



# K O I N Ō N I A

*...together on the journey*

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## SECULAR FRANCISCAN LEADERSHIP

### 800 years of *Memoriale propositi*: the relevance for OFS

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#### Introduction

It is merely common sense to see that any legal document, written some eight hundred years ago, taken solely in its literal sense, cannot guide the life of a group of people in present day, unless that group remain ultra-conservative. So it is a matter of fact that we cannot adapt the document of *Memoriale propositi* in our times. Studying, discussing and celebrating this document on its 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary do not mean that we are trying to revive its content. On the other hand, we want to say that such a document can surely indicate the mentality, social situation and spirituality of that time and thus to see if it has something to tell us today.

Although *Memoriale propositi* is not considered as one among the *Writings* of Francis of Assisi, this document had modelled the way of life of the Franciscan penitents until the Rule *Supra montem*. In the official language of the Roman Curia *Supra montem*, signed by Pope Nicholas IV (the first Franciscan to become Pope), on 18 August, 1289 is the first Rule signed by the Church for the Franciscan penitents<sup>1</sup>. So in the strict legal terminology the canonical erection of OFS belongs to Pope Nicholas IV, but the founder of the Order is always St. Francis of Assisi. The Pope himself in the Bull *Supra montem* states; “Therefore, the glorious confessor of Christ, Blessed Francis, founder of this Order, wishing to show by word and example the life to go to the Lord, educated his children in the sincerity of this same faith and commanded that they profess it with constancy, they held it firmly and put it into practice, so that, walking with safety along its path, they deserved, after

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<sup>1</sup> The decree issued by the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life at the request of the CIOFS Presidency, states: “This Dicastero attest that the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS), a public association of the faithful, with its seat in Rome, Via Pomponia Grecina n. 31, is erected by the Supreme Pontiff Nicholas IV with the bull “Supra montem” on 18 August 1289, and eventually confirmed by Pope Leo XIII with the Constitution “Misericors Dei Filius” on 30 May 1883 and by Paul VI with the *Breve* “Seraphicus Patriarcha” on 24 June 1978 and with the Decree of the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life on 8 December 2000”. This decree was issued on 14 March 2003 with the protocol n. R.G. 197/M.

the imprisonment of this life, to become possessors of eternal bliss”<sup>2</sup>. Here the Pope is confirming what the early biographers of St. Francis had already affirmed regarding the foundation of the Order of Franciscan Penitents or the Third Order.

In a recent study Lino Temperini wrote, “...the **Order of Franciscan penitents** (*Third order*) comes to life and develops in harmony with the phases of Francis’ itinerant preaching...In this context, full of novelties, Penitents or Tertiaries are affirmed everywhere, eager to share with Francis of Assisi the evangelical commitment on personal level, in the family and in the society”<sup>3</sup>. It should be noted that no specific approval was required for this Order, because it automatically fell under the penitential provisions in force for all ecclesial movements, as established by Innocent III himself. The *Memoriale propositi* gave these penitents a concrete form of life. In our present study we will try to see those elements that can be still spiritually relevant for the present Secular Franciscans<sup>4</sup>.

## 1. Devotion to the Saints and prayer life

Devotion to the saints was part of popular piety in the middle ages. The most popular figures of saints among the penitents of that time were Sts. Martin of Tours and Mary of Magdalene, as seen from the iconographies (think of the Chapels dedicated to them in the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi). St. Mary of Magdalene does not appear in *Memoriale Propositi*, but St. Martin appears in three places (Art. 6, 9, 14). We see in the biographies that as a man of his times the Lent of St. Martin<sup>5</sup> was devotedly practiced by Brother Francis (2 *Celano* 131; *Assisi Compilation* 81; *Mirror of Perfection* 62). So it was part of the popular piety and was highly recommended for the members of the Order of Penitents. We find the same name mentioned also in *Supra montem* (Chapters V, VII). In the *Rule of Leo III* St. Martin is no more mentioned. Instead we have St. Francis of Assisi, St. Clare, St. Louis of France, St. Elizabeth of Hungary, St. Elizabeth of Portugal and St. Margaret of Cortona all mentioned. And in the present *Rule* no saint is mentioned except St. Francis of Assisi. Obviously today the Franciscan Seculars celebrate most of the Franciscan Saints. The *Memoriale Propositi* can be an additional reminder that we are called to imitate the Saints in living our Evangelical promise.

Almost half of the document deals with the life of prayer and abstinence (art. 6-21). They were very close to the monastic practices of that time, as we read, “all are to say the seven canonical Hours” (12). All the regulations regarding abstinence and fasting in articles 6-11 also bear the stamp of monasticism. We do not find such an insistence even in the *Earlier Rule* (1221) or in the *Later Rule* (1223) given by Brother Francis to his Friars.

## 2. Personal life

One of the first things that we notice when reading the text of *Memoriale* is that it interferes directly in the personal life of the brothers and sisters. The document presents direct and concrete

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<sup>2</sup> The document is cited from A. FREGONA, *L’Ordine Franciscano Secolare: Storia, Legislazione, Spiritualità*, Padova 2007, 288-296.

<sup>3</sup> L. TEMPERINI, *Una regola per il terzo ordine francescano: Ottavo centenario del Memoriale propositi (1221), Regola antica del Terzo Ordine di San Francesco*, Roma 2020, p. 29.

<sup>4</sup> The English text of the *Memoriale propositi* used in this study is taken from L. TEMPERINI, *Ottavo centenario del Memoriale propositi (1221), la regola antica dei penitenti Francescani*, in *ATOR* 203 (2021) 151-158.

<sup>5</sup> This Lent begins traditionally from the feast of St. Martin on November 11 or from the octave of All Saints until Christmas: but Francis makes it from the Feast of All Saints until Christmas as seen in *Rnb* 3, 11. At present in the Franciscan world it is known as “Franciscan Lent”.

norms. All the descriptions about how to dress (art. 1-5) and what to eat (art. 6-11) might be seen today as an intrusion into one's personal choices and life. But in the Middle Ages it was seen as essential part of the choice of life that they have made by entering into an Order of Penance. They were to guard even the way they talk: "Also in their ordinary conversations they will do their best to avoid oaths. And should anyone have sworn thoughtlessly through a slip of the tongue, as happens where there is much talking, he should the evening of the same day, when he is obliged to think over what he has done, say three *Our Fathers* in amends of such oaths" (18).

All these norms regarding dressing, eating, talking etc., can be understood today only in the light of the purpose of this way of life. When speaking about the monthly meeting of the fraternities it is written, "...they are to have some religious who is informed in the words of God to exhort them and strengthen them to persevere in their penance and in performing the works of mercy" (21). So all the norms were oriented towards this two guiding principles of the Order: perseverance in penance and performing works of mercy.

The *Memoriale* speaks about only one instance in which a member can be expelled from the Order and that is something rooted in the personal life: being incorrigible. We read, "And if anyone proves incorrigible, after consultation with some of the discreet brothers he should be denounced to the Visitor, to be expelled by him from the brotherhood..." (35). He or she could not be readmitted to the Order "...except it please the saner portion of the brothers" (34).

### **3. Family life**

The whole family was called to get involved in the way of penance. The exhortation of *Memoriale* is thus, "Let each member fortify his household to serve God" (18). One of first things that a professed member has to do is to write the *Testament* and thus put in order his family affairs: "All who have the right are to make their last will and make disposition of their goods within three months after their profession, lest anyone of them die intestate" (25). At the same time other brothers or sisters are not to engage in the family life of a member. So it is prudently stated, "If anyone learns that a scandal is occurring relative to brothers and sisters, he shall report it to the ministers and shall have opportunity to report it to the Visitor. He need not be held to report it in the case of husband against wife" (36).

### **4. Social life**

When speaking about the entrance to the Order the *Memoriale* prescribes certain clear norms that are evangelical and at the same time touch the social life of the brothers and sisters: "when anybody wishes to enter this brotherhood, the ministers shall carefully inquire into his standing and occupation, and they shall explain to him the obligations of the brotherhood, especially that of restoring what belongs to others. And if he is content with it, let him be vested according to the prescribed way, and he must make satisfaction for his debts, paying money according to what pledged provision is given. They are to reconcile themselves with their neighbours and to pay up their tithes" (29). Here we see three conditions that are prerequisites for becoming a member of the Order of Penance:

- Restore what belongs to others.
- Reconcile with their neighbours.
- Pay up their tithes.

With regards to the reception of the Sacrament of Confession as well these three things are prescribed: “They are to make a confession of their sins three times a year and to receive Communion at Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. They are to be reconciled with their neighbours and to restore what belongs to others. They are to make up for past tithes and pay future tithes” (art. 15). The above mentioned values are still applicable in the social life of the members of OFS.

In the time of *Memoriale* it was of great social impact to say, “They are not to take up lethal weapons, or bear them about, against anybody” (16). It was normal to bear arms in the Middle Ages. Added to this prohibition to carry arms we see a positive command to live in peace: “As regards making peace among the brothers and sisters or non-members at odds, let what the ministers find proper be done...” (26). Distancing themselves from the places and social functions where people would not expect a penitent to take part was also foreseen in the Rule: “They are not to go to unseemly parties or to shows or dances” (5).

## 5. Economic life

Financial contribution from the part of the members is also mentioned: “And every member is to give the treasurer one ordinary denar. The treasurer is to collect this money and distribute it on the advice of the ministers among the poor brothers and sisters, especially the sick and those who may have nothing for their funeral services, and thereupon among the poor” (20). The use of this money is clearly mentioned: “...a faithful treasurer, who is to provide for the need of the brothers and sisters and other poor” (38). So first they were to take care of the needs of the poor members of the Order and then to the other poor outside the Order. They have to help also the sick brothers and sisters if they are found in need: “Whenever any brother or sister happens to fall ill, the ministers, if the patient let them know of it, shall in person or through others visit the patient once a week, and remind him of penance; and if they find it expedient, they are to supply him from the common fund with what he may need for the body” (22). They were also supposed to offer something of the money to the church where they hold the monthly meetings (20).

We find that even after 800 years in OFS these are the principal ways of utilizing the financial contributions received from the brothers and sisters.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, we would like to say that the document of *Memoriale propositi* guided and animated the life of the Penitents in general in the thirteenth century and the Franciscan Penitents, in particular, were guided by it until they had the first approved Rule in 1289. As the members of the Order of Secular Franciscans celebrate the 800 anniversary of this document it is a reminder of our beginning. We saw that the document uses clear and direct language and engages almost all the aspects of the life of its members. Daily conversion through penance was the spirit of lay-movements at that time. The clear “no” to arms, to luxuries of life, to unseemly celebrations and the clear “yes” to daily prayer life, fasting and penance were all traits of the spirituality of their time. As we finish the celebration of the anniversary, let this document continue to remain as a treasure in our paths.

## NEWS

### **Columbia: National Elective Chapter**

The National Elective Chapter of Colombia was celebrated from 2 to 5 July 2021 at the Fundación Casa de Ejercicios Espirituales Cristo Rey, Calle 170 No. 19B-62. Bogotá DC, Colombia. The Chapter was presided over by Sister Martha Esperanza Osorio Montiel, SFO delegated by Tibor Kauser, OFS Minister General and with Fr. Sergio Iván Rojas Díaz, OFM, delegate of the Conference of Spiritual Assistants (CAS) who presented the theme: “Have faith: a process of constant conversion for the Secular Franciscan brother”.

The liturgy was presided over by the Spiritual Assistants of the three Obediences: Fr. Hugo Osorio OFMCap; Fr. John Freddy Marín Rengifo OFMConv; and Fr. Dagoberto Marín Pachecho OFM. There were 4 religious and 25 Chapter members who actively participated in everything that was required of them for the smooth running of the work. On 3 July, during the Eucharist at 6.30 pm, thanksgiving was offered for the 800 years of the *Memoriale propositi*, presided over by Fr. Sergio Iván Rojas Díaz OFM, delegate of the CAS.

On July 4, the following candidates were elected: National Minister Gloria Eugenia Ribero Suárez and Vice Minister Genys Patricia Rodríguez Hernández. The elective Chapter took place in a fraternal atmosphere, without neglecting the strict observance of the safety norms required by the Ministry of Health for this kind of meeting.

### **Bosnia and Herzegovina: VFP and National Elective Chapter**

The National Fraternity of OFS in Bosnia and Herzegovina had the Fraternal and Pastoral Visit and the election of the new National Council on 9-11 July. The meetings took place in Medjugorje. The Fraternal Visit was made by Ana Fruk, a member of the CIOFS Presidency from Croatia and the Pastoral Visit by Fr. Alfred Parambathu OFMConv.

Since OFM is the only First Order family present in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the OFS National Fraternity is assisted solely by them. The national fraternity is divided into two regions: Herzegovina with 17 local fraternities and 1035 members; Bosnia with 32 local fraternities and 830 members. It is worth noting that almost 70 percent of vocations to the OFM come either from YouFra or from the families of OFS - one more reason for all of us to work for the OFS.

During the Elective Chapter Ivana Vidović was elected National Minister and Božica Lončar as International Councilor.

### **Latvia: National Elective Chapter**

The National Elective Chapter of OFS in Latvia took place on Saturday 17 July 2021 at the parish church of the Holy Trinity in Riga. It is an emerging national fraternity and has only 72 members, who live in two local fraternities. The OFS is assisted by the Capuchin Friars. During the first session, the reports of the National Minister, the National Treasurer and the National Formator were presented. In the following session Attilio spoke of the social responsibility of OFS in the light of *Laudato Si* and then Fr. Alfred spoke of the need to maintain peace and unity among the members of the SFO in the light of the *Letter to a Minister* of St. Francis.

The elective session of the Chapter was presided over by Attilio Galimberti, delegate of Tibor Kauser, Minister General of OFS and was assisted by Fr. Alfred Parambakathu OFMConv., General Spiritual Assistant. Gundega Zake Cimza was re-elected national minister and Agnes Irbe vice national minister. Fr. Bogulavs OFMConv., the National Spiritual Assistant and Fr. Janis OFMConv., Local Assistant were present at the Chapter. During the Holy Mass celebrated in the afternoon, presided over by Fr. Bogulavs, the new National Council was installed.

### **Spain: National Elective Chapter**

The elective Chapter of the National Fraternity of OFS in Spain took place from 10 to 12 September, at the Casa de Espiritualidad, Camino Cristo del Pardo, Madrid, of the Capuchin Friars. The National Council had sent us all the reports, including that of the National Spiritual Assistants, well in advance. The elective session of the Chapter, which took place on Saturday afternoon, was presided over by Attilio Galimberti, member of the CIOFS Presidency, delegated by Tibor Kauser, General Minister of OFS. He was assisted by Fr. Alfred Parambakathu OFMConv., General Spiritual Assistant. Among the 30 capitulars summoned, 29 capitulars were present for the Chapter. All four national Assistants and two other regional Assistants were also present. Antonio Álvarez was elected national minister for the second consecutive term. According to the national statutes of OFS in Spain, the national minister is also an international councilor. The new National Council was installed during Holy Mass on Sunday morning, presided over by Fr. Miguel Campillo OFMConv., National Assistant, and Fr. Alfred preached the homily. Fr. Valentin Redondo OFMConv., was also present at the Holy Mass representing his Minister Provincial.

### **Austria: National Elective Chapter**

On 10 -12 September 2021, at the Convent of the Franciscan Sisters of Vöcklabruck, the National Fraternity of Austria celebrated its elective Chapter with the theme: “«Because, where your treasure is, there will your heart be too» (Mt 6, 21), 800 years of *Memoriale Propositi* (1221)”. The moderator was Sr. Teresa Hometner who opened the meeting with a prayer. And then was followed the greetings of the representative of the CIOFS, Ana Fruk and Fr. Pedro Zitha OFM, General Spiritual Assistant.

The theme, presented after dinner, was “«in search of treasures»: my vocation to OFS”, presented by Silvia Giuliani, followed by the Vespers and the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament presided over by the National Assistant Fr. Leszek Nocun, OFMConv.

On the following day, Fr. Marek Król OFS presented a reflection on the “*Memoriale Propositi* and its actualization” which was discussed in the working groups. In the afternoon, the elective session for the new OFS National Council of Austria was conducted and session took a long time due to the lack of candidates. In the end and thanks be to God, the assembly was able to proceed and elect the new Council in which Franz Spenner was reconfirmed as National Minister, Alfred Obermair as International Councilor and Silvia Giuliani in charge of formation. Fr. Fritz Wenigwieser OFM celebrated Holy Mass with the installation of the newly elected Council, during which he thanked Fr. Guido, OFM, the outgoing National Assistant, and welcomed the new National Assistant Fr. Stefan Kitmüller OFM.

## **Angola: Fraternal and Pastoral Visits**

A Fraternal and Pastoral Visit was conducted to the OFS National Fraternity of Angola from 11-19 September 2021 by Rui Jorge Silva-OFS Portugal, delegated by the OFS General Minister, Tibor Kauser, and by Fr. Francis Bongajum Dor-OFMCap., General spiritual assistant. During the visit, the two visitors also presided over the national elective chapter from 16-19 September. At the time of the visit, according to the triennial report of the national minister, Nkanu Kiala, the national fraternity of Angola comprises 23 constituted local fraternities and 3 emerging Fraternities. All are subdivided into 3 regional fraternities (North, Centre and South). They number 262 finally professed members, 94 temporally professed members, 76 members in formation and 57 persons in an experience called “initiation” for a total of 489 persons. There are 13 spiritual assistants for all the levels. Several local fraternities are without appointed spiritual assistants. On Thursday, September 16<sup>th</sup>, the visitors discussed the specific challenge regarding spiritual assistance at a meeting with the Provincial Minister Fr. Pedro Binji-OFMCap., and the President of the OFM Foundation in Angola, Fr. Antonio Boaventura Zovo Baza.

The Fraternal visitor, Rui Jorge Silva and the out-going national Minister, Nkanu Kiala paid a courtesy visit to the Archbishop of Luanda on Saturday September 11<sup>th</sup>. He was very grateful for the visit and expressed his esteem for the Franciscan charism. They next met with the Regional Fraternity of Luanda on Sunday September 12<sup>th</sup> while waiting for the arrival of the pastoral visitor. When Fr. Francis arrived, the two visitors, accompanied by the national minister, travelled to the South to visit the Regional Council of that region. They held a meeting with the regional council of the South in Benguela on Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> and travelled back to Luanda on Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup>. Due to time constraint and long distances, the visitors could not travel to the north region as planned. On Thursday 16<sup>th</sup>, the visitors met with the national council. Rui J. Silva signed the documents of the national council after carefully reading them and asking for some clarifications.

## **Angola: National Elective Chapter**

The national elective chapter was held in the School of Santo Domingos in the Parish of Nossa Senhora de Fátima in Luanda. 25 persons were present for the chapter, of whom 9 had an active voice according to the national Statute. On Friday 17<sup>th</sup>, Domingos Calussumi OFS, gave a conference on the Theme: “800 anos da Redação da *Memoriale Propositi*” (800 years of the writing of *Memoriale Propositi*). The conference was prepared by Fr. Antonio Amandio OFS, a secular priest and Regional spiritual assistant of the South region, who could not be present at the time. Elections were done on Saturday September 18<sup>th</sup>. Domingos Calussumi was elected national minister and international councilor and Adriano Mateus dos Santos was elected Vice national Minister and substitute international councilor. Later in the day, Rui J. Silva installed the new national council at the end of a Eucharistic celebration in the Parish Church. For the closing Mass, the capitulars celebrated together with the Parish community on Sunday 19<sup>th</sup>, after which the new national council was presented to the Christian community as the Provincial Minister, Fr. Pedro Binji-OFMCap., welcomed them and gave them his blessings. The FPV and elective chapter were lived in a fraternal and joyful atmosphere with Franciscan simplicity and collaboration.

## **Lithuania: National Elective Chapter**

The elective Chapter of the National Fraternity of OFS in Lithuania was held on 17-19 of September at the Hill of Crosses Friary of the OFM. The Chapter was begun on 17<sup>th</sup> afternoon, on the feast day of the Stigmata of St. Francis. Tibor Kauser, the Minister General OFS, spoke to the

Chapter on the general situation of the Order around the world. Fr. Alfred Parambakathu OFMConv., General Spiritual Assistant, made a presentation on “Hill of Crosses – La Verna”. The elective session of the Chapter was held on 18<sup>th</sup> afternoon. Among the 28 Capitulars convoked, there were 23 Capitulars present for the Chapter. Two National Assistants and three Regional Assistants also were present for the Chapter. Virginija Mickute was elected as the National minister for the third consecutive term. Later she was elected also as the International councilor. The new National Council was installed during the Holy Mass on the same day evening, presided by Fr. Alfred. The whole National Chapter was held in a spirit of deep prayer, devotion and fraternal love.

### **Sweden: National Elective Chapter**

The elective Chapter of the National Fraternity of OFS in Sweden was held on 24-26 of September Marielunds Stiftgård, a diocesan center near Stockholm. Michel Versteegh, International Councilor of the Netherlands, delegated by Tibor Kauser, the Minister General OFS, presided over the elective session of the Chapter. Fr. Alfred Parambakathu OFMConv., General Spiritual Assistant, representing the CAS, assisted the Chapter.

On Friday, the first day of the Chapter, Michel Versteegh presented the theme “The role of the National Council in facilitating the National Fraternity”. The elective session was held on Saturday morning. 11 out of the 18 Capitulars were present for the Chapter. There were also two National Spiritual Assistants. Tomislav Azdajic was elected as the National Minister for the second consecutive term and Georg Stenborg was elected as the International Councilor. The new National Council was installed during the Vespers on the same day evening. On Sunday morning Fr. Alfred presented the theme “The *Transitus*: Towards reconciliation”.

### **Czech Republic: National Elective Chapter**

On 17-19 September 2021, after waiting a year due to the Covid 19 pandemic, the OFS National Fraternity of the Czech Republic finally had the opportunity to celebrate its elective National Chapter in the Marian Shrine of Hostyn. The Chapter opened on Friday evening with the celebration of Holy Mass presided over by the Provincial of the Friars Minor, Fr. Jakub Sadílek, followed by the prayer of Vespers and the presentation of the delegates. At the end, the Compline prayer was recited.

On Saturday the capitulars were blessed by the presence of the Provincial Minister of the Capuchins, Fr. Dismas Tomaščík, OFMCap, who celebrated the votive Mass of the Holy Spirit. Then all the delegates went to the Chapter room and there was the presentation of the reports of the outgoing National Council. In the afternoon they had the joy of celebrating the elective part of the Chapter which was presided over by Lucia Spodniaková OFS, delegate of the OFS Minister General, Tibor Kauser and assisted by Fr. Pedro Zitha OFM, member of the Conference of Spiritual Assistants and witness. During the election Vaclav Hayek was elected National Minister, while Marketa Kubešova was elected International Councilor. The Chapter concluded on Sunday with the Eucharistic celebration presided over by the priest responsible for the Shrine.

### **Belgium: National Elective Chapter**

The National Fraternity of OFS Belgium celebrated its Elective Chapter on 25 September 2021, in the Franciscan convent of “Notre-Dame de graces” in Woluwe Saint Pierre in Brussels. The Chapter was presided over by Attilio Galimberti OFS, delegate of the Minister General Tibor



Kauser, and by Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM member of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants of OFS-YouFra.

Before the election of the new Council, Attilio spoke about “the values of *Memoriale Propositi* today” and Piet de Leeuw OFS presented a concise Franciscan reading of the Encyclical “Fratelli Tutti”. These interventions were followed by the presentation of all the members present at the Chapter and the celebration of the Holy Mass presided over by the local Spiritual Assistant Fr. Benjamin OFM, during which Marilena Di Stasi made her profession to OFS. After a frugal lunch shared in a spirit of fraternity, in the afternoon, we proceeded with the elective part and with the appointment of the new Council by the President of the Chapter. Due to the lack of the necessary quorum, the vote was considered indicative and the appointment of the Council members reflected the results. Jacques Meulkens was confirmed as National Minister and Johan De Ridder as Vice Minister. The new Council will remain in office for a period of 2 years and, among others, will have the task of preparing a regulation for the Chapter that will allow its effective celebration. The day ended with the recitation of a specific prayer proposed by the National Spiritual Assistant Fr. Bart De Paepe OFMConv. The new Council then had its first meeting with the delegates of the International Council during which they were encouraged to undertake to implement the recommendations made at the time to help the Belgian Fraternity to grow towards fraternal unity and to write a draft of the National Statutes.