

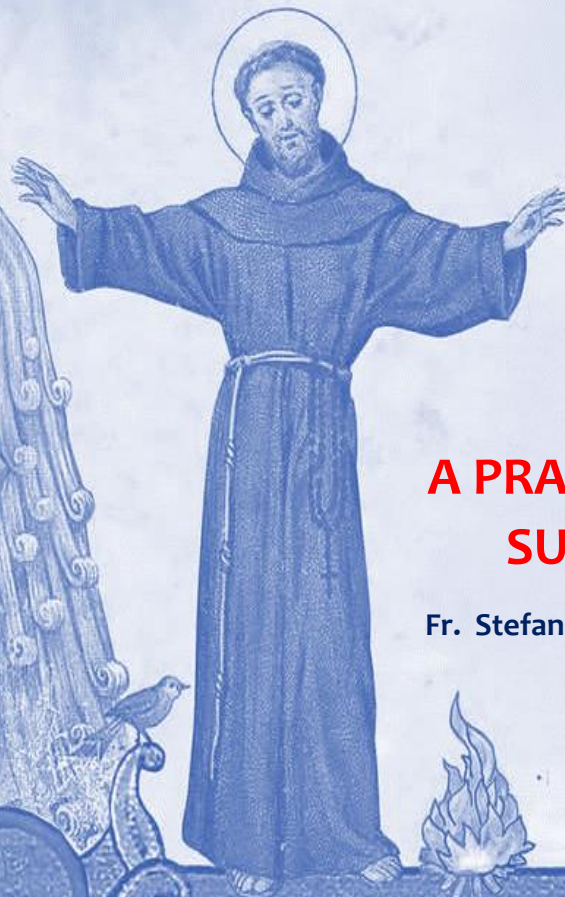
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**CONFERENCE OF SPIRITUAL
ASSISTANTS GENERAL OFS –
YOUFRA (CAS)**

KOINONIA

... together on the journey

**“Francis of Assisi praising and
contemplating the Creator”**



**A PRAISE BORN FROM
SUFFERING**

Fr. Stefan Acatrinei, OFMConv





Franciscan centenarians never cease to surprise and nourish us simultaneously. Having joined Francis during the last year—accompanying him on his journey to La Verna—we have come to know and understand him a little better. We enjoyed his beatific vision of the flaming Seraphim and, without any doubt, ended up just like him: that is, despite the pain caused by the wounds we received, we emerged with a renewed desire “to serve the lepers”¹ with more determination. In this way, the pain of injustices, wrongs suffered..., etc., not only failed to annihilate us, but became precisely a gushing source of service.

St. Francis remains an inexhaustible source of inspiration for this year as well, stimulating both our intellect and our actions with his Praise. Yes, because when his body's strength failed—rendering him physically unable to serve—his spirit remained ever fertile and fruitful, expressing its gratitude to the Creator through song and praise. In this context, the *Canticum of the Creatures* becomes a strong invitation for each of us to follow his example.

1. The fertile soil that made the *Canticum of the Creatures* spring up

Regarding the genesis of the Italian literary masterpiece—kept in the library of the Sacro Convento in Assisi (Codex 338, datable to the mid-13th century)—we receive details from the *Compilation of Assisi* and the *Mirror of Perfection*. These sources clearly define both the period during which this *Lauda* was composed and the circumstances of its creation: “Two years before his death, when he was now gravely infirm and especially suffering from his eyes, he took up residence at San Damiano in a little cell made of mats.”² It was, therefore, a delicate period in his life; physically, he was exhausted and “suffered night and day such excruciating pain in his eyes that he could hardly rest or sleep, and this increased and worsened these and his other infirmities.”³

Biographical sources state that Francis, even as a boy, was frail and weak.⁴ He was so affected by illnesses that, toward the end of his life and at a relatively young age, he became a broken man in need of considerable attention and care. One of the first events that significantly impacted his health was the illness he contracted in the prisons of Perugia. Scholars speak of malarial fevers⁵ and pulmonary tuberculosis. However, the situation was so severe that Francis was afforded the status of a sick prisoner and was subsequently ransomed by his father.⁶

One might even say that illness was a sign meant to integrate positively into the plan of his life. Although his health was, in a sense, later restored, its effects were felt intermittently, and over time,⁷ he contracted additional diseases. During his last trip to the East, he suffered a painful eye infection that left him completely blind. It is described as a “trachoma, a chronic conjunctivitis subject to flare-ups and the appearance of granulations, with possible association of other more or less characteristic lesions affecting all the structures that make up the eyeball (...).”⁸ In the last months of his life, glaucoma infected his eyes and, in addition to making him In the final months of his life, glaucoma affected his

¹ Cf. *ICel* 103: *FF* 500.

² *CA* 83: *FF* 1613; *SP* 11: *FF* 179.

³ *CA* 83: *FF* 1613; *SP* 11: *FF* 179.

⁴ Cf. *Legper* 2: *FF* 1546.

⁵ Cf. S. J. PIAT, *Con Cristo povero e crocifisso. L'itinerario spirituale di Francesco d'Assisi*, Milano 1978, 88.

⁶ Cf. A. FORTINI, *Nuova vita di san Francesco*, Assisi 1959, 178-179.

⁷ Cf. *ICel* 56: *FF* 420.

⁸ S. CIANCARELLI, *Francesco di Pietro Bernardone, malato e santo*, Firenze 1972, 80-81.

eyes; in addition to nearly blinding him, it caused excruciating headaches, intense burning in his eyes, and excessive tear secretion. The sight of light was so unbearable that “he was always in darkness in the house and cell,”⁹ and on his journey to Rieti, he had to “wear a large hood made by the friars and on his eyes a woollen and linen bandage sewn to the hood, because he could not stand the light of day because of the great pains the infirmity caused him.”¹⁰

Tommaso da Celano, in fact, states that Francis suffered from multiple illnesses until his death—liver



disease, spleen issues, stomach troubles,¹¹ and dropsy.¹² In all probability, he also contracted malarial infections, which caused “permanent lesions to those internal organs in which parasites are stably nested: the liver and the spleen.”¹³ One night in Siena, he experienced a gastric haemorrhage so severe that he resolved to make a will, known as the *Testament of Siena*.

As if the picture were not complete, in his later years, psychic sufferings were added to his physical ones—a fact aptly summarized in his *True and Perfect Joy*. It appears that Francis is describing his own failure, corresponding to a period marked by failure and rejection by his own friars. He also had to overcome a “great temptation” of the spirit.¹⁴ Through this literary or fictitious narrative, Francis answers his own questions and those of all the friars of the Order.

The final years of Francis' life were, therefore, very difficult. Ravaged by intense physical pain and troubled by significant internal tensions within the Order, he endured tremendous suffering. It was in this context that *The Canticle of the Creatures* matured and was born—a text rendered in the vernacular rather than Latin to truly reach the hearts

of all people.

2. Francis' approach toward suffering

Francis was no stranger to suffering in its many forms; he viewed hardship as a means of progressively identifying with the crucified Christ and as a path to continual sanctification. In light of his own experiences, he echoed St. Paul: „I rejoice in my infirmities, in outrages, in necessities, in persecutions, in anguish suffered for Christ's sake” (2 Cor. 12:10), for following Christ renders all suffering sweet when it springs from the will to do so. Like the Apostle, he discovered in suffering the strength and vitality that fuelled his apostolic mission, which found its very lifeblood in enduring hardship. His

⁹ Legper 43: FF 1591.

¹⁰ Ivi, 46: FF 1595.

¹¹ Cf. 2Cel 96. 130: FF 683. 714; Legper 37: FF 1585; Spec 91: FF 1789.

¹² Cf. 1Cel 105: FF 502.

¹³ O. SCHMUCKI, *Le malattie di Francesco durante gli ultimi anni della sua vita*, in AA. VV., *Francesco d'Assisi e francescanesimo dal 1216 al 1228* [Atti del IV Convegno Internazionale, Assisi 15-17 ottobre 1976], Assisi 1977, 345.

¹⁴ Cf. Legper 21: FF 1568.

profound sensitivity—refined by his personal trials—instilled in him a deep empathy toward the sick, nurturing within him feelings of compassionate understanding.¹⁵

In his Writings, illness is a recurring theme, to the extent that nearly an entire chapter of the Rule is devoted to the sick.¹⁶ One clear observation is that he approached illness with a maternal delicacy and deep humanity, regarding it as a means to share in Christ's passion.

For Francis, illness represented a moment of grace—a gift from God and a mark of honour borne with joy and even pride—that transformed into evangelical beatitude when endured with patience and serenity.¹⁷ It was a moment appointed by God for the benefit of the afflicted, who is called to accept His will with patience and resignation. The friar must submit to sickness as Christ submitted Himself to the Father's will, accepting our infirmities and thanking the Creator, because through this state of weakness, He leads one to eternal life: “I beg the sick brother to thank God for everything and to desire to be whatever the Lord wills, whether sick or well, because God teaches all those He has destined for eternal life by the torments of punishments, sicknesses, and the spirit of sorrow, as the Lord says: Those whom I love, I correct and chastise (cf. Ap 3, 19)”.¹⁸

The infirm friar's response was one of patient acceptance; no better way exists to serve God than by embracing the divine will—manifested through one's own suffering—without rebellion, desiring nothing for oneself but what God ordains, and viewing it as an act of benevolence. He was careful to avoid anger and resentment toward God and others, recognizing that such emotions serve no one.

Christ, who bore our infirmities, remains the exemplary model for every Franciscan. Surrendering to God's will is the only proper attitude, as the Franciscan glorifies the Lord through the patient acceptance of suffering more than through any other deeds. Just as Francis praises the Lord for those who “sustain infirmity and tribulation,”¹⁹ every Franciscan is called to praise and glorify God—who visits them through sickness—since all suffering, whether physical or moral, is marked by the grace and love of a God who cherishes His children.

For Francis, the diseases that gradually martyred his body served as a means of offering himself to God. He treated his human nature with such severity—depriving himself of necessary food and inflicting



¹⁵ Cf. *2Cel* 175: *FF* 761; *Proc* I 12: *FF* 2936.

¹⁶ Cf. *Rnb* X, Rb VI.

¹⁷ Cf. *Cant* 10: *FF* 263.

¹⁸ *Rnb* X 3: *FF* 35.

¹⁹ *Cant* 10: *FF* 263.

harsh discipline—that he “lived in an almost dead body.”²⁰ This clearly demonstrates how little he prioritized health and self-care. Illness, therefore, ought to be embraced in the same manner as those who persecute and martyr us.²¹

Although between 1216 and 1220 he felt compelled to journey to Palestine in a desire to attain martyrdom in Christ's own land, he later realized that martyrdom is possible even without the Saracens, when one serenely accepts suffering—whether in the form of hunger, sickness, pain, injustice, or persecution. In illness, Francis saw himself aligned with the crucified Christ; human suffering can only be overcome through union with Him and His charity, for contemplating Christ—who bore our sufferings—helps one to forget one's own.

Francis also advised the Poor Ladies on managing the trials of illness, urging them to be “patient in the infirmities and privations they suffered,”²² so that each might become a queen “in heaven crowned with the Virgin Mary.”²³

The eschatological finality of suffering is unmistakable and explains Francis' stance: “I thank you, O



Lord God, for all these sorrows of mine, and I beseech you, O my Lord, to give me a hundred times more, if it pleases you so. I will be most happy, if you will afflict me and spare me no pain, for to fulfil your will is for me superabundant consolation.”²⁴

3. A potential actualized reflection

The Franciscan fraternity appears to expand with this Praise—from a few companions who chose to live the Gospel with Francis to all men and women, especially the weakest and marginalized, who are called to embrace all of creation. Man was placed at the pinnacle of creation, with everything given to him for use and return to the Creator; thus, he is expected to excel in praise. Yet, one sadly finds that creatures serve the Lord far better than man, for while they obey the

Creator, man quietly turns his back on Him.

After eight centuries since Francis composed the Canticle amid tremendous suffering, it has lost none of its charm. Today, as then, it continues to remind man of God's goodness and of all He has done—and continues to do—for humanity, even if man ignores it or shows ingratitude toward the Creator by selfishly mistreating his own brothers and sisters, both animate and inanimate.

The state of the world, as observed by someone crossing into the second quarter of the first century of the third millennium, is both sad and worrisome. Man, continuously inflicts hardships on his fellow human beings through wars and emerging forms of violence and injustice, and on the environment by exploiting it irresponsibly, becoming increasingly insensitive to the suffering of others.

²⁰ *Legper* 39: *FF* 1587.

²¹ *Cf. Rb X* 9-10: *FF* 104.

²² *Legper* 45: *FF* 1594.

²³ *Apov* 6: *FF* 263/1.

²⁴ *LM XIV* 2: *FF* 1228.

Francis, though overwhelmed by his own suffering, was not indifferent to the discomfort experienced by the citizens of Assisi amid tensions between ecclesial and civil authorities. In those circumstances, he added the penultimate stanza to his Canticle on forgiveness. Being bedridden, he sent his brothers to sing it before the two rival factions, and the miracle soon followed.

With the same Canticle, Francis invites each one of us—his brothers and sisters—to praise God in all circumstances of life, for such an attitude consoles us and edifies our neighbour.²⁵

Conclusion

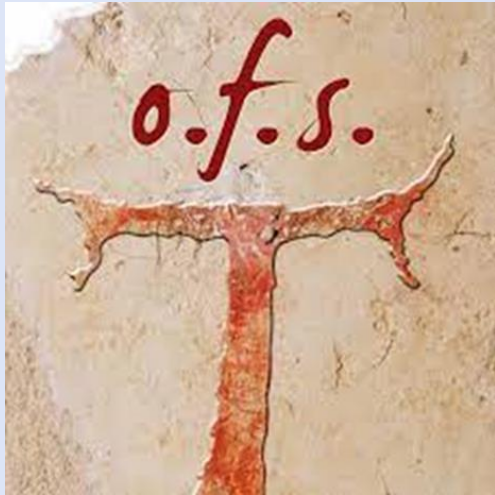
Suffering is an experience that affects all people and accompanies humanity on its journey; it appears to be a universal human fact “and is almost inseparable from man's earthly existence” (Salvifici Doloris 3). It manifests in two forms: physical and moral. In physical suffering, the body aches, while moral suffering affects the soul.

The humble and patient acceptance of suffering means entering into Christ's descent and embracing His logic. In doing so, suffering assumes a corrective role, arousing remorse for one's sins and a desire for a better life—an impulse born of the awareness of life's fragility and the illusory nature of earthly ideals.²⁶ Only in this way did Francis, even with a body exhausted by suffering, find the energy that generated his praise, and that praise brought him consolation while edifying his neighbour.

Pace e bene!

²⁵ Cf. *CA* 83: *FF* 1615.

²⁶ Cf. *1Cel* 3: *FF* 323.



Meetings, Visits and Chapters

8th Centenary of the Canticle of Creatures:

On January 11, 2025, the Franciscan Family celebrated the opening of the 8th Centenary of the Canticle of the Creatures, one of the most emblematic works of St. Francis of Assisi. This event marked the beginning of a year dedicated to honoring the spiritual, literary and ecological legacy of the saint of Assisi. The inaugural ceremony took place at two key sites in the life of St. Francis: the Sanctuary of San Damiano, where he composed much of the Canticle of the

Creatures, and the Shrine of the Nudity. The event began at 10:00 a.m. (CET) and could be followed live via YouTube.

The celebration was attended by the General Ministers of the Franciscan Family, the president of the Conference of Franciscan Sisters, and Bishop Domenico Sorrentino of the Diocese of Assisi. Planned activities included the reading of the Assisi Compilation on the creation of the Canticle, a short liturgy of the Word and reflections by the Ministers General.

At the end of the celebration, representatives of the Conference of the Franciscan Family went to pay homage to the Saint's mortal remains in the Crypt of the Basilica of St. Francis.

Togo: Elective Chapter

On Jan. 25, 2025, the national fraternity "St. Benoît l'Africain" of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of Togo had the joy of celebrating its elective chapter at the OFM Friars of Adidogome in Lomé. The chapter was held in one day, as usual for the various logistical reasons. The elective session was presided over by Chadian National Minister Angel Gabriel SOULASSENGAR, OFS, delegate of Minister General Tibor Kauser, OFS, and witnessed by Fr. Serge-Armand ADJESSI, OFM, delegate of the Conference of Spiritual Assistants General (CAS).

The chapter was attended by 58 brothers and sisters, including 46 chapter members, 10 observers and 2 religious. During the elective session, René Komlan Gamélé D'ALMEIDA, OFS, was elected as national minister and international councillor according to their statutes. On January 26, there was the inauguration of the new National Council. The new national minister thanked the former national minister Joseph Kosjo Fogan ADEGNON, OFS, for his faithful, loving and tireless service to the national fraternity over the past 9 years and for successfully organizing the chapter. Although it was a day filled with presentations of reports and then elections for the new council, the chapter members had a very fruitful and festive day; everyone went home very happy with the outcome of the chapter, thanks to the collaborative spirit that every member of OFS enjoyed in a fraternal atmosphere.

The Conference of General Spiritual Assistants is very grateful to Fr. Serge-Armand ADJESSI, OFM, for his readiness and willingness to accept our request at the last moment to give witness to the chapter on behalf of our General Conference, despite his busy pastoral schedule. May the Lord continue to bless his generosity in sharing his time with the OFS.

Benin: Elective Chapter

On January 26, 2025, at the sailors' reception centre - "Stella Maris," in the city of Cotonou, the second national elective chapter of the OFS national fraternity of Benin was held. The centre is owned by the Archdiocese of Cotonou and run by an OFS sister. Fifty-four professed participated at the chapter, including 49 with voting rights and 5 members of the local fraternities from the capital, who provided various services to the chapter.

The OFS National Fraternity of Benin is a recently canonically erected fraternity and has three regions with 5 fraternities. It has St. Elizabeth of Hungary as its patroness.

Benin is a West African country and French is its official and national language; other local languages are spoken and written throughout the country as well. Its population is 16 million. It is a country with rich cultural and artistic traditions.

The elective session was presided by the area councillor, Adolph Atsu Assagba, OFS, as delegate of OFS Minister General Tibor Kauser and assisted by Fr. Tomas Ginga Panzo Suva, OFMCap., as the representative of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS). Albertine KATTAPTA was re-elected as national minister and as international councillor as well. Monique DOHOUNZO was re-elected as substitute international councillor and vice minister.

The chapter was celebrated in an atmosphere of serenity and brotherhood. Besides the Secular Franciscans, the national assistant Fr. Roger BESSAN, OFMCap., and three other local spiritual assistants participated: a Friar Minor, a Capuchin, and a Franciscan Missionary Sister of the Mother of the Divine Shepherd (who assists a local fraternity in Cotonou).

During the closing Mass, presided over by Fr. Bernardin BOKO, OFMCap., Minister Custos of the Capuchins in Benin, the new council was installed. Fr. Roger BESSAN and Fr. Tomas Ginga SUVA concelebrated. Fr. SUVA presided over the act of installation and sending off with a special blessing to the new council.

The chapter concluded with a fraternal lunch in which delicious Benin foods were shared. The brothers bid farewell with Franciscan joy, songs and dances.

Zimbabwe: Elective Chapter

On February 7 and 8, 2025, the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of Zimbabwe celebrated its elective chapter at "Tafara - Our Lady of the Angels - Franciscan Friars OFM." The meeting began Friday evening with the prayer of vespers, followed by dinner and then the opening of the chapter with the outgoing national minister's greeting addressed to the capitulars and members of the CIOFS, represented by Minister General Tibor Kauser, OFS, and Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM, representing the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS). Afterwards, each outgoing National Council member shared the many challenges and joys of the fraternity with those present.

All 13-chapter members were present on Saturday morning, including the 2 National Spiritual Assistants, Fr. Elvis Gwangwava, OFMCap and Fr. Nicholas Banhwa, OFM. After the morning prayer, the capitulars resumed their work with the presentation of reports by the national minister, the formator, and the outgoing treasurer. This was followed by comments and questions from the chapter members and spiritual assistants. Most of the chapter members

appreciated the national minister's report and gave some concrete suggestions on how to move forward in the future and deal with the challenges the national fraternity is facing.

Later, the National Council began its elective session chaired by Minister General, Tibor Kauser, OFS, in which Inviolata Nhunduru, OFS, was elected as both National Minister and International Councilor. The elective session culminated with the formal photos of the new National Council.

In the afternoon, National Spiritual Assistant Fr. Elvis presented the report of the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants, followed by the Minister General's presentation on "Our Specific Vocation in the Secular Franciscan Order." Finally, the installation of the new National Council took place during the Holy Mass celebrated by Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM and concelebrated by Fr. Elvis Gwangwawa, OFM^{Cap} and Fr. Nicholas Banhwa, OFM.

A fraternal agape with Zimbabwean delicacies followed after the Holy Mass.

Sud Africa: extraordinary pastoral and fraternal visitation

The extraordinary fraternal and pastoral visit to the National Fraternity of South Africa took place from February 11 to 15, 2025. It was led by OFS Minister General Tibor Kauser who was, accompanied by CIOFS Presidency Councilor Eremenciana Chiyama, OFS, and Spiritual Assistant General Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM. In order to clarify some issues regarding the identity of the Secular Franciscan Order, the visit was scheduled so that the visitors would meet with bishops from six dioceses. This is the schedule of the meetings:

- Archbishop of Durban, Rev. Siegfried Mandla Jwara, C.M.M., together with the Auxiliary Bishop, Elias Kwenzakufani Zondi.
- Bishop Neil Augustine Frank, OMI - Diocese of Marianhill. After this meeting, the Minister General and his two companions went to Pietermaritzburg to celebrate the renewal of profession of the brothers and sisters of the OFS that took place in the hands of the Minister General, Tibor Kauser, during a Mass celebrated by the General Spiritual Assistant, Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM.
- Bishop Stanislaw Jan Dziuba, O.S.P.P.E - diocese of uMzimkhulu.
- Bishop Thulani Victor Mbuyisa, C.M.M. Diocese of Kokstad - this meeting was followed by the celebration of Holy Mass during which members of the OFS Fraternity renewed their Profession.
- Retreat House of the Capuchin Poor Clares of Hibberdene where the visitors were welcomed and where they allowed themselves some rest.
- Fr. Robert Bissel, Diocesan Administrator for the Diocese of Cape Town, followed by Holy Mass and the renewal of the Profession of OFS members.

Fr. Albert Gonsalves, OFM^{Cap} the major superior of the Capuchin friars with whom the visitors discussed how they could also include in the formation of the friars the themes of OFS identity and its autonomy, and how to act to strengthen the unity and collaboration between the First Order, TOR and the OFS.

The visit then continued with the return to Gauteng where Holy Mass was celebrated at the Croatian Catholic Church with renewal of professions, which was followed by a meeting with the Secular Franciscans.

This was followed by a meeting with His Eminence Cardinal Stephen Brislin, Apostolic Nuncio Archbishop Henryk Mieczyslaw Jagodzinski and Archbishop Dario Pavisa.

Lastly, the visitors had a meeting with the Major Superior of the Friars Minor, Fr. Siphelile Gwanisheni, OFM to also explore with him the topic of how the three superiors can work together at a Conference so that the OFS of the Kwazulu Naal region can become aware that it is an Order in the Church and not a Brotherhood, and so that the First Order and TOR friars consider the OFS as one of the priorities of their ministry.

Hungary: Pastoral and fraternal visitation

The Fraternal and Pastoral Visits (VFP) to the National Council of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of Hungary were conducted by Dina Shabalina, OFS, Councillor of the CIOFS Presidency and delegate of the Minister General, Tibor Kauser, OFS, and Fr. Tomas Ginga Panzo Suva, OFM^{Cap.}, Assistant General OFS-GiFra, representing the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS), from Feb. 13-16, 2025.

The activities began with a visit to the Franciscan School “Ginasium,” one of the educational institutions run by the Friars Minor and which has a highly recognized educational and training role in the country, where several of the nation's personalities have been trained, from the time of communism until today. In this school, the friars have a stable fraternity and dedicate their time to teaching and assisting the OFS fraternity there. The healthy collaboration between friars and secular Franciscans, all committed to the same mission and sharing the Franciscan charism and spirituality, is evident.

In the afternoon of the same day we travelled to Esztergom, a border town with Slovakia. There we visited the nursing home ran by the Friars Minor and Secular Franciscans, where we celebrated Holy Mass with them. We then had dinner in the OFS fraternity of St. Francis, located in the convent of the nuns who take care of the poor, which is a national foundation of Franciscan inspiration. In this OFS fraternity we had the opportunity to share not only bread but also their challenges and fears. It was indeed a very fraternal and enriching time.

Friday, 14 February, was reserved for personal talks with members of the National Council.

On February 15 we met with the Provincial Ministers and Major Superiors of the First Order (OFM. and OFM^{Cap.}) and of Sisters of Franciscan Inspiration. The dialogue with them was very lively and with many hopes for the near future to recommence the meetings of the Franciscan Family of Hungary.

Following this we had a meeting with all the regional and local assistants, among whom there were 7 Friars Minors, 3 Capuchins, 4 diocesan priests and 3 sisters. The dialogue with them was very fruitful and they were open to suggestions and comments that the visitors shared and clarified.

In the late afternoon, we met with Monsignor János Székely, the bishop in charge of the apostolic movements and groups in the Bishops Conference of Hungary. He came to our meeting, thanking us for our presence and for the witness and service that Franciscans (friars and seculars) give in the Hungarian church, engaging in various services in the dioceses.

On Sunday morning, the Mass was presided over at 8:30 a.m. by Fr. Pio, Minister Provincial of the Friars Minor. He introduced us to the parish community and made reference to the value of the fraternal and pastoral visit to the OFS Fraternity of Hungary. After Mass, the visitors had the official closing meeting of the visit with the National Council. Although not all council members were present, we closed the visit by bringing out some practical and concrete considerations, which they will have to carry out in the coming months, before the elective chapter next July.

In the afternoon we visited the OFS fraternity of St. Corando of PAHARZAM, OFM^{Cap.}, located in the Capuchin friary at the Marian Shrine of Măriabesnyò. We were welcomed by the local assistant Fr. Sergio Tellan, OFM^{Cap.}, the Capuchin Delegate in Hungary Fr. Marco Faccioli, OFM^{Cap.} and the whole OFS fraternity.

In short, the visit was for us a moment of grace, an opportunity of deepening the Franciscan Charism and spirituality, revitalization of the OFS national fraternity of Hungary and the whole Franciscan fraternity present in the country. In the end, we left the challenge to the OFS, to the First Order and to the Franciscan sisters to encourage the establishment of Franciscan youth in the country and Franciscan heralds (children) as a reality that enriches the Franciscan presence in every sense.

Danmark: Elective Chapter

The national fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order of Denmark celebrated its national chapter from March 7 to 9, 2025, in Maribo housed in the convent of the Sisters of St. Brigitta (Habitaculum Mariae, Sankt Birgitta Kloster).

This fraternity is very small, with only 20 members belonging to three local fraternities located in Copenhagen, Aarhus and Aalborg. Despite the small number, the fraternity is very active, determined, joyful, tenacious and committed to both the local church and the Order.

The CIOFS delegation, consisting of Mary Stronach, vice minister general, and Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM member of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants arrived in Copenhagen on March 6 and was hosted at St. Francis of Assisi Friary located at 4 Stenografe. The visit to the national fraternity began March 7 with the celebration of holy mass presided over by the Most Rev. Msgr. Czeslaw Kozon, bishop of Copenhagen, who is also responsible for Greenland and the Faroe Islands. At the end of the celebration, the visitors had a meeting with Msgr. Czeslaw during which they discussed several topics including that of the OFS' service in the local church and diocese. The meeting was very cordial and open, and concluded with lunch.

After expressing their gratitude to the bishop for his hospitality, the delegation left for Maribo. They were accompanied by the national spiritual assistant Fr. Stephen Maria Bejo, OFM^{Conv.}, and two members of the OFS. The location of the celebration of the elective chapter was reached after a two-hour journey, by train. The chapter opened with the celebration of Holy Mass, presided by the national spiritual assistant, Fr. Stephen, OFM^{Conv.}, and concelebrated by Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM. During the celebration, the chapter members renewed their Profession.

After dinner, the chapter continued with the presentation of the national minister's report. Then, each chapter member and the national spiritual assistant shared their joys and difficulties, challenges and projects that they believe the National Fraternity of Denmark will face in the near future.

On Saturday, the capitulars' day began with the celebration of Holy Mass, presided by Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM. In his homily, he reflected on the profound meaning of the Christian vocation that gives meaning to the call to the OFS. The work then continued with the financial report, which was unanimously approved; the discussion went on addressing some challenges for OFS fraternities in Denmark and, more generally, in Scandinavian countries. All agreed in stressing the need to give priority above all to formation and strengthening the relationship with the bishop and the diocese.

On Saturday afternoon, voting took place to elect the new National Council, which reappointed both Hellen Zielke Nielsen as National Minister and Catherine Moniel as International Councilor.

The elective part was then followed by the installation ceremony for the new board, which, of course, will serve for the next three years.

The Chapter concluded on Sunday morning with the celebration of Mass and the dismissal of all participants.

Portugal: elective chapter

The 20th elective chapter of the national fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order of Portugal was celebrated in Fatima, at the Biblical Center of the Capuchin Friars Minor, between March 07-09, 2025.

The first day began with the welcoming of the chapter members at 2 p.m. and ended at 11 p.m. with night prayer.

On the morning of Saturday, March 08, four lectures were given (“Canticle of the Creatures, a Praise to the Lord for the Common Home,” by Fr. Alvaro Silva OFM, “Franciscan Fraternity, a Path of Hope,” by brother Jose Domingos, FISFA, “OFS in the World,” by Noemi Paola Ricardi OFS, “The Source of Praise-Generating Energy,” by Fr. Stefan Acatrinei OFMConv.

At 2 p.m. Rui Silva, the outgoing national minister, presented the current situation of the OFS of Portugal. The elective Session of the chapter began at 5:15 p.m. and was presided over by CIOFS councillor Noemi Paula Ricardi. Fr Stefan Acatrinei, OFMConv., representative of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants, was the witness. There were 29 chapter members and 15 observers present. Antonio Ramos was elected as the new national minister. During the Eucharistic celebration, presided over at 9 p.m. by national spiritual assistant Fr. Francesco Ervas OFMConv. the new national council was installed.

Chapter work was resumed on Sunday, March 09 with the prayer of Lauds at 8:45 a.m. and concluded with the celebration of the Eucharist, presided over by the provincial minister, Fr. Antonio Martins OFMCap.

All enjoyed a very well prepared and organized chapter. The chapter was held in an atmosphere of prayer, peace, serenity and Franciscan joy.

Peru: Pastoral visit to the OFS - Part Two

A continuation of the CIOFS pastoral and fraternal visit to the OFS of Peru, currently without a National Council, took place during February 14-16, 2025.

The visit was presided over by International Councilor Ana María Raffo, who replaced International Area Councilor Silvia Diana absent for health reasons. Fr. Carlos Ginés, Assistant General of TOR, conducted the pastoral visitation of the Order on behalf of the CAS.

The visit took place mainly at San Francisco Solano Friary, in the Rimac District, in the city of Lima. The OFM friars fraternally welcomed the visitors.

The Visitation was held in the presence of the Order's National Assembly, composed of the regional ministers, national councillors and fraternal animators of the former regions, and the national spiritual assistants.

The visit went smoothly. Positive steps were taken regarding spiritual care and animation of former regions. A national animation team was formed which will work closely with International Councilor Silvia Diana in order to form a future national council. The visit concluded with a Mass of thanksgiving and a fraternal lunch.

Regional Elective Chapter in Lima, Peru.

The Chapter was held in the St. Anthony of Padua auditorium, in the parish of the Friars Minor in the Jesus Maria neighbourhood on Feb. 22, 2025.

After a short prayer, the previous Regional Council reported on its work and the way the Order in the Lima region was animated; some problems and challenges were also presented to the Chapter that the future Council will have to solve.

The election began with a prayer, the reading of a Gospel passage and the invocation of the Holy Spirit. The 95 brothers and sisters present elected the new Council 2025-2028 and Paul Zuzunaga as the new regional minister.

The Chapter was chaired by International Councilor Ana María Raffo. Fr. Carlos Ginés, TOR, was present on behalf of the CAS.

Byelorussia: Elective Chapter

The electoral session of the National Chapter of Belarus began on 15 March 2025 at 9.00 a.m. (Rome time), in online mode (Zoom), as an exception granted by the CIOFS Presidency in last November's meeting, due to the current politico-military situation in the area. All the capitulars met in Grodno.

The election session was presided over by Area Councillor Dina Shabalina, as delegate of General Minister OFS, Tibor Kauser, assisted by Fr Igor Kolzun, OFM Cap., as delegate and representative of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS).

Technically, the election process was well prepared. There was the necessary quorum because 31 out of 36 chapter members were present. The election process was conducted according to the OFS election procedure and in a very serene and fraternal manner.

There were enough candidates for each position. Most of the candidates willingly accepted the entrusted service. Most of the national councillors were elected to these services for the first time. Ludmila Swojczyk was elected as National Minister and International Councillor.

The elections ended with the official inauguration of the new OFS National Council of Belarus.

Presidency of the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order (CIOFS)

The spring meeting of the CIOFS Presidency Council was held in Rome, at Seraphicum. The work began on Saturday, 15 March, at 5pm. Among the various items on the agenda, I would like to mention a few: evaluation of the Intermediate General Chapter of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS), celebrated between 9-17 November, 2024; spiritual and juridical formation; updating and planning presented by the (seven) OFS area councillors and the Franciscan Youth (YouFra) representative; updating presented by the various secretariats; admission to profession of new members in Kazakhstan and Senegal and admission to formation of new members in Ghana and Senegal was approved.

On Wednesday, 19 March, at 6 p.m., the CIOFS Presidency Council had the opportunity to meet with the Minister General Massimo Fusareli, OFM, and his council in the OFM General Curia. The purpose of the meeting was to get to know each other and briefly share fraternal knowledge of the two councils with a view to strengthening the collaboration between the OFS and the Franciscan First Order. The day's schedule concluded with dinner shared with the brothers of the same friary in their refectory.

The work of the CIOFS Presidency ended on Saturday 22 March at 12.30 p.m.

Chile: Elective Chapter

The Elective Chapter of the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of Chile was held from 28 to 30 March 2025, in the retreat house of the Friars Minor in Mostazal, in the Libertador Bernardo O'Higgins Region. The agenda of those days included: ongoing formation with three conferences, one on Friday evening after dinner and two on Saturday morning; presentation of the reports for the triennium 2022-2025, election session with the election of the scrutineers, election of the National Minister and National Council; voting on priorities and closing mass, followed by lunch and dismissal of the Chapter members.

The ongoing formation session was based on the theme of BELONGING to the Order and LEADERSHIP as service from the perspective of the Secular Franciscan Order.

There were 46 Capitulars with voting rights, representing the three regions of the country and the members of the outgoing Council, and the three National Spiritual Assistants, representing the three Obediences of the First Franciscan Order present in the country: Order of Friars Minor Conventuals, Order of Friars Minor Capuchin and Order of Friars Minor. There were also some Franciscan sisters who serve as local assistants in the various OFS fraternities, especially where the Friars are no longer present.

The elective session was presided over by Santiago Negro, OFS National Minister and International Councillor of Argentina, as delegate of OFS General Minister Tibor Kauser and assisted by Fr. Tomas Ginga Panzo Suva, OFM Cap., representing the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS). The capitulars elected Ingrid Palacios Moreno, OFS as National Minister and International Councillor. She is from the Metropolitan Region of Santiago, formerly National Minister in the past. The five councillors were also elected; three of them were in the previous council and two are new.

On Sunday morning, while the assembly was analysing the situation of YouFra, the Assistant General, Fr. Tomas Ginga, took the opportunity to meet with the three national assistants of the

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First Order. He listened to them and talked about the reality of spiritual and pastoral assistance to the OFS-YouFra in the country with its difficulties, challenges, needs, joys and future. It was truly a moment of listening and sharing in which the assistants manifested a unanimous desire to work together, trying to communicate more with one another, so that their service would be more visible and shared, manifesting the desired unity among us for the good of the OFS brothers and sisters.

The Chapter ended with the installation of the new Council, held during the Holy Mass of the Fourth Sunday of Quaresma, celebrated in the Parish Church of St. Francis in Mostazal, presided over by Fr. Nicolás, OFM, National Assistant, concelebrated by Fr. Jack Gintín, OFMConv. and Fr. Tomas Ginga, OFMCap.