



K O I N Ō N I A

...on the journey together

CONFERENCE OF THE GENERAL SPIRITUAL ASSISTANTS TO THE SFO

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MAIN EVENTS OF 2011

PRESENTATION OF THE MOST IMPORTANT EVENTS OF THE YEAR

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Introduction

The four most important events in 2011 for both the SFO and the Franciscan Family are as follows (three of which are also for the Church):

- The Beatification of John Paul II on May 1 in Rome, Italy.
- World Youth Day (WYD) from Aug. 16-21 in Madrid.
- The SFO General Chapter from October 22-29 in San Paolo, Brazil.
- The 25th Anniversary of the World Day of Prayer for peace on Oct. 27, 1986, in Assisi.

The Ven. Servant of God, John Paul II is behind two of the above events: the youth and the responsibility of Religious Leaders of the world to promote peace at all levels. Pope Benedict XVI will be present at three of the aforesaid events.

1. The Beatification of John Paul II

On May 1, John Paul II will be declared Blessed by Pope Benedict XVI. Surely, many will be the images, words, and gestures that will be circulating around the world regarding his beatification and which, undoubtedly, will be requiring an intelligent choice of information. Check out the official website at www.karol-wojtyla.org. We already know how the figure of John Paul II is closely tied to the Franciscan Family and the city of Assisi where he visited so many times both before and after his election as Pope.

Among the words which John Paul II addressed the Secular Franciscans, we find the following:

My exhortation is this: 1) study, 2) love, 3) live the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order, approved for you by my Predecessor Paul VI. It is a true treasure in your hands in harmony with the II Vatican Council and one that responds to what the Church expects from you. Love, study, and live this your Rule because the values contained therein are eminently evangelic. Live these values both in fraternity and the world in which you are involved and rooted by your secular vocation. Live out these evangelical values in your families by

handing down the faith with prayers, example, and education; and live out also the evangelical demands of mutual love, faithfulness and respect for life (Rule 17).¹

In 2002, Pope Wojtyła remembered also the commitment of the Friars in the SFO, stating that

“Spiritual Assistance is important as a fundamental element of communion” to be carried out collegially at the regional, national, and international levels (*SFO General Constitutions* 90.3). Of utmost importance is the collegial service of *altius moderamen* “entrusted by the Church to both the First Order Franciscan and the Third Order Regular” which is tied for centuries to the Secular Fraternities (cfr *General Constitutions* 85.2; 87.1).²

Having said this, I enjoy remembering that many men, women, and children were able to see and listen to Pope John Paul II. Some even met him personally, managing to reach out and touch him or be caressed by his fatherly blessing. There is no doubt that his life was a blessing and continues to be so for the Church and the world. He is a model of a believer and good shepherd and from heaven he will be a help to us all who are still pilgrims and wayfarers in this stupendous and fascinating world, but at the same time difficult and with unresolved grave problems. John Paul II pray for us!

2. World Youth Day (WYD)

World Youth Day is strongly tied to the figure of John Paul II, who began it back in 1985. Since then, twenty six years have passed. The next World Youth Day is slated to take place from Aug. 16-21, 2011, in Madrid, the city to host the youth from the world over and Pope Benedict XVI. The true meaning behind the events is found in the Pope’s message for WYD 2011, entitled, ***Rooted in and Founded on Christ, Solid in the Faith*** (Cfr. Col 2,7), which can be accessed at <http://www.madrid11.com/it/in-cammino/testi-del-papa/248-mensaje2011>.

A novelty in this WYD will be the participation of all Franciscan youth (Lay, Secular, and Religious) **representing the Franciscan Family** in all the events of WYD, especially in those events belonging to the Franciscan Family in order to share and bear witness to the charism of the Seraphic Father St. Francis.³

The program of the Franciscan Family will unfold during WYD from August 16-19 at the **Franciscan Village**, which the International Commission and the Spanish Commission both wished to establish around the Church of **St. Francis the Great**. The area will remain open and accessible daily to participants during hours which will be made public at the proper time. **The Franciscan Village** is meant to be a meeting place where the youth and those in-charge can share and experience the universal fraternity in a simple way not often possible during large gatherings. **The Village** was thought of for meetings and various other activities, such as exhibition, projects, sailing of goods, conferences, prayer, adoration, refreshments, etc.⁴ This program includes a formative meeting with the Ministers General of the First Order, TOR, and SFO; it is slated for Wednesday on Aug. 17. For questions and clarifications, write to gmg2011ff@gmail.com. To register for WYD, you need to go to www.madrid11.com.

¹ Discourse of John Paul II to the members of the General Council of the Franciscan Order (September 27, 1982) at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/1982/september/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19820927_ordine-francescano_it.html

² Discourse of John Paul II to the participants in the General Chapter of the Secular Franciscan Order (Friday, November 22, 2002) in http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/2002/november/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20021122_francesceni-secolari_it.html

³ CONFERENCE OF THE FRANCISCAN FAMILY Letter of Feb. 2, 2010.

⁴ INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION OF THE FRANCISCAN FAMILY, Letter of July 20, 2010.

YouFra International Meeting 2011

“As it has become a tradition for YouFra from all over the world to get together days prior to WYD, so it will also be next year when we celebrate the **26th WYD in Madrid**. We are organizing a **YouFra International Meeting** to bring together young people in order to share and deepen the experiences that we have shared with our fraternities since our last meeting in Sydney. This will give us the possibility of participating and sharing the joy of being Christians together with all young people who will be present at WYD.”⁵

3. The SFO General Chapter

The third event of this year will be the *XIII SFO General Chapter* which will take place in Brazil in the city of St. Paolo from Oct. 22-29, 2011, at the Pastoral Center of Santa Fe. It will be the first time that a General Chapter actually takes place in South America where one third of both the SFO and YouFra coexist considerably.⁶

The main theme of the Chapter will be *Evangelized so as to Evangelize*. In order to promote among the Capitulars a deep reflection on the topic, a project was drawn up that would develop a Program of Ongoing Formation for 2011. This could be done through a monthly form which can be accessed at <http://www.ciofs.org/it.htm>

This will also allow for an in-depth study of some aspects of the Apostolic Exhortation, “*Evangelii Nuntiandi*” by Pope Paul VI of happy memory.⁷ In it, the Holy Father reminded us that it is urgent to respond to “the need and the hopes of a multitude of brothers, whether Christians or not, who await to receive the word of salvation from the Church” (EN n. 81).

I recall here, moreover, that from Oct. 7-28, 2012, the XIII General Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops will take place at the Vatican. The central theme will be the “New Evangelization for the Handing Down of the Christian Faith.”

4. World Youth Day of Prayer for Peace

After the *Angelus* of Jan. 1, Pope Benedict announced that *this year, 2011, is the 25th anniversary of the World Day of Prayer for Peace which Venerable John Paul II convoked in Assisi in 1986. Therefore next October I shall go as a pilgrim to the town of St Francis, inviting my Christian brethren of various denominations, the exponents of the world’s religious traditions to join this Pilgrimage and ideally all men and women of good will. It will aim to commemorate the historical action desired by my Predecessor and to solemnly renew the commitment of believers of every religion to live their own religious faith as a service to the cause of peace.*

Harkening back to that event in Assisi on Oct. 27, 1986, John Paul II, in his Christmas discourse to the Roman Curia, described that day with a completely new and original expression calling it, *The Spirit of Assisi*. Before going into depth about this concept, let us ask ourselves, what actually happened on Oct. 27, 1986?

The Actual Event

Thank to the initiative of John Paul II, the religious leaders of the world came together with the goal of “being together to pray” for peace. It was not about having a “common prayer” in the sense of

⁵ CIOFS - COMMISSION YOUFRA, Letter of 21 July 2010.

⁶ Cf. ENCARNACIÓN DEL POZO, *Letter Circ.* 21/08-14 (Rome January 31, 2011).

⁷ *Ibid.*

the realization of a religious syncretism.

The Pope said to the Cardinals,

*The fact of convening in Assisi to pray, fast, and walk in silence for a peace that, perhaps, today is always more fragile and threatened than ever, was a clear sign of deep unity by those seek spiritual and transcendental values in religion in answer to the great question of the human heart despite the real divisions (cf. Nostra Aetate, 1)*⁸.

There were 160 invites divided into 60 delegations of which 32 were Christian organizations and 28 non-Christian. The Catholic Church was represented by the Pope himself with a dozen Cardinals and a couple of Bishops for each continental episcopate.⁹ The Orthodox Church was represented by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Patriarchs of Antioch, Moscow, Georgia, Romania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, and Finland. The ancient Eastern Churches of the Coptics, Syrians, and Armenians were also in attendance. Among the confessional families of the west were the Old-Catholics, the Anglicans, Lutherans, Reformed, Methodist, Disciples of Christ, Baptist, and three other denominations. The Ecumenical Council of the Churches was also there. The *Antidefamation League* and the Israeli community of Rome represented Judaism. Buddhists participated from India, Thailand, Korea, and Japan, along with the presence of the exiled Dalai Lama. Muslims came from Morocco, Pakistan, Turkey, India, Bangladesh, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Saudi Arabia, and Mozambique. There were traditional African religions as well from Kenya, Ghana, and Togo. The last two religions to be mentioned that were present were both the Amerindians and the Japanese Shinto.

The Meaning of the Expression, Spirit of Assisi

After having spoken of the “essential ministry of the Church”, the Pope said further:

“The Church has exercised such a ministry even in Assisi, which though unprecedented, is, nonetheless, in no way less effective and committed as our guests attested. They have expressed their joy about it and urged that the journey begun should continue. On the other hand, the situation of the world – as evident on this Christmas vigil – is in itself a pressing call to rediscover and keep the Spirit of Assisi always alive as a reason for a hopeful future”.¹⁰

Again, the Pope feels the situation of the world as a “a pressing call to rediscover and keep the Spirit of Assisi always alive as a reason for a hopeful future” and continued saying that:

“the unique value of prayer for peace was discovered there in an extraordinary way, for peace cannot be attained without prayer, the prayer of all and of each one in his own identity and search for the truth. Another wonderful manifestation must be noticed as well, namely, the unity that bind us all despite the evident differences and divisions. Every authentic prayer is lead by the Holy Spirit who “intercedes with insistence for us” “because we do not know how to pray as we ought”; yet the Spirit prays in us “with inexpressible groanings and the one who searches hearts knows what is the intention of the Spirit (cf. Rm 8, 26-27).” In

⁸ JOHN PAUL II, *Christmas Address to the Roman Curia* (Vatican, 22 December 1986) n. 1.

⁹ LUIGI ACCATTOLI, *Chronicle of the Day Twenty-Five Years Later in St. Anthony's Messenger*, n. 1 (Padua, January 2011) 36-37.

¹⁰ JOHN PAUL II, *Christmas Address to the Roman Curia* (Vatican, 22 December 1986) n. 10.

fact, we can assert that every authentic prayer is inspired by the Holy Spirit, who is mysteriously present in the heart of each person.¹¹

In his Christmas message *Urbi et Orbi* of 1986, the Pope recalled anew the purpose of the Assisi event:

The Bishop of Rome thanks all those who have come to Assisi **to be together to pray for peace on earth and reflect** before “the last and ineffable mystery that surrounds our existence from where we draw our origin and toward where we are heading” (*Nostra Aetate* 1).¹²

There are no doubts about the objectives of the meeting of the Oct. 27, 1986, in Assisi. According to Andrea Riccardi the message was clear, that is, all religions do not justify terrorism and war; rather they pray for peace.”¹³ Pope Benedict XVI confirmed this idea and his presence in Assisi in order to commemorate that event will be a proof of the continuity of Papal Magisterium.

NEWS – CHAPTERS – VISITS – MEETINGS

India – Fraternal and Pastoral Visit

The Pastoral and Fraternal Visit of India were conducted from January 7-17, 2011, by both Doug Clorey, SFO, Vice-Minister General, and Br. Amanuel Mesgun Temelso, OFM^{Cap}, Assistant General; it was requested by the CIOFS presidency immediately after the Elective National Chapter of India which took place in May of 2011. The main reason for this visit was the resolution of the Spiritual Assistants given to the Minister General prior to the aforesaid Chapter. The last visit conducted in India was 6 years ago. The visitors were welcomed at the airport by the National Minister, Francis Albert, who accompanied them throughout the duration of the visit. They visited both Kerala and Tamil Nadu. During the visit, they were able to visit ecclesial authorities, such as the Ministers Provincial Br. Babu Jose Pamplany, OFM, Br. Thomas Jacob OFM^{Cap}, Br. Alphonse Charles OFM^{Cap}, Br. Matthew OFM^{Conv}, and the Vice-Provincial Br. P. S. Joseph as well as 4 National, Provincial, and Regional Assistants.

The visitors participated in the gathering of the National Council where only 3 members were absent. They were able to discuss at the meeting of the Regional Councils about the five priorities of the Order, i.e., formation, communication, Franciscan Youth, presence in the world, and emerging fraternities. Ideas were shared with members of the National Council as well as with hundreds of Secular Franciscans. The records and the minutes of both the National and Regional Fraternities were all looked at.

Although the SFO National Fraternity of India has some minor problems, nonetheless, it is still both a dynamic and vibrant fraternity with a promising future. The SFO in India is made up of 900 Local Fraternities divided into 80 Regional Fraternities, yet assisted only by 27 Friars of the First and Third Order Regular. The Secular Franciscans of India are 23,150. Among these, 2,975 are seculars yet to be professed and 2,525 are SFO candidates.

Italy, Rome – Meeting of the New OFM^{Conv}. Ministers Provincial and Custodes

¹¹ *Ibid.* n. 11.

¹² GIOVANNI PAOLO II, *Message Urbi et Orbi* (Christmas 1986) n. 4.

¹³ ANDREA RICCARDI, *Land of the Seekers of Peace. Assisi '86. Prayer can do more than weapons*, in *Saint Anthony's Messenger*, n. 1 (Padua, January 2011) 46.

In two periods from Jan. 10-15 and 17-22, 2011 in Rome, a good 37 Friars Ministers, Custodes, and Provincial Secretaries elected for the first time from 2009-2010, participated for a week in meeting with Ministers, General Definitors, and Friars at the service of the Order of Friars Minor Conventual in different offices of the General Curia. The program began with both a greeting and introduction by the Minister General on the goals of the meeting; it was followed by two reflections: one by Br. Giacomo Bini, former OFM Minister General on “Franciscan Service of Authority Today” and the other by Mauro Gambetti, Provincial Ministers OFMConv of the Italian Province of Bologna on “Animation in Administrative Areas: Guiding the guide; the Guardian and Conventual Chapter” (Cf News of Feb. 9, 2011, as it appeared at <http://www.ofmconv.org> Each Minister Provincial and Custode received the corresponding information on Assistance to both the SFO and YouFra prepared by Martin Bitzer, Assistant General to the SFO, but presented to the participants by Br. Jurek Norel, Vicar General of the OFMConv.

Cordoba, Argentina –Formation Days for the Spiritual Assistance to the SFO and YouFra

“Formation Days for the Spiritual Assistance to the SFO and YouFra” took place from Jan. 11-13 at St. Antonio of Arredondo, Cordoba. Forty-nine persons from different nations of South America (i.e., Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay) were in attendance. Sylvia Diana, SFO National Minister of Argentina, welcomed the participants, that is, the Secular Franciscans, among who were Ingrid Palacios, SFO National Assistance of Chile and Alcides Martinez, SFO National Assistance of Paraguay; Religious Sisters of Argentina and Paraguay; Friars of both the First Order and TOR, among them Carlos Trovarelli, Minister Provincial OFMConv (Argentina) and Federico Gayoso, Minister Provincial TOR (Paraguay); delegates of both the OFM Minister Provincial of Chile and OFMConv of Argentina-Uruguay; and National, Regional, and Local Spiritual Assistants as well as Friars interested on the topic of assistance to both the SFO and YouFra coming from the aforesaid 4 nations.

The speakers of these “Formation Days” were María Consuelo Núñez (Venezuela), Councilor of the CIOFS Presidency for the Spanish language, and Br. Martin Bitzer (Argentina), OFMConv, SFO Assistant General. After having touched upon the topic of Franciscan lay spirituality, the reflections all focused on the study of the *Statute for the Spiritual and Pastoral Assistance to the SFO* (2009) and their practical implications, such as the roles of both Major Superiors and Spiritual Assistants, importance of Fraternal and Pastoral Visits, etc. The speakers presented different handbooks prepared by the CIOFS presidency. The rough draft of 76 pages – handed out to the participants on the first day – collects all the conferences and documents that were presented with the exception of the *Statute for the Assistance* published in Spanish by Br. Luigi Furgoni, OFMConv., SFO National Assistant to Argentina.

Rome, Italy – Meeting with OFM New Ministers Provincial and Custodes

The meeting of newly elected Provincial Ministers and Custodes with the Minister General and his Definitory took place at the General Curia from Jan. 17-28. As usual, during this time, there were also days set aside for visiting the different offices of the Curia, including the office of the SFO-YouFra. It was an opportunity to present to them the current situation of both the SFO-YouFra in the world, but especially reflect together about the responsibility and role of Ministers Provincial and Custodes with regards to assisting spiritually and pastorally the SFO and YouFra.

Frascati, Italy – Meeting with New OFMConv Ministers Provincial

Yearly, the meeting of Formation for newly elected OFMConv Ministers Provincial took place in Frascati from Jan. 24-29, 2011. The topic of the meeting was “Call to Lead”; it involved 23 Ministers coming from different areas. During this annual appointment, the Minister General, his

General Definitors and offices of the General Curia informed the newly elected about their activities. All of them together discussed about all the problems of the Order which has an International physiognomy. Because this was a learning meeting, of reflection and preparation, all shared their problems openly and sought to widen their horizons. During the afternoon hours of Jan. 25, the SFO Assistant General, Br. Amanuel Mesgun, spoke to New Ministers regarding the current situation of the SFO, encouraging them to dedicate themselves with greater commitment to assist the SFO spiritually. After having exhorted them to live with the SFO in a “vital reciprocal communion”, he then answered their questions, clarifying the many ambiguities that come when exercising “altius moderamen”.

Assisi, Italy – Course for the SFO-YouFra Assistants of Italy

The *12th Formation Course for the Assistants of SFO-YouFra of Italy: The Secular Franciscan Order and the Spirit of Assisi in its 25th Anniversary* took place in Assisi this past Jan. 24-28 with about 100 in attendance. This was decided independently from Pope Benedict XVI’s decision to go to Assisi “with the goal of recalling the historical gesture of Oct. 27, 1986, as well as to renew the commitment of believers to live their religious faith as a service for the cause of peace.” According to Br. Luigi Senesi, OFMCap, the choice of the program was meant to be a “contribution to this moving event not only through moments of celebration, but also to relive it today.” This was done with a key interpretation by Br. Pietro Messa, OFM, and by listening to protagonists of and witnesses to the event, such as Msgr. Flavio Carraro, Msgr. Vittorio Peri, Br. Gianmaria Polidoro, OFM, and Br. Giuseppe Ferdinandi, TOR. Br. Vincenzo Coli, OFMConv, however, was absent for health reasons.

From this perspective of the *Spirit of Assisi*, we considered also the commitments and problems of Assistance by dialoguing with Br. Martin Bitzer, OFMConv (Conference of SFO Assistants General), Br. Roberto Rossi, OFMCap (Conference YouFra Assistants), Alfonso Filippone (YouFra President), Giuseppe Failla (SFO National Assistant to Italy) and by comparing notes at the Regional Conferences. Br. Martin raised the following question in his speech, “After the SFO of Italy reached its structural unity, did spiritual and pastoral assistance grow or was there a greater disaffection?” The debate among all raised a further question, “What kind of formation are Friars of both initial and ongoing formation getting? It will be opportune that Ministers Provincial should insert the Document, *Indications on Formation of Religious about the Knowledge of and Assistance to the SFO and YouFra* in the programs of the Friar’s Centers of Formation and Studies, so that they may know better the role and responsibility we all have in the service of spiritual and pastoral assistance to the Secular Franciscans – a service entrusted to us by the Church. This document can be found at <http://ciofs.org/Koinonia/kba6it04.pdf>.

Lastly, Br. Martin spoke about the *Questionnaire* that is on its way. It is aimed at knowing the number of Spiritual Assistants in the world and at what level they may be carrying out their service (Local, Regional, or National), especially the secular Spiritual Assistants and Assistants who are not members of the First Order and TOR. The goal of the questionnaire is “to prepare suitable tools for the formation of Spiritual Assistants to the SFO who are not members of the First Order or Third Order Regular. The answers to the *Questionnaire* must be submitted by March 31, 2011, to this e-mail address ciofs@ciofs.org. This is a whole area to be explored and to which a concrete answer must be given. The Formative course then concluded with both an assessment by the Assembly and different proposals for the future.

Rome, Italy – Formative Meeting with the Assistants of Lazio

On Feb. 9, 2011, the Formative meeting for Spiritual Assistants of the Lazio Region took place at the Convent of St. Lawrence outside of the walls of the Capuchin Friars with about 20 Friars in

attendance. The theme of the meeting, “SFO/YouFra: Called to Evangelize” was presented by Br. Ivan Matic, OFM, Assistant General; it was followed by a dialogue on the theme and on other questions presented by the participants.

Guadalajara, Mexico – Formation Course on Spiritual Assistance to the SFO and YouFra

The book, *Manual for the Assistance of the SFO and YouFra* was published this month of February in Mexico in Spanish. For this reason, the SFO National Council together with Br. Reynaldo Brizuela García, OFM, OFS National Assistant and Br. Alfredo García, OFM, YouFra National Assistant, in collaboration with the Conference of Assistant Generals of Rome organized two Formation courses in order to present the *Manual*.

The first course unfolded from Feb. 12-13, 2011, in the city of Guadalajara at the house of St. Clare, the SFO national headquarters. About 120 brothers and sisters were present representing 20 regional SFO fraternities and 11 regional YouFra fraternities. The second course unfolded from Feb. 14-16, 2011, at the “Valley of Mercy” near Guadalajara and was organized for both the SFO and YouFra Spiritual Assistants of all Mexico. More than 50 Spiritual Assistants were present and some Diocesan priests who serve as Spiritual Assistants. The presence of some Ministers Provincial was very much appreciated. Both courses were guided by both Assistants General Br. Amando Trujillo Cano, TOR, and Br. Ivan Matic, OFM.

Peru – SFO Elective National Chapter

From Feb. 18-20, 2011, the SFO Elective National Chapter unfolded at the "Foyer de Charité" of Ñaña Retreat House in Lima, Peru. About thirty Capitulars participated in it and elected Ana Maria Raffo Laos as National Minister and Carlos Ortega as Vice-National Minister. By a decision of the Chapter, they automatically accepted their role as International Councilor and its substitute respectively. The Chapter was presided over by María Consuelo Nuñez de Queremel, SFO, who was accompanied by Br. Amando Trujillo Cano, TOR, on behalf of the Conference of Assistants General. The SFO National Fraternity of Peru was confirmed by the Chapter and launched an innovative program of itinerant formation, which has already begun to show good results.

Belorussia - The SFO Elective National Chapter

From Feb. 25-27, 2011, the SFO Elective National Chapter unfolded at the Parish Hall of the Redemptorists of the Most Holy Savior in the area of Dziewiatówka in the city of Grodno. In attendance were 25 Capitulars and 9 Spiritual Assistants. The opening Mass was presided over by Msgr. Aleksander Kaszkiewicz, the Ordinary Bishop of Grodno and concelebrated by all the Assistants present at the Chapter. The election was presided over by the SFO Minister General, Encarnacion del Pozo, accompanied by the Councilor of the CIOFS Presidency Michèle Altmeyer and by Br. Alojzy Pańczak, OFM both SFO Assistant National of Poland and Delegate of the Conference of Assistants General. Maria Etol was elected National Minister. Also present at the Chapter was a group of youth from YouFra.

The SFO of Belorussia is made up of 34 Local Fraternities with 516 members, among whom 491 are solemnly professed and are mostly found in the Diocese of Grodno with 290 members. There are also 3 YouFra Local Fraternities with 42 members.