



K O I N Ō N I A

...together on the journey

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**AS YOU SENT ME INTO THE WORLD,
SO I SENT THEM INTO THE WORLD (Jn 17, 18)**

40 years after the Seraphicus Patriarcha

THE “ECOLOGICAL CONVERSION” AS VOCATION AND MISSION

Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM

INTRODUCTION

The most appropriate way to present valid arguments about the theme of ecological conversion is not only to say how and when man must change his attitude towards Creation but also to invite him to observe carefully the environmental changes we are witnessing and through which it seems that Mother Earth is inviting the heart of man to question the sense of belonging to Creation and the interdependence of all creatures.

OUR COMMON ORIGIN

Man and the universe are two aspects of the same Creation that have the same origin, God the Creator. Since in the modern world man finds himself immersed in consumerism, materialism and selfishness, it almost seems that he has forgotten this reality and therefore it becomes difficult to talk about the universe as something that is thought of for the benefit of all Creation. Speaking of ecology, it is important to be aware of the fact that all created things are necessary for the good of all and only when man becomes aware of this reality, he is able to perceive the cry of the universe. Man, a rational animal, has the responsibility of listening and evaluating his relationship with Creation and, with a humble and sincere heart, understanding its interdependence, never abusing the fact that “God intended the earth with everything contained in it for the use of all human beings and peoples” (*Gaudium et Spes* 69). It is important that he never forgets the fact of being rational and that therefore he has the task of arousing in him a lively and healthy attention to the care of Creation. Unfortunately, and especially in these last centuries, man’s attitude towards the environment has been that of opposing “I” to “Creation” completely losing sight of the aspect of reciprocity and awareness of the common origin and of the importance of the fact that both were created with an act of love of God. It seems that the man who, as we said, is the only rational being among other creatures, is led to use this intelligence as a way to get away from safeguarding the Creation, which is the mandate that God has entrusted to him,

to pass instead to its exploitation, thus altering that original and still valid relationship of union and interdependence. Well, to find an adequate answer to this problem it is necessary that man asks himself the question of why God has entrusted him with all that he has created.

FORGOTTEN VOCCATION AND MISSION

When God created the universe, he gave man the mission to guard it, or better, to use the words of the book of Genesis: ‘The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden, to work it and take care of it’ (Gen 2, 15). However, after having fallen into deception by the serpent, it is as if man had forgotten this mission and this situation continued also with the generation following that of Adam, namely that of Cain and Abel. Unfortunately, even today it seems that man continues to forget his mission and often utilizes the answer given by Cain to God who asked his brother’s account: “... Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Gen 4, 9).

Man not only destroys the environment but often denies his responsibility that is to protect, to watch over carefully, to preserve and safeguard God’s creation. It seems that man has never understood, and still does not understand that the environment is for his well-being and is for his benefit. The wars that still continue to torment peoples, the pollution present everywhere, both in developed and underdeveloped countries, are all elements that make us return to that episode in the book of Genesis (Gen 3,1-24) which deals with the disobedience of Adam and Eve and the lack of brotherly love and the envy of Cain towards Abel (Gen 4: 3-16). And it is sad to see how history shows how, even today, man is incapable of learning from his past and continues to forget the mission to which he has been delegated by God himself (see Genesis 2:15). However, it is important to affirm that even if we notice so much wickedness of many human beings towards the Creation, we can however find others who have what was the attitude of “Noah” (see Genesis 6-9) and that they still worry about doing good and that they seriously listen to the cry of Mother Earth so deeply wounded by human aggression.

“Another welcome sign is the growing attention being paid to the quality of life and to ecology, especially in more developed societies, where people’s expectations are no longer concentrated so much on problems of survival as on the search for an overall improvement of living conditions. Especially significant is the reawakening of an ethical reflection on issues affecting life. The emergence and ever more widespread development of bioethics is promoting more reflection and dialogue-between believers and non-believers, as well as between followers of different religions - on ethical problems, including fundamental issues pertaining to human life.”¹

ECOLOGICAL CONVERSION

The problem linked to climate change, particularly evident in recent years, has attracted the interests of many scholars engaged in the search for the most appropriate methods for individual and collective understanding of the phenomenon and to facilitate everyone’s awareness of the dramas that they will live if man does not change his relationship with the environment quickly. There has been much talk and writing on the theme of Creation, from many points of view, but what seems to have been lacking in this process is the total conversion of man or rather his global understanding of what is happening to our mother Earth. Many initiatives have however arisen, such as the proposal for the celebration of the World Day for the Care of Creation, born in 2006 and celebrated on September 1 of each year: these are attempts to address all people of good will, both in political and religious ambits, to implement a true, total and sincere dedication to the care of creation. Unfortunately, however, there are still many who seem to be indifferent to the theme of ecological conversion.

¹ JOHN PAUL II, *Encyclical Letter Evangelium Vitae* (25 March 1995), art.27

During his life, the Poverello of Assisi not only converted and changed his lifestyle by modeling himself on the following of God and repairing his Church that was falling into ruin, but also began to take a deep attitude of attention and love towards mother Earth. Some of his contemporaries thought that he was crazy and that his relationship with nature was exaggerated, but he had already understood the importance of Creation and of the indissoluble and fundamental relationship between the Creation and the life of man. For this reason, even today, Francis of Assisi continues to be a reference for ecological conversion, because the example of his relationship with Creation is a real and concrete teaching and the *Canticle of Creatures* is a model of how today's man must see and approach the Creation: "Praised be my Lord for our Mother Earth". A mother who needs to be loved because she sustains us, a mother who must be listened to because her cry is that of a mother who is always ready to give her life for her children. Without loving what God has given us freely it is difficult to talk about ecological conversion. First of all we must understand that God has entrusted us with the care of Mother Earth as an act of love, because He himself loved everything He created and "God saw that it was good" (Cf. Gen 1-2). If therefore Creation and the Earth are good, they are given to us for our good and, as such, they need to be cared for and loved to remain always good, beautiful and new for the benefit of humanity, today and for the future.

I believe that when modern man is able to understand that the Earth is not just an instrument to be used and exploited, but a mother who must be respected and loved, then he will come to true *metanoia* (conversion) and be able to live in harmony with the Creation finding the appropriate ways to use his intelligence in order to improve his relationship with the environment. Ecological conversion can only take place when human being is able to understand that all beings, animate and inanimate, are God's creatures and, as such, they all have the same dignity. No doubt there is a big difference when it comes to human dignity, but this does not mean that man should abuse the environment being convinced that he is superior to all other beings, animate and inanimate. All that God created was and is good and therefore man has the great responsibility to preserve and to continue to develop Creation for the common good.

True ecological conversion must not be imposed by the rulers but must arise from a personal and individual awareness, especially now that the world has almost become "a small global village". This is why men should be able to easily learn the models of virtuous behavior towards the environment by looking at what is done by others. A personal attitude towards the environment, guided by human wisdom in union with that of divine, will help man to become a sage who in his debate on the theme of ecological conversion will show his wisdom not with words but with works. It is important for man to become aware of the fact that this is the moment to initiate a change in personal lifestyles and to find and implement urgently practical ways that can eliminate those utilitarian attitudes towards the environment still present today.

In his encyclical "*Laudato Si*" Pope Francis has brought everyone's attention back to such an important topic and the need for a total conversion regarding Creation, inviting "to care for the common home"². In 2016, representatives of almost all the countries of the world gathered in the 21st Conference of Parties (COP21), have reached the "Paris agreement" which, in very concrete terms, proposes a path towards the solution of the same problem. Therefore, the more the political and religious world engages in the awareness of this theme, the more there is hope that the planet can be saved from so much destruction caused by pollution, bearing in mind however that,

Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change. We lack an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with

2 Cf. POPE FRANCIS, *Laudato Si*.

everyone. This basic awareness would enable the development of new convictions, attitudes and forms of life. A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal.³

Conversion can only begin when man succeeds in taking seriously the lament and the cry of mother Earth. Without a reciprocal and equal relationship between human being and nature it will always be difficult to talk about ecological conversion. It is therefore important that man understands that for a healthy life there must always be a healthy relationship with the nature on which he depends for his life. Without understanding this concept, conversion will never exist and one will never have the desire to change one's lifestyle as this change is only possible when there is a transformation of the heart and the mind. Conversion also comes from a total and absolute understanding of the value of what has been entrusted to us by God. We do not need to be scientists to understand that the Earth is complaining because of our behavior towards her. It is enough to look at what is happening: cyclones, tsunamis, erosion, drought, fires, etc. So talking about ecological conversion is a civil and socio-cultural issue for all the inhabitants of this planet, regardless of social class, political and religious faith. In order to foster a concrete and effective change, conversion must first be individual and only after collective. To have a true ecological conversion, man must fall in love with nature, that is, seek to discover God in Creation, just as Francis of Assisi did. When there is love for the environment, then there is respect, there is a change in the attitude towards it and there is the desire to want to defend it. One can then ask oneself who should rekindle such love. The answer is simple, it is the man himself, because it is he who is already suffering from the consequences of his negligence. There is no doubt that environmental degradation is one of the most worrying aspects for all of humanity and for this we are all called to ecological conversion, from the youngest to the oldest, from believer to unbeliever, we all have to be available to become custodians of nature because without a collective participation in the beautiful and creative action of God, ecological conversion will be only a theoretical and not practical topic. Ecological conversion without the love shown by offering a gift without asking anything in return will be a theme to be studied but not to be lived. Man must not only change his attitude but must find the courage to accept the fact that he himself is the cause of the deterioration of the gift that has been entrusted to him by the beginning of the Creation of the world, because of his betrayal. This courage will help man to return to the roots of his origin and of his mandate which is to be a collaborator of God in Creation and to overcome the egoistic and individualistic mentality. The cry of mother Earth not only reminds the man to listen but reminds him of his origins to be gifted with intelligence, created to guard all other creatures.

ECOLOGY: A VISION TO CELEBRATE

When it comes to creation, it is important for all of humanity to realize that it is not just something to think about or discuss, something to be protected but a given opportunity to praise the Creator: believers and non-believers are all found to admire the work of God, the God who created the Universe for all those who live there. Therefore, having God entrusted all creatures to us, we are all called not only to thank the Creator but also to celebrate the gift received.

The ecological vision should be the one celebrated by everyone because with a healthy relationship with the environment - the one modelled by ecology - everyone enjoys its fruits. When all humanity has become aware of this truth, it will then be easy to talk about ecology as an indispensable gift to humanity. For this reason man must have a strong and effective relationship with the environment, that is, he must not take advantage of the goods he has received as if they were worthless things and not related to his survival, but he must always try to understand that the changes in the environment are real and that they are becoming a great concern, both from the social point of view

³ Cf. POPE FRANCIS, *Laudato Si*, art. 202.

and from the political, religious and economic point of view, because in all these areas man is at the center, called to be aware of how to handle the gifts received.

How can we celebrate ecology without first having a relationship of mutual interdependence? In order to live, man needs Creation and vice versa. Therefore, it is up to humanity to keep it. The example of Francis of Assisi shines also in the *Canticle of Creatures*: he not only praises God for all that he has created, but leads us further, towards what we are called to do for Creation as collaborators of God in the work of Creation. Francis celebrates the gift of nature, which God has given us, uniting the intellectual to the spiritual aspect and with this sensitivity sees all creatures, animate and inanimate, as brothers and sisters, children of the same father, God.

CONCLUSION

Today's man is called to recognize that the mother earth needs to be considered a member of the same family, a family where there is mutual love in which everyone enjoys the authentic joy of one's existence and of the other. Therefore, together we can celebrate our common existence knowing that we are mutual gifts for each other. When there is this conscience man becomes capable of celebrating the gift received from God and can understand that ecology is the way to live in harmony with creation in universal fraternity.

NEWS - CHAPTERS – VISITS – MEETINGS

Malawi – National elective Chapter

The National Chapter of OFS in Malawi was celebrated at the Mary Mother of Africa monastery of the Poor Clares in Lilongwe from 27 June to 1 July 2018. The National Fraternity of Malawi is divided into 9 Regions, with 58 local Fraternities and 1013 members. All members of the Regional Councils are the Capitulars. The participants arrived on the 26th and, in preparation for the Chapter, participated in a one-day spiritual retreat that was led by Fr. Misheck Banda OFMCap, regional assistant.

Jennifer Harrington, Councilor of the Presidency of the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order (CIOFS), presided over the Chapter, assisted by Fr. Alfred Parambakathu OFMConv, general spiritual Assistant of the OFS-YouFra. There were 120 brothers and sisters, of whom 45 were Capitulars of the 83 convoked. The Chapter opened with a prayer led by Fr. Misheck Banda OFMCap and followed by a general meeting with the whole assembly and, subsequently, Jennifer and Fr. Alfred met the National Council. The following day Jennifer spoke on the main themes of the last General Chapter and Fr. Alfred presented an overview of the Secular Order. On Saturday, before the election, Jennifer spoke about the role of the various national council offices. During the election Christopher Malunga was elected National Minister and Tresfor Zakaliya was elected as the International Councilor. The new council was inaugurated during the Sunday Mass presided over by Fr. Misheck Banda OFMCap. In the afternoon Jennifer and Fr. Alfred met Msg. Tarsizio G. Ziyaye, archbishop of Lilongwe and, among other things, also discussed the problem of the brothers and sisters who still use the habit. The Chapter took place in a very simple and fraternal atmosphere. The effort and dedication of these brothers and sisters are really to admire. The lack of all the national assistants and the absence of the outgoing National Minister during the Chapter are the points to be improved.

Porto Rico – National elective Chapter

From 29 June to 1 July 2018 the National Fraternity of OFS in Puerto Rico celebrated its elective Chapter at the Capuchin Center in Trujillo Alto, Puerto Rico. The Chapter was presided by María Consuelo Núñez de Queremel, Vice Minister General of OFS, accompanied by Fr. Amando Trujillo Cano, TOR, general spiritual Assistant of OFS-YouFra. There were 33 capitulars of the 41 summoned and one observer. The welcoming Eucharist, presided over by the National Assistant Fr. Anibal Rosario OFMCap, was celebrated on the afternoon of Friday 29 June. The outgoing National Minister then presented the report on the activities carried out in the three-year period. The Eucharist for the opening of the Chapter was celebrated on the next morning, presided by Fr. Gerardo Antonio Vargas Cruz, OFM, new national OFS Assistant. After the report of the National Treasurer, Rafael Serrano, the Capitulars worked in groups to discuss the two reports and then found themselves in plenary session to analyze the proposals for action for the next three years as elaborated in the groups. Subsequently, Consuelo Núñez on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the OFS Rule gave a presentation entitled “The Pauline Rule: A Gift of the Lord”. We then moved on to the elective session and Isabel Lima Perez was confirmed as National Minister and International Councilor for a second term, while José Luis Serrano Vega was re-elected as the National Vice Minister. On the morning of Sunday, 1 July, Fr. Amando presented the theme “The perfect joy”. At the end of this speech, the assembly continued its work by voting for the resolutions of the Chapter for the three-year period 2018-2021, all of which were approved. The concluding Eucharist was presided over by Fr. Amando with whom concelebrated Fr. Luis Oscar Padilla, OFMCap, local assistant. During the celebration, María Consuelo, following the OFS Ritual, established the new Minister and the new National Council. The chapter took place in a fraternal atmosphere of prayer, reflection, dialogue and discernment.

Pretoria – 1º Pan-African Congress of OFS-GiFra

The first OFS-YouFra pan-African Congress took place at Padre Pio Spirituality Center in Pretoria from 20 to 25 July 2018 with the theme: “The OFS at the service of reconciliation, peace and social justice”. There were 116 participants, who came from 22 African countries, including 24 spiritual assistants. The participants included 7 members of the CIOFS Presidency, with the OFS General Minister, Tibor Kauser. Of particular importance was the presence of Archbishop William Slattery of Pretoria who also celebrated the opening Mass; of the general spiritual Assistants, of Fr. Benedict Ayodi, OFMCap, general Animator of JPIC, of Fr. Dominique Griego, OFMCap., South Africa, of Nina Richards, OFS South Africa, of Michel Janian and of Jenny Harrington, Councilors of the Presidency. The Congress had moments of prayer, conferences, workshops, plenary sessions and fraternal evenings for recreation at the end of each working day. The themes discussed were: the Church at the service of reconciliation, peace and social justice, current issues, formation, embracing the lepers of our time, the role of the spiritual Assistant and some concrete initiatives throughout Africa, undertaken by the Franciscans for the promotion of reconciliation, peace and justice. The participants of the Congress drafted a conclusive message to be sent to all the OFS national fraternities of the continent. All the participants expressed satisfaction and gratitude to God Almighty and to the organizers and they voted unanimously to begin the preparation for the next Congress in 4 or 5 years, as established by the Presidency. This first pan-African OFS-YouFra Congress was the fruit of several years of preparation by the Project Africa group, established by the CIOFS Presidency specifically for this purpose.

Rwanda – National elective Chapter

The elective national chapter of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of Rwanda was celebrated from 26 to 29 July 2018, at the parish of Kivumu, attended by only 18 capitulars, being Rwanda an emerging National Fraternity. The Chapter was presided by Michel Janian, OFS, delegate of the OFS

General Minister and member of the CIOFS Presidency who also presented the theme: “To love and guide the OFS Fraternity”. He was assisted by Fr. Louis Marie BANDEREMBAKO OFM, delegate of the general Assistant Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM. On July 28th was held the elective session in which Edouard KAYONGA, was elected as National Minister and Valens HAFASHIMANA as International Councilor. Despite the reduced number of participants, the Chapter took place in a very joyful and fraternal atmosphere.

Paraguay – Fraternal and Pastoral Visit

The fraternal and pastoral visits (FPV) to the National Council of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of Paraguay were conducted by Silvia Noemi Diana, OFS, Councilor of the CIOFS Presidency and delegated by the Minister General, and Fr. Amando Trujillo Cano, TOR, general Assistant of OFS-YouFra, representing the Conference of general spiritual Assistants (CAS), from 3 to 5 August 2018. Activities started at the “Oasi Francescana” Retirement Home, in Itauguá, with the meeting with the National Council OFS, and then with the Major Superiors of the First Order and TOR and with the Directive Board of the Franciscan Family of Paraguay. The program continued on the same day 3 after transferring to the Retreat House of the Missionary Brothers of St. Francis, in Coronel Oviedo, Caaguazú, where at the same time, the II Intermediate National Chapter of OFS in Paraguay took place with the theme: “As you have sent me into the world, I also sent them into the world” (Jn 17.18). The Visitors had meetings with the National Council of YouFra, the Regional Ministers, the Spiritual Assistants, and individual interviews with each of the members of the OFS National Council. Silvia Diana also checked the records and acts as well as the register of cash and asset management. Toward the end of the FPV, visitors presented their preliminary observations and recommendations to the OFS National Council. The opening Mass of the Chapter was presided by Fr. Marcelo Benítez OFM, OFS National Assistant. The Eucharist on the second day was presided over by Fr. Edisson Cazali, OFM Cap, Regional Assistant of Alto Parana. The concluding Mass of the Intermediate Chapter and the FPV was presided over by Fr. Amando and concelebrated by Fr. Marcelo Benítez, OFM, and Br. Federico Gayoso, TOR.

Ireland – National elective Chapter

The weekend dedicated to the National Chapter opened with a meeting of the National Council on Friday 10 August, concerned with final arrangements for the elections and the liturgies that would be celebrated. There was an update on developments in the JPIC team. Capitulars and observers arrived on 11th August, as the election was scheduled to be commenced at 2:00pm. The session opened with the reports of the outgoing council, copies of which were provided for all those who attended the Chapter. The president was Paula Pearce OFS, delegated by Tibor Kauser, Minister General of OFS and the witness was Fr. Alfred Parambathu, OFMConv., general spiritual Assistant of OFS-YouFra. The members of the outgoing council were thanked for all their hard work, especially at a time when there had been two resignations. Thirty members had the right to vote, of which 29 were present. Philomena Rooney was elected National Minister and Marie Hopkins the International Councilor. Since it was the feast of St. Clare, the homily of Saturday evening Mass was focused on her figure. The evening prayer was at 7.30 pm, followed by a detailed and informative presentation on the life of St. Clare made by Paula Pearce. This was followed by a very interesting quiz.

The following day, after the Morning prayers, Sr. Peter, of the Order of St. Clare, spoke about the life and the Writings of St. Clare. In the Holy Mass presided over by Fr. Michael Duffy OFM Cap,

the new Council was installed. The spirit of Franciscan fraternity and joy was felt during the Chapter. It is also a difficult time for the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland, as the referendum on abortion took place earlier this year. The members of the national fraternity, under the guidance of the council, were very active in the campaign against the liberalization of abortion laws. Unfortunately, their campaign was not successful, but the members continue to pray earnestly for their country.

Colombia – Fraternal and Pastoral Visit

The fraternal and pastoral visits to the National Council of OFS in Colombia were carried out in the name of CIOFS Presidency, respectively, by Maria Consuelo Núñez de Queremel (Chelito), Vice Minister General OFS, and Fr. Amando Trujillo Cano, TOR, general Assistant of OFS-GiFra, from 14 to 17 August 2018. The meeting took place in two parts, the first in the Francisco Palau Spirituality Center in Bogotá. On the evening of the 14th there was a meeting with Lorena Katherine Triviño Gutiérrez, National President of YouFra. The following day, the Visitors met the OFS National Minister Sara Ruiz, the Major Superiors Fr. Héctor Lugo García, OFM, Minister Provincial of the Province of Santa Fe, Fr. Francisco Gómez Vargas, OFM, Minister Provincial of the Province of São Paulo, Fr. Sigfredo de la Cruz, OFMConv, Vicar of the Custody of St. Francis of Assisi, and the National Assistants Fr. John Fredy Marín, OFMConv, and Fr. Ramón Salinas, OFM. The Minister Provincial of the Capuchins could not attend because he was going to the General Chapter of his Order. At the moment there is no OFMConv National Assistant. The second part of the FPV was held at the Casa de Encuentros San José, in Floridablanca, Santander, on the 16th and the 17th. The first day was dedicated to meet the National Council. After dinner, Fr. Amando had a meeting with the national assistants. Chelito has verified the records and acts as well as the register of cash and asset management. The following day, the activities continued with a meeting with the Regional Ministers, followed by the final meeting with the OFS National Council, in which the Visitors presented their preliminary observations and recommendations. The third Intermediate National Chapter of OFS in Colombia was held at the same venue, from 17 to 20 August, with the theme: “Challenges for Secular Franciscans in the 21st Century”. Fr. Amando presided at the opening Mass of the Chapter and then gave a presentation entitled “The role of the OFS spiritual assistant and his contribution to the promotion of reconciliation”, while Chelito presented the theme “Being a Secular Franciscan”.

Lithuania – III^o European Congress of OFS-GiFra

The 3rd European OFS-YouFra Congress was held from 20 to 26 August, 2018 in Kaunas, Vilnius and several more spots in Lithuania. The Congress was an itinerant one. It was a very nice and inspiring experience to visit so many different places, meet with local brothers and sisters, live for a short time with them and share each other’s life. There were 130 representatives from 24 European countries, including 20 spiritual Assistants, and around 30 organizing staff. The CIOFS Presidency was represented by Tibor Kauser, the General Minister of OFS, Attilio Galimberti and Ana Fruk, both Councillors of the area and Andrea Karlović, Councillor of YouFra. The Congress was started with the opening Eucharist at the Kaunas Basilica presided over by the Archbishop Lionginas Virbalas, SJ. During the first evening the participants got to know each other better, along with enjoying the many good national dishes that the members from other countries had brought.

On the second day of the Congress Fr. Alfred Parambathu OFMConv, general spiritual Assistant, presented the theme of the Congress: “Whoever believes in me, rivers of living water will flow from within him” (Jn 7, 38). He underlined that drinking the water that Jesus gives to us means

becoming more and more like him and through that being a source of the Holy Spirit ourselves, letting him work in and through us. In the afternoon Prof. Benas Ulevicius presented the theme “Veni, Sancte Spiritus”. In the evening there was a special prayer asking forgiveness for all the faults of the Franciscan family.

The Marian sanctuary of Šiluva was the venue of the Congress on the following day. Fr. Antanas Bluzas OFM and his brother priest Gintaras Bluzas, who are natives of the place, spoke on the very words of Virgin Mary of Šiluva: “once my son was worshipped here, now they are sowing and ploughing”. They reminded the participants of their commitment not to let Europe become a place where a lot of work is done but not for the salvation of our neighbours and ourselves. The visit to the Hill of Crosses in the afternoon was a further testimony of the power of the cross and of belief. Our strongest hope is that the Cross of the European Franciscan Family that has been set up and blessed at this unique location shall represent the joint strengths and the endurance of the charism of OFS, YouFra and all members of the Franciscan Family. Staying with different families at Kretinga on next two days was a concrete manifestation of the same spirit.

The fourth day was begun with a prayer session at the Monastery of the Poor Clare Sisters at Kretinga. The whole day was mostly dedicated for social services that included meeting with children, elderly, oncology patients, persons with disabilities, people with addictions etc. at different centres. The day ended with the Franciscan Fiesta at the churchyard of OFM friars, participated by a lot of local people. On the following day the activities of the Congress was mostly focused at Samogitian Calvary, where the Holy Eucharist was presided over by Bishop Kęstutis Kėvalas. The *via crucis* with 20 stations was a Spirit-filled experience. And the Spirit guided all the participants during the Evening of Evangelisation realised through a flash mob and oration at the Archcathedral Basilica of Kaunas.

Vilnius – the city of Divine Mercy – was the place of the Congress on the next day. Following the Eucharistic celebration at the Shrine of Divine Mercy, presided by Fr. Alfred OFM Conv, the participants were divided into different linguistic groups for sightseeing. In the evening all gathered at the Marian sanctuary of Trakai to recite the Franciscan Crown and later went to an ancient Cistercian Monastery at Pazaislis for fraternal gathering and dinner. On the last day of the Congress, August 26, Sunday, during the final Session which was presided over by Tibor Kauser, among different things it was decided to conduct the next European Congress in Spain.

Although the 3rd European Congress is formally concluded, its spirit continues through the pilgrimage of the Icon *Regina Familiae Franciscanae* and through the social project of *Well4Africa*. The Congress once again showed that, also beyond the connections through common faith and Franciscan vocation, the relationship between individuals with different traditions, habits and cultures is always possible and has become very precious.

Brasile – National elective Chapter

The national elective Chapter of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of Brazil was celebrated at the “Centro de treinamento de lideres - Salvador-Praia de Itapua”, from August 24 to 26. There were 40 capitulars, 19 spiritual assistants and some observers who brought the number of those present to 80. The Chapter was presided over by Silvia Diana, delegate of the OFS General Minister and member of the CIOFS Presidency who was accompanied by Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM, member of the Conference of general spiritual Assistants (CAS). The inaugural Mass was presided over by the Minister Provincial Fr. Liomar Pereira da Silva, OFM Cap. After the Mass, the outgoing National Minister welcomed all the members present and reported the capitulars on the activities of the three years, and then giving the floor to the other members of the outgoing Council to illustrate what they had done about their areas of responsibility. The approval of the agenda was followed, after which all the representatives of the

regions were asked to present the typical symbols of each region for a demonstration to be held during the Chapter. On Friday afternoon Moema Miranda, OFS presented the theme of the chapter “Secular Franciscans, protagonists of an outgoing Church”.

On the morning of Saturday, 25 August, the new National Council of Brazil was elected, which led to the election of Maria Jose Coelho, as National Minister and International Councilor, of Marco Antonio Dias Rodriguez as National Vice-Minister and Substitute International Counselor. The day ended with an evening of celebration and folk dances presented by the Bahian ladies.

The conclusion of the chapter was the Holy Mass on Sunday presided by Mons. Dom Estevam dos Santos Filho, auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of San Salvador da Bahia, during which the new council was installed by Silvia Diana. The Chapter then ended with a fraternal agape in the style of the state of Bahia. It was a moment of fraternal joy and sharing at the end of which the capitulars took leave to return to their homes in different parts of Brazil.

England – National elective Chapter

The National Elective Chapter of the OFS National Fraternity of England took place from 14 to 16 September 2018 at the High Leigh Conference Center, in Hoddesdon. Attilio Galimberti, Councilor of the Presidency, was delegated by Tibor Kauser, Minister General of OFS, to preside over the elections. He was accompanied by Fr. Amando Trujillo Cano, TOR, representing the Conference of general spiritual Assistants of OFS-YouFra. Out of the 24 capitulars 23 were present, as well as three observers and three national spiritual Assistants: Fr. John Cavanagh OFMCap, Fr. Jesmond Pawley, OFMConv, and Fr. Donal Walsh, OFM. On Friday evening, the opening Eucharist was presided by Fr. John. On Saturday, the National Minister, the Treasurer and the Web Site Coordinator presented their reports, followed by a group discussion on priorities for the next three years and the report of national spiritual Assistants. Therefore each group presented its proposals to the assembly. At noon, the Eucharist was presided over by Fr. Donal. In the afternoon, Attilio presided over the elective session in which Betsy Hart was elected National Minister and International Councilor, and Kathy Maskens as vice Minister and Substitute International Councilor. In addition to regular offices, the Chapter decided to assign a specific area to each of the other three councilors: communications, JPIC and young people. The activities of the day ended with a spiritual reflection of Fr. John, followed by a social meeting. On Sunday morning, there was another round of group work to complete the priorities previously presented, while the national spiritual assistants met with Fr. Amando. After the closing remarks of the new national minister, Fr. Amando presided over the closing Mass, during which Attilio installed the newly elected Minister and National Council. The Chapter was conducted in a fraternal spirit and openness to the action of the Holy Spirit.

Australia - Fraternal and Pastoral Visit

From 11 to 16 September, Augustine Yoon Young Hak, OFS, International Councilor of the Secular Franciscan Order (CIOFS) and Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM, member of the Conference of the general spiritual Assistants (CAS) conducted fraternal and pastoral visits (FPV) to the National Council of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of Australia at Baulkham Hills – “St. Joseph conference center” in Sydney. The first day was a visit to the national council of Australia and on the second day the visit with local, regional and national spiritual Assistants and then the visitors went to Sydney for meeting the minister Provincial Br. Phillip Miscamble OFM, with whom they discussed on improving spiritual assistance in Australia. In the afternoon there was the visit with the representatives of the regional council of “New South Wales”, local council of the Korean community and after the dinner there was

the meeting with young Croatian Franciscans who live in Sydney. After the visit we were invited to participate in the non-elective Chapter of Australia.

Sweden - National Elective Chapter

The national elective Chapter of OFS in Sweden was held on September 22nd in Stockholm-Marielund Conference center. The Chapter was presided over by Danijela Rebac, delegated by the OFS General Minister, Tibor Kauser and assisted by Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM, general spiritual Assistant. The inaugural Mass was presided over by Fr. Witold Mlotkowski OFM, National Assistant. There were 15 capitulars and a local assistant, a lay brother Fr. Mikael Bergstedt TOR. In the first session the national minister and his council presented the report of the triennium and afterwards followed the election of the new national council in which Tomislav Azdajic was elected as national Minister and Georg Stenborg as International Councilor. On Saturday afternoon the new Council was installed by Danijela Rebac during the Mass presided over by Fr. Witold Mlotkowski. The Chapter took place in fraternal atmosphere and culminated in a fraternal lunch on Sunday.