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# KOINONIA

... together on the journey

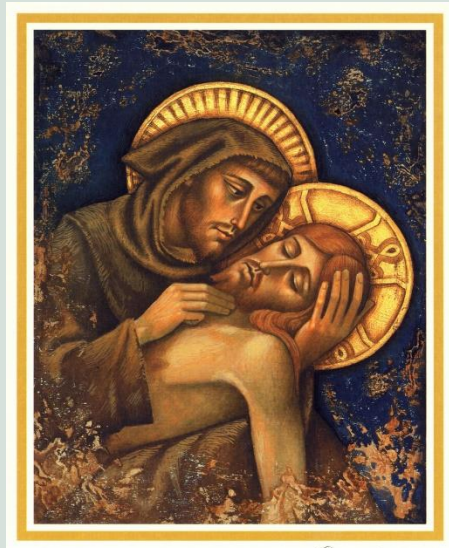
***“Jubilees that reinvigorate our Franciscan being: Stigmata”***



**The Stigmata : Following and Conforming to Christ**

Fr. Carlos Gines, TOR

<https://ciofs.info/en/news/koinonia/>



"He bore the Cross of Christ rooted in his heart. And it was precisely because of this that the stigmata shone outwardly. in the flesh, because inside, its root reached deep into his soul" (2Cel 211).

## Introduction

**The Stigmata**<sup>1</sup> (from the Latin stigma, derived from the Greek *στίγμα*), are first and foremost marks or wounds that appear spontaneously on the body of some people, almost always ecstatic mystics and often preceded or accompanied by physical and moral torments. These wounds are similar to those that, according to traditional Christian iconography, were inflicted on Jesus of Nazareth at his crucifixion. The wounds generally appear on the hands, feet, and the right side, and sometimes also on the head and back, recalling the crowning with thorns and scourging of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>2</sup>

St Francis of Assisi, the most famous of the Church's stigmatised saints, had one and only one desire: to live in Christ and to be 'configured' to Him.

*"As we know, in that year the Lord gave him the mystical answer he was waiting for, even though he was tormented by so much anguish and uncertainty. On the morning of 17 September 1224, after he had reached the top of the mountain of La Verna, in the amazement of a beautiful day filled with birdsong, and after his prayer had become for days and days more ardent, resembling an agony of love, suddenly, before his eyes, enraptured in the dazzle of Love, a Seraphim had appeared, beating the air with his six wings and bearing in his supernatural being the image of the Crucified One. Coming out of ecstasy, Francis felt himself penetrated by a multiple, piercing, and sweet pain: the wounds of the Passion were visible and bleeding on his hands, his feet, and his side. The witness of Christ bore in his flesh the stigmata of his God".<sup>3</sup>*

Francis had received the stigmata of Christ's Passion on Mount La Verna, but they had remained hidden from the vast majority of people. Only two years later, on the day of St Francis's death, were "more than fifty friars and countless lay people" able to see and venerate his Stigmata<sup>4</sup>. Celano writes In the eyes of all he appeared "as if he had just been taken down from the cross".<sup>5</sup> In the dead Francis, they believed they were contemplating the dead Christ himself.<sup>6</sup>

In this way, the example of St Francis shows us that the Christian way consists in the "imitation of Christ." who lived through love and died out of love, on the cross. The disciple "must, so to speak, enter into Christ with his whole being, he must 'appropriate' and assimilate the entire reality of the Incarnation and Redemption in order to find himself".<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. St BONAVENTURA: *Major Legend of St Francis*, 13-15.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. ROYO MARÍN, ANTONIO (1968). «Fenómenos místicos de orden corporal. La estigmatización». *Teología de la perfección cristiana*. Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos. pp. 928-934.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. ROPS DANIEL, *Historia de la Iglesia de Cristo*. Vol. IV: La Catedral y la Cruzada (I Parte). Madrid, Luis de Caralt - Librairie Artheme Fayard, 1970, pp. 127-134.

<sup>4</sup> 3 Cel.5

<sup>5</sup> 1 Cel 112.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. DE SCHAMPELEER JEAN, *Selecciones de Franciscanismo*, Vol. XIV, núm. 42 (1985) 379-388.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Redemptor hominis*, 10.

As St John Paul II taught us: the cross, a sign of love and total self-giving, is the emblem of the disciple called to be configured to the glorious Christ.<sup>8</sup>

### 1. Christian Discipleship

How the Lord Jesus makes contact with His disciples is unique. It is the Lord Jesus who chooses and calls: "When it was day, he called his disciples, chose twelve, and appointed them apostles" (*Lk* 6:12-19). It is the Lord Jesus who passes, looks, and calls (*Mt* 4:18-22).

Jesus Christ is the heart and soul of the Gospel. St Francis understood that observing the Gospel means nothing other than putting Christ at the centre of one's life. But this does not tell the whole story. What is special about St Francis' relationship with Jesus Christ is that the saint was so devoted to Christ, that he gave himself completely to the service, imitation, and love of the Lord with incredibly unique feelings and in inimitable ways<sup>9</sup>.



Thus, Christian discipleship in St Francis became his own life when he discovered that it was the Gospel that told him how to live and how to proceed. This happened when Christ himself, from the crucifix in the ruined church of San Damiano, had spoken to him.<sup>10</sup>

The Gospel, the crucifix, and the Church become the sources on which St Francis' response to God's call is based; the point from which and with which he begins to walk in faithfulness to the divine call. They are the sources in which he discovers the merciful love of God the Father.

In this way, the Christian following of the Saint means following in the footsteps of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Already in the primitive Franciscan Rule, we find these words: "The Rule and life of the Friars Minor is this, namely, to live in obedience, in chastity and without anything of their own and to follow the doctrine and example of our Lord Jesus Christ".

The ardent love for Christ was the source from which St Francis drew his great zeal to serve and imitate the Saviour, his zeal to follow him, and his zeal to seek out his brother, his neighbour. He understood that true discipleship implies the creation of fraternity, because only true Christian discipleship leads to the new fraternity of the sons and daughters of God, as a homily<sup>11</sup> by Pope Benedict XVI reminds us.

<sup>8</sup> GIOVANNI PAOLO II, UDIENZA GENERALE, mercoledì 6 settembre 2000.

[https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/es/audiences/2000/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_aud\\_20000906.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/es/audiences/2000/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_20000906.html).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. FELDER HILARINO, San Francisco y Cristo, en Idem, Los ideales de San Francisco de Asís. Buenos Aires, Ed. Desclée de Brouwer, 1948, pp. 41-60.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *1Cel* 21; *TC* 21-24.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. <https://es.zenit.org/2012/06/29/benedicto-xvi-solo-el-seguimiento-de-jesus-conduce-a-la-nueva-fraternidad/>

Being Christian means, as the Pope states, requires us to consider the way of Christ as the right way to be human, as the way that leads to the goal, of a fully realised and authentic humanity. Being a Christian is a journey, or rather, a pilgrimage, a walking with Jesus Christ, a walking in the direction He has indicated and is indicating to us.<sup>12</sup>

St Francis, with the gift of the stigmata, was struck by the same love of God according to his highest desire for imitation in all senses, as St Bonaventure emphasises: "Then the man full of God understood that, as he had imitated Christ in the deeds of his life, so must he be conformed to him in the sufferings and pains of the Passion, before he passed from this world.

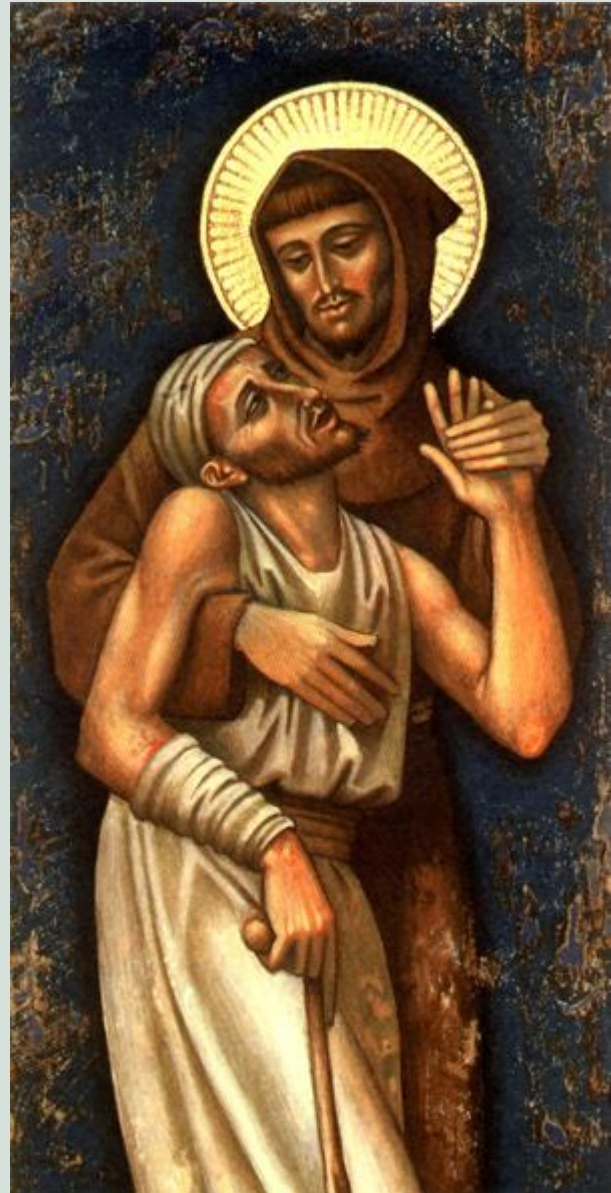
And although now that body of his, which had in the past borne so many austerities and unceasingly carried the cross of the Lord, no longer had any strength, he felt no fear, indeed he felt more vigorously animated to face martyrdom. The indomitable fire of love for the good Jesus erupted in him with flames and flames of charity so strong that the many waters could not extinguish them"<sup>13</sup>.

To be a Christian, to live the Christian life under the inspiration of the saint of Assisi, is to walk the path that Christ walked. The saint teaches us that following Jesus is not the imitation of some element of his life, but the total and full imitation of every aspect of his life.

## 2. Conformity to Christ

We might think that to be conformed is to follow but, as we tried to make clear in the previous paragraph, Christian following begins with conformity to Christ. There is no conformity to Christ if one does not follow him in everything and if, as a first step, one has not received his call.

As we know, the Christian life is a vocation, it is the response to an initiative of God. "One does not become Christian as a result of an ethical decision or a grand idea, but through an encounter with an event, with a Person, who gives a new horizon to life and, with it, a decisive orientation".<sup>14</sup> Christianity is not a morality, as Benedict XVI emphasises, it is an encounter with a Person: Jesus Christ.



<sup>12</sup> Cf. BENEDETTO XVI, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/es/homilies/2010/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20100328\\_palm-sunday.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/es/homilies/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20100328_palm-sunday.html)

<sup>13</sup> *LM* 13, 2.

<sup>14</sup> *Deus caritas est*, 1.

St Francis discovered Jesus Christ, St Francis sought him and found him, God spoke to him, and the Saint responded, he followed him and God moulded him along the way.

The stigmata are an expression of God's love for St Francis. The stigmata are an expression of God's intimate relationship with him, and it is God's response that he heard from Francis a 'Yes,' like that uttered by the Virgin Mary.

Our gaze must be fixed on God, as we have seen the Saint did in his life after responding to His call. Therefore, our Christian life as disciples of Christ is a call to live with Him and to cooperate with Him, to be recreated by God, configured in the likeness of His Son, Jesus Christ.

To be conformed to Christ is to allow oneself to be forged in God's love, it is to be converted to HIM, it is not to lose faith in the Risen One and in the fact that God can do everything and makes everything new. All this develops, little by little, along the path along which God invites us to walk, instructs us, and forms us, as he did with the disciples on the road to Emmaus (*Lk 24: 13-35*). As they walked, troubled by their doubts and tempted by discouragement, they heard the consoling words of Jesus. Christ made them realise how, on many occasions, his ways are not our ways. Therefore, it is necessary to live with a deep and radiant faith that leads us to lovingly accept God's will in our lives.



We must remember that the event of the stigmata does not occur in the middle of a 'happy' situation that the Saint is experiencing. He is experiencing situations that he does not understand, situations in which the Saint himself is confused. Faith itself comes into crisis because of negative experiences that lead us to feel abandoned by the Lord. But this path on which we walk can become, like that of Emmaus, the path to purification and maturation of our faith in God.

Conformation to Christ can even entail the same experiences our Lord Jesus Christ had on the cross (*Gal 2:20; 6:14 and 17*). St Francis is the crucified one, he is another Christ. Christ's sorrows were always before his eyes, filling them with unceasing tears. At every step, he could be heard sobbing and there was no consolation for him when he thought of Christ's wounds.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. *2Cel* 10-11; *TC* 14; *LM* 2,1.

To conform to Christ is to desire the desires of Jesus Christ himself. On the morning of 14 September 1224, the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross Francis was struggling with his crucified love, beseeched "O my Lord Jesus Christ, two graces I pray thee to grant me before I die: first, that in my life I may feel in my soul and body, as much as possible, that pain which thou, sweet Jesus, didst endure in the hour of thy most bitter passion; second, that I may feel in my heart, as much as possible, that excessive love with which you, Son of God, were kindled to willingly endure so much passion for us sinners".<sup>16</sup>

### **3. Challenges to the Franciscan Family arising from the wounds of St Francis of Assisi**

In this, the eighth centenary, the stigmata, as always, helps us to understand that every person, every Franciscan, every soul must imitate the Master, that is, follow and conform to the same Lord Jesus Christ.

In one way or another, the Franciscan is crucified with Christ, because of his commitment to love to the cross. The stigmata, even in these modern times, signifies being united with God in perfect love that is manifested in prayer, piety, and the practice of works of mercy. It is a place where God speaks and triggers an apostolate that bears witness to what God is capable of doing in every Franciscan.<sup>17</sup>

As Franciscans, the stigmata challenge us to live, believe, and hope differently. Respond, walk, and be willing to love as God loves us. Let us reflect on this statement starting from these four points:



#### **1. Responding to God**

The Franciscan vocation is a call from God. It is God who invites. It is a call that awaits a response every day. It is a call that invites one to choose God in every moment. In this world of laxity, where everything is allowed, where the motto is: I want this and I don't want that; and where freedom is confused, the Franciscan responds freely to

God's call by giving everything to Him.

Answering the call means desiring the same love of God that St Francis desired. Our vocation begins with the personal call that God addresses to us; he calls us by name. At the same time, he asks us for a response of generous and gratuitous love.

Today, following Jesus means identifying with Him as the Saint did. On this journey, we adopt his inner attitudes, assimilate his way of thinking, and aspire to his values. St Francis is a living example of this journey.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *1Cel* 35; *LM* 8.

<sup>17</sup> Who are you, my sweetest God, and who am I, vile worm and useless servant of yours? - said St Francis on Mount Alverna.

Responding to God means sharing his mission. Those who consecrate their lives to him implement his saving action through a myriad of services in today's world: proclaiming and anticipating the kingdom of God. Proclaiming Jesus Christ is the best service we can offer as a Franciscan fraternity.

The response is lived under the prompting of the Holy Spirit. The grace of the Spirit particularly inspires the following of Jesus in harmony with the Church and the inspiration of the saint.

## **2. Being visible signs**

The stigmata of St Francis of Assisi with its mystery constitute a sign that evokes an even more miraculous reality. They call to the mind of those who see and contemplate them something beyond, a transcendental reality.

Because of our human condition, we can only reach their miraculous nature through rational signs such as spoken language that express something for what they are or for the additional meaning that they invoke. These signs that St Francis wears on his body speak to us and communicate a profound reality.

As Franciscans we are living signs, signs of another reality, a supernatural reality, for instance, we are living signs of the fraternity that God creates. As Franciscans, we are signs, in the world and in everyday realities, signs that call to mind transcendental realities, realities of God's own merciful love, as we said before.

But are we credible signs or have we consumed the signs?

## **3. Nurturing my relationship with God, praying.**

St Francis had a special relationship with God. Mount La Verna showed the obvious need the saint had to pray. His intimate adherence to God was so strong and deep that everything in him was prayer: his work, his contact with his brothers, his apostolic pilgrimage, his coexistence and encounters with all creatures. He felt the need to enliven his prayer life with a retracted life, with a greater rigour of penance, and a superior radicality of recollection; with a greater fullness of prayer.<sup>18</sup>

As Franciscans, we have discovered that the unity between prayer and life, prayer and work, prayer and human coexistence, prayer and apostolate, and prayer and experience of the cosmos, must constitute an indestructible unity.

We must take care of our relationship with God through prayer which becomes the life of the soul. Discover the necessity of these times as St Francis did, as only in prayer do we find our brothers and sisters, creation, apostolate, and work in God; we find our complete fulfilment and promotion. Only in prayer can we subjectively realise our participation in the divine nature, our being 'in Christ'.

## **4. Love to the extreme, the cross**

The stigmata of St Francis of Assisi are the imprint of God's love. God's love for humanity. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (*Jn 3:16*).

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. KOSER CONSTANTINO, OFM., "La lección del monte Alverna", en *Selecciones de Franciscanismo*, vol. IV, n. 11 (1975) 141-153.

God's love to the end is also revealed in St Francis, in his wounds. God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him (*Jn* 3:17). Thus, God reminds us in St Francis how much he loves us and how much he desires us.

We could say that St Francis is a living reminder of the great love God has for us through his Son Jesus Christ. St Francis is once again love-made flesh for the world. God incarnates himself in every man and woman to remind them how much love he has for humanity.

As Franciscans, we are the incarnation, as St Francis was, of God's love in the world. An incarnation that passes through the cross and does not avoid it.

For St Francis, "living according to the Gospel" does not consist only of practising the apostolic prescriptions: going barefoot, having only one tunic, not carrying a purse, proclaiming the Good News, and offering one's cheek to those who slap us... It is all this, of course, but the essential is not the apostolic life, it is not even the common or fraternal life. It is living under the love of God through the Spirit that makes us follow the footsteps of Christ and leads us where we do not want to go (*Jn* 21:18), that is, to the Cross: "Offer your bodies and carry his holy cross" (*OFP* 7:8).<sup>19</sup>

The Franciscan Christian sequela leads to being configured with the Master to the point of being visible signs for today's world. "Whoever wishes to follow me, let him deny himself and take up his cross" (*Mt* 16:24).

Peace and good!

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. DE SCHAMPHELEER JEAN, OFM., *Selecciones de Franciscanismo*, Vol. XIV, núm. 42 (1985) 379-388].



## MEETINGS, PRESENCES AND CHAPTERS



### INDIA: National Elective Chapter

On January 13-15, 2024, the national fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) in India celebrated its 17<sup>th</sup> National Elective Chapter. The event was held at the retreat center at the Basilica Shrine of Our Lady of Good Health in Velankanni, Tamil Nadu State, India. The International Councillor for Asia and Oceania, Francis Byong Ju Park, serving as the Delegate of the OFS Minister General, Tibor Kauser, presided over the Chapter. Fr. Ștefan Acatrinei, OFMConv., was present as a representative of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS).

The national OFS fraternity of India currently numbers approximately fourteen thousand members. It is made up of one hundred and two established regional fraternities and seven emerging fraternities, divided into six areas:

1. Kerala, Latin Rite
2. Kerala, Syro-Malabar Rite
3. Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry
4. Karnataka
5. Goa
6. Jharkhand

At 4:30 p.m., Saturday, January 13, all the Capitulars gathered in front of the statue of St. Francis of Assisi, located near the Shrine, and marched in procession towards the Chapter Hall, where, at 4:45 p.m., Fr. Charles Rayappan, OFMCap., the National Spiritual Assistant, opened the Chapter with prayer. After the initial greeting from the National Minister, Mass was celebrated at 6:00 p.m. with the Minister Provincial, Fr. Lawrence Susainathan, OFMCap., presiding. The concelebrants included the representative of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants and the three National Spiritual Assistants present, Fr. Charles Rayappan, OFMCap., Fr. James Chooramana Devassykutty, OFMConv., and Fr. Eugene Ambrose, OFM. After the Mass, the Chapter continued with the presentation of various reports.

At 6:00 a.m., the program on Sunday began with Morning Prayer and meditation, followed by scheduled sessions. Fr. Samy Irudaya, OFMCap, former general spiritual assistant of the OFS, presented the conference “Franciscan servant Leadership in family and social life in the modern world” at 10:45 a.m., which was also the theme of the chapter. In the afternoon, the Capitulars elected Oliver Fernando as the National Minister for his third consecutive mandate. They also elected the members of the National Council. According to the National Statutes the National Minister is also the International Councillor. At 7:00 p.m., Mass was celebrated, presided over by Fr. Ștefan Acatrinei, with the National Spiritual Assistants concelebrating. During the Mass, the new National Council was installed. At 9:00 p.m., the Trichy regional fraternity presented an artistic program.

The Chapter concluded on Monday, January 15, with Mass at noon presided over by Fr. Ștefan Acatrinei and concelebrated by the Spiritual Assistants. Ninety-one Capitulars and eight observers took part in the Chapter, which was conducted in a serene and fraternal atmosphere.

### **BAHRAIN: National Elective Chapter**

On 13 January 2024, in the Sacred Heart Church Parish in Manama, Bahrain, the first elective chapter was celebrated by the local Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS), after its canonical erection a few months earlier. The chapter was presided over by Michel Janian, OFS, (former International Councillor of the CIOFS Presidency), delegate of the Minister General Tibor Kauser, OFS, and witnessed by Fr. Marcus Fernandes, OFM<sup>Cap.</sup>, delegate of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS).

The OFS's presence in Bahrain is new and is bearing its first fruits. It is worth pointing out that the majority of members are foreign brothers and sisters (from India and the Philippines), who are there for work purposes. The National minister and council were installed during the celebration of the closing Holy Mass and Sonia Maria made her profession in the SFO. Sonia was born in Bahrain, but lives and works in Kuwait.

The chapter took place in a serene and fraternal atmosphere, with the presence of the local spiritual assistant and other Capuchin friars. The capitulars elected Prakas M. A. Corda as local minister and the members of the new council. According to National Statutes, the minister is also the international councillor. The chapter ended with a Eucharistic celebration presided over by Fr. Marcus Fernandes and concelebrated by the local spiritual assistant. The new council was also installed during the same celebration.

### **KOREA: National Elective Chapter**

The National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of South Korea is one of the largest fraternities within that Order. It has 13,642 members spread throughout fourteen regional fraternities and one hundred and forty local fraternities. Each local fraternity has between forty and one hundred members. In the capital city of Seoul, there are three regional fraternities that rotate management of a soup kitchen for the poor. The kitchen provides two hundred meals a day, five days a week. To help overcome any feelings of shame, the poor can pay one cent for each meal.

On January 26-28, 2024, the OFS National Fraternity of South Korea conducted its 19th National Elective Chapter. The event took place at the Conventual Franciscan Retreat Centre in Seoul. After the introduction of delegates and guests, the National Minister greeted all present and opened the Chapter at 2:00 p.m. with prayer. The Provincial Custos, Fr. Stephano Kim, OFM<sup>Cap.</sup>, presided over the opening Mass. Then, various reports were presented, as well as a lecture by the Delegate of the OFS Minister General, Tibor Kauser, Dina Shabalina, who presided over the Chapter.

The second day began with Mass at 6:30 a.m. The work of the Chapter resumed at 9:00 a.m. Fr. Stefan Acatrinei OFM<sup>Conv.</sup>, representative of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS) was present to witness the chapter. He gave a lecture on the theme: "Evangelical Life: Let's Start Over." During the afternoon session, Sung-Kun HONG was re-elected to his second term as National Minister, while Soon Chun Maria KANG was elected International Counsellor. The day ended with a beautiful fraternal evening.

On the third day, the work of the Chapter continued as it had, in a serene and fraternal atmosphere. The Chapter's work concluded that day with the installation of the new National Council, which took place during Mass at 2:00 p.m., presided over by the Minister Provincial, Fr. Marco Jin Chol JEONG, OFMConv.

The Chapter was truly well prepared and celebrated in a positive manner. It was enjoyed by all eighty Capitulars and seven observers, and included moments of intense prayer.

### **RHODES, GREECE: National Elective Chapter**

The local fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of Rhodes was canonically erected on 26 February 1899, at the convent church of the Friars Minor, with the title of St. Mary of Victory in Rhodes. From the ancient fraternity, there is still one sister left, who keeps the charismatic flame alive and summarises the fraternal life.

Thus, after many years of almost inactivity caused by various historical and existential facts, the seventeenth of February marked the official re-launch of the aforementioned OFS fraternity, now with the title, Our Lady of Victory, with its headquarters in the friary of the Friars Minor, Street 45 Kathopoúli, in the city of Rhodes, Greece.

The acts that marked the activation of the OFS presence are:

- the admission to the SFO of two new members (Robert and Etienne)
- the perpetual profession of six sisters
- the reading of the decree for the reactivation of the above-mentioned fraternity and the celebration of the elective chapter. All these acts are authenticated by decision No. 2311-49 of the CIOFS Presidency, and all other documents signed on this day.

The Holy Mass of profession was presided by the local assistant, Fr John Lucke Gregory, OFM, concelebrated by Fr Joseph, OFM, and by Fr Tomas Ginga Panzo Suva, OFMCap., as representative of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS). The rite of admission and profession was performed/received by Noemi Paola Ricardi, OFS, councillor of the CIOFS Presidency and of the Southern Europe and Mediterranean area, delegate of the General Minister, OFS, Tibor Kausar.

On the same day, February 17, at 2:35 p.m., the chapter assembly of seven people gathered for the elective chapter to elect the local council for the next three years. Thus, four members were elected, and the Minister is Sister Angela Phillipou.

The three ceremonies were lived, feasted, and celebrated in an atmosphere of fraternity, prayer, and Franciscan joy. The chapter concluded with the official inauguration of the new local council by the delegate of the General Minister, Noemi Fr. Ricardi, and witnessed by the local and general spiritual assistants, Fr. Jonh Lucke and Fr. Tomas Ginga.

At the end, Fr. Tomas Ginga concluded with a final prayer and thanked the work done by Fr. John Lucke, OFM. Despite being the only Catholic priest in that peninsula, where Catholics are a minority, Fr. John nevertheless leads and animates with strong witness faith in Christ and love of neighbour, with works of visible charity; especially in assisting refugees and displaced persons, with the active and dedicated collaboration of OFS members.

### **FRENCH-SPEAKING SWITZERLAND: Regional Elective Chapter**

The Regional Chapter of French-speaking Switzerland was held on February 23 and 24, in the town of St. Maurice, about 120 kilometres from Geneva.

The 21 capitular brothers and sisters gathered in the retreat house of a Franciscan association working with the Capuchin friars.

On Friday, Feb 23, a meeting was held with the outgoing Regional Council. The experiences of the service in the Council were shared and the needs and strengths of the fraternities in the French-speaking region of the country were discussed. Furthermore, the progress made regarding the collaboration with the other two regions of the country, the Italian and the German-speaking regions, was also discussed.

On Saturday, Feb 24, the Chapter began with the prayer of Lauds and a fraternal breakfast. Fr. Carlos Ginés, TOR, General Spiritual Assistant, on behalf of the General Conference of Spiritual Assistants (CAS), opened the meeting with a reflection on trust and faith in God and fraternity.

After the reading of the report on the service of the outgoing Regional Minister, Gérard Corpataux, and of other reports, the President of the Chapter, Noemi Paola Ricardi, OFS, delegated by the Minister General, Tibor Kauser, OFS, gave suggestions for the procedure of the elections. Marco Zocchi, OFS, was elected as the new Regional Minister.

The chapter celebration concluded with the Eucharist at which the new Regional Council of French-speaking Switzerland was installed.

### **LATAKIA, Syria: National Elective Chapter**

The Chapter of the local fraternity of Latakia, Syria was held at the friary of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Latakia on 24 February 2024. The delegates for this Chapter were: Fr. Michael Jeanya, as delegate of the OFS General Minister, Tibor Kauser and Fr. Abdallah Noufeily, OFMCap, as delegate of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS).

The Fraternity is made up of 38 members, of whom 26 are perpetually professed and 12 are temporary professed. Thirty-five of the 38 voting members were present at the chapter. The chapter elected Maha Younis as Minister.

YouFra is present with about 60 members, but it is necessary to organise the group by forming and electing a local council to set up the life of a normal YouFra fraternity. YouFra needs to be both accompanied and assisted by OFS. Only in this way will the young people be followed and accompanied in their process of growth.

### **BULGARIA: National Elective Chapter**

The elective Chapter of the small OFS Fraternity of Bulgaria was held from 8 to 10 March, in the presence of the International Councillor, Noemi Paola Ricardi, delegate of the OFS General Minister, and in the presence of the General Spiritual Assistant, Fr. Carlos Ginés, TOR, in the name of the General Conference of Spiritual Assistants.

The elective Chapter was held in the facilities of the parish of the Capuchin Friars in the city of Sofia. After the reflections of the General Assistant and the Delegate of the OFS Minister General, the elections began. Mariana Mineva, OFS was elected as National Minister.

Fr. Daniel Kowalewski, OFMCap, Spiritual Assistant of the Fraternity, presided at the Eucharist at which two new sisters were professed. The Chapter concluded with a great festive lunch.

The Chapter was also a good opportunity to visit and animate two OFS fraternities in the cities of Zhytnica and Karkovki, more than 150 km away from the capital. The first, due to the communist period, has been drastically reduced and aged. The second is a new and young emerging fraternity led by the Franciscan Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.