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LIVING THE FRANCISCAN CHARISM IN TODAY'S WORLD

40 years after the *Seraphicus Patriarcha*

“THE LORD GAVE ME BROTHERS AND SISTERS” (cf. *Test.* 14):

The secular Franciscans and the gift of fraternity

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Introduction

From May 29 to June 2 was held a “Capitolo generalissimo” of all the Franciscan families of Umbria to commemorate the fifth centenary of *Ite vos*. The “prophecy of fraternal communion” is what has been experienced and activated in Foligno, in the knowledge that there is no truth, nor Christian credibility in a spirituality that does not become fraternal communion¹. It would mean that we Franciscans have yet a long way to walk on the footprints of Francis. The present study is a humble attempt to understand the meaning of fraternal bonds in the life of a secular Franciscan. First we will go through the life and *Writings* of Francis and then will take up the Rule and Constitutions of OFS.

1. Fraternal experiences of Friar Francis of Assisi

The early biographies of St. Francis of Assisi that have come down to us contain mainly stories of the fraternal experiences during the earthly life of the saint. We can enumerate any amount of such stories. But the Franciscan scholars of our time have pointed out that the road of fraternal life that Francis had to walk was not always carpeted with petals of roses. There were moments of joy, serenity and agreement; as well as moments of misunderstanding, sorrows and pain. We would better understand the man-saint Francis when we immerse into his world of agonies and trials.²

1.1 In the biographies

From the official biographies of St. Francis, especially from those of Thomas of Celano, it can be seen that Francis had a tormented period immediately after his conversion: all alone he was taking care of the lepers and reconstructing ruined churches in Assisi³. In the year 1208 together with the first

¹ Cfr. D. PAOLETTI, *La profezia della fraternità e della semplicità. Il Capitolo generalissimo dei francescani umbri: una memoria abitata in San Bonaventura informa*, (anno IV, no. 53), p. 8 (<http://www.seraphicum.org/>)

² Some of the scholarly works like G.G. MERLO, *Nel nome di San Francesco*, Padova 2003; J. DALARUN, *La Malavventura di Francesco d'Assisi*, Milano 1996; T. DESBONNETS, *Dalla Intuizione alla Istituzione*, Milano 1986 are examples of studies done in that direction.

³ Cfr. 1Cel, 16-17. Studies prove that almost for three to four years Francis was living close to the lepers, may be at the leper hospital of San Rufino dell'Arce near the Portiuncula or that of San Lazzaro close to the Rivo Torto, or that of San Salvatore delle Mura. During this period, in the habit of a hermit, Francis repairs San Damiano, San Pietro and St. Mary of the Angels of Porziuncola as evidenced in 3 Com 16-24.

disciples, Bernard of Quintavalle and Peter Cattani, consults the Gospel at St. Nicholas Church (3Com 27-29; An Per 10-11). Putting on the habit of penitent began their first apostolic preaching. In the following spring their number increases to twelve. On an unknown date in 1209-1210, Pope Innocent III verbally approves the *Rule of life* “according to the form of the holy Gospel” (Test, 14). From Rivo Torto the fraternity is shifted to the St. Mary of the Angels of Porziuncola, where the fraternity began to increase in number and grace, thus marking the golden period of “Francis and his first companions” that lasted almost for a decade.

As the result of a series of events that disturbed the serene life of the fraternity, Francis renounces to accept the direction of the Order during the Chapter of autumn in 1220, celebrated during the feast of St. Michael the Archangel⁴. We are in a period of great transition of the *religio* or movement of the Penitents of Assisi into an *ordo*, the Order of Friars Minor. Francis, with the assistance of some of his friars, is engaged in developing the primordial *Rule of Life* into an official Rule, the first version of which is presented in the Chapter of Mats in 1221. The *Assisi Compilation* vividly narrates those contrasting moments of discussion on the new *Rule* going on between Francis and “some of the wise brothers” (AC 18). The discussion has an abrupt end with these words of Francis; “My brothers! My brothers! God has called me by the way of simplicity and showed me the way of simplicity. I do not want you to mention to me any *Rule*, whether of Saint Augustine, or of Saint Bernard, or of Saint Benedict. And the Lord told me what He wanted: He wanted me to be a new fool...” The tensions regarding the *Rule* are overcome in 1223 with the papal approval received on 29th November of the same year. But the personal turmoil of Francis goes on. During this period we find a Francis who is wandering through hermitages among woods with a handful of his companions. He is almost away from the main current of the Order⁵.

But we find a quite different Francis after his stigmata. He discovers the “*True and Perfect Joy*” at the side of the crucified Jesus. He would not limit himself to go to the “Crosiers’ place” as the brother in the story of “*True and Perfect Joy*” finally orders Francis, but up to the wounds of the crucified One at Calvary. This change of attitude in Francis can be evidenced in his last *Writings*, of which we take into consideration the *Letter to Brother Leo* and the *Testament*. They reflect some of the last thoughts of Francis regarding fraternity.

1.2 The Letter to Brother Leo

The *Letter to Brother Leo*, one among the only three autographs of Francis that have come down to us, can be divided into two parts (vv. 1-15 and vv. 16-19) that were written in two different moments. In the first part, before giving a summary of “all the words that we spoke on the road”, Francis says to Brother Leo, “and afterwards you should not for advice come to me”. Francis seems to have been fed up with the constant requests for advices from his disciple. But the harshness of Francis should have hurt Brother Leo. Seeing that Francis added the last four lines; “And if is it necessary for you for your soul

⁴ We can mention just a few crucial moments in this regard. In 1219 Francis journeys to the Holy Land, appointing as his vicars Mathew of Narni and Gregory of Naples. History attests that these two vicars convoked a “Chapter of *seniores*” and introduced monastic practices of asceticism and monastic structures of authority. Phillip the Tall, to whom Francis had entrusted the care of the Poor Ladies of San Damiano, obtained from the Roman Curia some privileges for their sake. Another friar named John of Capella established a separate “intentional” community of those ministering to lepers. All of these led Francis to seek the help of the Apostolic See thus obtaining Cardinal Ugoline as the Cardinal Protector of the Order. And we have the first Papal document addressed to Friar Francis and to his Order, named as *Cum secundum*. For a critical study on this period, the readers can refer especially to two recent studies: R. J. ARMSTRONG, *Novellus pazzus in mundo. The call to foolishness* in CF (79) 2009, 469-486; S. BRUFANI, *Ordinem secundum sua statute reformavit. Francesco d’Assisi nella crisi del’20* in *Franciscana* (XV) 2013, 1-47.

⁵ Other than the already mentioned works (note 1), among the authors who recently have paid attention to the crisis that Francis had to undergo during this period, we would refer to A. VAUCHEZ, *Francis of Assisi. The life and afterlife of a medieval saint*, London 2012 (especially pp. 122-135) and A. THOMPSON, *Francis of Assisi. A new Biography*, London 2012 (especially pp. 72-125). Emblematic are the words that Francis said at one time during this period: “Who are these people? They have snatched out of my hands my religion and that of the brothers. If I go to the general chapter, then I’ll show them what my will is!” (AC 44; 2Cel 188).

for another consolation to you, and you want to come back to me, come”. The recent studies have proven that the last four lines were added after the first fifteen lines had already been composed. The pen used for lines 16-19 is different from the one used for lines 1-15. The handwriting of lines 16-19 seems to be more painstaking, too.⁶ We can assume that those four lines were written after Francis had received the stigmata! Francis becomes more and more fraternal towards his brothers!

1.3 In the *Testament*

In the *Testament*, Francis, at his death-bed, remembers the early days of his life. The stigmatized body of Francis is about to approach the graveyard, and his fading soul is uttering the last words in the form of a *Testament*. After speaking about his meeting with the lepers that led to his conversion and his faith in churches and in priests, Francis speaks about the arrival of his brothers in these words; “And after the Lord gave me some brothers...” All the turmoil and difficulties that he had to suffer from the part of his brothers are still waving in his mind; yet he joyfully sees the arrival of the first brothers as a “grace from the Lord”. The life of his fraternity flows from grace accepted in faith, a faith initiated among lepers (1-3), realized in prayer before the cross of Jesus Christ (4-5), lived in the midst of the sacramental signs within the Church (6-13), and patterned after the words of the Holy Gospel (14)⁷. Thus towards the end of his life, Francis presents three distinctive characteristics of Franciscan fraternal life in his *Testament*:

- Inspired by the Holy Gospel, and thus it is a divine grace (14)
- Confirmed by the Church, thus divinely instituted (15)
- Lived in absolute poverty, thus complete dependence in divine providence (16-22)

So Franciscan fraternity has to be inspired by God, must be confirmed by the Church and is lived in its best way when the brothers and sisters are really in need of each other – in poverty. These three factors make Francis to forget all the difficulties and enable him to say at the end of his life that the fraternal life is a gift from God.

Francis lives in a totally different social context⁸: the society is more urban and mercantile, in which social relationships are not of subordination to a lord, but of association among citizens. Son of this new social context, Francis is more sensible to certain human and evangelical values that the ancient monasticism had left in shadows. Thus, almost spontaneously, the new community that grows around him is marked by the sign of fraternity: all those who take part in it are brothers in the same level. The young community is, in the full sense of the term, a *fraternity*. The word *frater*, rediscovered in its original and evangelical vigor, becomes thus the proper name of those who join the new community, a name that distinguishes them from Monks and Canons⁹. That name indicates a new and original style of human relationship inside a religious group and it is this human bond that is proposed to his followers and thus to all the secular Franciscans as well.

2. Fraternal life in the Rule and the Constitutions of the Seculars

The new *Rule* of the Secular Franciscans has incorporated the spirit of St. Francis on fraternity. As a matter of fact Francis uses the word “order” (*ordo*) only one time in his *Writings*, to describe his

⁶ Cfr. M. W. BLASTIC (and others Ed) *The Writings of Francis of Assisi. Letters and Prayers* (Vol I), New York 2011, p. 87. The text of this letter is cited from the same book. Bartoli Langeli is of the opinion that the last four lines were written over something that had been erased by Francis or by someone else and that to the left side at the bottom of the letter a Tau can still be identified. Cfr. *Gli autografi di frate Francesco e di frate Leone*, Turnhout: Brepols, 2000, 45-46.

⁷ Cfr. M. W. BLASTIC (and others Ed) *The Writings of Francis of Assisi*, 246.

⁸ Here the comparison is with the social context of monasticism, which was planted in an essentially rural society, characterized by stability. Benedictine monastery was linked with a piece of land, from which the sustenance was brought forth. For this reason, it was naturally inserted into the feudal system of the time and shared its model of government and social relations. The abbot governed not only the monks, but all the families of farmers who were living and working in the land of the monastery.

⁹ Cfr. E. LECLERC, *La fraternità come testamento*, Milano, 2016, 60-61.

foundation, preferring the terms *religio* – which was applied to any religious movement – and especially “fraternity” (*fraternitas*) or “life” (*vita*).¹⁰ In the *Rule* of 1978 the word “fraternity” appears 13 times and the adjective “fraternal” appears 4 times. Similarly the word “family” appears 6 times and the word “community” appears 6 times. But the word “order” altogether appears just 5 times.¹¹ Thus the orientation of the *Rule* becomes clear.

2.1 Christ: the center of fraternal relations

The absolute aim of a secular Franciscan is to imitate Francis, who made Christ the inspiration and the center of his life with God and people (*Rule* 4). So Christ becomes the center of our relations with God and with man. The relationships with the brothers and sisters assume primary place in the life of a secular Franciscan in encountering the person of Christ and the order of priority is not casual: “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” (*Rule* 5). So first and foremost, it is in the fraternal relationships that a secular Franciscan must encounter Christ. And all the more “the spirituality of the secular Franciscan is a plan of life centered on the person and on the following of Christ...” (G.C 9, 1). Unless they are able to see “all people as a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ” (*Rule* 13) the “Francis-ness” will be lacking in them.

2.2 Purity of heart: the source of fraternal relations

Why do we suffer so much to live in fraternal unity? Even after all the teachings and examples set before us, if the seculars still suffer to live in true brotherhood, it is due to the lack of inner freedom that comes from the purity of heart. The *Rule* says; “Witnessing to the good yet to come and obliged to acquire purity of heart because of the vocation they have embraced, they should set themselves free to love God and their brothers and sisters” (12). So it is the purity of heart or the “radical interior change” (*Rule* 7) that gives the inner freedom to love one another. The Constitutions consider purity of heart as the “source of true fraternity” (*Rule* 15, 4). The most desired “peace” can be brought in only through “reconciliation and fraternal love” (G.C 23, 1).

2.2 Vocation to OFS is a vocation to fraternal life

The secular Franciscans are “called to build a more fraternal and evangelical world...” (*Rule* 14). Living in fraternal communion is part of their vocation. This fact is underlined in the General Constitutions where it says; “The vocation to the OFS is a vocation to live the Gospel in fraternal communion” (G.C 3, 3). Trying to build fraternity among all peoples (Cfr. G.C 18, 3) and with all creatures (Cfr. G.C 12, 1) is in the heart of their vocation. Above all else is their “life-giving union” with the other families of the Franciscan Order (Cfr. *Rule* 1). Like their father and founder St. Francis, they will naturally meet with the difficulties of living together as a fraternity. As we have evidenced above, in the same manner of the Saint, they have to discover in “Christ, poor and crucified”, “the value of contradictions for the sake of justice and the meaning of the difficulties and the crosses of daily life” (Cfr. G.C 10).

Conclusions

Francis did not give the world a new doctrine; neither proposed a new theological interpretation. Nonetheless, his life brings forth a light and a force of renewal that remains still to be actualized. This light and this force come from a return to the Gospel, which gives rise to the movement of fraternal life. Francis wants to say that God takes birth where an authentic human fraternity begins. Men and women of today are in search of authentic relationships, glimpses of which they find in St. Francis. The greatest challenge of a Franciscan today is to live in fraternity. Who is not fraternal is not a Franciscan.

¹⁰ A. VAUCHEZ, *Francis of Assisi*, 297.

¹¹ “Fraternity” is seen in Art. 2 (2 times), 20(2), 22, 23(2), 24, 25(3), 26; “family” in Art. 1(2), 2, 9, 11, 17; “fraternal” in Art. 14, 1, 23, 26; “community” in Art. 13, 16, 21, 22, 23, 24 and “order” in Art. 2, 20, 22, 23(2).

NEWS - CHAPTERS - VISITS - MEETINGS

Bali, Indonesia – 5th OFS and YouFra Asia-Oceania Congress

The 5th OFS and YouFra Asia-Oceania congress was held at Bali, Indonesia from 20 to 27 April, 2017. There were 81 representatives from 16 countries. There were no representatives only from two countries: Papua Guinea and Singapore. The Congress was well organized in its minute details. The central theme was “conversion to be carried out everyday”. This key word is something we need to do together with daily prayer when we seriously live our vocation observing the Rules and the General Constitutions. The challenge that we often meet and are unable to overcome is the personal desires in our lives, in the fraternity, in our vocational journey. We opened the congress in an inspiring manner with the Eucharistic celebration presided over by Mons. Silvester San, bishop of the diocese of Denpasar. The choir added solemnity to the celebration through their angelic voice. There was a fascinating traditional Balinese dance during the offertory. The delegates were warmly welcomed by Hendro and Augustine, followed by an opening discourse by Tibor.

There were 81 participants from: Indonesia (13), Malaysia (16), Taiwan (4), Sri Lanka (3), Nuova Zelanda (4), Tailandia (2), India (2), Australia (3), Cina (4), Hong Kong (2), il Giappone (1), Corea (5), Myanmar (1), Pakistan (1), Filippine (6), Vietnam (8) e CIOFS (7). There were presentations on 7 themes: formation, communication, family, how to manage the OFS, finance, administration of membership and JPIC. There were group discussions after every presentation and then the result was presented in common. We also spoke about YouFra, China Project, on Aging and on minority issues.

The participants were blessed to participate in the tour organized. They were moments to meet the culture of the nation. The Franciscan fraternity was celebrated every evening with songs and dances from the part of the participants who come from different cultures. We dedicated an evening for meeting all the spiritual assistants present. There were 11 assistants, plus Fr. Amando and Fr. Alfred. That was a moment of fraternal sharing.

We lived moments of reflections, prayer, study, discussion, project for the future and above all else of fraternal life; the congress remains forever in our memories.

Philippines – National Elective Chapter

The national elective Chapter of Philippines took place from 29 April to May 3, 2017 in the retreat house – “House of Silence” Lower Busay, Lahug. Inaugural mass was presided over by the Archbishop of Cebu; His Excellency Jose S. Palma, D.D. The delegates were guided by the theme of the Chapter “*the role of OFS as participants and agents of the realization of the communion of communities*”. The theme was chosen in line with that of the national journey of nine years for the new evangelization of the Church in the Philippines to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the arrival of the Gospel in the Philippines.

The chapter was presided over by Augustin Young Hak Yoon SFO, Counsellor of the Presidency, assisted by Fr. Elson M. Songzon, OFM, delegate of CAS. The national spiritual assistant Fr. José M. Litigio, OFM, was present during the whole celebration together with representatives of Conventuals, Capuchins and TOR. The above said theme was subsequently reflected in the report collected on “The priorities of OFS in the Philippines 2017-2020”. The election may have been forty-eight members of the SFO to make 1 with voting rights. The election was held on 1 May by forty eight members with the right to vote. Belinda B. Inao was elected as national Minister, Maria Yvonne M. Lanuza as International Councillor and Rowena R. Diaz as substitute. The last day of the chapter was dedicated to the presentation and approval of the priorities of OFS 2017-2020. It was a well guided Chapter and was conducted in a very good fraternal atmosphere.

Bosnia and Herzegovina – National Elective Chapter

The national elective Chapter of OFS in Bosnia and Herzegovina took place at the retreat center of the Franciscan sisters at Bijelo Polje, near Mostar (Herzegovina), from May 5-7, 2017. There were thirty one participants together with Fr. Domagoj Šimić OFM, national spiritual assistant. The Chapter was presided over by Ana Fruk, Counsellor of the Presidency and was assisted by the national spiritual assistant of Croatia, Fr. Zvonimir Brusač, TOR as delegate of CAS. At the same time and at the same place took place also the national elective assembly of the YouFra. In the first part of the Chapter the reports of the Regional Ministers (Bosnia and Herzegovina) were presented together with the triennial report by the National Minister. Matea Galić was elected as the National Minister (second term, Herzegovina) and Božica Ivanković was elected International Counsellor (Herzegovina). The capitulars approved numerous decisions for the triennium 2017-2020.

The members of OFS and YouFra prayed and celebrated the Eucharist together. The Eucharistic celebrations were presided over by Fr. Domagoj Šimić, OFM, National assistant (first day), Fr. Antonio Šakota, OFM, National assistant of YouFra (second day) and Fr. Zvonimir Brusač, TOR, delegate of CAS (third day). On the second day, Fr. Antonio Šakota held an excellent conference on the hymn of St. Paul the Apostle on charity. In the National Fraternity there are 44 local fraternities (in Bosnia 30, in Herzegovina 14 and 3 emerging fraternities).

Romania – National Elective Chapter

The national elective chapter of OFS in Romania took place from 18 to 20 February, 2017, in the convent of the Friars Minor at the Franciscan church of Csíksomyó in Miercurea Ciuc, in the region of Transylvania. The chapter was presided over by Attilio Galimberti, Counsellor of the Presidency, assisted by Fr. Alfred Parambakathu OFMConv, member of CAS. The Chapter began with Vespers on the evening of the first day, followed by a meditation for an hour after dinner. On the second day, the inaugural mass was presided over by Fr. Lucian Dumca, Custos of the Capuchins. Celina Francau, the National Minister, presented a brief report on the last three years of the life of the National Fraternity. There are 47 local fraternities, divided into 3 regional fraternities. There are about 1200 professed members among whom only 700-800 are active. The elections were made in the afternoon of the second day. Among the 57 voting members 42 were present. Tibor Penu Szilard was elected national Minister (first term) and Celina Francau was elected International Counsellor. On the last day, the mass was presided over by Fr. Szabolcs Orban, provincial Minister OFM, and concelebrated Fr. Teofil Petrisor, Minister provincial of the Conventuals.

A spirit of Franciscan fraternity reigned during the chapter. The spiritual assistants of the three orders were present for the chapter.

Cannara – dedication of two squares, procession to Piandarca e Holy Mass.

On Sunday May 21, the local fraternity of OFS, blessed Lucio of Cannara, together with the local people, the Mayor of the town, other local fraternities in the region, and representatives of the Regional Council of Umbria, national and International Council of the SFO, celebrated the “Memory of the institution of the Franciscan Third Order and the preaching to the birds”. Among two hundred participants, were also present: Tibor Kauser, Minister General OFS; Fabrizio Gareggia, Mayor of Cannara, PG; Don Francesco, parish priest of Cannara; Fr Jerzy Norel OFMConv, Vicar General; Pedro Zitha, OFM, and Amando Trujillo Cano, TOR, Assistant Generals of OFS-YouFra; Remo Di Pinto, National Minister OFS, and other members of the National Council the OFS. The program included the dedication of two squares in Cannara, one to the Franciscan Third Order, and the other to Saint Francis of Assisi; a fraternal meal; a pilgrimage to Piandarca, the place traditionally linked to the preaching of Francis to the birds. The closing Holy Mass was presided over by Fr. Amando.

La Verna, Italy – VI National Elective Chapter

The VI National elective Chapter of OFS in Italy was held at the shrine of La Verna (AR), from 1 to 4 June, 2017, and was presided over by Ana Fruk, councilor of CIOFS delegated by the Minister General, accompanied by Amando Trujillo Cano, TOR, Assistant General of OFS-YouFra representing CAS. Pedro Zitha OFM, new Assistant General was also present. The theme of the Chapter was: “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet” (Jn 2, 8) which gathers the spirituality that has guided the preparative assemblies of the Chapter. There were 46 from 48 chapter members summoned, together with some thirty observers, including some members of the YouFra, all four national Assistants (Fr. Giorgio Tufano OFMConv, Fr. Roberto Francavilla OFMConv, Fr. Lorenzo Scafuro OFM and Fr. Antonio Morichetti TOR, acting president) and some regional Assistants.

The opening Eucharist was presided over by Fr. Lorenzo Scafuro. After the report of the outgoing National Minister, Remo di Pinto, national Assistant, Fr. Giorgio Tufano, and national Treasurer, Marcello Allegro, the Presidency of the Chapter faced some challenges raised for the continuation of the Chapter which have been happily resolved by the grace of God and fraternal dialogue. Elective session was held on Saturday 3 being elected national Minister and international Councilor Paola Braggion. Ana Fruk confirmed the election of the new Minister and the new National Council. The concluding mass was presided over by Fr. Amando. The chapter members also participated in different liturgical moments with the friars of the sanctuary. The chapter took place in an atmosphere of brotherhood, prayer, discussion and joyful recreation. The concluding session was a dialogue between the Assembly and the new Council and national Minister.

Singapore - National Elective Chapter

The national elective chapter of OFS in Singapore was held on June 2 to 4, 2017 in San Damiano Spiritual Center of Friars Minor at the Franciscan church of St. Mary of the Angels, Bukit Batok, Singapore. So far the national fraternity of Singapore was attached to Malaysia. With this chapter, both have become Emerging national fraternities.

The chapter was presided over by Tibor Kauser, Minister General of OFS, assisted by Fr. Alfred Parambathu OFMConv, Member of CAS. There were 27 Capitulars. Janet Lim was elected national Minister (first term) and Christina Padman was elected Vice-Minister. During the mass on 3 June, presided over by Fr. Alfred Parambathu and concelebrated by Fr. John Wong OFM, Custos of Malaysia-Singapore-Brunai, Tibor Kauser installed the new National Council. On the following day Tibor and Fr. Alfred had a meeting with the new Council.

Malaysia - National Elective Chapter

The national elective chapter of OFS in Malaysia was held on 9 to 11 June, 2017 in the Retreat Centre, at St. Pius Church, Bundu Tuhan Ranau, in the region of Sabah. Before the Chapter, there was a meeting with the Archbishop of Kota Kinabalu, Mons. John Wong.

The Chapter was presided over by Tibor Kauser, Minister General OFS, assisted by Fr. Alfred Parambathu OFMConv, Member of CAS. The Chapter was attended by 73 seculars including 39 capitulars. There were also 5 Franciscan Sisters who are serving the Fraternity with their dedicated spiritual assistance. Marina Jean Anjuman was elected national Minister (first term) and Deva Sayalam was elected Vice-Minister. During Sunday mass of 11 June, presided over by Fr. Alfred Parambathu, Tibor Kauser installed the new National Council.

Netherlands – National elective Chapter

The national elective chapter of OFS in Netherlands was held from 9 to 11 June 2017 in Huiz Elizabeth in Denekamp. About fifty participants experienced this national fraternal event among chapter members with voting rights (17); spiritual Assistants and voluntary participants (19); technicians and invitees from outside (4); and delegates of CIOFS. The first day was marked by a conference by a theologian, Erik Borgman, a lay Dominican Professor of public theology in Tilbur, on the topic “how to handle the

wounds within ourselves”. The morning of the second day was dedicated to the triennial report of the Minister and the outgoing Council and the establishment of priorities for the next three years. This part was presided over by Fr. Rob Hoogenboom OFM, Minister Provincial. On 10th, Saturday afternoon was dedicated to elections of the new Council and the session was presided over by Mårton Beke, OKS, delegated by Tibor Kauser, Minister General OFS, assisted by Fr. Francis Bongajum Dor, Assistant General OFS-YouFra.

After the election of the new Council Fr. Rob Hoogenboom, OFM presided over the thanksgiving Mass during which the new Council was installed by Mårton Beke. Fr. Francis gave the homily. During the election Theo Reuling was elected national Minister, Mariette Fleur, International Councilor, and Michel Versteegh international Councilor substitute.

The chapter was well prepared and well-coordinated in detail. The works, the liturgy, the meals, the texts and the welcome and farewell of the guests were well prepared. For the election, we had only one candidate for each position, due to the number of nominations and the older age of some. Mårton and Fr. Francis are very grateful to the Council and the OFM friars of Amsterdam for the hospitality.

Abidjan – Ivory Coast: Formation course – Project Africa

The first formation course planned by the committee of Project Africa for countries in the Western region of Africa was held as scheduled from 14 to 17 June 2017 at Centre de Spiritualité Saint Padre Pio of Capuchins at Angré-Abidjan. There were 45 participants from four countries: Burkina Faso, Benin, Ivory Coast and Togo. The main theme was “The Franciscan charism and the Church – go rebuild my house”. The opening mass was presided by His Excellency Paul Siméon Ahawana, OFM, Archbishop of Bouaké; a celebration participated also by all the Capuchin friars gathered in Chapter in those days in the same Center. In his homily, the Franciscan prelate said that all Franciscans have received the mission to proclaim the Gospel of fraternity, and stressed on the importance of witnessing fraternal life both to the local church and to the African society. The course was animated by Michel Janian SFO, Counsellor of the Presidency; Fr. Paul Zipki OFM, provincial Vicar of the province of Verbo Incarnato; Adolph and Marie Antoinette Assagba; and Fr. Francis Bongajum Dor OFM Cap, Assistant General of OFS-YouFra. The topics covered in this course were among others: Formation, animation and guidance of a fraternity, the social doctrine of the Church, family, budget, communication and Chapter.

Other than the works of the formation course, Fr. Francis made an intervention to the Capuchin Friars gathered for the chapter on the mission of the friars towards OFS. On the last day, after the closing Eucharist celebration, the participants received a certificate of participation, then concluded the session with a pilgrimage to the national shrine “Notre Dame d’Afrique, Mère de toute Grace”, where they performed an act of consecration of the fraternities to our Lady. The final stage in these days of sharing was the visit to the fraternity of Friars Minor of Ébimpé-Abidjan, to pray at the tomb of Fr. Daniel, a zealous local Assistant of OFS, known by many even in Togo and died recently. After a festive moment of music and dance, concluded with a prayer and a blessing by Fr. Paul Zikpi, superior of the community, the participants left having given each other a kiss of peace and good.

This first formation course was, by grace and by the contribution of many, very successful, given the number of participants and heard the final evaluation. Many appreciated the formation booklet provided by the Project Africa and the content of the conferences. Some elements should be improved. The coordination team led by Christophe Lobognon OFS, made a great job, indispensable for the success of the course. The participation of national and local Assistants was an important contribution. From the discussion with them was expressed the need to organize a formation course only for the Assistants of OFS-YouFra. The coordination team of Project Africa expresses its gratitude to CIOFS and to MZF, and to the national fraternity of OFS in USA for contributions to the funding of the courses.