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KOINONIA

... together on the journey

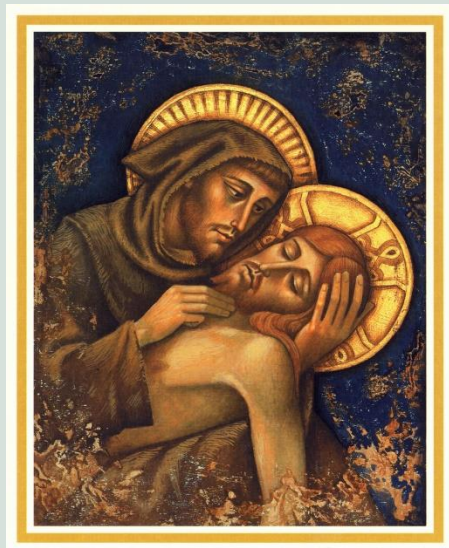
“Jubilees that reinvigorate our Franciscan being: Stigmata”



The Stigmata as a gift of consecration

Fr. Stefan Acatrinei, OFMConv

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



Francis was undoubtedly a seeker of God, and thanks to his tireless perseverance and dedication, he experienced His presence in many ways and places. To remind us of some of them, we need only mention the little church of San Damiano¹, his encounter with the leper², his reading and meditation on the Gospel³, his moments of prayer⁴, and his dreams⁵. However, the encounter that left visible and indelible marks in his body, “the last seal”, as Dante calls them⁶, i.e. the stigmata⁷, took place “two years before his death, while he was praying on a slope of the mountain called Alverna”⁸.

The unique, never-before-heard experience of St. Francis, the Stigmata, was further painted by various artists. The paintings are striking in their beauty. The viewer of these paintings can easily overlook the cruel reality of suffering and see only Francis entering into a dimension where beauty and admiration predominate, serenity and joy are generated. Viewers can easily be caught up by Francis’ emotions of “lively joy and superabundant gladness” caused by the “beautiful and sweet gaze” of the Seraphim, on the Verna. On the other hand, his biographers tell us that Francis saw Christ “confined on the cross in the bitter pain of the passion (...) joy and bitterness alternated in his spirit”⁹. With that event, which generated mixed emotions, Francis reached a new stage in his life, which made him more like Christ.

Let us, therefore, try to accompany Francis on his “journey” to La Verna. We must remember that stigmatization is Francis’s point of arrival as if it were the conclusion of a long journey, he undertook many years ago, precisely with his conversion. It was a journey, no doubt, like any journey: with its ups and downs, with its joys and sorrows, with expectations, disappointments, and many challenges.

So, let us, too, embark on the journey (at least with the help of our intellect). By imagining ourselves to be Francis’ companions, hoping to understand his journey better and find some proper answers, at least, to some “whys?” such as: Why the stigmata? Why on La Verna?

1. Inner transformation as a prerequisite for visible gift.

To find the right answers to the mentioned questions, we cannot ignore Thomas of Celano. According to Thomas of Celano, the reasons for Francis’ stigmata are already present in the account of his conversion. “(...) he was walking one day by the church of San Damiano, which was abandoned by everyone and almost in ruins. Led by the Spirit, he went in to pray and knelt devoutly before the crucifix. He was shaken by unusual experiences and discovered that he was different from when he had entered (...). From that time on, compassion for the Crucified was

¹ Cf. *2Cel* 10: FF 593; *LM* II 1: FF 1038; *3Comp* 13: FF 1410.

² Cf. *2Cel* 9: FF 592.

³ Cf. *1Cel* 22: FF 356.

⁴ Cf. *Chronicles and Other Testimonies* XII: FF 2692.

⁵ Cf. *Chronicles and Other Testimonies* XIX: FF 2706/10.

⁶ Cf. *Paradise, Canto XI*, v.107: FF 2110.

⁷ Cf. *1Cel* 94: FF 484; *LM* XIII 3: FF 1225; *3Cel* 4: FF 89; *3Comp* 69: FF 1483; *AP* 46: FF 1541; *Lm* VI,1.2: FF 1375.

⁸ *3Comp* 69: FF 1483.

⁹ *1Cel* 94: FF 484.

impressed into his holy soul. And we honestly believe the wounds of the sacred Passion were impressed deep in his heart, though not yet on his flesh”¹⁰.

According to his biographers, Francis’ encounter with the crucifix at San Damiano was of fundamental importance¹¹. It was there that Francis had the decisive inspiration for his life, and Clare contemplated it throughout her



life, making it her mirror. Through the crucifix of San Damiano, Francis understood that the fate of Christ made obedient unto death would also become the fate of all those following Him, obedient servants, like Him, to the will of the Father. This is why “from that moment, the memory of the crucifix, the idea of love triumphing by sacrificing itself, became the centre of his religious life, the soul of his soul”¹². The crucifix of San Damiano becomes the most critical and reliable witness of Poverello’s entire spiritual journey, and it becomes the model and goal of his interior adventure: to arrive at the risen and glorious life with Christ through the path of the cross. Francis understands that the glorious crucifix must also be for him “the way, the truth, and the life” (*Jn 14:6*)¹³. He understands that it is only through immolation and death that one can reach the triumph of true love and the resurrected life with Christ; he understands that the path of the cross does not end in pain but in resurrection and that the cross is the obligatory route to get there. Thus, “the forms of this icon then marked his memory for the rest of his days”¹⁴, and divine grace transformed his heart, and he became compassionate towards the suffering humanity to the point of emerging in it to elevate it.

With his description, Thomas of Celano introduces the same emotions and feelings that accompanied Francis on La Verna at the moment of his encounter with the Seraphim, and the inner transformation becomes the framework for introducing the theme of stigmatization during the period of conversion. This image is a clear Christocentric reading of Francis’ entire life and an indication of the spirituality of the Passion as one of the fundamental elements of his charism and future fraternity. The cross, therefore, is not only a symbol of the Passion but also a symbol of life and a means to get there. These two realities mirrored in the crucifix of San Damiano, where Christ accepted to die on the cross, stripping himself of all his divine prerogatives, as a sign of his greatest love so that the human being might have life, thus manifesting in the cross not only his total kenosis but also his greatest love for humanity. What

¹⁰ *2Cel 10: FF 249*.

¹¹ Cf. *3Comp 13-14: FF 1411-1412; 3Cel 2: FF 826*.

¹² P. SABATIER, *Vita di san Francesco d'Assisi*, Milano 1988, 98.

¹³ Cf. *Am I 1: FF 141*.

¹⁴ D. GAGNAN, *Office de la Passion, prière quotidienne de saint François d'Assise*, Ant 55 (1980) 53.



impressed Francis most was not so much the fact of the crucifixion itself but its meaning, the extent of that fact: God's love for humanity. The Passion of Christ, therefore, became, for Francis, the highest expression and sign of God's greatest love for humanity.

2. The wonderful power of the act of consecration

The search for meaning, which brought Francis to the little church of San Damiano, bore fruit thanks to Christ Crucified. His newfound meaning made him shift the centre of gravity of his existence from himself to others. It is, in fact, a shift from egocentrism to interpersonal decentralization, in which the Crucified One occupies the centre of identity. This shift requires an ecstatic life lived outside oneself, inside the other. Following such a person means abandoning oneself as the focal point of one's existence to transfer one's existence beyond oneself into the subjectivity of another, who reveals himself as the totality of life because he is the Son of the eternal Father. From then on, St. Francis began to live the Gospel by meditating on the cross, as testified to by St. Bonaventure, who closes his biography by summarizing the centrality of the cross in the life of

the founder: “For the cross of Christ, both offered to and taken on by you at the beginning of your conversion and carried continuously from that moment throughout the course of your most proven life and giving example to others, shows with such clarity of certitude that you have finally reached the summit of Gospel perfect”¹⁵.

St. Bonaventure, as well as Thomas of Celano, associates the beginning of Francis' conversion with the cross, which always accompanied him on all the paths of his life. Francis took it up and, by incarnating it in himself “through conduct worthy of all praise” it became his reliable and inseparable companion. Not only did it never let him down, not even in the

¹⁵ *LM XIII 10: FF 1263.*

most challenging moments, but these were precisely the opportunities that strengthened their mutual bond.

Considering Francis' early embodiment of the cross of Christ, one might wonder: Why did he venture to La Verna? Was it to have the marks of the cross etched onto his body? And if so, was this journey truly essential?

While the information from his biographers agrees to link the cross to the beginning of Francis' conversion, the motivations for his going up to La Verna differ. While the Assisi Compilation says that Francis wanted "to do a Lent in honour of Saint Michael"¹⁶, St Bonaventure puts it all down to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who led him there: "Therefore, two years before he returned his spirit to heaven, after a variety of many labours, he was led by divine providence to a high place apart called Mount La Verna"¹⁷. On the other hand, the author of *The Anonymous of Perugia*, without alluding to any reason for his presence on Mount Verna, presents the stigmata as a sign of the Lord's love for Francis: "Wanting to show the love He had for him,

the Lord impressed on his members and his side the stigmata of His most beloved Son"¹⁸.

There is no doubt that Francis, during his life, received innumerable gifts, both



spiritual¹⁹ and material²⁰ and for any of them he thanked the Lord, as was indeed his custom: "Let us refer all good to the Lord, God Almighty and Most High, acknowledge that every good is His, and thank Him, from Whom all good comes, for everything"²¹.

The motivation for Francis' ascent to La Verna, offered to us by the author of *The Holy Stigmata of St. Francis and their Considerations*, is very significant. It is truly a confirmation of Francis' practice of returning the gift by thanking the Lord and it opens a new ground for reflection since a new term, "consecrate", is used: "consecrate that blessed mountain"²².

Without claiming to enter into very thorough research, we would like to briefly mention the unique perspectives that St Francis and his biographers bring to the term "consecrate", in order to better grasp its meaning. The term "consecrate" occurs five times in the Writings. Francis himself uses it on a few occasions, but with different nuances, speaking of the Lent that

¹⁶ *CAss* 118: *FF* 1672.

¹⁷ *LM XIII* 1: *FF* 1223.

¹⁸ *AP* 46: *FF* 1541.

¹⁹ Cf. *LM VII* 1: *FF* 1117; *Test* 14: *FF* 116; *1Cel* 24: *FF* 361; *2Cel* 10: *FF* 594, etc.

²⁰ Cf. *3Comp* 56: *FF* 1465; *2Cel* 170: *FF* 756; *1Cel* 57: *FF* 422; *LM IX* 8: *FF* 1174-75; *FiorCons*: *FF* 1898.

²¹ *ER XVII* 17: *FF* 49.

²² *FiorCons*: *FF* 1899.

was consecrated by the Lord with his fasting²³, of the Blessed Virgin Mary, whom the heavenly Father consecrated²⁴, of the consecrated bread on the altar²⁵, and of the words that consecrate the bread on the altar²⁶.

Biographers, on the other hand, use the word “consecrate” and the other terms derived from it much more often and in more varied circumstances, in reference to Saint Francis²⁷, to his feast²⁸, to his body²⁹, to his grave³⁰, to the priest’s hands³¹, to places and objects³², to fasting³³, to the brothers and to the Order³⁴, to St Clare and the sisters from San Damiano³⁵.

It can easily be noted that Francis, in his *Writings*, never uses the term “consecrate” in reference to a place. On the other hand, although his biographers use this term in various circumstances, never mention it in the way the author of the *Considerations on the Stigmata* does. Only here does Francis clearly express his noble intention to “consecrate that mountain”³⁶.

Francis then took some brothers with him and set off to “consecrate that mountain”. We can, therefore, state with all certainty that Francis went to La Verna to 'consecrate' what he had received as a gift and not to receive the stigmata. God could have infused the stigmata into his body anywhere else. The stigmata are, without doubt, marvellous and extraordinary signs of the Lord’s love for Francis³⁷. However, it seems legitimate to see them in connection with his willingness to “consecrate” the gift he received and because of carrying out this action, i.e., having undertaken the journey that led him to La Verna for this very reason.

This opens an immense horizon for our reflection. The event of the stigmatization in Francis’ spiritual journey presents itself as a point of arrival, indeed as a crowning of the journey already made. Just as Jesus, on the eve of completing his work, thanks God the Father (cf. *Jn* 17), so too Francis, having almost finished his journey of Christification, thanks God by consecrating “the gift” received. But what gift? All that comes from God was a source of glory for him since he perceived it as a gift: “So this is the only reason for boasting: if we return to the Lord the glory that is his, if we serve him faithfully, and credit Him for what he has given us”³⁸. Would it be permissible to limit ourselves only to the gift of the mountain, of life, of vocation, of brothers, of one's sufferings³⁹, or of the most delicate moments of his life⁴⁰? This challenging question is spiritually justified. Therefore, choosing the answer that is able to bring with it greater spiritual profit, is up to each of us.

Does not the expression “consecrate the gift” embody the consecration of all the gifts of his life? For such an intention, the Lord responds to him with the reward of the stigmata. We

²³ Cf. *LR* III 6: *FF* 86.

²⁴ Cf. *SBVM* 1-3: *FF* 259.

²⁵ Cf. *Am* I 19: *FF* 144.

²⁶ Cf. *1Lch* 2, *2Lch* 2: *FF* 207/a, 207; *1Cust* 2: *FF* 241.

²⁷ Cf. *Lm* III, IV: *FF* 1351; *AP* 46: *FF* 1541.

²⁸ Cf. *3Cel* 107: *FF* 928; *3Cel* 112: *FF* 933.

²⁹ Cf. *LM* XV 8: *FF* 1254.

³⁰ Cf. *1Cel* 126: *FF* 542.

³¹ Cf. *1Cel* 9: *FF* 335; *2Cel* 201: *FF* 791; *Fior* 53: *FF* 1896.

³² Cf. *1Cel* 87: *FF* 471; *LM* III 6: *FF* 1276.

³³ Cf. *Clar*: *FF* 2180.

³⁴ Cf. *3Comp* 55: *FF* 1464; *Salimbene* 18: *FF* 2598.

³⁵ Cf. *LM* XII 2: *FF* 1205; *1Cel* 20: *FF* 353; *2Cel* 13: *FF* 599.

³⁶ *FiorCons*: *FF* 1899.

³⁷ Cf. *3Cel* 11: *FF* 835; *3Cel* 11: *FF* 835.

³⁸ *LM* VI 3: *FF* 1105.

³⁹ Cf. *1Cel* 107: *FF* 504.

⁴⁰ Cf. *TPJ* 8-15: *FF* 278; *Giano* 14: *FF* 2337.

are, therefore, invited to contemplate the stigmata as a gift and even because of the consecration. Francis is also physically bound to the passion of Christ's crucifixion thanks to his fidelity and determination to accept everything as a pure gift, never ceasing to thank God for each of them and return them one by one to Him. Just as on the altar, through the hands of the priest, the gifts of bread and wine become the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ⁴¹, so on Mount La Verna, Francis, because of his determination "to consecrate the gift", is transformed "into His image"⁴² and appears "in certain things like another Christ given to the world for the people's salvation"⁴³.

As the event occurred "two years prior to the time that he returned his spirit to heaven"⁴⁴, we know that Francis was weak and infirm by then⁴⁵. Despite his now precarious physical condition, the Lord, with the impression of the stigmata, inflicts other pains in his body⁴⁶. How is it possible, we are prompted to ask, that the Lord adds pain to pain as a reward?

It is difficult to understand God's logic, but Francis' immense love for Christ does not stumble in pain but rather, it becomes a "unique gift, a sign of special love"⁴⁷. It was he who asked for it: "that he would grant me in my life that I might feel in my soul and in my body, as much as possible, all that pain which he felt in himself at the time of his most bitter passion (...) that I might likewise feel in my heart that excessive love with which he was inflamed to sustain such passion for us sinners"⁴⁸.

Francis's wonderful example invites us not to hesitate to consecrate the gifts the Lord bestows us daily, the pleasant and the unpleasant. Thomas of Celano, noted that the reception of the stigmata filled Francis with longing to serve lepers for the few years that remained⁴⁹.

Can I accept everything I experience daily, everything that happens to me, as a pure gift from God? What emotions are stirred in me by perceiving God's gifts in my brothers and sisters? Do I savour, at times, the sweetness of the cross? Do I try to enter its mystique to warm myself with the warmth of this boundless love?

Peace and good!

⁴¹ Cf *Am* I 18: *FF* 144.

⁴² *LM* 13 V: *FF* 1228.

⁴³ *Fior* VII: *FF* 1835.

⁴⁴ *3Cel* 14: *FF* 829.

⁴⁵ Cf. *CAss* 72: *FF* 1600; *Lm* V, III: *FF* 1368; *SpecP* 115: *FF* 1815.

⁴⁶ Cf. *3Cel* 4: *FF* 829.

⁴⁷ *1Cel* 114: *FF* 519.

⁴⁸ *FiorCons* V: *FF* 1954.

⁴⁹ Cf. *1Cel* 103: *FF* 500.



MEETINGS, PRESENCES AND CHAPTERS

CZECH REPUBLIC - National Elective Chapter

The National Elective Chapter of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of the Czech Republic was celebrated from 13 to 15 September 2024.

Despite the bad weather that hit the entire Czech Republic in September, with various floods throughout the territory, the event was celebrated. Unfortunately, due to these floods, some chapter members cancelled their participation in the elective chapter; they were unable to attend it. However, despite this undesirable situation, 66 capitulars, out of the 89 originally planned, were present.

The OFS brothers and sisters wanted to show the importance and profound significance of the chapter in the life of an OFS fraternity. This is not to give more credit to those present versus those who could not be there, but it does confirm the importance of the chapter in the life of an OFS fraternity at all levels. The OFS national fraternity of the Czech Republic is notable for one detail, namely that it has no regional fraternity.

At the chapter was present also the OFS National Minister of the Slovak Republic, who came as a guest of honour.

The elective session was presided over by Sister Dina Shabalina, international councillor of the OFS Presidency, delegate of the OFS General Minister Tibor KAUSER. The chapter was witnessed by Fr. František KROCZEK, OFMCap., delegate of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS).

Vendelin HAJEK was reelected National Minister and Markéta KUBESOVA as International Councillor. The elections were conducted peacefully. It was a time of celebration and renewal of Franciscan joy and gladness.

CAPE VERDE - National Elective Chapter

The 3rd National Elective Chapter of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of Cape Verde was held from 23 to 24 September 2024 in the city of Praia, Santiago (Cape Verde), at the friary of the Friars Minor Capuchins. About twenty-five capitulars were present, of whom eleven had voting rights, the others were guests and members of the local fraternity of Praia.

The chapter was held smoothly, and the first part was presided over by National Vice Minister Adilson de Pina, since the national minister in charge has been abroad for some time.

The elective session was held on August 24 and was presided over by Eremenciana CHINYAMA, Councillor of the area and delegate of the OFS General Minister, Tibor KAUSER. Fr Odair GONÇALVES, OFMCap., councillor of the Provincial Custody of the

Capuchins of Cape Verde was the witness as delegate of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS). The national spiritual assistant, Fr José GARCIA, OFM^{Cap.}, presented the theme: 'From the wounds to the light of Francis'. National YouFra president Elida de PINA was also present.

Adilson de PINA was elected national minister and international Councillor. Dalva CORREIA was elected as substitute councillor. The other members of the current national council were elected on the same day as well.

The newly elected National Council was confirmed by the International Councillor of the CIOFS Presidency, Eremeciana CHINYAMA. Fr. Odair GONÇALVES, OFM^{Cap.}, presided the Mass in the afternoon and the new Council was installed.

CAMEROON - National Elective Chapter

The national fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of Cameroon celebrated its national elective chapter, from 03 to 05 October 2024, in the Emmanuel Community's House of Spirituality in Melong.

The activities of the Chapter began on the afternoon of the same day, 03 October, with the celebration of the Transitus of St Francis. There were present not only the OFS Chapter members, but also the Emmanuel community, which welcomed them. The 36 capitulars were led by the national spiritual assistant, Fr Theophile SEKA, OFM^{Cap.}, who presented the theme 'Secular Franciscans at the crossroads of the Franciscan charism and other spiritualities'. Then, the area councillor Adolph Atsu ASSAGBA spoke on 'leadership in the service of the brothers and sisters.'

Adolph Atsu ASSAGBA, area councillor and member of the CIOFS presidency, presided over the elective session of the chapter as delegate of OFS General Minister Tibor KAUSER. Fr. Cedric Verbe KOHYEN, OFM^{Cap.}, witnessed the election as delegate of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS). The twenty-three (23) chapter members with voting rights, elected Guillaum MBARGA as National Minister and International Councillor. He is assuming the two offices, as established by the national statutes. The election was confirmed by the delegate of the OFS General Minister. The installation of the newly elected council took place during the closing Eucharistic celebration.

The chapter was celebrated and lived in an atmosphere of joy, fraternity and festivity for all in the spirit of the seraphic Father Saint Francis.

DOHA- Profession, Canonical Erection and Chapter

From 18 to 20 October 2024, at Our Lady of the Rosary Catholic Church in Doha, Qatar, the emerging local fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of Qatar gathered together with the entire parish community to celebrate the first profession in the Order of 7 brothers and sisters. Their profession, accepted by the OFS General Minister, Tibor KAUSER, OFS, took place during a Eucharistic celebration which was presided over by the General Spiritual

Assistant of the OFS and Franciscan Youth, Fr. Pedro ZITHA, OFM, who represented the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS).

Tibor KAUSER, General Minister OFS, received their profession during the Eucharistic celebration. The Mass was presided over by Fr. Pedro ZITHA, OFM, the General Spiritual Assistant of the OFS and Franciscan Youth, who represented the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS), and concelebrated by the local Spiritual Assistant, Fr Stephen Francis KACHAPPILLU, OFM Cap.

At the end of the rite of profession, Fr Stephen OFM Cap, read the decree of Canonical erection of the new local fraternity of Doha to the whole assembly. The decree of canonical erection was issued by the Custos of the Capuchins in Arabia, Fr Michael FERNANDES, OFM Cap. The Custos, unfortunately, could not be present at the celebration because of other commitments he had previously made, which could not be waived.

In addition to the decree of erection, Fr. Michael sent an e-mail to thank the OFS Minister General, Tibor KAUSER, and to encourage us to work together for the glory of God, witnessing our Franciscan spirituality to the world.

After the Mass, the newly professed gathered in a hall and celebrated the First Elective Chapter of the fraternity. The first council of the fraternity was elected, and Jovy E. ABEJUELA is its first Minister. The council will remain in office for the next three years.

This first day of work ended with a fraternal agape defined as 'bring and share' because all the newly professed, the OFS candidates and members of their families brought food to share fraternally. It was a moment of great joy that concluded the three important events of the day with a feast.

Part of the following day was dedicated to the ongoing formation of the fraternity and was attended by both members of the newly elected local council and other members of the fraternity.

Subsequently, the General Minister and the CAS representative had a meeting with a group of young people who aspire to establish a YouFra fraternity in Qatar. It was a moment of listening and sharing, during which the young people were given indications on how to continue the journey and how to create the necessary structures for the fraternity to live in accordance with the spirit of the Order.

In conclusion, the celebration in Qatar was well planned and organised. So, the CIOFS congratulates the organisers and thanks all the members of the OFS and the Capuchin friars of Qatar who have contributed a great deal to the spiritual growth of the OFS in Qatar and in all the Gulf countries during these years. The success of the events experienced during these days is entirely theirs.

GERMANY – National Elective Chapter

On October 11-13, 2024, the elective Chapter of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of Germany was celebrated at the beautiful Conventual Franciscan friary in Schwarzenberg, Germany. The OFS national fraternity of Germany is divided into six regions and has about 1,500 members, half of whom are in Bavaria.

On Friday, October 11, at 7:00 p.m., the Capitulars enjoyed a concert in the friary church entitled “*Franziskus Vir Catholicus.*” It was performed by the *Choralschola* of Graz (Austria), under the direction of Franz Karl PRAË. Afterwards, the outgoing National Council and the Minister Provincial of the Province of St. Elizabeth in Germany, Fr Andreas MURK, offered official greetings.

On Saturday, October 12, the Chapter began with Mass and Morning Prayer. The morning session was dedicated to reports from the National Minister and the National Treasurer. Discussions about both reports followed.

Noemi Paola RICARDI presided over the elective Chapter. She is a member of the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order (CIOFS) and the Delegate of the OFS Minister General, Tibor KAUSER. Fr Ștefan ACATRINEI, OFMConv., represented the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants. Ursula CLEMM was re-elected as National Minister. Twenty-two Capitulars and ten auditors were present. Noemi and Fr Ștefan met with the new National Council at 8:00 p.m., for a fraternal discussion and to offer recommendations. On Sunday, October 13, the new National Council was installed during Mass at 9:00 a.m. in the beautiful church of the Schwarzenberg friary. Fr Andreas MURK, provincial minister OFMConv., presided the Eucharistic celebration. At 10:30 a.m., the work of the Chapter resumed, and the Capitulars voted on priorities for the new three-year term.

The Chapter concluded with lunch. After working for three days in the Franciscan spirit, the Capitulars departed the beautiful friary in Schwarzenberg.

SRI LANKA - National Elective Chapter

The Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of Sri Lanka celebrated its National Elective Chapter from 25 to 27 October. The Chapter was hosted by the TOR Provincial Curia in Bolawalana. On the 25th, the OFS General Vice-Minister, Mary STRONACH, delegate of the Minister General Tibor KAUSER, and Fr. Pedro ZITHA, OFM, representative of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS), had a meeting with the Major Superiors of the First Order, namely, Fr. Hippolytus BENEDICT, OFM, Fr. Frolic FERNANDES, OFMCap, and Fr. Roshan Wasantha PERERA, TOR. Fr. Sebastian Pillai THOBIAS, CMSF (Congregation of the Missionaries of St. Francis) is also a member of the conference of Major Superiors who assist the OFS spiritually, and therefore participated in the meeting, since the congregation he heads has canonically erected several local fraternities.

The following day began with a speech by the TOR Minister Provincial, Fr. Roshan Wasantha PERERA. Addressing the brothers and sisters of the OFS, he reminded them of the need to listen to the invitation of Jesus ‘be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect’ in order to be able to bear witness to this holiness in every aspect of life. This was followed by the report of the outgoing National Council. After a break, the list of candidates was presented to the capitulars, along with the proposal to add new positions within the Council in order to promote the Order's unity in the country, which is currently experiencing a situation of linguistic and political division. This session was followed by discussions in small working groups on the proposals, which ended with an assembly session for sharing. Subsequently Fr. Pedro ZITHA, OFM, presented a reflection on the ‘need for constant discernment in the OFS’. This was followed by the Holy Mass that marked the official opening of the Elective Chapter.

The following morning, which opened the elective day of the Chapter, began with Eucharistic adoration led by Fr. Ippolito BENEDETTO, OFM. It was then the turn of Mary STRONACH, OFS, who spoke of the 'broader vision of the OFS in the world' and recommended the preparation of a five-year plan aimed at developing spiritual, financial, structural and formative aspects of the National Fraternity. This was followed by the financial report, presented by the outgoing treasurer Cecil PEIRIS, OFS. She provided new perspectives and visions on how to prepare the budget, and then proposed new forms and methods to make the members of the fraternities more responsible, both personally and communally, on the problem of the financial contributions needed to ensure the growth of the Order in Sri Lanka.

At the end of the reports, the Chapter members elected the new Council, which will remain in office for the next three years. Cecil PEIRIS, OFS was elected National Minister and Ranjanie FERNANDO International Councillor. The elective session ended with the celebration of Holy Mass, during which the new Council was installed. After the Mass, the capitulars took their leave and left to return to their places of residence.

SPAIN - National Elective Chapter

The National Elective Chapter of the OFS in Spain was held from 25 to 27 October in Madrid, at the Retreat House of the Franciscan Sisters of Our Lady of the Divine Shepherd. The Chapter began with the prayer of Vespers and was followed by a dinner when the brothers and sisters arrived for the meeting.

The Chapter was presided over by Councillor and International Delegate Sissi Silvia Diana, representing the Minister General Tibor KAUSER. Fr Carlos GINES, TOR, General Spiritual Assistant was present to witness the event on behalf of the CAS. The National Spiritual Assistants also were present: Fr. Valentin REDONDO, OFMConv., Fr. Joaquín RECASENS, OFM, Fr. Mario GARCIA, OFMCap., and Fr. Alfonso VIVERN, TOR.

The Chapter elected Maria José PÍRIZ as the new National Minister and International Councillor, and María Berenice MORENO as the new Vice National Minister.

The newly elected Council thanked everyone and particularly the previous Council for their work and dedication. Fr Carlos GINES, TOR, who presided the Mass, exhorted and encouraged them to live the new stage of the OFS National Fraternity in Spain with new hope; a hope that God and St Francis offer them in order to be able to see and follow on the path of the Gospel.

II CIOFS Presidency - November

On November 2-8, 2024, the Presidency of the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order (CIOFS) met at the Seraphicum in Rome for its autumn session.

The daily program began with Morning Prayer at 7:15 a.m., followed by Mass. From 9:00 a.m.-12:50 p.m. and 3:00-7:50 p.m., the scheduled work listed in the agenda was carried out.

Among the different points on the agenda, particular attention was given to the various reports that will be presented during the OFS Intermediate General Chapter. The Chapter will take place November 9-17, 2024, again at the Seraphicum.

At 6:30 p.m. on Wednesday, November 6, the Presidency Council met with the Minister General of the Conventual Franciscan Order, Friar Carlos TROVARELLI, and the members of his Definitory. The meeting was conducted at the Friary of the Twelve Holy Apostles in Rome. This “let’s get acquainted“ meeting, helped renew the commitment and mutual support of the participants in living the Franciscan charism. The meeting concluded with a fraternal dinner.

Everyone enjoyed the time they spent together. The atmosphere of fraternity and mutual esteem was transformed into a joy the participants had never experienced before.

OFS General Intermediate Chapter 2024

From November the 9th to 17th, 2024 at the *Seraphicum* College of the Friars Minor Conventuals, in Rome, the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order (CIOFS) celebrated, with the participation of 66 capitulars and 16 observers, the Mid-Term Chapter of the OFS, whose theme was "*You are love*".

Each day, the Eucharistic celebration emphasized a specific aspect of it. On the first day, the Mass was presided over by the General Spiritual Assistant Fr. Stefan ACATRINEI, OFMConv, who emphasized on the "*joy of encounter*".

On the second day, the General Spiritual Assistant Fr. Carlos C. JULVE, TOR led the reflection on the theme "we come with our brothers and sisters". On the third day, the Minister General of the Capuchin Friars, Fr. Roberto GENUIN, presided the Mass and touched the theme "*the memory of our deceased brothers and sisters*". On the fourth day, Fr. Fernando VENTURA, OFMCap, dealt with the theme of *the family*. On the fifth day the Mass was celebrated in the Shrine of La Verna and the general spiritual assistant, Fr. Pedro ZITHA, OFM, dealt with the theme "*The 800 years of the Stigmata. Centenary 2024*". On the sixth day it was the turn of the Minister General of the TOR, Fr. Amando Trujillo CANO, who spoke about the "*Care of our common home*", while on the seventh day the Minister General of the Friars Minor Conventual, Fr. Carlo TROVARELLI, spoke about the 750th Centenary of St. Bonaventure. On the eighth day, "*commitment*" was discussed, a theme addressed by the OFM Minister General, Fr. Massimo FUSARELLI. In his homily he pointed out three words offered by the liturgy of the day: **Truth, Love and Prayer**. The Chapter ended on the feast day of St. Elizabeth of Hungary, of whom the TOR Minister General, Fr. Amando Trujillo CANO, spoke.

During the working sessions, the Chapter members approved the Chapter Regulations and the work programme.

The Chapter members also approved, with a specific vote, the final draft of the **International Statutes** of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) that had previously been sent to the national fraternities.

The Chapter members also had the joy of reflecting on the *Instrumentum Laboris* "**You are love**"

On the penultimate day, the capitulars voted and approved the budget for the next three years. Representatives of some fraternities, such as those of Argentina, Brazil, Croatia and Portugal, shared the projects that have developed their national fraternities. The capitulars then had the opportunity to listen to the members of the "*Table for Peace, Disarmament and Nuclear Conversion*" of the OFS of Lazio, who shared their knowledge and concerns regarding the vastness of the atomic arsenal present in the world. They pointed out that, unfortunately, the Christian world is also in possession of these weapons of mass destruction, which in their opinion should be transformed into an instrument of peace and progress. The first tools to be used are prayer, which changes the hearts of men and women, and commitment to building peace, for the good of all humanity.

The last session of the Chapter was dedicated to the evaluation and decisions on the questions that will guide the life of the International Fraternity in the next three years and that will have to be implemented by the Presidency of CIOFS.”