in a shared meal with the Board of the New Zealand Friars Minor Trust. They then met Bishop Steve Lowe of the Diocese of Auckland. A central moment of the visit was the meeting with all the friars at the Retreat Centre, followed by Holy Mass and a fraternal dinner with the friars, the Secular Franciscans (OFS), some members of local religious communities and clergy, together with parishioners and friends.

There are currently seven Friars Minor in Aotearoa, all living and serving within the Diocese of Auckland: two born in New Zealand, three in Indonesia, one in India and one in Vietnam. This international composition is a concrete sign of the universal face of the Order and represents both a richness and a challenge.

Among the principal difficulties is living fraternity within the reality of dispersed ministries. The friars are called to serve very diverse pastoral contexts: the Pākehā (New Zealanders of European origin), the Māori (the indigenous people), communities from the Pacific Islands (Samoa, Tonga, Fiji and the Cook Islands), and numerous

Asian faithful from India, Sri Lanka, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, the Philippines and Malaysia.

In addition, they minister in a strongly secularised society: only 12% of the population identify as Catholic and 53% state that they have no religion. As Bishop Lowe observed, “a lack of spirituality leads to individualism, egocentrism and isolation”. In this context, the friars renew their commitment to live fraternity authentically: praying and taking meals together each day, gathering weekly for a fraternal meeting and shared meal, fostering open communication, organising outings together, and favouring communal pastoral presences and shared ministries.

Their evangelical service is expressed in the parishes and in the Retreat Centre, which offers a spiritual sanctuary in the heart of the city, open to individuals and groups of every religious tradition. They also represent the international face of the Franciscan Order in Aotearoa.

In his address, the Minister General exhorted the friars to live truly as a fraternity, to care for ongoing formation concerning the motivations of Franciscan life, and to develop a shared fraternal mission. He warned against the risk of identifying too closely with parish ministry and encouraged them to study and apply the *Ratio Evangelizationis* of the Order. He urged them to be among the people and to help the People of God experience the Franciscan charism as a genuine richness.

## General Curia Agenda



✓ From the 2nd to the 5th March, the Minister General, Br. Massimo Fusarereelli, and the Definitor General, Br. John Wong, will be in Cambodia to visit the friars of the presence in Phnom Penh. On March 7, Br. Massimo will preside over Holy Mass in the Basilica of Assisi on the occasion of the exposition of the remains of St. Francis; on March 8 he will preside over Holy Mass in the Basilica of the Observance in Siena, for the memory of the “Little Testament”.

✓ The meeting of the International Commission for the Protection will be held in Malta from the 3rd to 6th March: Br. Albert Schmucki (Definitor General and President of the Commission) will participate together with Br. Joseph Condren, Secretary of the Office for the Protection of the Order.

✓ From the 3rd to 5th March, Br. Cesare Vaiani, Definitor General, will participate in the pilgrimage to Assisi of the Province of St. Anthony of the Friars Minor (Italy) on the tenth anniversary of its erection. On the 6th March, he will hold a conference for the Diocese of Chiavari entitled “Looking at the present through the eyes of Francis of Assisi”.

✓ On the 9th March, the Minister General and the General Definitors for the European Provinces will participate in the Executive Council of UFME, which will take place in the General Curia from the 8th to 10th March.

✓ The Tempo Forte will take place from the 9th to 20th March at the General Curia.

During the meeting, the internationalisation of the Order was also discussed: the need to be truly pilgrims and strangers, capable of going beyond national and cultural boundaries. Reference was made to the international novitiates already present in the Philippines, Italy and various African and South American Entities, as well as to international houses of formation, such as that in Lusaka. Young friars, before Solemn Pro-

fession, are likewise encouraged to undertake experiences outside their own countries.

Br Stephen Bliss summarised the spirit of the encounter in these words: “What I am hearing is your encouragement for each of us to commit ourselves to renewing our fraternity and renewing our lives as Franciscans.”

## Government of the Order



### The Seed Continues to Grow in the Antipodes Visit of the Minister General and the General Definitor to Australia



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From 12 to 17 February 2026, the Minister General, Br Massimo Fusarelli, and the Definitor General for Asia–Oceania, Br John Wong, visited the Friars Minor of the Province *ad instar* of the Holy Spirit in Australia.

Today the Province *ad instar* of the Holy Spirit is organised into three “hubs” (centres) or principal guardianates in Sydney, Brisbane and Auckland, although the friars live and serve in various other locations. Some are engaged in ministry to migrants from different parts of the world.



At the Provincial Chapter of 2025, the provincial leadership shared a clear vision: friars collaborating in visible and joyful ways, walking together in concrete service to the Church and the Province. The three “hubs” – in Sydney, Brisbane and Auckland – also express the post-Chapter priorities summarised in the acronym H.U.B.S.: Hospitality, Unity, Brotherhood, Service. This month, the friars begin their Key Initial Planned Actions for the period February–November 2026.

The official presence of the Friars Minor in Australia began with the arrival of the Irish friar Br Bonaventure Geoghegan in 1838, the first OFM friar to exercise the priestly ministry legally in the country. He contributed significantly to the construction of some of Australia’s oldest Catholic churches.

On 12 February, following their visit to Auckland in Aotearoa New Zealand, the Minister General and the Definitor arrived in Brisbane. That same day, at the friary in Kedron (guardianate of the Brisbane hub), they took part in a prayer of commendation and blessing for 30 newly appointed student leaders of Padua College, a boys’ secondary school led by the friars. Teachers and parents were also present. The evening concluded with a barbecue prepared by the Provincial Minister, Br Stephen Bliss.

The first missionary friars, including Br Peter O’Farrell, arrived individually to serve as chaplains in the early penal colonies. Having arrived independently in the 1860s, Br Peter saved his government salary with great sacrifice in order to found a future community of friars in Waverley, Sydney. Common life and a commissariat took shape in the 1870s, leading to the erection of the Province of the Holy Spirit in Australia–New Zealand in 1939.

The following day, Br Massimo and Br John attended the first Mass of the 2026 academic year at Padua College, with 1,500 students, 140 members of staff and representatives from neighbouring Catholic and Muslim schools. The school, part of Franciscan Schools Australia, strongly promotes Franciscan values. Approximately 85% of the students

are Catholic. The celebration began with a Welcome to Country ceremony, led by a student descended from one of the local Aboriginal peoples, who formally welcomed the assembly to the land of his ancestors. During a meeting with a group of seventeen-year-old students, the young men spoke candidly about their challenges and hopes as the future adults of Australia.

In their meeting with the friars in Brisbane, the Minister General encouraged them to remain faithful to the Franciscan charism, even in parish, educational, administrative and migrant ministries, often spread across a vast geographical area. The friars shared what they consider distinctive about their presence in Australia: approaching people as equals and friends, being present without judging, and loving the People of God.

When asked what kind of Franciscan life they would propose to young men who might be interested, the Brisbane friars replied: a fraternity rooted in its own identity, which values each person's gifts, offers mutual support, simple and welcoming, attentive to people, open to the Holy Spirit and connected to an international brotherhood.

On the evening of 14 February, the Minister General and the Definitor General arrived in Sydney,

where they met the friars serving in Sydney, Wollongong and Canberra, including friars from Bosnia, Croatia and Slovenia, as well as four Anglican Franciscan friars.

In his address, entitled "The Seed Continues to Grow", Br Massimo took up the message of the Letter of the Ministers General for the Eighth Centenary of the Transitus of St Francis (1226–2026). At the heart of his reflection was the image of the seed: Francis as a seed of the Gospel, which continues to bear fruit. The Saint left three gifts: mercy, born of the encounter with the lepers; faith in the Church, loved as Mother even in her fragility; and fraternity as a circle of peace, not a pyramid of power. Br Massimo recalled that fruitfulness does not depend on efficiency, but on the love with which we have been "sown" by God. He also presented the new document of the Order, the *Ratio Evangelizationis* "Ite in Mundum", which invites every friar to rediscover himself as fraternity-in-mission.

In Sydney there was also a meeting with members of the Franciscan Family: FMM, OFS, OFM Conventual, OSC, and Anglican Franciscans of the First and Third Orders. In this climate of communion, the seed of Francis continues to grow in the Antipodes, calling all to bear fruit in mercy, faith and peace.

## Visit of the Minister General to Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands

*Foundation of St Francis of Assisi, 18-24 February 2026*



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From 18 to 24 February 2026, the Minister General, Br Massimo Fusarelli, and the Definitor General for Asia-Oceania, Br John Wong, visited the Foundation of St Francis of Assisi in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. The visit took place at a significant moment: nearly 80 years have passed since the arrival, at the beginning of 1947, of Australian and Italian missionaries in Aitape, in the western Sepik area. This anniversary invites gratitude and renewed commitment to the Franciscan presence and mission in this land.

Papua New Guinea is a tropical country of extraordinary natural beauty and rich in resources, yet marked by great poverty and widespread

underdevelopment. The population is approximately 11 million: over 25% are baptised Catholics and around 95% identify as Christian. The three fraternities of the Foundation are all located in lowland areas near the sea: in Aitape, in the capital Port Moresby, and in Banaule on the island of New Britain.

Today the Foundation includes 18 local friars, together with one Australian missionary, one Italian and two Vietnamese. The friars truly live and serve according to Franciscan values of humility, poverty and simplicity, in close proximity to the people. The Minister General and the Definitor General received traditional welcomes in Port Moresby and in Aitape, a sign of the



deep esteem for the Franciscan presence by the people of this land. The journey from Port Moresby to Aitape required, each way, a one-and-a-half-hour flight and a four-and-a-half-hour road journey in a four-wheel-drive vehicle, crossing more than fifty rivers, many of them without bridges. This demanding geography make the generosity of the mission even more evident.

During the visit, Br Massimo and Br John met with the friars of the different communities, the Poor Clare sisters, the MFIC sisters, members of the OFS, and some local priests and religious, including the Bishop of Aitape, Bishop Siby Mathew HGN. It was a time of listening, prayer and fraternal sharing.

The Foundation is currently living through a time of restructuring, led by the President of the Foundation, Br Paul Smith, with the accompaniment of the General Animator for the Missions and Delegate General for Papua New Guinea, Br Dennis Tayo. After a pause of six years, vocations have resumed, and many young people are showing interest in Franciscan life. At present there are six postulants and eight aspirants.

The OFM friars maintain a very close fraternal and collaborative relationship with the Capuchin friars. They share a common two-year postulancy programme, based at the Capuchin postulancy house in Madang, where OFM and Capuchin postulants and formators live together. Furthermore, during the construction of the Capuchin friary in Port Moresby, several Capuchin friars lived for months in the Foundation's initial formation fraternity. This spirit of communion is a concrete sign of Franciscan fraternity.

In his meeting with the friars of the Foundation, the Minister General stressed that he had come “from the other side of the world” not to bring answers from above, but to walk together, to listen and to pray. He expressed appreciation for the discernment process undertaken by the Foundation, which was able to recognise honestly what is good – simple fraternity, closeness to the poor, missionary spirit, growing vocations – and to name the difficulties with courage. “Guard fraternity as your most precious treasure,” he said, recalling that Saint Francis built the Order not with great structures, but with men capable of loving and serving one another.

Meeting with the Foundation Council and the Guardians, the Minister General encouraged a leadership lived as fraternal service, founded on clear communication and personal accompaniment of the friars, especially the younger ones. He insisted on the importance of respecting and living the decisions of Chapters and Councils, communicating them clearly and reviewing their implementation over time.

There remains a great need for new missionaries capable of integrating into other cultures in a fraternal and collaborative way, especially those with experience in formation and administrative ministries. This is essential in order to support the growth of the Order in Papua New Guinea and to give this presence an increasingly international face.

At the conclusion of the visit, Br Massimo assured the friars of the affection of the entire Franciscan family throughout the world: “You are small in number, but great in your calling. May the Lord bless you and may Saint Francis walk with you.”



## India, Fraternal Visit of Br. Ignacio Ceja, Vicar General

### *A Grace-Filled Journey in the Jubilee Year of St. Francis*



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During the Jubilee Year of St. Francis, the three-week visitation in India of Br. Ignacio Ceja, OFM, Vicar General of the Order of Friars Minor, which began on 25 January 2026 and concluded on 15 February 2026, became a moment of grace, renewal, and fraternal communion for the Franciscan family in India. Representing the Minister General and the General Definitory, his presence strengthened the friars and faithful in their commitment to Gospel life and mission.

The visit began with the inauguration of the Jubilee Year at St. Louis Friary, Palamaner – fondly regarded as the cradle of Indian Franciscans – in the presence of aspirants and novices. From there, Br. Ignacio travelled to Madurai for the blessing of St. Anthony's Academy.

He later inaugurated the Jubilee celebrations at St. Anthony's Friary, Bengaluru, the Mother House of the Indian Franciscans, presiding over the Eucharist and addressing the brothers during the Intermediate Chapter, where he shared the message of the Minister General.

Continuing his journey, he visited Goa, the historic Franciscan center once home to Portuguese Franciscans, where he also inaugurated the Jubilee Year. At Assisivanam in Kerala, home to philosophy students, he received a joyful welcome and spent time encouraging the brothers in formation.

He also visited friaries and pastoral centers of the Custodia of Mary, Mother of God, including Malom Noatoli and Nanesera, where he spent quality time with the fraternities and parishioners, offering guidance and encouragement. Everywhere he went, the faithful welcomed him with joy and reverence, experiencing his presence as a sign of the Church's closeness.

A particularly moving aspect of the visitation was the welcome offered by tribal communities at Malom Noatoli and Nanesera. Through traditional dances, songs, and symbolic gestures of honour, they expressed deep respect and gratitude. Their simplicity, communal solidarity, cultural richness, and strong faith resonated deeply with Franciscan values of fraternity, humility, and care for creation.

At St. Anthony's Friary, North Guwahati, the brothers of the Foundation of St. Francis of Assisi welcomed Br. Ignacio with traditional Assamese hospitality, including the presentation of a *Pulen Gamusa*. He visited mission centers and interacted with the brothers in formation, expressing joy at seeing many young friars and encouraging them to grow as committed Franciscans rooted in prayer, fraternity, and service.

During his visit to Nongjri Mission, he attended the send-off program for Class X students of St. Thomas School and encouraged them to strive for excellence. He also inaugurated and blessed a newly constructed cloth-drying shed for the boys' hostel – a small but meaningful step toward improving student welfare.

Throughout his visit, Br. Ignacio ensured that he spent quality time meeting the friars, listening to their experiences, and sharing the dream and universal vision of Francis of Assisi. Struck by the beauty and richness of India, he inspired the brothers – especially those in formation – to broaden their horizons and embrace the universality of the Franciscan mission.

His fraternal presence strengthened bonds of unity, renewed missionary zeal, and deepened spiritual commitment among the friars and faithful. This visitation, celebrated during the Jubilee Year of St. Francis, stands as a moment of grace and renewal. Inspired by this encoun-

ter, the fraternities continue their journey with renewed hope, fidelity, and dedication to living the Gospel in the spirit of St. Francis in today's world. We express special gratitude to Br. Baptist D'Souza, OFM, Delegate of the General

Secretary to the Foundation *OFM Fraternitas*, Rome, whose support made Br. Ignacio's visit to India possible and whose fraternal accompaniment during the initial phase of the journey was deeply appreciated.

## Reflections by Br. Massimo February 2026



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In celebrating the Year of St. Francis, we are offered the opportunity to receive the gift of the Indulgence. Among the conditions proposed, there is affective detachment from sin, a true "freedom" capable of making us love. However, this involves an active commitment to recognising the snares that prevent our hearts and minds from orienting themselves toward a good that transcends our selfishness.

Let us not forget that this is not just an individual path, but a social and community responsibility. The lack of freedom affects us all, even in countries that consider themselves democratic. The situation is alarming, and the Franciscan message of freedom through love is more relevant than ever.

The Year of St. Francis can become an opportunity for a step forward. Let us not live it only in external gestures but let us allow the light of the freedom that loves to shine through acts of solidarity and authentic encounters, especially with those who are poor and marginalised.

According to some ancient Christian thinkers, freedom is the seal of God's image in us. We cannot, therefore, exempt ourselves, as citizens and believers, from the active commitment to support in all its forms that freedom which promotes the dignity and future of the human person.

In recent months, my travels to visit the Friars have taken me to countries where freedom of expression is in tatters, stifled by authoritarian governments. I felt a sort of palpable oppression, a pall that makes everything grey and plastered. Control stratagems, such as the closure of social media and rapid communication platforms, have taken me back to a time when the network did not exist, making me reflect on how impossible it can seem to live without these tools in our current reality. At the same time, constant monitoring through cameras and other forms of surveillance creates a sense of vulnerability: you know that you are being watched, and your every movement is being tracked. It's not pleasant, and it makes you feel trapped.

I realised that freedom is never taken for granted and that the

lack of it becomes palpable, influencing moods, even while walking down the street. Freedom is a powerful and increasingly threatened word, often sacrificed in the name of security, the economic interests of a few and geopolitical pressures. We are required to give pieces of ourselves to very small oligarchies. But what is freedom really?

The Franciscan tradition teaches us that freedom is closely linked to love. It is only those who love who are truly free. This combination of love and freedom does not mean giving vent to every impulse or desire. For St. Francis, we are free because we are liberated; we can love authentically only if we allow ourselves to be guided by the Spirit of the Lord, who educates us in true love. This love is what gives us life and pushes us to reflect on our true good.



## Franciscan Centenaries

### Extraordinary exposition of the mortal remains of St. Francis *On the occasion of the Eighth Centenary of the Transitus*



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On the 21st February in Assisi, in the Basilica of St. Francis, the extraordinary exposition of the mortal remains of St. Francis began, which will be exhibited for a month in the Lower Basilica, on the occasion of the VIII Centenary of the Transit of the Saint (1226-2026). The initiative represents a time of grace that unites the faithful, pilgrims and institutions in the name of universal fraternity.

After the exhumation of the mortal remains of the saint in the morning in the crypt of the Basilica, in the afternoon, at 4.00 p.m., the celebration of the translation and the prayer of Vespers was held in the lower church, presided over by Cardinal Ángel Fernández Artime, papal legate for the Papal Basilicas of Assisi, with the participation of the friars of the entire Franciscan Family. Among the OFMs present were Br. Ignacio Ceja Jiménez, Vicar General, Br. Cesare Vaiani, Coordinator of the Franciscan Family Committee for the VIII Centenary, part of the General Definitory and Br. Francesco Piloni, Minister Provincial of the Friars Minor of Umbria and Sardinia.

In his homily, Cardinal Fernández Artime indicated the exposition as “an event of extraordi-

nary grace” and, addressing the faithful, invited them to live this time not with nostalgia, but as a path of concrete conversion: “Stop. Look. Let yourselves be touched by my Love.”

The celebrations continued on the 22nd February with Sunday Mass at 11:00 a.m., again presided over by Cardinal Ángel Fernández Artime. The calendar of the exhibition also includes liturgical and cultural events in the coming weeks, until the final celebration on the 22nd March.

The exhibition offers pilgrims the opportunity to pause in prayer before the remains of St. Francis. The reservations received to date indicate a wide international participation: at the moment, the pilgrims who have registered for free for the veneration of the remains of the Poverello, the Poor Man of Assisi (which will end on the 22nd March) are hundreds of thousands.

For the veneration, free booking is required through the official portal [sanfrancescovive.org](http://sanfrancescovive.org). On weekdays, the entrance is from 7.30 am (on weekends from 7.00 am), with the Basilica closing at 7.00 pm. In the Basilica, it is not allowed to take photos or videos.



## Opening of the VIII Centenary of the Transit of St. Francis in DRC

### Province of St. Benedict the African



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On Wednesday, February 3, 2026, the “St. Benedict the African” Province in the Democratic Republic of Congo celebrated the official opening of the eighth Centenary of the Transit of St. Francis of Assisi.



The celebration took place at the St. John XXIII Scholasticate in Kolwezi, commemorating the night between 3 and 4 October 1226, when Francis serenely surrendered his soul to God. Presided over by Br. Georges Misange, OFM, Minister Provincial, the ceremony, which was held from 17.00 to 19.30, brought together several guests: Br. Sipehele Gwanisheni, OFM, Definitior General for Africa; Br. Darko Tepert OFM, Secretary General for Formation and Studies; Br. Jean-Baptiste Tabaro, OFM, Minister Provincial of the Province of St. Anthony of Padua (DRC); and Br. Benjamin Kabongo, OFM, Vicar Provincial of the Province of Our Lady of the Angels (DRC). The brothers and sisters of the OFS, the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Mary and the Franciscan Sisters of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ also participated.

The celebration was divided into two main moments. The first took place in the large conference hall of the Scholasticate, opened by the greeting of Br. Benoît Kibambye, Guardian of the Fraternity, followed by the introductory prayer of Br. Georges Misange. A presentation on the Transit, prepared and illustrated by Br. Marcel Tshikez, OFM, Provincial Moderator of Ongoing Formation, made it possible to deepen the spiritual significance of this founding event.

Subsequently, in procession and with lit candles, the assembly went to the chapel for the second moment, consisting of meditations, prayers, biblical readings, songs, and testimonies. Br. Benoît Kibambye shared his experience in the apostolate for orphaned children of the Kwetu House, a work founded by Br. Damien Isabel, OFM. Mr Eleuthère testified to the commitment of the OFS to the poor, the sick and the marginalised. Br. Sipehele Gwanisheni, OFM, then addressed the faithful present before the final blessing. The evening ended with a fraternal moment and refreshments shared with the Franciscan Family.

In his letter of February 3, 2026, the Minister Provincial, Br. Georges Misange invited all the parishes and fraternities of the Province to organise, by the end of March, a local celebration for the opening of this Centenary, so that this year of grace can be fully lived by the brothers and the people of God entrusted to them.

*Br. Marcel Tshikez, OFM*

## Fasting

LENT 2026

“When you fast, perfume your head and wash your face, so that people will not see that you are fasting, but only your Father, who is in secret; and your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you” (Mt. 6:17-18).



## A blessed Lent to all!

## Poland, inauguration of the Centenary of the Transit in the Province of Our Lady of the Angels

*Coinciding with the conclusion of the Canonical Visitation*



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On Sunday, February 22, in the Church of the Stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi in Krakow-Bronowice, Poland, the Province of St. Mary of the Angels solemnly celebrated the conclusion of the Canonical Visitation and the inauguration of the Jubilee Year of Easter of St. Francis of Assisi.



The solemn Eucharistic celebration, presided over by the Minister Provincial Br. Krzysztof Bobak represented the crucial moment of the day, designed as a thanksgiving to the good Lord. During the Holy Mass, which was attended by the friars representing the convents of the entire Province, the jubilee candles were blessed and then brought to their fraternities as a sign of unity, prayer and responsibility for the Province and for the entire Order of Friars Minor.

With reference to the Jubilee Year, the thought of the Holy Father Leo XIV was emphasised, who wrote: the Poverello, the Poor man of Assisi, constantly guides the Church to the sources of the Gospel, teaching simplicity of heart, brotherhood without boundaries and the joy that comes from total abandonment to God.

For the Franciscan Family, this is a moment of special grace, an invitation to look with new eyes at the charism of the Seraphic Father and to renew the spirit of the Gospel within themselves. The Minister Provincial emphasised that the particular candle delivered to the communities is not only a symbol of gratitude but also a sign of deep reflection and realism. In a world that is experiencing secularisation and a crisis of trust in the Church, credibility is born of simplicity, transparency, and authentic brotherhood. A small community that prays together, that forgives each other and that cares for the poor shines with a very intense light.

The Eucharist that concluded the canonical visitation of the Province also became an occasion for spiritual preparation for the next Provincial Chapter, which will be held next May: an extraordinary occasion of grace and listening to the Holy Spirit!



## Animation of the Order

### Leo XIV approves the cult of Blessed Gabriel Maria Nicolas

*A new blessed for the Order of Friars Minor*



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On February 21, 2026, Pope Leo XIV received in audience Cardinal Marcello Semeraro, Prefect of the Dicastery of the Causes of Saints, and authorized the publication of the Decree on the life, virtues and reputation of holiness, as well as on the confirmation of the immemorial cult of the Venerable Servant of God Gabriele Maria Nicolas, professed priest of the Order of Friars Minor, co-founder of the Order of the SS. Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, born in Riom (France) around 1460 and died in Rodez (France) on August 27, 1532. The equivalent beatification of Blessed Gabriele Ma-

ria Nicolas, decreed by Pope Leo XIV on February 21, 2026, renews the memory of one of the most singular figures of the Order of Friars Minor of the 15th century: highlights his human and spiritual stature, the religious life lived with exemplarity and austerity in the context of Franciscan Observance, the conformity to the Crucified Christ, the Eucharistic and Marian devotion, the fundamental contribution to the foundation of the Order of the Annunciation alongside Saint Joan of Valois, the commitment to social pacification, the leading role in the formation, direction and government of

the confreres, as guardian, as Provincial Minister, as General Definer, as Vicar General. Gilbert Nicolas - who went down in the history of holiness as Gabriel Maria for his great devotion to the Mother of God - was born around 1460 near Riom, in Auvergne, France. In his youth, after listening to a sermon on the Immaculate Conception of Mary, he came to the decision to give up all human love to give himself entirely to God. Welcomed among the Friars Minor of the Observance in the convent of Notre-Dame de Lafond, La Rochelle, he made

his religious profession between 1476 and 1478. Having become a priest, for about twenty years he taught moral theology to young confreres in formation.

Around 1490 he became the spiritual guide and confidant of Saint Joan of Valois, the repudiated wife of Louis XII, then canonized by Pius XII in 1950. When from 1499 the project to found a religious order dedicated to the Virgin Mary was outlined in her, Friar Gilbert Nicolas shared the purpose and collaborated without reservation: she recruited and personally trained the first nuns, wrote the Rule and worked for its approval. In the Rule of the Order of SS. Annunciation, the blessed expressed his spirituality and Marian doctrine by proposing the imitation of the evangelical virtues of the Virgin Mary as a form of life for the nuns. Over time, this Rule was also adopted by other Institutes, such as the Marian Clerics founded in Poland by St. Stanislaus Papeczyński in 1673, and as the Congregations of Apostolic Annunciations, the first of which was founded in Belgium in the 18th century by the abbot Pierre Jacques de Clerck.

Continue reading his biography on [www.ofm.org](http://www.ofm.org)



## The Franciscan Network for Migrants in Iquique, Chile

*“A welcoming hand and a listening silence”*



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On Monday, the 31st January, 2022, news of an anti-immigration march in the city of Iquique, Chile, attended by about four thousand people, went around the world. Some protesters attacked a refugee camp, inhabited mainly by Venezuelans, destroying its tents and burning its personal belongings. A similar episode also occurred at the end of September 2021.

In response, the Bishop of the Diocese of Iquique, Mgr. Isauro Covili, OFM, since his installation in mid-2022, has launched continuous appeals to stop all forms of violence, inviting everyone to be “instruments of peace” and to live a culture of welcome with migrants in the area.

Iquique is a city in the Tarapacá region (on the border with Bolivia), in northern Chile, 1,800 kilometres north of Santiago. It has an estimated population of 233,228.

The Franciscan Network for Migrants (RFM) of Iquique has carried out several activities since its founding in 2023. The beginning of 2026 has been particularly intense.

The first of these activities took place from 9 to 11 January. The RFM, together with the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, organised the three-day initiative “Space of Fraternal Joy” with the aim of creating a safe and fraternal space that would promote joy, play, learn-

ing and integration for the migrant children of Paso de la Mula during their holiday period. January and February are, in fact, holiday periods in Chile, which coincide with the austral summer of the Southern Cone. Paso de la Mula is one of the migrant settlements in Alto Hospicio, Iquique.

On the first day of the event, the 9th January, the brothers and sisters playfully explored the theme “My Emotions,” and on the second day, “My Cultural Identity.” Games, songs, painting, prayer and theatre were the pedagogical tools used to entertain the children gathered at the Vincentian Sisters. The third day was the most awaited. The program included an excursion



to one of the city's beaches. At seven in the morning of the 11th January, about 30 children returned to the place arranged by the nuns. A delicious breakfast awaited them. Two hours later, they were enjoying the waves of the Pacific Ocean.

On the beach, a two-meter-long plastic inflatable whale was the main attraction for the children. Everyone wanted to get on it or, at least, hug it. The black and white whale was only able to rest during lunch, whilst the children enjoyed the meal prepared by the nuns. After a break, the sand and the sea welcomed the children again.

Alto Hospicio is located on one of the desert coastal mountain ranges of Iquique. Following the violence that erupted in 2021 and 2022, many migrants occupied land and have since built precarious housing without basic services.

Another activity carried out by RFM took place in February 2026. A small portable pool has been installed in the Vincentian Sisters' courtyard that will be available until the beginning of

the school year: "The pool is for girls on Tuesdays and for boys on Wednesdays," explains Sister María Isabel Ruiz, FDC.

For her part, Sister Totty Bórquez, FMM, a member of the RFM in Iquique, acknowledges that migration is a topic discussed with suspicion and distrust in the city. For her, the RFM is a welcoming hand, and, in the silence of listening, the migrants learn not to be alone and to believe in them.

On the afternoon of the 17th February, in the room where breakfast was served on the day of the outing, while the girls enjoyed the pool, their mothers participated in a meeting to define the program, days and times of the three-month thermal printing entrepreneurship workshop for ten migrant women. Outside, Sr. Jeanette Martínez, FDC, took care of the girls and offered them a light snack.

The participants come from Bolivia, Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua. This project not only aims to train them in the production of various products,

but also to provide resources for brand development, social media management for product positioning, and legal advice for the establishment of a cooperative. The subtitle of the workshop is "Woman, you can!".

Fr. Julio Campos, OFM, parish priest of the parish of St. Anthony of Padua in Iquique and facilitator of the RFM of Chile, says that working with migrant children and adults "is an opportunity to enrich my vocation as a younger brother who follows Jesus in his poverty and innocence." In addition, RFM plans to increase its support to the Chilean Catholic Institute for Migration (INCAMI) of the Chilean Bishops' Conference, through its pastoral work with migrants.

Listening and spiritual accompaniment are offered to migrants passing through or residing in the city. Among the services offered by INCAMI are legal advice, immigration guidance, a shelter, health services and a listening and spiritual accompaniment centre. Br. Vicente Taji, SVD is the Director, while Janett Gómez Calle is the Director and Coordinator of the Iquique office.

"Working with migrants is a daily challenge because it involves going out of oneself, looking towards the other, listening to someone one does not know and acting with trust," says Fr. Julio Campos. "This attitude towards life is healthy because it means living with the hope of believing in others and, therefore, of believing in God," he concluded.

*Br. Daniel Rodríguez Blanco,  
OFM*

*JPIC Office Director – Rome*

## News from the Entities



### Congress of Formands in the Province of NS de Guadalupe Central America and Panama, February 12-15, 2026



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From the 12th to the 15th of February 2026, the Congress of the Formators of the Franciscan Province of Our Lady of Guadalupe, in Central America and Panama, was held at the Monte Auvergne Franciscan Spirituality Centre in Planes de Renderos, El Salvador. The meeting brought together student friars, temporarily professed, accompanied by their formators and representatives of the postulants, in an atmosphere of fraternity, prayer and discernment. During these days, the friars shared their lives, deepened their formation process and reflected together on the current challenges facing the Church, the Order and the Province.

The general objective of the Congress was to offer a space for formation, reflection, and discernment, allowing the young friars to deepen their human, spiritual and Franciscan growth, renewing their identity as Friars Minor and developing concrete proposals for formative and missionary development in preparation for the Elective Provincial Chapter of 2026.

The daily program was marked by the celebration of the Eucharist, moments of prayer, formative discussions, group work and plenary sessions. These spaces fostered an open and sincere dialogue on fundamental themes such as affective maturity, self-knowledge, fraternal life, mission, and the Franciscan presence in the new peripheries, especially in the digital world, on the margins of society and in the care of creation.

One of the significant fruits of the Congress was the formulation of concrete proposals to strengthen the formation accompaniment in the different phases and the election of the new Commission of Formands, as well as of the representatives to the Provincial Chapter. These moments demonstrated the commitment and co-responsibility of the young friars in building provincial life.

The Congress ended with the celebration of the Eucharist and an atmosphere of gratitude for what was shared. The participants returned to their respective houses of formation with a renewed desire to continue walking as Friars Minor, at the service of the Church and the People of God in Central America and Panama.

*Br. Edgar Daniel Coyoy Medrano, OFM, Provincial Secretary*



### Poland, formation meeting for the Guardians Province of St. Francis of Assisi



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From the 10th to 12th February 2026, a fraternal-formative meeting was held at the Pilgrim's House in Wejherowo, Poland, aimed at the Guardians of the local communities of the Province of St. Francis of Assisi. The meeting offered participants many opportunities for

training through different sessions.

Prof. Br. Adam Sikora, OFM, led a reflection on the Order in the House of God, while Br. Archanioł Borek, OFM, delved into the Franciscan model of evangelisation. Krystian

Włodarczak explained how to raise funds through the Siepomaga.pl platform.

The programme also included Bogna Białecka's speech on crisis prevention and the recognition of situations that require more attention, as well as



pact also took part in the meeting. Br. Justyn Berus OFM, Provincial Bursar, presented an overview of the economic situation of the Province, while Br. Leonard P. Bielecki OFM, Minister Provincial, shared reflections on current issues in the community. This meeting, which takes place annually within the Province, goes hand in hand with the formation that every year brings together all the Franciscan Superiors in Poland.

The activities of the Province can be supported through the <https://www.siepomaga.pl/franciszkanie> portal.

The Province reciprocates the support received with prayer: a weekly Holy Mass celebrated for benefactors and daily prayer recited after lunch.

mutual support arrangements. Prof. Fr. Jan Perszon offered a reading of the crisis in the Church in the light of the ev-

er-timely message of St. Francis. Ewa Macińska, representative of PZUW insurance, and Marek Piekarowicz from Inn-

# LIFE in the Order



## Deceased Brothers

† 22nd February: Br. Benigny (Zbigniew Jan) Piechota, Prov. St. Francis of Assisi (Poland)

† 16th February: Br. Pierantonio (Angelo Giovanni) Norcini, Br. Luigi Albiero, Prov. St. Anthony of the Friars Minor (Italy)

† 12th February: Br. Franco Azzimonti, Prov. St. Anthony of the Friars Minor (Italy)

† 10th February: Br. Joël (Charles) Lorenz, Prov. Blessed John. Duns Scotus (France)

† 5 February: Br. Thomas Raymond Hartle, Prov. Our Lady of Guadalupe (USA)

*Information received from the General Secretariat*



Pro Monialibus



**XVII Ordinary Federal Assembly  
of the Federation of the Poor Clares of Colombia**  
*February 10-17, 2026*



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From the 10th to 17th February, the XVII Ordinary Federal Assembly of the Federation of the Poor Clares of Colombia was held, during which the Federal Government was elected for the six-year term 2026-2032. The sisters met at the San Pablo House of the Province of Santa Fe, in the Municipality of Itagüí, Antioquia. Present at this Assembly were 62 sisters from 32 monasteries of the Federation. In the first few days, the reports of the Federal President, the Bursar and the formation team were presented, which received a great reception and very positive feedback from the assembly.

Two days of formation sessions were held on personal and community life projects and on the need to continue to support monasteries that have already completed them. The participants were pleased to receive the visit of the Minister Provin-

cial of the Province of the Holy Faith of Colombia, Br. Alirio Urbina Rodríguez, OFM, and the General Visitor for the canonical visitation of the Province, Br. Sandro Roberto D'Acosta, OFM. The assembly lived in a truly fraternal spirit, sharing the experiences of each monastery, and recognising the challenges that will have to be faced in the coming years.

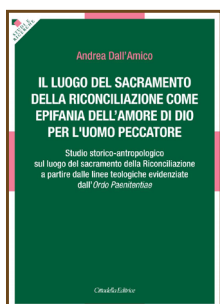
The Federal Government for this six-year term of office was con-

stituted as follows:

- President: Mother Leidy of Our Lady of the Rosary, OSC;
- Councilor: Sr. María Fernanda de Jesús Misericordioso, OSC; Sr. Magda Constanza de la Pasión, OSC; Sr. María Eunice del Niño Jesús, OSC; Sr. María Rosa del Paraíso, OSC.
- Federal Treasurer: Sr. María Hilda of St. Joseph, OSC.

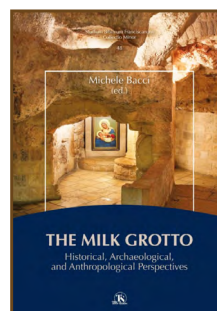


Franciscan Bookmark



Il luogo del sacramento della Riconciliazione come epifania dell'amore di Dio per l'uomo peccatore

Andrea Dall'Amico, OFM  
Cittadella Editrice



The Milk Grotto

Historical, Archaeological, and Anthropological Perspectives

Michele Bacci  
TS Edizioni



### Pope Leo XIV will participate in the “GO! Franciscan Youth Meeting” The European Youth Meeting in Assisi, August 3-6, 2026



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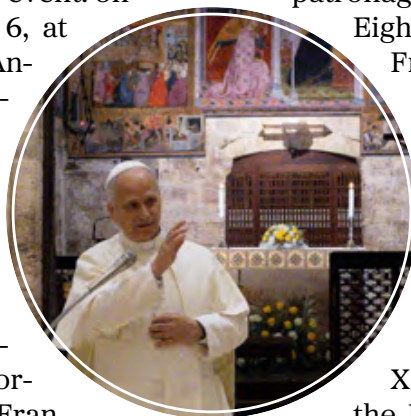
On February 19, the Holy See announced that Pope Leo XIV will participate in the “GO! Franciscan Youth Meeting,” the European Youth Meeting to be held in Assisi from August 3 to 6, 2026.

The Holy Father has chosen to join the young people of Europe on the final day of the event: on the morning of Thursday, August 6, at the Basilica of Santa Maria degli Angeli, Pope Leo will meet with participants for a moment of listening, before presiding over the solemn Eucharistic Celebration.

The event is aimed at young Europeans between the ages of 18 and 33, both believers and non-believers, and aims to offer a unique opportunity to meet in the spirit of Saint Francis, in the year marking the 800th anniversary of his death. The goal is to create a shared space where participants can experience authentic moments of listening, dialogue, and learning. The program alternates moments of prayer and spirituality with moments of celebration and sharing, allowing young people to discuss the fundamental themes of life in a context of universal brotherhood.

Specific thematic workshops will be held on August 4th and 5th, designed to inspire and engage young people in personal exploration. “Fra Gospel” will also be held, a singing competition dedicated to music born from the heart and soul, offering musical talent an exceptional stage. GO! Franciscan Youth Meeting began as a chapter of mats and is the fruit of a significant synergy between various

ecclesial and civil entities. The event is promoted by the Ministers General of the Franciscan Family and organized by the Friars Minor of Assisi (OFM, OFMCap, and OFMConv), in collaboration with the Diocese of Assisi - Nocera Umbra - Gualdo Tadino and Foligno, and the City of Assisi. Under the patronage of the National Committee for the Eighth Centenary of the Death of Saint Francis, the initiative takes on profound ecclesial and spiritual significance, fitting within the celebrations for the 800th anniversary of the Transitus of the Saint of Assisi.



The Friars organizing the event stated: “We want to forcefully reiterate the invitation that Pope Leo XIV extended to young people during the Jubilee last summer: ‘Our hope is Jesus.’ This meeting was created precisely to give voice to the profound desire, held in the heart of every young person, to encounter the Lord. In the footsteps of Francis, we want to build bridges so that every young person can rediscover the beauty of this hope in their daily lives, discerning the Face of God incarnate in every person, especially in the smallest and most vulnerable.”

*In collaboration with the Communications Office of the Seraphic Province OFM of Assisi*

For more information:

Program: <https://www.goassisi.org/en/plan/>  
Registration: <https://www.goassisi.org/en/>

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# OFM

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