



K O I N Ō N I A

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«Walking with the young people: a vital challenge for OFS»

«Identity and Mission of YouFra»

Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM

Introduction

At times the world shows a negative and false image of youth, presenting it as lost in worldly things and without a future. It is sad to see that this is the idea that adults have of young people. Sometimes they forget their duty to empower young people to discover their true identity as living images of God and to live it in a dignified manner. Often young people are identified as generations that suffer a crisis of religious, cultural, political, social and economic identity. But this identity crisis often depends on the different realities in which they live, see and judge the world, a world in which the moral aspects in the political, social and religious spheres are almost non-existent. It is precisely in this kind of situation that the mission of Franciscan Youth is to show the world that young people still feel able to reactivate the flame of faith, so that they will never lose the hope of identifying themselves with those disciples of Jesus who have been called to be light of the world and salt of the earth. Their active participation in the recent Synod of Bishops centered on the theme «young people, faith and vocational discernment». Their engaging joy manifested not only in World Youth Days but also in the most humble and simple parish meetings and the presence in the various projects and proposals of the Church. All this shows that young people still continue to turn their eyes to Jesus, in order to be totally «rooted in him and built upon him and established in the faith as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving» (Cf. Col 2,7). If this is the daily attitude of young people, there is still hope that they can live their identity and mission.

Youth, future hope of the World and of the Church

A world without youth is a world without a Future, and if the Church does not take care of youth it is like a house founded on sand. So what should be the attitude of civil society, politicians and the Church towards young people? For centuries the political world, with its worldly ideologies (see for example the laws in favour of abortion, of marriages between individuals of the same sex that flourish in all parts of the world, political propaganda against the moral teachings of the church, etc...) has increasingly forgotten its responsibility to promote a youth which will be the society of tomorrow, healthy and with profound human and religious values. Unfortunately, some young people have been deceived by these proposals and as a result youth see themselves deprived of the «flourishing of virtues and life»¹.

However, the Church has never forgotten its responsibility to form young people, to seek the most appropriate ways to «listen to the world of youth and ask how to accompany the new generations to recognize and welcome the call to love and to life in fullness²». There are many apostolic and mission initiatives - I remember in particular those organized by the Youth Ministry and the Apostolic Penitentiary - but, in particular, it is important to underline that, in 1948, the Church approved the official birth of Franciscan Youth, side by side with many other Catholic movements: all this shows how the Church is

¹ Cardinal Mauro Piacenza, «Confessione dei Giovani, Fede, Discernimento vocazionale». *Mi fai incontrare Dio? I giovani la fede e la riconciliazione*, edited by Penitenzieria Apostolica, 2018, p. 18.

² *Ibid*, p. 6.

always available to help young people both to find a space of discernment and to rekindle the flame of faith that the world of today with its false and worldly propaganda seeks to extinguish.

Today the world of youth is polarized by ideas and proposals that are contrary to true moral, ethical and political freedoms; the Church, for its mission, must always ensure young people its closeness and its support so that they should never feel alone. The Church must serve as a mirror of truth, a mirror that reflects to the young the teachings of Christ – the way, the truth and the life. Today, more than ever, the Church is called to show young people the true path to follow, that is, to show Christ, because Christ is the way that every Christian is called to follow if he wants to find peace, happiness and unconditional love. This is confirmed by Cardinal Mauro Piacenza, when he says: «only the Catholic Church remains, in its weak fortress or strong weakness, to hold back the cataracts of evil, to act as a holding device which prevents man from destroying and annihilating himself, therefore we are called to respond to the needs of the young, building the Christian and at the same time the man: the man because Christian and the Christian because man»³.

Identity of YouFra in Today's World

There is no better way or recipe to find one's true identity than to commit oneself to understand what the Scriptures say about man and woman, creatures made in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen. 1: 26-27). The Word of God offers, to those who listen to it, not only the opportunity to know their own identity, but also numerous perspectives to carry out the mission of witnessing to an evangelical life lived after the model of St. Francis. It is imperative that we should try to imitate the young man of the Gospel: "Good Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Mk 10:17). In other words, even today, young people must have the courage to ask Jesus what the path they must follow to find their true identity and their mission in this world is, in the place and in the reality in which the Lord has placed them.

When young people let themselves be guided by the light of the Holy Spirit, they understand that they are «called to share their experience of Christian life in fraternity, and, in the light of the message of St. Francis of Assisi, seek to deepen their own vocation under the auspices of the Secular Franciscan Order»⁴.

Those who understand this and are thus able to deepen their vocation will be pleased to discover that their being a Christian is somehow intertwined with that of the OFS, whose Rule can become an inspirational document for the growth and maturation of their own Christian and Franciscan identity (cf. GGCC OFS art.96, 3). For this reason, the most important thing is to identify oneself as children of God who need to love others and to be loved, to listen and to be heard, to respect others as one wants to be respected (Cf. Mt. -40; Mk 12.29-30.33; Lk 10.27).

However, this awareness is not attained automatically: everyone must listen to the Word of God, be able to love it and preserve it in his heart. It is important to have the courage to find one's specific and true identity as children of God, worthy of the freedom to witness the faith, the happiness of living and proclaiming the truth, not only with words, but also with works. Thus the Holy Father reminded young people: "My dear young friends, love the word God and love the Church, and this will give you access to a treasure of very great value and will teach you how to appreciate its richness...It is not easy to recognise and find authentic happiness in this world in which we live, where people are often held captive by the current ways of thinking. They may think they are "free", but they are being led astray and become lost amid the errors or illusions of aberrant ideologies"⁵. Therefore, the great secret whose discovery allows us to find our identity is hidden in the Sacred Scripture and in the Rule of the OFS (cf. GGCC art. 96.3): if it is sought with a spirit of discernment it is discovered and thus we become children loved by God and called by Him to follow Him along the path prepared for us, for the benefit of the fraternity and the world to which we belong. As believers we must always identify ourselves with Jesus: in service, in sacrifice, in listening, in forgiveness, in accepting, in mercy and in brotherhood. It is essential that today's young people, despite their fragility, feel that they are his disciples, joyful to carry on the hope of a better future, without ever falling into conformism and allowing themselves to be guided by the true light - Christ himself! - at the same time walking in the light of the message of St. Francis of Assisi!

To find one's identity depends totally on continuous discernment, on the ability and courage to let oneself be guided by the Spirit of God. «If we live by the Spirit, we also walk according to the Spirit» (Gal 5:25). Of course, it is not enough to read or listen to the Word of God if one does not have faith transmitted

³ *Ibid*, p. 23.

⁴ OFS GGCC, Art. 96, 2.

⁵ Message of the Holy Father, Benedict XVI, to young people on the occasion of the XXI World Youth Day, 2006, p. 5.

by parents. To find their identity, young people need the accompaniment of adults, who are exemplary teachers who help them, accept them as such and offer them the opportunity to find in their example the lived Gospel in which they can find comfort, acceptance, light for their steps even in a world where egocentrism dominates the hearts of so many young people! For this reason the Holy Father continues to remind them: «To you young people I say: Do not be afraid to go against the current, when they want to rob us of hope, when they propose rotten values, values like food gone bad - and when food has gone bad, it harms us; these values harm us. We must go against the current! And you young people, are the first: Go against the tide and have the daring to move precisely against the current. Forward, be brave and go against the tide! And be proud of doing so»⁶.

As Jesus asked his disciples to tell him what men thought of him (cf. Mt 16:13), so should be the attitude of parents, elders, religious leaders and political leaders: «to search together to look for the possible self-awareness of the world of youth»⁷, so that young people can recover the desire to feel like people of faith, able to learn from adults and admit that they need their help. This is the secret for appropriating one's identity and mission which, for the members of YouFra, is that of being Christian and Franciscan. Therefore, always try to be witnesses and instruments of the mission of Christ among men, announcing Christ with life and with the word (cf. Rule OFS 6 CCGG 17.1). This is the heart of true and authentic Franciscan identity.

Challenges for the OFS and YouFra

For centuries the challenge for Christians has always been to find the courage to be living and effective witnesses of the Gospel of Jesus, in whatever ambit of life they lived. Unfortunately, given that we are human beings and sinners, every day we are called to face ever new challenges. Jesus has always been clear on this point, and in fact he asks us to “take up our cross and follow him” (Mark 8:34). Living in such a selfish world, sometimes without even realizing it, people fall easily into individualism. The estrangement from one another justified either by the difference in age or by different attitudes and thoughts often represents a fundamental challenge for both. In today's society, in which we focus more on what divides than on what unites us which makes us grow and helps us to live our Franciscan vocation as members of the OFS and YouFra it is necessary that everyone is aware of the importance of beginning to open wide the doors that create divisions, be they age, ideologies, religions...and begin to live the Franciscan charism in which the emphasis is placed on the Gospel. However, to face the different challenges, the members of the OFS and YouFra must always try to walk together looking at Jesus and not at themselves - and, often this is the biggest challenge both for the members of the OFS and of the Franciscan Youth.

In this context, «By their Profession, Secular Franciscans commit themselves to live the Gospel according to Franciscan spirituality in their secular state» (GGCC, Art. 8), devoting themselves to the effective and fruitful witness of their faith. First of all, we should not be content with just belonging to the Franciscan family, but rather we must look for ways of being consistent with the faith and with the Franciscan charism, which calls us to live in vital and reciprocal communion with the brothers who are a gift of God.

The ecological challenge, the wars that are fought in the world, the consumption of drugs, marital crises, moral and spiritual decadence and the problems that lead to migration are further challenges on which the Franciscan youth and the Secular Franciscans are called to reflect both on a personal and collective level to find the most appropriate answers on how to propose the right way to the world, inspired and traced by the Gospel.

What is the attitude of the young Franciscans and secular Franciscans with respect to these challenges? No one can escape their present and future consequences. It is the duty of everyone to take responsibility for building a new world, where moral values are respected and protected. It is necessary to seek together adequate solutions, and it is essential that those who have the responsibility of spiritual assistance commit themselves to «make grow collaboration in the witness and in mission, and to accompany processes of community discernment to interpret the signs of the times in the light of faith and under the

⁶ Pope Francis, Angelus, Piazza San Pietro, Sunday, 23 June 2013, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus.

⁷ Cardinal Mauro Piacenza, “*Confessione dei Giovani...*” p. 13.

guidance of the Spirit, with the contribution of all the members of the community, starting from those who are on the margins»⁸ of society and of the Church.

Conclusion

The Church together with civil and political society is facing many and difficult challenges. The big difference is that the Church does not trust in the *slogans* of politicians but in the Holy Spirit. And it is in Him that the Church guided by the Spirit of the love of God will be able to arouse in the young the true belonging to the universal world: in Him moral and political values find their foundation! Unfortunately, civil and political society have moved away from the Church and everyone seems to walk alone without considering or seeking the other. However, we must reiterate the fact, and for this we must be grateful to her, that the Church has never lost hope and trust in young people, because she is aware of the fact that Christ has promised to always be with her (Jn 14, 15 -21). The Church will always face moral challenges with faith and courage and will always fulfil its task of leading young people towards Christ without fear of any political ideology, because «the Spirit of God blows incessantly on the Church»⁹.

NEWS – CHAPTERS – VISITS – MEETINGS

San Giovanni Rotondo – Meeting of the CIOFS Presidency

From 16 to 23 March 2019, the Presidency of the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order (CIOFS), in conclusion of the celebrations for the 40th anniversary of the Rule, decided to hold the first meeting of the year in San Giovanni Rotondo, so that all members could have the opportunity to visit the tomb of the former OFS Minister General, Emanuela de Nunzio. Some of the spouses and friends of the presidency members have been with us. Every working day began with Mass and ended with vespers. It was a week of intense work in which many things were discussed and decided, such as the situation regarding the updating of the National Statutes, the financial statement, the situation of the national fraternities, the planning on the possibility of celebrating a Chapter of Mats and in particular the preparation of the General Chapter 2020. Despite the compact program of appointments, we were still able to go on some pilgrimages. One afternoon we went on a pilgrimage to the Shrine of St. Michael the Archangel and in the evening we visited the local fraternity, where we participated in the Lenten *lectio divina*, followed by a fraternal agape. The following day, we went to celebrate Holy Mass at the tomb of Padre Pio. On the penultimate day of work there was another pilgrimage to Rodi Garganico, for a visit to the tomb of Emanuela de Nunzio, where we were greeted by members of the local fraternity with their two Spiritual Assistants. On Saturday afternoon we returned to *Seraphicum* in Rome for the celebration of the concluding Mass of the 40th anniversary of the Rule of the OFS.

College of *Seraphicum*: March 24, Celebration of the 40th anniversary of the Rule of OFS

In a way to thank the Lord for the gift of the new Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order that is 40 years old this year, on Sunday, March 24, 2019, the Minister General of OFS, Tibor Kauser and the whole Council of the CIOFS Presidency, led a commemorative celebration on behalf of the whole Order. Around one hundred people attended the event from among guests and Secular Franciscans from different countries of the world. The celebration was held at the College of *Seraphicum* in Rome. The celebration began with a solemn Mass presided by His Eminence Cardinal João Braz de Aviz, Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life and concelebrated by His Eminence Mgr. José Rodríguez Carballo, Secretary of the same Congregation and about twenty priests. A strong moment of the day was marked by conferences on the central theme of the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order. Benedetto Lino, OFS-Italy, Encarnacion del Pozo, OFS-Spain; Michèle Altmeyer, OFS-France and Fr. Riniero Cantalamessa OFMCap, the Apostolic Preacher, gave the conferences. A photo album of celebrations of the anniversary in the world, prepared by Bob Stronach, OFS-United States, was presented to the participants. The day ended with a festive lunch after the thanks-giving of the Minister General.

⁸ The Synod of Bishops, XV Ordinary General Assembly, *The youth, the faith and the vocational discernment, Final Document*, 2018, p. 124.

⁹ Krzysztof Nykiel, “*Nella Testimonianza, nella Sacra Scrittura e nei Sacramenti l’annuncio di Cristo ai Giovani*” *Mi fai incontrare Dio? I giovani, la fede e la riconciliazione*, edited by Penitenzieria Apostolica, 2018, P. 294.

Hungary – Fraternal and Pastoral Visits

The Fraternal and Pastoral Visits in the National Fraternity of Hungary was held from 25- 28 April, 2019, in the Friary of Budai Ferences Rendház, the OFM Provincial Curia in Budapest. The Fraternal Visit was conducted, made and guided by Miss Ana Fruck, Councillor of the CIOFS Presidency and the Pastoral Visit by Fr. Alfred Parambakathu OFM Conv., General Assistant of OFS-YouFra. The Hungarian National Fraternity consists of thirty-six local fraternities divided into four Regions with 428 professed members. They maintain close relations the Hungarian origin members of OFS in Slovakia, Romania and Serbia. Most of the local fraternities are assisted by the OFM Friars, who constitute the largest religious order in Hungary. Other fraternities are assisted by the OFM Cap., OFM Conv., Franciscan religious and diocesan priests.

During the visit, the visitors met with the National Council, major superiors, spiritual assistants and Regional ministers. Sharing and discussions took place in a very open and sincere way. The visitors attended a monthly meeting of the local fraternity of Pelliscsaba (the fraternity of Tibor Kauser, Minister General of OFS) in which Fr. Alfred presented a study on the “Letter of Brother Francis to Brother Leo”. Furthermore, Fr. Alfred visited three OFM convents and two OFM Conv. Convents in the intermediate times he had before and after the visit. The visitors thank the National Council and Fr. Tihamér Papp OFM, the National Assistant, for the perfect organization of the visit and the promptness of the help and the attention shown.

Zimbabwe – National Elective Chapter

The national elective chapter of OFS in Zimbabwe was celebrated at St. Francis of Assisi High School Nharira - Chivhu, from 2-5 May, 2019. There were 8 capitulars with the right to vote, two national assistants - Fr. Tawanda Chirigo, OFM and Fr. Elias Musona OFM Cap. The chapter was presided by Jenny Harrington, OFS, delegated by Tibor Kauser, Minister General, accompanied by Fr. Francis Bongajum Dor, OFM Cap, General Assistant. Some observers and guests were also present. At the time of the chapter, OFS-Zimbabwe recognizes 10 local fraternities of which 5 are officially erected and 5 others are emerging. These are then divided into 2 regions, East and West. At this moment, only the fraternities in the East region have perpetually professed members and regular councils and therefore, have been represented in the chapter. The opening Mass was celebrated on Friday 3 May, due to the late arrival of some members. This Mass was presided over by Fr. Francis. During the work, the visitors gave formation on fraternal life and on Spiritual Assistance. Much time has been devoted to the revision of the national statutes and the *Well4Africa* project. The election of the new national council was held on Saturday 4th May and the following were elected: National Minister and Formator: Eremenciana Chinyama; International Councilor: Rodgers Chirima; National Deputy Minister, Walter Tavaziva; Substitute International Councilor: Daniel Chidemu. The concluding Mass was celebrated on the night of Saturday 4 to allow everyone to participate because some had to return early in the morning. Fr. Tawanda presided over this Mass during which Jenny Harrington installed the new Council. The Chapter was a time full of fraternal encounter, work, formation and celebration in evangelical joy and Franciscan simplicity.

Czech Republic - Fraternal and Pastoral Visits

The Fraternal and Pastoral Visit to the National Fraternity of the Czech Republic was held from 15 to 19 May, 2019. Most of the visit was held in the convent of Kostel Panny Marie Sněžné, the OFM Provincial Curia in Prague. The Fraternal Visit was conducted by Miss Monika Midverytė, International Councilor of Lithuania and delegate of Tibor Kauser, the Minister General of OFS and the Pastoral Minister by Fr. Alfred Parambakathu OFM Conv., General Assistant of OFS-YouFra. The Czech National Fraternity is made up of forty-nine local fraternities with 823 permanently professed members. During the visit, the visitors met Bishop Z. Wasserbauer, auxiliary bishop of Prague, the National Council, major superiors and spiritual assistants. Visitors attended a monthly meeting of the local Fraternity of Černošice. The National Fraternity organizes several pilgrimages during the year, sometimes even with the participation of the Secular Franciscans of Slovakia. Sharing and discussions during the visit took place in a climate of sincerity and great openness.

Nicaragua – Fraternal and Pastoral Visits and Chapter

The SFO National Fraternity of Nicaragua has a new National Council and a new National Minister on behalf of Angela Ramos. The new council and minister were elected during a national elective chapter held at the OFS National Centre of Nicaragua in Ciudad Dario in the Diocese of Matagalpa. Out of the 88 Capitulars 68 were present for the National Chapter. The chapter took place simultaneously with the Fraternal and Pastoral Visit from 15 to 19 May 2019. Ana Maria Raffo Laos, CIOFS Presidency Councillor was delegated by the Minister General of OFS, Tibor Kauser to preside over the elective Chapter and to carry out the fraternal visit. Fr. Francis Bongajum Dor, OFM Cap., General Assistant accompanied her and

carried out the pastoral visit. Everyone had a very peaceful atmosphere of prayer, simplicity and joy. The elective session took place on the afternoon of Saturday 18 May. The new council and national minister were installed by Ana Maria Raffo Laos the following day during the concluding Mass presided by Fr. Francis and concelebrated by Fr. Francisco, national assistant, in the presence of more than 300 Secular Franciscans who came to live together the last day of the Chapter. Angela Ramos also bears the responsibility of International Councilor.

The National Fraternity of Nicaragua has more than 1000 members in 71 local Fraternities and 11 Regions. It also has 410 members of YouFra in 23 local Fraternities, as well as 182 children enrolled in the NiFra. For all of them, on the whole national territory, there are only 24 OFM Friars and 8 Capuchin Friars, as well as some Franciscan Congregations (Alcantarine Sisters) for the assistance. On May 17, the visitors met Mons. Rolando José Alvares Lagos, bishop of Matagalpa. The following day, 18 May and early in the morning, the bishop who was invited came to the National OFS Centre to preside at the Eucharist and give his blessing to the Secular Franciscans whom he recognizes in their commitment to the local Church. Other meetings held during the visit were with Fr. Carlos Torres, OFM, Definitor of the Province for Nicaragua, with the whole of the outgoing Council and with the national assistant alone and, on the last day, with the newly elected Council. One day, the capitulars celebrated Mass together with the nearby community of the Poor Clares. Ana Maria held a conference on secular Franciscan spirituality and Fr. Francis gave a brief conference on spiritual assistance to the OFS and YouFra.

Vietnam – National Elective Chapter

The national elective chapter of the Secular Franciscan Order of Vietnam was held from 24 to 25 May 2019 in Dalat and was presided over by Attilio Galimberti, member of the CIOFS Presidency and delegate of the Minister General Tibor Kauser OFS, who was accompanied by Fr. Joseph Vu Lien Minh OFM, delegate of the Conference of Spiritual Assistants (CAS). 45 delegates with voting rights and 6 observers were present at the Chapter. Joseph (Giuse) Vu Quang Khai was elected National Minister and Anthony Phung Bai as International Councilor. The celebration of the Chapter took place in serenity and with great fraternal spirit and all participants expressed their satisfaction with the result obtained.

Ukraine - National Elective Chapter.

The national elective chapter of the OFS-YouFra Fraternity in Ukraine was held on June 1, 2019 at the Convent of the Friars Minor Capuchin in Starokostyantyniv in the Khmelnytskyi region. The Chapter was presided over by Michel Janian OFS, International Councilor of the CIOFS Presidency and Delegate of the Minister General of OFS, Tibor Kauser. He was assisted by Fr. Krzyshtof Pelts OFM Conv., the delegate of the CAS. During the election Kutrysh Zoya was elected National Minister and Shabalina Dina international councillor. There were 48 chapter members who participated in the Chapter. The entire Chapter was held in an orderly and fraternal way.

General Chapter of TOR: election of Fr. Amando as Minister General of TOR

The General Chapter of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis (TOR) was celebrated from 25 May to 11 June 2019 at the General Curia of the TOR Friars in Via dei Fori Imperiali, 1 in Rome. During this chapter, on Pentecost Sunday, June 9, Fr. Amando Trujillo Cano was elected Minister General. Fr. Amando was born in Mexico and has just completed 12 years of service as Assistant General of OFS-YouFra and 6 years as General Vicar of his Order. We wish him all the best in his new assignment at the service of his Order and of the Franciscan Family.

Malta – National Elective Chapter

On Saturday, June 15, 2019 at the Franciscan Centre of the Friars Minor of Hamrum, in Malta, took place the national elective chapter of the OFS National Fraternity. It was presided over by Attilio Galimberti OFS, delegate of the Minister General of OFS who was accompanied, as a representative of the Conference of General Assistants (CAS), by Fr. Pedro Zitha OFM.

According to the Statute of the National Fraternity of OFS of Malta, the members of the outgoing National Executive Council and the ministers of the 10 local Fraternities, for a total of 18 are Capitulars. Of these they were present only in 11 allowing to have the quorum necessary to celebrate the Chapter. Two National Assistants, Fr. Alfred Calleja OFM Conv., and Friar Stephen Magro OFM were also present. The result of the election was as follows:

National Minister – Anthony Vella – Reconfirmed

National Vice-Minister – Joseph Gatt
Treasurer – Francesca Schembri
Responsible for the Formation – Anthony Vella
Secretary – Godwin Vella Clark
International Councillor – Evelyn Vella Clark
Substitute Int.Coucillor – Franca Zammit

To these are added three other councillors whose duties will be decided by the Council at its first meeting. They are: Joseph Aquilina, Antoinette Zammit and Carmen Farrugia. It should be noted that Joseph Gatt, absent from the Chapter, was contacted by telephone after his appointment and confirmed the acceptance of the service. His was heard by two other Chapter members who served as witnesses. At the end of the Chapter the Holy Mass was celebrated during which the new Council was officially installed which was celebrated with a fraternal agape consumed with great simplicity.

Malta – Fraternal and Pastoral Visit

The fraternal and pastoral visit (FPV) to the OFS in Malta was led by Attilio Galimberti, OFS, delegate of the Minister General OFS and by Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM, member of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS).

During the visit it was realized that, despite the presence of all the families of the First Order, OFM, OFMConv., and OFMCap., in Malta that assist the local Fraternities, only two of them are part of the national conference of assistants. On the first day of the visit, Fr. Pedro met a group called the young Franciscans who for the past two years have been making a journey of discernment that should lead to the creation of the Franciscan Youth of Malta. The following day a meeting was scheduled with the Ministers Provincial but it was possible to meet, and in separate moments, only Fr. Richard Stanley Grec OFM, and Fr. Gorg Farrugia OFM Conv. It should be emphasized that the conference of major superiors does not yet exist in Malta and for this reason they have been sent to think about its implementation for the good of the Franciscan Family of Malta and, consequently, of the OFS. During the visit the delegates met the national assistants Fr. Alfred Calleja, OFM Conv., and Fr. Stephen Magro OFM. A special thanks goes to Fr. Alfred Calleja, OFM Conv., who supported and greatly contributed to the survival of the OFS in Malta.

During the visit it was possible to meet the local fraternities and their spiritual assistants of Hamrun, Rabat, Sliema and Birkirkara. During these visits the local assistants Fr. Joseph Magro OFM, Fr. Eugene Paul Teuma, Fr. Joe Giugliano, OFMCap., and Fr. Paul Galea OFM were present. The national fraternity of Malta does not yet have a stable National Seat but it seems that the problem will soon be solved. Another problem that the visitors have asked to solve is that of collegial assistance. The national council still has to work a lot on the unity and collaboration between the fraternities and the spiritual assistants in a fraternal spirit.

Dominican Republic – National Elective Chapter

The national elective chapter of OFS of the Dominican Republic was celebrated from June 14th to 16th 2019 at the *Casa de Retiro Fray Leopoldo De Alpanseira* in San José De Mandinga in Santo Domingo Este. Present for the national event were 30 from the 35 summoned. The chapter was presided over by Maria Consuelo Nuñez (Chelito), Vice Minister General of OFS, delegated by Tibor Kauser OFS, Minister General. She was assisted by Fr. Francis Bongajum Dor OFMCap., Assistant General. The main theme chosen was “Commitment to live the Rule and the sense of belonging to the OFS”, a theme presented by Chelito. On Friday 14th, at 5 pm, the Opening Mass was presided over by Inocenzio OFMCap., The elective session was held on Sunday 16th. Rafael Pericles Ferrer was elected national minister and international councillor.

The OFS National Fraternity of the Dominican Republic is composed of 220 local fraternities organized in 15 regions with more than 1000 members. Spiritual assistance is mainly guaranteed by the Capuchin Friars. The OFM friars are in charge of a Region. The service of assistance remains a great challenge since, in practice, only one, Fr. Sainclus Jodelet OFMCap., is the assistant appointed to deal with almost all of the OFS in the country. The chapter of 2019 was dedicated especially to the memory of Fr. Miguel Pineda Galves, OFMCap., (Fray Balbino) died a few months earlier after many years of commitment to serving the OFS in the Dominican Republic. He had left a happy memory. On Sunday 16, the Concluding Mass was presided over by Fr. Francis, concelebrated by Fr. José David Vasquez OFMCap., Custos of the

Dominican Republic. Chelito installed the new Council during the Mass and the chapter ended with a lunch. The chapter was very peaceful and purposeful, an expression of the good will of the brothers.

Brazil – Fraternal and Pastoral Visit

The Fraternal and Pastoral Visit to the National Fraternity of Brazil was held from June 14-16, 2019, in the *Centro de Espiritualidade Madre Marcelline* (CEMM) in Rua São Mácio in Rio de Janeiro. The Fraternal Visit was conducted and led by Silvia Noemi Diana, Councillor of the CIOFS Presidency and the Pastoral visit by Fr. Alfred Parambathu OFM Conv., General Assistant of OFS-YouFra. The National Fraternity of Brazil is very large with 16 Regions, divided into 6 areas. Visitors met all members of the National Council and also visited the national headquarters of OFS. The Conference of National Assistants is composed of five Friars (2 OFM, 1 Conv, 1 Cap and 1 TOR) and a Franciscan nun. Everyone was present during the visit. Visitors had an excellent dialogue with the Formation team and the representatives of YouFra. Since the Franciscan Major Superiors are quite numerous and they do not form a Conference, the visitors could not meet any of them. The entire visit took place in a very fraternal and Franciscan way.

Brazil – Course of Formation for the Formators

A Formation course for Formators of OFS and YouFra for the countries of Cono Sur (Brazil, Bolivia, Argentina, Paraguay and Chile) was organized from 20 to 23 June 2019 in Foz do Iguacu in Brazil. It was the first time that such a course was organized. The course was organized and animated by Silvia Noemi Diana, Area Councilor of the CIOFS Presidency and Emanuelson Matias de Lima, International Councilor of YouFra for Latin America. Fr. Alfred Parambathu OFMConv, General Assistant of OFS-YouFra and Anna Maria Raffo, Councilor of the CIOFS Presidency participated in the course. The entire program took place in a school complex (Nossa Senhora da Conceição), run by the Vincentian nuns.

There were participants from Brazil (15), Bolivia (7), Argentina (10), Paraguay (15) and Chile (2) and five Spiritual Assistants. There were also 47 observers and volunteers who took part in the various activities of the course. Representatives from all the countries mentioned above presented and shared their experiences and formation materials. Several topics were presented, such as the Franciscan Pedagogy (Eduardo Molino from Argentina), the socio-ecological crisis and the Secular Franciscans (Washington Lima from Brazil), the Family and the local Fraternity (Silvia Noemi Diana), the role of Spiritual Assistants in formation (Fr. Alfred) and fraternal animation and double belonging (Emanuelson Matias from Brazil). The YouFra national coordinators talked about how they are organizing the annual Franciscan Youth Day in their respective countries. Each presentation was followed by group discussions and plenary sessions. Fr. Alfred held a separate meeting with the Spiritual Assistants. The whole course was organized in a very Franciscan way. All the participants stayed in different houses of the Secular Franciscans of Foz do Iguacu. Every evening was blessed with national feasts and fraternal sharing. The participants also decided to conduct the next course in Argentina.

Myanmar – National Elective Chapter

The national elective chapter of Myanmar was held on 22-23 June 2019 at “St. Francis of Assisi Parish, Tamwe, Yangon”. It was presided over by Augustine Younghak Yoon, International Councilor OFS and by Fr. Adam Esponilla Dalac OFM, delegate of the Conference of Spiritual Assistants (CAS). The chapter was attended by 13 delegates with voting rights and one observer. Ann Rose Tazin Aung OFS was elected National Minister. The fraternity of Myanmar is only a presence with the hope of becoming a constituted national fraternity in the near future.