



K O I N Ō N I A

...together on the journey

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LIVING THE FRANCISCAN CHARISM IN TODAY'S WORLD 40 years after the *Seraphicus Patriarch*

SEDUCED BY GOD, SEEKERS OF CHRIST¹ *Secular Franciscans and their relationship with God* Fr. Amando Trujillo Cano, TOR

You have seduced me, Lord, and I let myself be seduced! (Jer 20:7a)

This year the Secular Franciscan Order will celebrate its 15th Ordinary General Chapter, from November 4-11, at the *Seraphicum* College in Rome. The general theme of the Chapter will be “As you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world” (*Jn 17:18*), and the subtitle: “Animating and guiding the OFS in today’s world”. In keeping with this theme, the General Spiritual Assistants of OFS-YouFra have chosen as the general theme for the newsletter of this year: “Living the Franciscan charism in today's world”: 40 years after the *Seraphicus Patriarcha*. Our intention is to collaborate with the reflection on this important event in the life and mission of OFS and, in a certain way, of the Franciscan Youth. Here are the topics and the name of the Assistants responsible for preparing each of them:

- **Koinonia 2017-1: “Seduced by God, seekers of Christ”** (cf. *Jer 20:7*; *OFS Rule 5*): *Secular Franciscans and their relationship with God* - Fr. Amando Trujillo Cano, TOR.
- **Koinonia 2017-2: “The Lord gave me brothers and sisters”** (cf. *Test. 14*): *Secular Franciscans and the gift of fraternity* - Fr. Binoy Thomas, OFMConv.
- **Koinonia 2017-3: “Sent forth as witnesses and instruments”** (cf. *OFS Rule, 6*): *Secular Franciscans in the Church and in the world* - Fr. Francis Dor, OFM Cap.
- **Koinonia 2017-4: “Go forward with courage! With the Gospel in heart and hands”** (cf. *Address of Pope Francis. Meeting with the young people of Umbria, Pastoral visit to Assisi, 04/10/2013*): *The Franciscan Youth in the world* - Fr. Peter Zitha, OFM.

Introduction

In this first issue of the year, we reflect on the relationship that is the source of all Christian and Franciscan vocation: that which binds us to God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In addition, it seemed convenient to name this article based on two phrases that correspond to the two dimensions of such a relationship, that is to say, the initiative of God – who manifests himself to us and calls us to know and love him – and the human response, which derives from our faith in Christ, the revelation of the Father, whom Francis of Assisi followed passionately.

¹ (Cf. *Jer 20:7*; *OFS Rule 5*).

To synthesize and express the first dimension in a vivid manner, we found the following words of the prophet Jeremiah (s. VII-VI B.C.) to be very suggestive: «You seduced me, Lord, and I let myself be seduced; you were too strong for me, and you prevailed! » (*Jer 20:7*). This famous phrase of the prophet describes his experience of faith as an interaction between the “seducing” love of God, which conquered his heart, and the prophet’s freedom, which was initially reluctant to enter into communion with him, because that is, on the one hand, beautiful and profound, and, on the other hand, it involves a faithful commitment even in adversity. The Vatican II reminds us that the divine initiative is the original and ultimate factor of any relationship between God and the human being:

The root reason for human dignity lies in man's call to communion with God. From the very circumstance of his origin man is already invited to converse with God. For man would not exist were he not created by God's love and constantly preserved by it; and he cannot live fully according to truth unless he freely acknowledges that love and devotes himself to His Creator. Still, many of our contemporaries have never recognized this intimate and vital link with God, or have explicitly rejected it. Thus atheism must be accounted among the most serious problems of this age, and is deserving of closer examination.²

On the other hand, to express the core of the second dimension of the relationship with God – the human response to the “divine seduction”, we have taken a phrase inspired by the OFS Rule that points to the centrality of the search for Christ in the life and spirituality of the brothers and sisters of the OFS:

Secular Franciscans, therefore, should seek to encounter the living and active person of Christ in their brothers and sisters, in Sacred Scripture, in the Church, and in liturgical activity. The faith of Saint Francis, who often said, «I see nothing bodily of the Most High Son of God in this world except his most holy body and blood», should be the inspiration and pattern of their Eucharistic life. (*OFS Rule*, 5).

We will discuss this number later in the section dedicated to the *OFS Rule*. Before that, we will briefly consider the manner in which the relationship with God is described or implied at the beginning of the *Testament* of Francis of Assisi and in his *Letter to the faithful I*. We are aware of the great challenge that represents presenting this topic in a few pages and, therefore, we do not intend to make an exhaustive review of all the elements that we will consider, but only a synthesis that will help to identify the most relevant aspects of each topic. In addition, the relationship of the secular Franciscans with God expresses and develops itself through other means, too, such as music, painting, poetry, dance, liturgy, the life of each fraternity and the experience of the secular Franciscans saints and blessed that have embellished the face of the Order in its eight centuries of life.

1. The beginning of the conversion of Francis of Assisi

The experience of God that the *Poverello* had has been analyzed in countless works and it would be impossible to summarize them in a few lines. Therefore, here we would like to point out only one aspect of that experience of faith, which he himself described in his *Testament*, written toward the end of his life, recounting the beginning of his life of penance or evangelical conversion:

And the Lord gave me, Brother Francis, thus to begin doing penance in this way: for when I was in sin, it seemed too bitter for me to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I showed mercy to them. And when I left them, what had seemed bitter to me was turned into sweetness of soul and body. And afterwards I delayed a little and left the world.

In these first few lines of his *Testament*, Francis clearly indicates several elements of his experience of faith:

- It was God who took the initiative to call him personally to the penitential life

² VATICAN COUNCIL II, PASTORAL CONST. *Gaudium et Spes*, 19: AAS 58 (1966) 1038-1039.

- Francis confesses his initial sinful condition that made him feel great bitterness, or disgust, at the sight of the suffering of the horrible disease of leprosy, with all its implications, not only on the physical level, but also in the spiritual, psychological and social ones
- The penance which the Lord has called him to do began with the practice of mercy to those who suffer from this disease on the margins of society
- The experience of “doing” mercy transforms the whole of his being, makes him feel the sweetness of soul and body, that is, marks the beginning of his progressive and permanent conversion to the Lord³
- Leaving the world, did not mean for Francis to enter a monastery or getting away from what was happening around him, but rather, to leave the sinful condition that prevented him from opening up to the suffering of others and to undertake an evangelical life in fraternity – which in turn generated fraternity – after the example of Jesus and his apostles.

This original experience marked the beginning of the conversion of Francis and was provoked by the Lord, not in a liturgical setting or religious precinct, but in the immediacy of the pain and the marginalization of others. This fact has a special value for secular Franciscans, who are called «to build a more fraternal and evangelical world» (*OFS Rule*, 14).

2. Letter to the Faithful I [*Ep Fid I*]

The Letter to the Faithful of Francis of Assisi is the text that best enables us to glimpse about the contents of his penitential and evangelical preaching⁴. We have two versions of it, one more brief, called *Letter to the Faithful I* (first redaction), or *Codex of Volterra*, and a broader and more developed one, known as the *Letter to the Faithful II* (second redaction). Here we will focus on the *Letter to the Faithful I*, which has been considered by some scholars, although there is not a general agreement on the matter, as the first draft of written norms given by Francis of Assisi to the brothers and sisters of penance, so to say, as its “early Rule”⁵. The title for this letter as given in the manuscript of Volterra is: «These are words of life and salvation: whoever reads and follows them will find life and draw from the Lord salvation». And the first part of the letter is entitled: «Concerning those who do penance». As we know, this letter is included in its entirety as a prologue to the *OFS Rule*.

We are interested to note here only two outstanding points of the identity of «those who do penance», according to the *Letter to the Faithful I*, in their relationship with God. In the first place, Francis describes five actions that reflect his understanding of the penitents’ basic identity. It is interesting to note that these five verbs mark a penitential journey that has as its point of departure the love of God and of neighbor, indicated by Jesus as the most important commandment of all. This journey then passes through the radical rejection of the tendency to sin⁶, which characterizes the fallen human nature, and then through the sacramental union with Christ, until it materializes in «worthy fruits of penance». That is to say, for Francis the point of departure and the essence of penitential life are not the mortification or devotional practices, but evangelical love, which conquers selfishness and introduces us to the communion with Christ, generating signs of a genuine conversion to Him.

In the second place, Francis proclaims happy and blessed those who do and persevere in «such things». Those who have embarked on this path of evangelical conversion on the basis of the experience of God’s love, have already begun to experience true happiness since they have entered into a life of profound communion and “familiarity” with the triune God: «the spirit of the Lord will rest upon

³ Cf. P. MARANESI, *Facere misericordiam. La Conversione di Francesco d'Assisi: confrontocritico tra il Testamento e le Biografie*, Assisi, 2007, and P. MESSA, *Le fonte patristiche negli scritti di Francesco di Assisi*, Assisi, 2006, p. 246ff.

⁴ Cf. FRANCIS OF ASSISI, *Scritti*, ed. critica di C. Paolazzi, Grottaferrata, 2014, p. 172.

⁵ Cf. R. PAZZELLI, *Il titolo della Prima recensione della Lettera ai Fedeli*, in *Analecta TOR* 19 (1987), p. 246.

⁶ Cf. R. PAZZELLI, *San Francesco e il terz'Ordine. Il movimento penitenziale pre-francescano e francescano*, Padova, 1982, p. 204.

them (cf. *Is* 11:2) and make Its home and dwelling place among them (cf. *Jn* 14:23), and they are children of the heavenly Father (cf. *Mt* 5:45), Whose works they do, and they are spouses, brothers and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ (*Mt* 12:50)». Francis continues by describing in detail what this communion with each person of the Trinity means and the excellent value that this communion brings.

3. The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order

a. A Christo-centric faith

The Rule of the OFS, promulgated by Pope Paul VI on June 24, 1978⁷, with the Apostolic Letter *Seraphicus patriarch*, shows the Christocentric dimension as the most outstanding feature of the relationship of secular Franciscans with God. However, it also presents important elements of the lively and deep relationship that the OFS brothers and sisters are called to live and nourish with the Holy Spirit and with God the Father. These three dimensions will be presented, in this order, distinguishing several levels or aspects in each one of them.

A fundamental option of life. Right at the beginning, the Rule presents the following of Christ as the essential identity of the Franciscan family, lived «in the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi» (n. 1). In fact, it clearly affirms that the «Rule and life of the Secular Franciscans is this: to observe the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by following the example of St. Francis of Assisi, who made Christ the inspiration and the center of his life with God and people». Christ is at the same time «the gift of the Father's love» and «the way to him». For all this, they are called to the assiduous reading of the Gospel, so as to go from «gospel to life and life to the gospel» (n. 4). To assume this fundamental option of life means that secular Franciscans have to seek the living Christ in the various areas of their existence: in their brothers and sisters, in Sacred Scripture, in the community of the faithful, including their liturgical celebrations, and they should pattern their eucharistic life after the faith of St. Francis, who had great esteem for the body and blood of the «Most High Son of God» (n. 5).

Conforming to Christ. Participating in the Paschal Mystery of Christ through baptism, secular Franciscans are to proclaim the Risen Lord «by their life and words» (n. 6). The evangelical conversion to which they are called as «brothers and sisters of penance» consists in the radical and continuous conformation of their thoughts and deeds to those of Christ (cf. n. 7). In addition, after the example of Jesus Christ, the true worshipper of the Father, let «prayer and contemplation be the soul of all they are and do». They are called to unite themselves to the redemptive obedience of Jesus in their secular state and to confess Christ, poor and crucified, following him faithfully «in difficulties and persecutions» (n. 10).

Impact in secular life. Christ, poor and humble, is also the motivation for secular Franciscans to seek «a just relationship with temporal goods» with a spirit of detachment and simplicity, as «stewards of the goods received» (n.11). They must know to accept all persons «as gift of the Lord and an image of Christ» and they shall become brothers to all, especially of the most lowly, creating for them «conditions of life worthy of people redeemed by Christ» (n. 13). The following of Christ is also a way of humanization and implies the exercise of their responsibilities competently in a «Christian spirit of service» (n. 14). Marriage and family life have to be signs of Christ's universal renewal of love for the Church (cf. n. 17). They accept serenely the coming of Sister Death as the «ultimate encounter with the Father» since they are «immersed in the resurrection of Christ» (n. 19).

b. Under the impulse of the Holy Spirit

Continuous and fruitful interaction. The Rule begins by noting the active presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church, raising spiritual families within her, including the Franciscan family, which includes «laity, religious and priests» (n. 1). Later, when speaking of the brothers and sisters who are

⁷ To deepen in the history of the Rule, cf. R.M. STEWART, “*De illis qui faciunt penitentiam*”. *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order: Origins, Development, Interpretation*, Rome, 1991.

part of the Franciscan Order in all the Fraternities throughout the world, the Rule says that they are «led by the Spirit, to strive for perfect charity in their own secular state» (n. 2), that is to say, he inspires them to live in holiness⁸. The Holy Spirit is also the One who introduces believers in the Truth, which is Christ (cf. n. 4). This phrase is based on two verses of the Gospel of John 6:14 and, more specifically, 16:13: «when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will». From these references we can say that the Rule describes the relationship of secular Franciscans with the Holy Spirit as a continuous and fruitful interaction that starts right from the origin of the Franciscan spiritual Family, continues by introducing the brothers and sisters in the Truth, which is Christ, and encouraging them to seek the fullness of charity - holiness - in their secular condition.

Source of blessing. The Rule concludes with the first part of the blessing that Francis wrote at the end of his *Testament*, referring to the Spirit as source of earthly blessing, next to the «beloved Son» of the Father, for whoever observes «these things». Francis qualifies the Spirit with two adjectives: Most Holy and Paraclete. The superlative Holy corresponds to the style of expression typical of Francis, who emphasizes the transcendence of God in relation to the creatures; while the title of the Paraclete - from the Greek *parakletos*: the one who is «called at the side of» (*para-kaleo*; *ad-vocatus*) - takes up the use that the Gospel of John makes of this qualification by applying it to the Spirit that Jesus promises his disciples (cf. *Jn* 14:16.26; 16:7; 15:26), and which has been translated in various ways: “advocate”, “Defender”, “Master”, “helper”, “consolator”. The “epilogue” of the Rule picks up the blessing of Francis: the Spirit of upmost holiness accompanies and defends secular Franciscans who are faithful to the Rule they have promised to live from all the adversities of life.

c. A merciful Father

Overflowing gratitude. The Rule presents God as a Father who gives gifts to His children. The greatest gift of his love is Christ, the Way to the Father and bearer of abundant life (cf. n. 4), the «Most High Son of God» (n. 5). Each person is also a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ and, therefore, secular Franciscans have to welcome them «with a gentle and courteous spirit», as the Father sees in every person «the features of his Son» (n. 13). In the same logic, the Rule calls on secular Franciscans to consider work also as a «gift of God», which allows them to participate «in creation, redemption, and service of the human community» (n. 16). Finally, the blessing of Francis already mentioned before, taken from the *Testament* and presented as “epilogue” of the Rule, asks that those who observe «these things» may «be filled in heaven with the blessing of the Most High Father». The overflowing gratitude of God is manifested by the gifts described in the Rule: Christ, every person, work and the blessing of heaven. Each one of these gifts implies an adequate response from the part of the beneficiaries.

Sacramental and prayerful life. In response to the Father who gives these gifts to His children, the Rule exhorts secular Franciscans to participate actively in the sacramental and liturgical life of the Church, and to adopt a prayerful life. Thus, while trying to live the daily conversion, central to the vocation of «the brothers and sisters of penance», the Rule invites secular Franciscans to participate in the sacrament of Reconciliation, which «is the privileged sign of the Father’s mercy and the source of grace» (n. 7). In addition, prayer and contemplation – also central to the penitential vocation – are to be the soul of their existence and action, in imitation of Jesus Christ, «the true worshipper of the Father». Likewise, they are to participate in the sacraments of the Church, «especially the Eucharist», and other forms of the liturgical prayer of the Church (cf. n. 8).

More consequences for the secular life. From this relationship with the merciful Father, some consequences emerge in different areas of secular Franciscans’ life. Thus, the faithful fulfillment of their proper duties is also a sign of their adherence to the will of the Father, «uniting themselves to the redemptive obedience of Jesus» (n. 10). Following the example of the poverty and humility of Christ and

⁸ Let us remember that Vatican II considers holiness as the fullness of Christian life and the perfection of charity (cf. *Lumen gentium*, 40).

Mary, secular Franciscans are to serve as «stewards of the goods received for the benefit of God's children in favor of the sons of God», and «as “pilgrims and strangers” on their way to the home of the Father, they should strive to purify their hearts from every tendency and yearning for possession and power» (n. 11). They will achieve freedom to love God and brothers from their «purity of heart», which they are called to search for, as they bear witness to the future goods (cf. n. 12). They are also called to build the Kingdom of God through the construction of a «more fraternal and evangelical world», in collaboration with «all people of good will» (n. 14). At the same time, they have to respect «all creatures, animate and inanimate», because they «bear the imprint of the Most High» (n. 18). Finally, they are invited to serenely tend toward the ultimate encounter with the Father, aware of the true meaning of «Sister Death» (n. 19).

Conclusions

The journey made in this brief article has led us to highlight some significant elements when reflecting on the relationship with God that secular Franciscans are called to cultivate and develop. For reasons of space and time, we took into consideration only the beginning of the conversion of Francis according to his *Testament*, and then took up two elements from the *Letter to the Faithful I* which, in a certain way, served as an introduction to the synthesis that we have made of the experience of the Triune God, which the Pauline Rule proposes embracing to secular Franciscans. We hope that this reflection will be useful for the brothers and sisters who have been called to live the franciscan penitential charism in the secular Franciscan Order in their search for the living God, who has revealed himself fully in his Son Jesus Christ and continues to accompany and motivate his Church through the Holy Spirit, who has awakened the Franciscan vocation in each one of us and sustains it.

News - Chapters - visits - MEETINGS

Annual meeting of the CAS 2016 (Tempo Forte)

The annual meeting of evaluation and programming of the Conference of general Assistants of the OFS-YouFra (CAS) – called *Tempo Forte* – took place in the Proto-Monasterio of Rivortorto of the Conventual Friars, from December 1-5, 2016. Those were days of fraternal sharing in which we evaluated our work carried out in the year 2016 and we decided several things with regard to our work as a conference for the year 2017: the liturgical celebrations during the coming Presidency meetings; the OFS General Chapter; the Asia-Oceania Congress; the topics for the Bulletin Koinonia; our collaboration with the projects and the Commissions of the Presidency; how to make more effective our pastoral visits, etc. In addition, we planned our commitments for next year with regard to the national chapters, fraternal and pastoral visits to the national councils, monthly meetings, translations of various documents, etc. The *Tempo forte* undoubtedly helped us to move forward with Franciscan joy and hope in our collegial service to the OFS and YouFra at the international level. On Saturday night, we attended the procession with candles at the Porziuncola. On the last day, we celebrated the Eucharist at the tomb of St. Francis and then we had breakfast in the Sacro Convento, and later we had our lunch at the convent of the TOR Friars. We, the four Assistants, are very grateful for the fraternal hospitality and generosity extended to us during our meeting by the local OFMConv community and the other communities.

Kenya - National Elective Chapter

The National Fraternity of Kenya held its National Elective Chapter from December 8-11, in Nairobi. The Chapter was presided over by Daniel Chidemu, OFS-Zimbabwe, delegate of Tibor Kauser, OFS Minister General, who was assisted by Fr. Francis Jabedo, OFMConv, delegate of CAS. The elections

were held on Saturday 10. Patrick Macharia was elected National Minister and Jacinta Kingori International Councillor. During the closing Mass, presided over by Fr. Francis Jabedo in the afternoon of the 10, Chidemu Daniel installed the new National Council.

Secretariat of the CIOFS, Rome – Christmas Greetings

On Thursday December 15, the annual gathering of the CIOFS Secretariat staff and collaborators with the General Assistants of the OFS present in Rome for the exchange of Christmas greetings began with a fraternal meal, at the seat of the CIOFS Secretariat. Present were: Tibor Kauser, OFS Minister General; Isabella Di Paola, General Secretary; Lucio Monti, General Treasurer; Isabella Rimmaudo, Laura Busaglia, Benedetto Lino, Fr. José Antonio Cruz Duarte, OFM, and Fr. Amando Trujillo Cano, TOR, who led the prayer and singing. The gifts, the carols and the toast for the occasion were not lacking.

Chad – National Elective Chapter

The national elective Chapter of the OFS in Chad was held from the 15th to the 18th of December at *St. Elizabeth Centre*, in Moundou. Michel Janian, Councilor of the Presidency, presided over the Chapter, and was assisted by Fr. Francis Bongajum Dor, OFMCap. The first two days were devoted almost exclusively to the local fraternities' reports. About fifty members were present, including 21 with the right to vote, six spiritual Assistants, and about 10 members of the Franciscan Youth, who also lent their service in the liturgy, in cooking, etc. Ange-Gabriel Soulasaye was elected National Minister and International Councilor in replacement of Michel Passeh. Fr. Thomas Robe is the new National Spiritual Assistant. Over a year ago, Fr. Olivier Nonkar replaced Fr. Raffaele Madalena, who had been appointed Assistant, but returned to his country for emergency health reasons. On Saturday 17, during the closing Mass, Michel Janian installed the new Council. The visitors had a brief meeting with the new Council on the afternoon of 17, before leaving the Capitulars to undertake a long journey to the capital, Yamena. The chapter was marked by simplicity and fraternal joy.

New Assistant General OFM

Fr. João Pedro Zitha, OFM, commonly called Fr. Peter, was born in Mozambique on August 1, 1973. He grew up in Nelspruit, South Africa, entered the Order of Friars Minor on February 3, 1998, and then made his solemn profession on December 29, 2004. He was ordained a priest on October 21, 2006. Then for three years, he carried out his pastoral service as vicar of a parish. In 2009 he moved to Rome to do his studies of specialization in Sacred Liturgy, obtaining a Licentiate on the 22 of June, 2012. In the same year he returned to South Africa, where he was appointed parochial vicar and chaplain of the university (Rhodes University in Grahamstown), positions which he held for one year. On February 15, 2014, he moved to Durban, where he served as pastor and assistant to the Vicar. The Minister General of the Order of Friars Minor, Fr. Michael A. Perry, nominated him Assistant General of OFS on November 11, 2016, and he moved to Rome to initiate his service in January 2017. On January 20, 2017, Fr. José Antonio Cruz Duarte, OFM, participated for the last time in the CAS meeting, and introduced Fr. Peter. The Conference of General Assistants is grateful for the service and the collaboration that Fr. José Antonio carried out since he was appointed by the Minister General, Fr. Michael Perry, OFM, in March of 2013. We wish him all the best in his return to Brazil and to his Province.

Death of Fr. Benitius Brevoort, OFMCap and Fr. Benet Fonck, OFM, former General Assistants

In recent months, the Lord called from this world two former General Assistants of OFS-YouFra, Fr. Benet Fonck, OFM, and Fr. Benitius Brevoort, OFMCap. Fr. Benet Fonck, was born on 03/06/1945 in the United States and was ordained on June 3, 1972. He then worked in parishes in Texas, Illinois and Missouri. He was Assistant General to the OFS-YouFra from 1980 to 1985. After returning to his home Province, he continued to serve his Order and the Church until he retired to *St. Clare's Village*, in Alton, where he died on 23/12/2016. Fr. Benitius Brevoort (Ben Brevoort) was born on 04/03/1938 in Kota Raja, Diocese of Medan, Indonesia. Temporary Profession: 31/08/1957; perpetual profession:

31/08/1960 and priestly ordination: 02/22/1964. He was Assistant General to the OFS-YouFra from 1990 to 2002 and Guardian of the Convent of Garbatella-Roma, between 2012 and 2015. In the period following his service as General Assistant, Fr. Ben continued to serve the CIOFS Presidency as an interpreter and a witness of Franciscan simplicity and joy. He returned to his Province in the early 2016 and was preparing himself for a new mission in the Netherlands. The Lord called him to His presence on 17/01/2017 in Medan, Indonesia. He was buried in the Cemetery of the Capuchin Province.

San Juan de los Lagos, Mexico – Course for Spiritual Assistants of OFS-YouFra

The annual Course for Spiritual Assistants of the OFS and YouFra of Mexico took place from February 8-10, 2017, in the Pastoral house Saint John Paul II, in San Juan de los Lagos, Jalisco. The course was organized by the OFS National Executive Board and the Conference of Ministers Provincial OFM in Mexico, through the National Assistants of the OFS: Fr. Abelardo Aranda Echeverría, OFM, Fr. Jesus Arrondo Aguerri, OFM Cap, and Fr. Francisco Vargas Aceves, OFM Conv. Fr. Amando Trujillo Cano, TOR, General Assistant OFS-YouFra was invited as the speaker. The presentations were followed by work in groups and plenary sessions. About fifty Spiritual Assistants OFM, OFM Conv., OFM Cap., and a diocesan priest were present. They also counted on the presence and the logistic support of five members of the OFS National Executive Board. The course took place in an atmosphere of fraternal dialogue, reflection and prayer. The opening Mass was presided by Fr. Constantine Alonso Saldivar OFM Cap, Custos of the Mexico-Texas, while the concluding Mass was presided by Fr. Amando.

Colombia – National Elective Chapter

The VIII National Elective Chapter of the OFS in Colombia took place in Barranquilla, from March 18-20, 2017, and was presided by Marielide Lima Tagliaferro, delegate of the Minister General, Tibor Kauser, who was accompanied by Fr. José Antonio Cruz Duarte, OFM, delegate of CAS, who presided over the opening Mass accompanied by three Provincial Ministers. There were 42 Chapter members, 46 observers and 3 assistants. Sara I. Ruiz was re-elected as National Minister and International Councillor. The Chapter was held in an atmosphere of great joy, fraternity and prayer.

Rome, College of *Seraphicum* – Meeting of the Presidency of CIOFS

The first CIOFS Presidency meeting of this year was held as usual, in Rome, at the *Seraphicum* College of the Friars Minor Conventual, on Via del Serafico 1, from March 18-25. All the members and collaborators of various services were present. The meeting began with a day of spiritual exercises prepared and animated by the CAS. It was a week of intense work, fraternal sharing and prayer, without losing the opportunity to enjoy some recreation time and to celebrate in fraternity. During the meeting, the Presidency took the decision to launch an *ad hoc* group to accompany and assist the National Fraternity of India to start again with a new impetus. A central element of the agenda was the preparation for the Intermediate General Chapter, which will take place in the same settings of the *Seraphicum*, in November this year. The Councilors and Assistants left very satisfied and filled with new commitments for the Order.

Switzerland – Formation Course

A formation course for the diverse Franciscan fraternities of Switzerland was celebrated from March 31 to April 1, at the Mattil Antoniushaus, in Morschach, Switzerland. The central theme of the course was “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (*Mt* 6:21) – Belonging as the key to the future”. There were 48 participants from the three Franciscan fraternities and language groups, that is to say, the French (MFL), the Italian (OFS) and the German (FG). Among the participants were five Capuchin spiritual Assistants and the Capuchins Minister Provincial of Switzerland, Fr. Agostino de Pietro. The starting point of the meeting was the lecture given by Attilio Galimberti, Counselor of the Presidency, on Belonging to the OFS. On the afternoon of the first day and throughout the morning of the following day, linguistic groups were formed to discuss the theme of the meeting. The concluding Mass was presided by Fr. Agostino de Pietro.

