

REPORT OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE ASSISTANTS GENERAL TO THE SFO GENERAL CHAPTER

St. Paul, Brazil, Oct. 22-29, 2011



GREETING

Dear brothers and sisters: May the Lord give you peace!

I cordially greet you on behalf of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS) and the Ministers General of the First Order and TOR, of whom we are delegates at the international level for this fraternal service to both the SFO and YouFra. I also wish to greet, through you, the brothers and sisters of the SFO and the Franciscan Youth from around the world.

In this report I will share with you what the Conference has experienced and done over the last three years since the last General Chapter of the SFO celebrated in Hungary in November 2008.

1. CONFERENCE OF GENERAL SPIRITUAL ASSISTANTS (CAS)

a) Composition of the Conference in 2008 and today

During the last General Chapter, the Conference was composed of Br. Samy Irudaya (Chairperson), OFM^{Cap}, India; Br. Martín Bitzer, OFM^{Conv} (Secretary), Argentina; Br. Ivan Matić, OFM, Croatia, and Br. Amando Trujillo Cano, TOR, Mexico. Currently, the Conference consists of Br. Amando Trujillo Cano (Chairperson), TOR; Br. Amanuel Mesgun Temelso (Secretary), OFM^{Cap}, Eritrea; Br. Ivan Matić, OFM, and Br. Martín Bitzer, OFM^{Conv}.

b) Meetings of the Conference

Our Conference meets once a month to closely monitor the various activities that it does in a collegial way. In addition, once a year (toward the end), it gathers for a week during the so-called "Tempo Forte" to assess the whole year and plan for the upcoming one.

c) Meetings with Ministers General, Provincials, Custodes, and Visitators General

In 2009, there took place within the context of the *International Chapter of Mats* celebrated in Assisi (April 15-18) the first meeting of CAS with the Conference of Ministers General of the First Order and TOR. The success of this meeting propelled the Ministers General to meet our Conference once a year, in October, around the Feast of St. Francis. And so it has been done until now in these last two years.

Another type of meeting of the SFO Assistants General is one that each one separately keeps in his own General Curia with the Ministers Provincial, Custodes, and Visitators General of his own Order. These are very important moments of formation and information which the Assistants offer to Major Superiors and Visitators General who come to Rome or are meeting as a Plenary Council, as a Conference of Provincial Ministers, etc.

2. ASSESSMENT OF THE LAST THREE-YEAR PERIOD

a) General introduction

The Collegial service of CAS is held in different areas or sectors: activities of the Conference as such; presence in the CIOFS Presidency, Chapters, Visits, Conferences, and Formation Courses.

b) Activities of the Conference

▪ Koinonia Newsletter

It is a quarterly publication in the four official languages of the SFO with an editorial (first part) and with important information about the spiritual and pastoral care and the life of the SFO in the world (second part).

From 2009 to 2011 various issues were addressed, as shown below:

2009

VIII Centenary of the Franciscan charism. In addition to publishing the *Conclusions* of the General Chapter of the SFO of Hungary (2008), it seemed appropriate to offer readers some of the documents approved there, such as *the Incorporation of YouFra members into the SFO* and *the practical Interpretation of Article 89.4, b of the General Constitutions*.

2010

Priorities of the work of the CIOFS Presidency. Here is the list of published articles: 1. Letter of MM.GG. of the First Order and TOR regarding Assistance to the SFO and YouFra; 2. Formation: The top priority of the Secular Franciscan; 3. Franciscan Youth: The third priority of the SFO; 4. The presence of the Secular Franciscans in the world.

2011

Main Events of 2011. In addition to the beatification of John Paul II, it seemed opportune to publish anything that relates to other events of this year, such as *World Youth Day* and the *International Meeting of YouFra* (both celebrated in Madrid), the *Eighth centenary of the founding of the Poor Clares*, and the *General Chapter of the SFO* in Brazil.

- **Handbook for Assistance**

In recent years we have been informed that there are efforts to translate the *Handbook* in Korean, Japanese, German, Swahili, Vietnamese, and Portuguese. In 2009, the Handbook was translated and also printed in Chinese. The SFO of Canada has printed the first version of the Handbook in French in a simple format. As for Spanish, there are two versions of the manual: one from Mexico, printed in 2011, and the other from Spain, which will be printed soon. The English translation is ready, but we have yet to find someone who would see to its publication. At this point we must remember that in addition to the Italian edition, the Handbook has already been published in the following languages: Croatian, Polish, Chinese, French, and Spanish.

- **Updating of the Statutes for Assistance**

In 2009, the Conference updated *the Statutes for Spiritual and Pastoral Assistance to the SFO* approved by the Ministers General of the First Order and TOR. With a *Letter of Presentation* (Rome, October 4, 2009), they also addressed the Provincial Ministers and Custodes exhorting them to undertake the commitment of assistance to the SFO and YouFra which the Church has entrusted to the friars.

- **Questionnaire**

In response to the request of the General Chapter of 2008 in Budapest, in order to schedule a "specific courses of formation" at the regional, national or continental level, the Conference of General Assistants to the SFO and the CIOFS Presidency have considered opportune to know the number of Secular Spiritual Assistants and Assistants who are not members of the First Order and Third Order Regular, and at what level (local, regional, national) they are carrying out their service.

The CAS, therefore, has taken steps to carry out a questionnaire about the reality of Assistance to the SFO in the world. Through the National Councils of the SFO, all National Spiritual Assistants were called upon, and by way of information, all the Provincial Ministers, Custodes of the First Order and TOR.

c) Assistants General in the CIOFS Presidency

As members of the CIOFS Presidency, the Assistants General have attended all six meetings of the Presidency over the last three-year period, and have been involved both in preparing and implementing the decisions of the Presidency.

A specific responsibility for the Assistants was the preparation of the liturgy for the days of the Presidency's meeting, which was done with the help of the Councilors. But the greater responsibility of Assistants unfolds in the Commissions and Formation projects of the CIOFS.

In addition, the assistants were urged to review (together with a lay reviser) the National Statutes that arrive from different parts of the world.

d) Attendance at the Chapters, Visits, Conferences, Formation Courses and other international meetings

▪ **Chapters**

The Assistants General try to be personally present at the celebration of the National Elective Chapters. When it has not been possible for them to participate in a given Chapter, the Conference has delegated some National Assistants or other suitable and prepared friars to be present at the Chapters on behalf of CAS. We want to thank, on this occasion, those who have helped us with this service, especially for the spirit of cooperation and fellowship existing between the Conference of Assistants General and the various Conferences of the National Assistants, Provincial Ministers, etc.

We want to emphasize here another aspect. Although our fraternities are increasingly appreciative of our participation in the Chapters or visits, nonetheless, it must be said that more than half of the expenses made to carry out this service is still paid by the Offices of Assistants General. The same can be said for the expenses of our delegates.

▪ **Pastoral Visits**

For a list of pastoral visits made and Chapters attended by Assistants General or its delegates, see "Presentation of the CIOFS." Both within the CAS as well as within the CIOFS Presidency, we had a serious discussion regarding the preparation and realization of Chapters as well as fraternal and pastoral visits. As a result, we begin to notice a qualitative improvement in the manner of celebrating these fundamental events for the life of both the established and emerging SFO National Fraternities.

▪ **Congresses**

Among the most important events were: the Asia-Oceania Congress in India from May 8-13, 2010, and the Congress of Africa in Lusaka, Zambia, from June 1-7, 2011.

▪ **Formation Courses**

Here is the list of countries where the courses were conducted: Italy, Croatia, Spain, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, India, Central African Republic, Argentina, and Mexico. In

some cases, courses were also attended by members of the SFO, Friars, Sisters, and members of the Franciscan Youth from neighboring nations. Furthermore, on occasions of both the fraternal and pastoral visits as well as National Chapters several Formation courses were also conducted.

- **International Meetings**

- *International Gathering of the Franciscan Youth* celebrated from August 12 to 15 in Madrid on the occasion of *World Youth Day 2011*.
- On the occasion of *World Youth Day 2011*, for the first time, the Franciscan family celebrated together this important moment for the universal Church and so was present before the youth of the world. A special space was the so-called "Franciscan Village" at the Basilica of *San Francisco el Grande*, in Madrid, where various activities and presentations of the Franciscan family were carried out. Highlights of the program were, for example, the meeting with the Ministers General of the Franciscan family, the "Festival of Joy" concert, and a prayer vigil in the same Basilica.

e) Franciscan Youth (YouFra)

The General Chapter of Budapest-2008 recognized the good work done for YouFra during the six-year period of 2002-2008. Moreover, they asked that this essential commitment for young Franciscans should continue with emphasis on the responsibility of the SFO to increase its members' awareness and active responsibility in relation to YouFra.

Responding to the mandate of the Chapter, during this three-year period, work was done especially on the service of fraternal animation to YouFra by the SFO. For this reason, a document was prepared with guidelines for the Fraternal Animators.

Also during this period, the *V European Congress of Franciscan Youth* was celebrated from August 18-24, 2009 in Lithuania, and the aforementioned *International Gathering of YouFra* took place from August 12-15, 2011 in Madrid on the occasion of *World Youth Day*.

3. FUTURE PROJECTS

The Conference of Assistants General is committed to continue its regular meetings for the next three years in order to reflect and address the priorities of the SFO and Franciscan Youth, plus the issues that concern spiritual and pastoral assistance. CAS will work further in the preparation of appropriate tools for the formation of the Spiritual Assistants of the SFO-YouFra who are not members of the First Order or the TOR. Upcoming Formation Courses for Spiritual Assistants to the SFO-YouFra will take into account this new reality.

4. CONCLUSION

Over the past three years, since the last SFO General Chapter, we, four Assistants General, have shared different aspects of the life of faith from our own experience of Franciscan spirituality and in the context of the pastoral ministry entrusted to us by the Church through our respective Ministers General. In this regard, we have heard the Lord's call to serve our brothers and sisters of the SFO and YouFra faithfully and generously by assisting them both spiritual and pastorally, and to serve our religious brothers who are called to share in the same service at other levels. We also heard the call to be witnesses and guarantors of the Franciscan charism, a mission that goes beyond our human abilities and which is only possible with the grace of God and fraternal help. At the same time, we heard the call to be, through personal example, promoters of unity within the Franciscan family, faced by many challenges as it is, but also blessed with many opportunities for growth. We are aware of our call to promote ecclesial communion in the many opportunities we find to build bridges, heal wounds, and seek with others the truth in charity. We've collaborated on the formation development of many Franciscans through our support for Formators working in often uphill conditions, who want to contribute to the full development of Christian life and fidelity to the Franciscan charism of all members of their fraternities. We also discovered the call to listen better, to speak more openly, and to discern together the ways of God in our service as Conference. We have received, finally, abundant graces and a chance to meet hundreds of Secular Franciscans, Franciscans youth, Spiritual Assistants and other members of the Church, who have enriched us with their testimony and their aspirations of life. We have certainly received more than what we have been able to give and for all this, we give thanks and praise to the "Most High, all powerful, good Lord."

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CAS Chairperson