



# K O I N Ō N I A

*...together on the journey*

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

40 years after the *Seraphicus Patriarcha*

## **SECULAR FRANCISCANS AND THEIR PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS**

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### **Introduction**

Political issues have been a fundamental aspect in the history of humanity and at present seem to be of great relevance. There are new horizons that are open to the different peoples of the Earth in this era of globalization and climate change, plus the drama and amplitude of some social problems. The Magisterium of the Church in the modern age, as well as many lay people and Catholic associations, have underlined the importance of the participation of Catholics in political affairs, as part of the commitment to «Christianize the world» and the vocation of lay people «to be witnesses to Christ in all things in the midst of human society».<sup>1</sup> This article wants to propose some basic elements of reflection in the light of political science, the social doctrine of the Church, the Rule and the Constitutions of OFS, as well as some individual and collective testimonies to guide the participation of Secular Franciscans in politics.

### **1. Meaning of «politics» according to political science**

Political science<sup>2</sup> speaks of a classic meaning of politics that derives from the adjective polis, (*politikós*) and denotes everything that refers to the city: citizen, civil, public, sociable, social, etc. This term was diffused by the influence of Aristotle's great work *Politica*. However, in the modern age the term has lost its original meaning and has been replaced little by little by expressions such as «science of the state», «doctrine of the state», «political science», «political philosophy», etc., and is commonly used to indicate the activity or set of activities that in some way have the polis, the state, as the reference point. In addition, the concept of politics, understood as a form of activity or human praxis, is strictly connected with that of power, which consists, according to the traditional view, «in the means to obtain some advantage» (Hobbes) or analogously as «the set of means that allow to achieve the desired effects» (Russell). Other authors recall that Aristotle argued that it is natural for someone to live in a political way, understanding not only that a person lives better in a complex society, rather than abandoned and isolated, but also that having

<sup>1</sup>POPE PAUL VI, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the modern World Gaudium et Spes*, 7 December 1965, n.43.

<sup>2</sup>BOBBIO N., *Politica*, in *Dizionario di Politica*, Novara, 2016, p. 712-720.

one's own opinions on how to deal with issues of public interest is appropriate to human nature. Thus they conclude that «politics is a noble activity with which people decide the rules of life and the objectives of the collectivity»<sup>3</sup>.

## 2. Social doctrine of the Church

In addition to Scripture and based on it, the Church proposes a social teaching that it has developed over the centuries and that has been synthesized in a *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (CSDC):

The Christian knows that in the social doctrine of the Church can be found the principles for reflection, the criteria for judgment and the directives for action which are the starting point for the promotion of an integral and solidary humanism. Making this doctrine known constitutes, therefore, a genuine pastoral priority, so that men and women will be enlightened by it and will be thus enabled to interpret today's reality and seek appropriate paths of action (CSDC, 7).

### 2.1 Biblical foundation

The CSDC proposes three biblical aspects as the basis of a Christian reflection on the political community which correspond to three decisive moments in the history of salvation<sup>4</sup>. For reasons of space, we only enunciate them here, inviting you to read them: a) the Lordship of God (no. 377-378); b) Jesus and political authority (no. 379) and c) the first Christian communities (no. 380-383).

### 2.2 Participation and mission in the political community

Chapter IV of the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* is entitled *The Life of the Political Community* and offers some fundamental elements on the «desire to play a greater part in organizing the life of the political community» and on better ways to «establish political life on a truly human basis» (*Gaudium et Spes*, 73):

Great care must be taken about civic and political formation, which is of the utmost necessity today for the population as a whole, and especially for youth, so that all citizens can play their part in the life of the political community. Those who are suited or can become suited should prepare themselves for the difficult, but at the same time, the very noble art of politics, and should seek to practice this art without regard for their own interests or for material advantages. With integrity and wisdom, they must take action against any form of injustice and tyranny, against arbitrary domination by an individual or a political party and any intolerance. They should dedicate themselves to the service of all with sincerity and fairness, indeed, with the charity and fortitude demanded by political life (*Gaudium et spes* 75).

### 2.3 Principles of the Social Doctrine of the Church

The SDC has developed general principles that also must guide the political participation of the faithful. These principles are extensively explained in Chapter III and Chapter IV of the CSDC, and are the following: 1) The dignity of the human person, 2) The principle of the common good, 3) The universal destination of goods, 4) The principle of subsidiarity, 5) Participation, 6) The principle of solidarity, 7) The fundamental values of social life, and 8) The way of love.

### 2.4 Service in politics

The CSDC also offers other elements pertinent to our theme: Chapter VIII on *The Political Community* and No. 4, Section II of Chapter XII on *Service in Politics* (nos. 565-574). For reasons of space we only mention here some significant fragments:

«For the lay faithful, political involvement is a worthy and demanding expression of the Christian commitment of service to others» (n. 565). «The lay faithful are called to identify steps that can be taken in

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<sup>3</sup>KELLY P. – DACOMBE R. and Others., *Il libro della politica*, Milano, 2018, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup>PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2005, nn. 377-383.

concrete political situations in order to put into practice the principles and values proper to life in society. This calls for a method of discernment[1188], at both the personal and community levels» (n. 568).

## **2.5 Pope Benedict and the ethical foundation of political deliberations**

From the rich and profound teaching of Pope Benedict XVI, we note only an emblematic fragment of the speech he delivered at Westminster Hall, during his apostolic trip to the United Kingdom:

[...] I cannot but voice my concern at the increasing marginalization of religion, particularly of Christianity, that is taking place in some quarters, even in nations which place a great emphasis on tolerance. There are those who would advocate that the voice of religion be silenced, or at least relegated to the purely private sphere. There are those who argue that the public celebration of festivals such as Christmas should be discouraged, in the questionable belief that it might somehow offend those of other religions or none. And there are those who argue – paradoxically with the intention of eliminating discrimination – that Christians in public roles should be required at times to act against their conscience. These are worrying signs of a failure to appreciate not only the rights of believers to freedom of conscience and freedom of religion, but also the legitimate role of religion in the public square. I would invite all of you, therefore, within your respective spheres of influence, to seek ways of promoting and encouraging dialogue between faith and reason at every level of national life<sup>5</sup>.

## **2.6 The encyclical letter of Pope Francis *Laudatosi*'**

In his Encyclical Letter *Laudatosi*' on the care of our common home, Pope Francis integrates concepts such as social and political love, the civilization of love, the common good and the common house that we inhabit:

Love, overflowing with small gestures of mutual care, is also civic and political, and it makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world. Love for society and commitment to the common good are outstanding expressions of a charity which affects not only relationships between individuals but also «macro-relationships, social, economic and political ones». That is why the Church sets before the world the ideal of a «civilization of love». Social love is the key to authentic development: «In order to make society more human, more worthy of the human person, love in social life – political, economic and cultural – must be given renewed value, becoming the constant and highest norm for all activity» [...] (n. 231).

Not everyone is called to engage directly in political life. Society is also enriched by a countless array of organizations which work to promote the common good and to defend the environment, whether natural or urban. [...] In this way, the world, and the quality of life of the poorest, are cared for, with a sense of solidarity which is at the same time aware that we live in a common home which God has entrusted to us. These community actions, when they express self-giving love, can also become intense spiritual experiences (n. 232).

## **3. The Rule of OFS**

We now turn our attention to the Rule of OFS of 1978, but before that, it will be useful to refer to Pope Pius XII Address to the Franciscan Tertiaries of Italy in 1956, cited in note 3, of No. 1 of that Rule:

From Blessed Lucchesio up to the innumerable lay people of every communion, to priests, to Bishops, to Roman Pontiffs, it is a true multitude of souls who attributed to the Third Order a great part of the spirit that animated them to walk on the path of perfection. No less surprising is the history of their works, directed to the religious, moral, social, and political reorganization of the society. [...] In times of struggle and revenge the Tertiaries became promoters of harmony and peace; against the abuses of the feudal lords they operated with prudent daring, for the benefit and defense of the most humble classes; to diminish and, as far as possible, to destroy the effects of heresies and schisms, they practiced and preached absolute fidelity to the

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<sup>5</sup>Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI on the occasion of the Meeting with the Representatives of British Society, Apostolic Journey to the United Kingdom (16-19 September 2010), Westminster Hall – City of Westminster, Friday 17 September 2010.

Church and its visible Head; to put a row on the spread of injustice, arrogance, robbery, gave an example of detachment from wealth, vanity and honors<sup>6</sup>.

However, in the Rule of OFS of 1978, the term “politics” does not appear, but there are clear references to the responsibility that lay Franciscans have regarding public life:

- ✓ «...A sense of community will make them joyful and ready to place themselves on an equal basis with all people, especially with the lowly for whom they shall strive to create conditions of life worthy of people redeemed by Christ»<sup>7</sup> (Rule 13).
- ✓ «Secular Franciscans, together with all people of good will, are called to build a more fraternal and evangelical world so that the kingdom of God may be brought about more effectively» (Rule 14).
- ✓ «Let them individually and collectively be in the forefront in promoting justice by the testimony of their human lives and their courageous initiatives. Especially in the field of public life, they should make definite choices in harmony with their faith» (Rule 15).
- ✓ «Mindful that they are bearers of peace which must be built up unceasingly, they should seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue, trusting in the presence of the divine seed in everyone and in the transforming power of love and pardon»<sup>8</sup> (Rule 19).

#### 4. Constitutions of OFS

It must be remembered that the Constitutions of OFS expressly dedicate Title II of the Second Chapter (art. 17-27) to the *active presence in the Church and in the world* of Secular Franciscans. Some of these articles develop some aspects contained in the numbers of the Rule cited above, namely:

- ✓ «the service for building up the Kingdom of God within the situations of this world» is a central aspect of «their preferred apostolate» (17.1).
- ✓ «their active presence [...]in society» is a form of «participation in the service of sanctification» of the Church (17.4).
- ✓ the call to «make their own contribution, inspired by the person and message of Saint Francis of Assisi, towards a civilization in which the dignity of the human person, shared responsibility, and love may be living realities»<sup>9</sup>(18.1).
- ✓ «they should [...] create a spirit of welcome and an atmosphere of fraternity everywhere. They should firmly commit themselves to oppose every form of exploitation, discrimination, and exclusion and against every attitude of indifference in relation to others» (18.2;cfr. *Rule* 13).
- ✓ «they should work together with movements which promote the building of fraternity among peoples: they should be committed to “create worthy conditions of life” for all and to work for the freedom of all people» (18.3;cfr. *Rule* 13).
- ✓ «they should actively put forward initiatives that care for creation and should work with others in efforts that both put a stop to polluting and degrading nature and also establish circumstances of living and environment which would not be a threat to the human person» (18.4).
- ✓ «in the spirit of minority, they should opt for relationships which give preference to the poor and to those on the fringe of society, whether these be individuals or categories of persons or an entire people; they should collaborate in overcoming the exclusions of others and those forms of poverty that are the fruit of inefficiency and injustice» (19.2).
- ✓ their commitment «to build the Kingdom of God in temporal situations and activities» and their vocation to live «in the Church and in society as an inseparable reality» (20.1; cfr. *Rule* 14).
- ✓ to assume «with [...]spirit of service [...]their social and civil responsibilities» (20.2).
- ✓ «the brothers and sisters should commit themselves to collaborate so that all persons may have the possibility to work and so that working conditions may always be more humane» (21.1).
- ✓ «they should collaborate as much as possible for the passage of just laws and ordinances» (22.1).

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<sup>6</sup>Address of His Holiness Pope Pius XII to the great Family of Third Order Franciscans of Italy, Vatican Basilica – Sunday, 1 July 1956.

<sup>7</sup>Rule of 1221, 9,3; Mt. 25,40.

<sup>8</sup>Rule of Leo XIII, II,9; 3 *Companions*, 14,58.

<sup>9</sup>See *Gaudium et Spes*, 31 ff.

- ✓ «the fraternities should engage themselves through courageous initiatives, consistent with their Franciscan vocation and with the directives of the Church, in the field of human development and justice. They should take clear positions whenever human dignity is attacked by any form of oppression or indifference. They should offer their fraternal service to the victims of injustice» (22.2).
- ✓ «the renunciation of the use of violence [...] does not mean the renunciation of action. However, the brothers and sisters should take care that their interventions are always inspired by Christian love (22.3).
- ✓ their collaboration «with those movements and institutions which promote peace while respecting its authentic foundations» (23.1).
- ✓ their collaboration «with the efforts undertaken in the Church and in society to affirm both the value of fidelity and respect for life and to provide answers to the social problems of the family» (24,3).

## 5. Some concrete witnesses

Now let us consider some individual and collective testimonies that can motivate and enlighten the participation of the Secular Franciscans in politics, in their own life circumstances.

### a. Blessed Franz Jägerstätter<sup>10</sup>

Franz Jägerstätter was born in St. Radegund (Upper Austria) on May 20, 1907 and was baptized in the parish church the next day. Franz married Franziska Schwaninger in 1936, with whom he had three daughters. Franz entered the Third Order of St. Francis. After the Nazis occupied Austria in 1938, Franz was called thrice to take up arms. At the third time, although he presented himself to his military company in Enns on March 1, 1943, he refused to perform weapons training for military service as being contrary to his religious conscience as a Catholic. After suffering imprisonment and torture, he was sentenced to death in Berlin for “undermining military morale” and, transferred to Brandenburg / Havel, he was beheaded on August 9, 1943.

### b. Two testimonies from Spain

Sister Bienvenida Eulogia Santos Cea, OFS, Ex-Minister of the San Gregorio Magno Region, served as Councilor for Culture and Social Affairs in the City of Arenas de San Pedro, Province of Ávila, from June 1971 to April 1979. Eulogia was noted for her institutional achievements in favor of the elderly, the poor and municipal cleaning workers. Brother José Luis Lopetegui Fuertes, former National Minister of OFS, held positions of national leadership in various labor organizations, devoting much of his time to ensuring that retirees and pensioners in Spain enjoy a decent retirement and pension. José Luis has been present in the national media and held meetings with multiple public officials, high-level representatives of political parties, trade unions, committees of workers, deputies and senators.

### c. Mario Cayota OFS, Ambassador of Uruguay to the Holy See

Brother Mario Cayota OFS, current Ambassador of Uruguay to the Holy See, has endeavored to live his diplomatic service with an ecumenical spirit due to the great variety of cultures, religions and philosophies that characterize the 188 embassies accredited to the Holy See. For him it has been important «to be at the very heart of the People of God». As a Franciscan lay person, he feels called to bear witness to the Franciscan charism, exercising his diplomatic work with a spirit of service, living the preferential option for the poor, concern for sister nature and care for creation, the contemplative dimension, fraternity, Christological spirituality, etc.

### d. Together for Mexico - Presence of lay Catholics in the social sphere<sup>11</sup>

In 2008, a National Union of Catholic Movements was created in Mexico called *Juntospor México* (Together for Mexico), which brings together approximately 80 movements, public institutes and associations, and private lay Catholics. *Together for Mexico* has as its bases to be and to act, the spirituality of communion, and the commitment to contribute to the construction of a society based on the principles of

<sup>10</sup> For further information, see: <https://www.dioezese-linz.at/site/jaegerstaetter/english>

<sup>11</sup> For further information, see: [www.juntospormexico.mx](http://www.juntospormexico.mx); Facebook @JuntosxMexico; Twiter @juntosxm.

the social doctrine of the Church. In 2011 it was incorporated as a Civil Association. For the second consecutive period, OFS is part of its national leadership. Among other things, the organization held the first Meeting of Legislators and Interreligious Councils of Mexico and sent two delegates to the 48<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the Organization of American States in June 2017. In 2016 they participated in the “Historical Union around the Family” with civil institutions and different religious confessions and, subsequently, in a demonstration in defense of the family and of the unborn, reaching the participation of one million people from more than 100 cities.

#### **e. Referendum on marriage in Croatia**

In the first months of 2013 a citizens’ initiative called “In the Name of the Family” was born in Croatia. It was a secular movement supported by groups of different religious confessions. The initiative led to a referendum on December 1, 2013, with the following question: «Do you want the provision according to which marriage is the union of life between a man and a woman to be included in the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia?». Among the voters 65.87% were in favor and the Constitutional Court had to approve the constitutional amendment. Although the challenges have not ended in this field, the change in the Constitution was a great achievement for the Croatian people determined to preserve their deepest human values. Members of OFS also participated, but those who stood out nationwide were young people, including YouFra.

#### **Conclusions**

After this brief exposition of the foundations of the participation of Secular Franciscans in politics and of some significant testimonies, our hope is to have aroused greater interest in Christian commitment in this important sector. It is advisable to deepen each one of the topics treated here with the help of the multiple instruments of information and formation existing in different languages. In particular, the elements of the Rule and the Constitutions of OFS that we have pointed out represent a real treasure of concrete principles and orientations for the participation of Secular Franciscans in sociopolitical field. At the same time they represent challenges that cannot be ignored if Secular Franciscans really want to be «open to the challenges that come from society and from the Church’s life situation, “going from Gospel to life and from life to Gospel”» (Const. 8.2, see Rule 4); if they wish to bear witness to their faith «in their presence and participation in the life of society» (Const. 12.1) and if they are willing to assume «the risk of courageous choices in their life in society with decisiveness and serenity» (Const. 12.2). Much good would be done and many misunderstandings would be avoided if the Fraternities reflected more deeply on these points and acted accordingly.

### **NEWS - CHAPTERS – VISITS – MEETINGS**

#### **Norway - Fraternal and pastoral visits**

The Fraternal and Pastoral Visits (VFP) to the OFS of Norway were conducted by Ana Fruk OFS, delegate of the Minister General OFS (Fraternal Visitor), and Fr. Alfred Parambakathu OFMConv, General Spiritual Assistant (Pastoral Visitor), from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> September 2018. Norway, with almost 5.2 million inhabitants, is largely a Protestant country, with only 3.6% of Catholics (190,000 people). The Catholic Church is growing, especially because of the immigrants, but the members of the OFS are mostly Norwegians. The OFS of Norway has the status of an emerging national Fraternity with 4 local Fraternities and 34 members. On Friday, September 14, at the Lunden Kloster of the Dominican Sisters, Fr. Alfred met with the 3 spiritual assistants (OFM) of the Fraternities in Norway. The meeting with the National Council began on Saturday, September 15, 2018, at 2:00 p.m. in the parish hall of St. Olav, in Oslo, with the presence of Fr. Hallverd Hole OFM. On Sunday the Mass was celebrated in the parish church of St. Mary's

in Støbekk with all the members of the Council and many other members. During the final meeting, Ana Fruk presented some recommendations to the OFS Fraternity.

### **Angola - National elective Chapter**

The national elective Chapter of OFS of Angola was celebrated from September 14 to 16, 2018 in the Convent of Our Lady of Fatima of the Capuchin friars in Luanda. 46 of the 53 capitulars were present. The Chapter was presided by Jenny Harrington OFS, of South Africa, Councilor of the Presidency, delegated by Tibor Kauser, Minister General of OFS. She was assisted by Fr. Firmino Kakulo OFM<sup>Cap</sup>, delegate of CAS. The elections were held on Saturday. Nkanu Kiala was reelected as national Minister and international Councilor for a second term, and Joana Quinta was elected as substitute international Councilor. It should be noted that the national Fraternity of Angola has 561 members, including 432 professed and 164 in formation, with 19 erected and 12 emerging local Fraternities. The Chapter was held in a fraternal spirit. The commitment of the provisional national Council, appointed a year earlier, to organize the Chapter well must also be recognized.

### **Romania - Beatification of Verónica Antal**

Veronica Antal (1935-1958), the last in the long line of Saints and Blesseds of the Secular Franciscans, was beatified on September 23, 2018 in the Church of Dormition of the Virgin Mary, in Nisiporești, Romania. Cardinal Angelo Becciu, prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, said in his homily during the beatification ceremony that the new blessed, like St. Maria Goretti who is considered to be an «icon of purity», «consecrated her life to Jesus and was faithful until the martyrdom, which took place in a tragic context of great suffering and persecution for the Christians of this land». As the process of beatification was carried out by the Conventual friars, their whole general definitory was present for the occasion. The OFS was represented by its Minister General, Tibor Kauser. Fr. Alfred Parambakathu OFM<sup>Conv</sup>, General Assistant of OFS, also participated.

### **Croatia - Fraternal and pastoral visits**

Andrea Karlović OFS, delegated by the Minister General OFS, Tibor Kauser, and Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM, general spiritual Assistant, made the fraternal and pastoral visits (VFP) to the OFS of Croatia from October 5 to 8. In the morning of October 5, the Visitors, together with Branka Cernugelj, the national Minister and the national Assistants, Fr. Vladimir Vidović OFM<sup>Cap</sup>, the President in turn, Fr. Zvonimir Brusac TOR, Fr. Mate Bašić OFM and Fr. Anto Pervan OFM<sup>Cap</sup>, met with the auxiliary Bishop of Zagreb, Msgr. Ivan Sasko. They spoke about the importance of OFS in the Church and in the diocese, as well as the challenges that today's youth face in political and ecclesiastical levels. This was followed by the meeting with the Provincial Minister, Fr. Ilija Vrdoljak OFM, and the delegates of the Ministers of the OFM<sup>Cap</sup>, the OFM<sup>Conv</sup> and the TOR. In the afternoon, Andrea and Fr. Pedro went to the Tabor Conference Center in Samobor where they met the secular Franciscans who, taking advantage of these VFP, came to participate in the XVIII national Chapter. Fr. Augustin Kordić OFM<sup>Conv</sup> presented the history of the Secular Franciscan Rule; the members of YouFra who had assembled for their elective Chapter were also present. The VFP officially began with the Mass in the evening, followed by a fraternal agape. The following day, the Visitors had a meeting with the spiritual Assistants of OFS and with those of YouFra. The meeting with the regional Councilors continued, while other members proceeded with the work in groups. After dinner there was a meeting with the national executive Council of YouFra, followed by a fraternal exchange of typical dishes from different regions of Croatia. The last day of the VFP was devoted to the meeting with the national executive Council and to the revision of the books, both of OFS and of the Spiritual Assistants. The Visitors sincerely thank Fr. Mate Bašić OFM and Fr. Zvonimir Brusac TOR for their generous support during all the days of the visit.

## **United States of America - National elective Chapter**

The national Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order of the United States (NAFRA) renewed its leadership. Jan Parker was re-elected as the national Minister for a second term, Awilda Guadalupe (Willie) was elected international Counselor and her substitute is Jane De Rose-Bamman. The elective Chapter was held at St. Louis Renaissance Hotel, Missouri, from October 9 to 14, 2018. There were 37 capitulars present, as well as three spiritual assistants and 12 observers. Although the voting began with 37 active voices, in the end, there were 41, since 4 observers were elected to the Council. Chantal Healy OFS, from New Zealand, delegate of Tibor Kauser, presided over the chapter. She was assisted by Fr. Francis Bongajum Dor, OFMCap, general spiritual Assistant. The elective Chapter was preceded by a three-day meeting of the national executive Council. After the Chapter the members of the outgoing Council and the newly elected Councilors held a meeting. The opening Mass was presided over by Fr. Christopher Panaglopoulos, TOR, who from this Chapter substitutes Fr. Alexander Escalera, OFMCap, as president of the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants (CNSA) and, therefore, member of the executive national Council (NEC) for a term of two years. Before the actual elections, Fr. Francis gave a presentation on “The Incarnation of the Word” and also presided over the closing Mass, during which Chantal Healy installed the new Council. The Chapter was marked by commitment to service, evangelical joy, a great sense of maturity and openness to the Holy Spirit. The love among the brothers and sisters was visible throughout the entire chapter.

## **Sri Lanka - National elective Chapter**

The OFS in Sri Lanka is an emerging national Fraternity with 15 local Fraternities and around 230 brothers and sisters. The national Chapter was held from October 12 to 14, 2018 in the auditorium of the parish church of St. Joseph in Negambo. Jennifer Harrington, member of the CIOFS Presidency and delegated by the Minister General, Tibor Kauser, presided over the Chapter. She was assisted by Fr. Alfred Parambakathu OFMConv, General Spiritual Assistant OFS-YouFra. On Friday morning they met with the outgoing national Council, including the national spiritual Assistant, Fr. Cosmos Perrera TOR. The Chapter began in the afternoon with a presentation by Fr. Marlaka Leonard, TOR Provincial Minister. Jenny presented the video about the Rule and Fr. Alfred spoke about the general situation of OFS in the world. The presentations were translated into Tamil and Sinhala. On Saturday morning, the national Minister and the Treasurer presented their reports, followed by the elective session. All the professed members are capitulars and there were 123 present. Harry Dickson was elected national Minister for the second time. Jennifer installed the new Council during the Holy Mass on Sunday, presided over by Fr. Cosmos, during which the homily was preached by Fr. Alfred. Although there were some tensions among the members, the Chapter ended in a very fraternal way.

## **India - National elective Chapter**

The national elective Chapter of OFS in India was held in Assisi Shanthi Kendra, Karukutty, Kerala, from October 19 to 21, 2018. The Chapter was presided over by Tibor Kauser, Minister General of OFS and was assisted by Fr. Alfred Parambakathu OFMConv, General Assistant of the OFS-YouFra. The opening session of the Chapter was held on Friday afternoon in which the Minister Provincial Fr. Leo Payyappilly OFMConv, was present. This was followed by the reports of the area Councilors and the national Formator. On Saturday morning, Oliver Fernando, the outgoing national Minister, and Fr. Peter Kannampuzha OFMConv, president of the Conference of Spiritual Assistants, presented their reports. Two other national Assistants, Fr. Charles OFMCap and Fr. Pius Puthumana TOR were present. This session was followed by a presentation on the theme of the Chapter “Franciscan Values in the Modern World” by Fr. Rocky Decunha OFMCap. The afternoon was dedicated to the elections. Only 44 out of the 98 capitulars convoked were present and thus, in the absence of a quorum, the elections were not held. Tibor then decided to hold an orientation voting that would help him appoint the national Council. In the evening the Holy Mass was presided over by Fr. Alfred. On Sunday morning, Tibor informed that the new Council will be appointed only after consulting several people, including the CIOFS Presidency. The new national

Council was announced on November 9, 2018. Oliver Fernando was appointed as national Minister and International Councilor and Jerry Joseph as vice Minister.

### **Rome - Meeting of the CIOFS Presidency**

The second meeting of the CIOFS Presidency of this year was held, as usual, at the College of *Seraphicum* from November 4 to 10. All the members were present, except Chelito Núñez, Vice Minister General, who was absent for reasons of health of her husband. The work was carried out with commitment and fraternal collaboration among all. Each day was begun with the prayer of Lauds and Holy Mass and ended with Vespers, dinner and moments of fraternal recreation. Some days, not to be delayed in the program, the members also worked after dinner. Of the work done on this occasion, it is worth mentioning the reports on national Chapters, Fraternal and Pastoral Visits, Congresses and the celebration of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the new Rule, the economic report and the programming of the year 2019. Some projects and documents were approved, especially the new translations of the Rule and Ritual of OFS. Among the guests, for various reasons, there came Noemi Riccardi of the Legal Commission, Paola Braggion, national Minister of the OFS-Italy and Francesco Mattiocco of the Commission of the Cause of Saints. On one of the days Fr. Guido Fineschi OFM, Minister Provincial of Tuscany, came with two other friars to discuss the case of the house of Poggibonsi. On Saturday 10, last day, the members participated in a Study Day on Raymond of Lull at the Basilica of Saints Cosmos and Damian, General Curia of the TOR.

### **Vietnam - Fraternal and pastoral visits**

The VFP to the national Fraternity of OFS of Vietnam were carried out by Augustine Yoon, Councilor of the Presidency of the CIOFS and delegate of the Minister General, Tibor Kauser, and by Fr. Alfred Parambakathu OFMConv, general Assistant of OFS-YouFra, on 14-18 November 2018. The OFS in this country was begun in the year 1940 and is now composed of 19 regional fraternities and 248 local fraternities with 5,603 professed members and 1615 members in formation. YouFra also has a strong presence in Vietnam with 3,270 members. Only the friars of the OFM assist the OFS in Vietnam, because the other families of the First Order have been present since a short time. The main meetings were held at the Damiano Retreat House, near to the St. Francis Institute of the OFM, in Dinh Phong Phù, HCM City. The Visitors met with the national Council, the regional Ministers, the national Assistants and the Vicar Provincial of the OFM, who were happy with the VFP of the members of the Presidency. Vietnam is a fraternity in its full growth.

### **Lithuania - Fraternal and pastoral visits**

The fraternal and pastoral visits (VFP) to the OFS in Lithuania were carried out respectively by Dina Francesca Shabalina OFS, Ukraine, delegate of the Minister General, Tibor Kauser, and by Fr. Francis Bongajum Dor, OFMCap, general Assistant of OFS-YouFra, on November 14 to 17, 2018. On the first day, the Visitors shared a welcome dinner in Vilnius with Virginija Mickute, National Minister, Monika Midveritè, responsible for formation, and Natalija, National Treasurer, and confirmed the program of the visit. On Thursday 15, along with Virginija and Monika, the Visitors left for Siauliai region, where there was a Holy mass, a visit to the mountain of crosses and a meeting with the Regional Council. In Siauliai, they were joined by Nerius, national vice Minister, Fr. Antanas OFM, national Assistant OFS-YouFra and Fr. Severinus OFM, regional Assistant of Siauliai and Panevežys. In the afternoon, the Visitors and the members of the current national Council moved to Panevežys for another meeting with the Regional Council. The Visitors returned to Vilnius on Friday. The day was dedicated to three meetings: with the Major Superiors of the First Order, with Spiritual Assistants and, finally, with the national Council of YouFra. The delegate of the Conventual friars did not attend due to health reasons and, instead, the delegate of the Capuchins arrived, although they are not yet engaged in the service of assistance to the OFS and the YouFra. On Saturday, November 17, the feast of St. Elizabeth, patron of OFS, the Visitors, with Virginija, Monika, Natalija and Fr. Antanas, went to Kaunas where they celebrated a Mass with the regional Fraternity and then gathered to talk about the life of the Order in the region. A final meeting was held after lunch with the national Council. Llona Keruckiene, fraternal Animator of YouFra also joined them. Upon

returning to Vilnius, the Visitors met and dined with the regional Fraternity. On Sunday 18, the Visitors left Vilnius accompanied by Monika and Virginija, with whom they discussed separately during the trip. Dina checked and signed the records books. Both Visitors are very grateful to the national Council and to the OFM friars for the hospitality received.

### **Slovenia - National elective Chapter**

The national elective Chapter of OFS in Slovenia was celebrated in the “Domduhovnosti” of the Capuchin friars in Kančevci, from 16 to 18 November. The Chapter was presided over by Ana Fruk, delegate of the General Minister of OFS, and assisted by Fr. Pedro Zitha OFM, member of the Conference of Spiritual Assistants (CAS). The election of the new Council was held on 17<sup>th</sup> Saturday in the afternoon, at the end of which Fani Pečar was elected as national Minister, Jozef Kozeljcome, as national vice Minister, Tomaž Potokar, international Councilor, and Metod Trajbarič, substitute international Councilor. Various priorities for the next three years of the national Fraternity of Slovenia were established on the next day and the Chapter concluded with the celebration of the Holy Mass, presided over by Fr. Primož Kovač OFM Cap. The whole Chapter was a moment of joy that ended with a fraternal agape.

### **Slovakia - Fraternal and pastoral visits**

Fraternal and pastoral visits (VFP) to the OFS of Slovakia were carried out respectively by Attilio Galimberti, member of the Presidency of the CIOFS and delegate of the Minister General, Tibor Kauser, and Fr. Alfred Parambakathu OFM Conv, general Assistant of OFS-YouFra. The visits were held from November 30 to December 2, 2018. The OFS in Slovakia has 5 regional Fraternities and 59 local Fraternities, with a number of 902 professed. The Visitors met with the three major Superiors of the First Order: Fr. Frantisek Olbert OFM, Fr. Tomáš Lesňák OFM Conv., and Fr. Norbert Pšenčík OFM Cap. The national Council and the regional Ministers were present at the meetings held at the Friary of the Capuchins in Žilina. Fr. Robert Jozef Chabada OFM, national Assistant, and three other Assistants were present. The VFP were well organized thanks also to Lucia Spodniakovà, the international Councilor.

### **France - Fraternal and pastoral visits**

Fraternal and pastoral visits (VFP) to the OFS of France were held from Friday 7 to Sunday 9 December 2018, respectively by Michel Janian, Councilor of the Presidency and delegate of the Minister General, Tibor Kauser, and by Fr. Francis Bongajum Dor OFM Cap, general Assistant. All members of the national Council were present at the visit. The Visitors met with the national Council at the Convent of the Capuchins in Paris. The afternoon of Friday 7 was devoted to some reports and sharing. Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> was dedicated to individual meetings. Some regional Ministers came on Saturday to share their experiences. A meeting was scheduled with Bishop Michel Pansard, Bishop of Evry, but was not possible due to the demonstrations in the city. On Sunday 9<sup>th</sup>, Fr. Francis visited the national headquarters and then met with the Major Superiors, Fr. Michel Laloux OFM and Fr. Eric Bidot OFM Cap. The meeting was held together with the national Assistants, Fr. Dominique Lebon OFM Cap and Br. José Kohler OFM. The national Minister, Chantal Audrey and the vice Minister, Claire Dechenaux also participated. The Visitors had the opportunity to appreciate the great commitment of the national Council in its service to the national Fraternity, especially in formation. The Council expressed its great satisfaction and gratitude for the visit, which would be the second for the national Fraternity of the OFS in France.