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ANNUAL TOPIC: OFS AND YOUFRA TODAY IN THE WORLD

OFS AND YOUFRA IN ASIA AND OCEANIA

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INTRODUCTION

In this last issue of our newsletter we address the topic of the OFS and the Franciscan Youth in Asia and Oceania to complete the plan designed for this year, that is, to make a presentation of the general situation in which these two components of the Franciscan family find themselves in various continents. In the first part of this article, I will outline a general framework of the ecclesial and social development in Asia and Oceania, based mainly on the post-Synodal apostolic exhortations, such as *A New Hope for Lebanon*,¹ *Ecclesia in Asia*,² *Ecclesia in Oceania*³ and *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente*.⁴ Later on, I will refer to the three previous Congresses of the OFS in Asia and Oceania (2004, 2007, and 2010), as well as plans for the upcoming Fourth Congress of the OFS to be held in Korea, in May of 2013. Lastly, I will provide some information about the national fraternities of the OFS and YouFra in these vast regions.

I. SOCIO-RELIGIOUS CONTEXT OF ASIA AND OCEANIA

Although there are no universal criteria to delimit the Asian continent, we can say that "Asia is the... largest and most populous continent of the Earth, with about 44 million km², representing 8.70% of the Earth's total surface and 29.45% of the land area, with its 4.2 billion people, that is, 60% of the world's population."⁵ The continent includes some 48 sovereign states, five dependent territories and two countries with limited recognition.⁶ The Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* of John Paul II emphasizes the singular importance of this continent in which God "from the beginning, revealed and fulfilled his plan of salvation"⁷ which became incarnate in Jesus Christ, his only Son. The document also states that "the mission of love and service of the Church in Asia is conditioned by two factors: first, by understanding itself as a community of disciples of Jesus Christ, gathered around their pastors, and secondly, by the diverse social, political, religious, cultural, and economic realities in the vast Asian continent."⁸

Meanwhile, Oceania comprises 14 sovereign states and about 17 independent territories and it "is an island continent [...] consisting of the continental shelf of Australia, the islands of New Guinea, and New Zealand, and the coral and volcanic islands of Micronesia, Polynesia and Melanesia. All these islands are spread over the Pacific Ocean. With an area of 9,008,458 km², it is the smallest continent on the planet."⁹ "In *Ecclesia in Oceania*, Pope John Paul II

¹ JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *A New Hope for Lebanon* (10 May 1997).

² JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia* (6 November 1999).

³ JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Oceania* (22 November 2001).

⁴ BENEDICT XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente* (14 September 2012).

⁵ Asia, in *Wikipedia. The Free Encyclopedia*, Internet (29.12.2012): <http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asia>

⁶ Portal: Asia, in *Wikipedia. The Free Encyclopedia*, Internet (29.12.2012): <http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portal:Asia>

⁷ JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 1.

⁸ JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 5.

⁹ Portal: Oceania, in *Wikipedia. The Free Encyclopedia*, Internet (29.12.2012): <http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portal:Ocean%C3%ADa>

presents the general features that characterize the ecclesial reality and its challenges: "the Church, the *communion* of believers, is now a tangible reality of life among many peoples of Oceania. Today Jesus returns to show them his loving care, calling them to an even deeper faith and an even richer life in him. Thus, the bishops could not help but wonder: how can the Church of Jesus Christ be an effective tool, who wants to meet the people of Oceania in new ways?"¹⁰

Regarding the *Asian context*, John Paul II specifies, "We cannot fail to be amazed by the huge number of the Asian population and the varied mosaic of many cultures, languages, beliefs, and traditions [...] The Church feels deep respect toward these traditions and tries to strike a sincere dialogue with their followers."¹¹ Within this context, Benedict XVI emphasizes two basic dimensions of the specific ecclesial situation in the Middle East, stating that "The Church in the Middle East, which from the dawn of Christian faith has made her pilgrim way in those holy lands, today courageously continues her witness, the fruit of a life of communion with God and neighbour. *Communion and Witness*."¹² In this region, there is a wide diversity of church traditions, such as the venerable Eastern Catholic Churches *sui juris*, the Latin Church, priests and lay people from India and other Eastern and Latin churches of Asia and Eastern Europe, including worshipers from Ethiopia and Eritrea. All of them, "together they bear witness to the unity of the faith amid the diversity of their traditions."¹³ John Paul II referred to certain features of the particular reality of Lebanon, stating that "Catholics live there as members of different patriarchal Churches and of the Latin Apostolic Vicariate. From this fact, since he can remember, the young baptized Lebanese Catholic recognizes himself either as a Maronite, Melkite, Greek, Armenian Catholic, Syrian Catholic, Chaldean, or Latin."¹⁴

Moreover, *Ecclesia in Oceania* states that cultural diversity of this continent has been changing according to the history of the region and which currently includes the traditional towns, the western culture brought by the colonizers, and the Asian cultures. Unfortunately, it also notes that: "In New Zealand, and even more in Australia, the colonial and post-colonial policies of immigration have made the indigenous people a minority in their own land and, in many ways, a dispossessed cultural group."¹⁵

A great cultural and linguistic diversity also exists within certain countries and even within the Catholic community and the OFS present in them. For this reason, some national fraternities face great difficulty in providing training materials for minority language groups. The geographical conditions of these continents also influence the cost and amount of time required for the completion of Chapters, fraternal and pastoral visits, courses, etc. These challenges are confirmed in *Ecclesia in Oceania*, where it states that "The great variety of languages - 700 in Papua New Guinea alone - together with the vast distances between islands and areas make communication across the region a particular challenge. In many parts of Oceania, travelling by sea and air is more important than travelling by land. Communication can still be slow and difficult as in earlier times, though nowadays in many areas information is transmitted instantly thanks to new electronic technology"¹⁶.

Ecclesia in Asia lists multiple religious and cultural values of the people of that continent and highlights the spirit of religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence; the signs of great vitality; the capacity for renewal of Asian religions; the deep thirst for spiritual values, especially among the young; the innate spiritual insight and moral wisdom typical of the Asian soul.¹⁷ In contrast to this reality, Benedict XVI stressed in *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente* two new mutually opposed realities that have emerged in the contemporary world, including the Middle East, namely, "secularism, with its sometimes extreme forms, and violent fundamentalism, which pretends to have a religious origin."¹⁸ Meanwhile, *Ecclesia in Oceania* highlights several characteristics of the peoples of this continent, such as the strong sense of community and solidarity in the family and tribe, in the village or neighborhood; the real spirit of cooperation of the Church of this continent and the deep respect for tradition and authority.¹⁹

As for the economic and social realities of Asia, John Paul II also warned a wide range of phenomena: the very different levels of development among the various countries, the infiltration of materialism and secularism, the rapid changes; urbanism, and formation of huge cities, emigration, building giant industrial complexes, tourism, pastoral care for migrants and tourists, the population growth and human development, the contribution of the Church to the defense and promotion of life, the negative influence exerted by the industries of the media and entertainment on Asian cultures; the economic, cultural, and political marginalization of millions of people; poverty and exploitation of women; the

¹⁰ JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Oceania*, 4.

¹¹ JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 6.

¹² BENEDICT XVI, *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente*, 1.

¹³ BENEDICT XVI, *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente*, 2.

¹⁴ JOHN PAUL II, *A New Hope for Lebanon*, 1.

¹⁵ JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Oceania*, 7.

¹⁶ JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Oceania*, 6.

¹⁷ JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 6.

¹⁸ BENEDICT XVI, *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente*, 29.

¹⁹ JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Oceania*, 7.

social, cultural and political isolation of millions of Indians and tribesmen; the enormous economic growth of many Asian societies in recent decades, and so on.²⁰

Furthermore, *Ecclesia in Oceania* highlights that the *global process of modernization* has had positive and negative effects on this continent. The document lists several positive human values that are contributing to a process of greater human and social development in the region and calls on the Church to encourage it. However, there are also negative effects, such as the gradual decline of the natural religious sense, growing secularization, privatization of religion and the low incidence of the Church in public life. Within this context, John Paul II poses this challenge to believers, saying, "In presenting Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life, the Church must respond in new and effective ways to these moral and social questions without ever allowing her voice to be silenced or her witness to be marginalized."²¹

The exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*, describes the state of the *political realities* as extremely complex, such as the political ideologies ranging from democracy to theocracy, the governance models include military dictatorships and atheistic ideologies. There are states with an official religion, discrimination against minorities, persecution of Christians, the hope of religious freedom in China, widespread corruption and the inability of people before it. At the same time, citizens are more aware of their dignity and human rights which results in increasing social demands.²²

It is now necessary to outline some of the challenges and tasks that the Church has recognized as fundamental to its mission from the realities described above in both continents. In his apostolic exhortation, *A New Hope for Lebanon*, John Paul II described the main challenges for the Catholic Church in this country after the war: "jointly seek the way for the renewal of faith, better collaboration and more effective common witness without forgetting the rebuilding of society."²³ Among the pressing challenges facing the Asian Church, the exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*, underlines "the need for a new commitment to proclaim Jesus Christ in the continent where such proclamation began two thousand years ago."²⁴ John Paul II also notes this fundamental aspect of the Church's mission with respect to Oceania, stating that "the new evangelization is a priority for the Church in Oceania [...] She is sent to the contemporary world, to the men and women of our time, "to proclaim the Gospel."²⁵ The apostolic exhortation stresses the importance of inculturation of the Gospel from the multicultural context of that continent, which is also applicable to other realities, including Asia, "The Synod Fathers called for the Church in Oceania to develop an understanding and presentation of the truth of Christ starting from the traditions and cultures of the region."²⁶

On the subject of the laity, Pope Benedict XVI urged in *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente* "Be concerned to give an account of your faith (cf. *1 Pet* 3:15) by the consistency of your daily life and your activity. To make your witness truly bear fruit (cf. *Mt* 7:16, 20), I urge you to overcome divisions and all subjective interpretations of the Christian life. Take care not to separate that life – with its values and its demands – from the life of your family or from life in society, the workplace, the political and cultural spheres, since all the many areas of the lay person's life fall under God's plan. I invite you to be bold for the sake of Christ, in the confidence that neither tribulation, nor anguish, nor persecution can separate you from him (cf. *Rom* 8:35)."²⁷ In order to refer to the issue of the role of women in both society and the Church, we quote the words of John Paul II in *Ecclesia in Asia* when he said, "the wider participation of women in the life and mission of the Church in Asia to be an especially pressing need... Women should be more effectively involved in pastoral programmes, in diocesan and parish pastoral councils, and in diocesan synods. Their abilities and services should be fully appreciated in health care, in education, in preparing the faithful for the sacraments, in building community and in peacemaking."²⁸ On the subject of the family some exhortation by the Pope in *Ecclesia in Asia* may serve as an example "...when the family itself is threatened by an array of forces. To be an agent of evangelization in such a time, the Christian family needs to be genuinely "the domestic Church", humbly and lovingly living out the Christian vocation."²⁹ Finally, on the subject of young people, I quote some reflections from *Ecclesia in Oceania* where it states that "...this is also a time in which young people face great difficulties. [...]. Yet in these situations too, young people are often searching for the life that only Christ can offer them. It is imperative therefore that the Church proclaim the Gospel to the young in ways that they can understand, ways that can enable them to grasp the hand of Christ who never ceases to reach out to them, especially in their dark times."³⁰ At the same time, John Paul II recognized the

²⁰ JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 7.

²¹ JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Oceania*, 7.

²² JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 8.

²³ JOHN PAUL II, *A New Hope for Lebanon*, 1 (our translation).

²⁴ JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 19.

²⁵ JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Oceania*, 18.

²⁶ JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Oceania*, 17; cfr. JUAN PABLO II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 20-22.

²⁷ BENEDICT XVI, *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente*, 56.

²⁸ JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 45.

²⁹ JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 46.

³⁰ JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Oceania*, 44.

"young for their acute sense of justice, personal integrity and respect for human dignity, for their care for the needy and their concern for the environment."³¹

II. CONGRESS OF OFS-YOUFRA OF ASIA AND OCEANIA

I OFS Congress of Asia and Oceania - 2004

The First Congress of the OFS-YouFra of Asia and Oceania was held from November 6-10, 2003, in Quezon City, Philippines. The CIOFS Presidency wished to respond to the urgent need of "addressing the emerging fraternities in regions such as Thailand, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Hong Kong - Macau, Mainland China and Malaysia."³² In attendance were 26 delegates from OFS and 5 spiritual assistants as observers from 12 countries. "Reports from several countries, presentations and dialogue among delegates and CIOFS represented by the Minister General and the four Assistants General were the most enlightening and enriching of the entire Congress."³³ A parallel meeting of spiritual assistants from the same continents took place from Nov. 8-15 with the participation of 22 delegates from 13 countries. About 30 Secular Franciscans of the region joined them for two days.

II OFS Congress of Asia and Oceania - 2007

The Second OFS Congress of Asia and Oceania was in Penan, Malaysia, from March 24-30, 2007, bringing together sixty participants from 12 countries. "Among the participants to the Congress were 25 Secular Franciscans (plus 8 secular Franciscan as a support), 2 members of the Franciscan Youth and 18 Spiritual Assistants. Seven members of the CIOFS Presidency expressed their full support and solidarity through their active presence and participation in the Congress throughout the five days of intense fraternal interaction, information, exchange, formation, dialogue, and consultation. The present, established, and emerging National Fraternities as well as the spiritual assistants and members of YouFra all presented their reports".³⁴

III Congress of the OFS-YouFra of Asia and Oceania - 2010

The Third Congress of OFS-YouFra of Asia and Oceania was held from May 8-13, 2010, in the house of Assisi Shanti Kendra of the Conventual friars in Karakutty, Kerala. It was attended by about 100 people, including Secular Franciscans and Spiritual Assistants from 15 countries of both continents and 8 members the CIOFS Presidency. The Congress had as its theme: "The OFS for the Church and the World." "There were moments of formation and fraternal sharing with reflections on the reality of the OFS-YouFra in several countries in the region [...] as well as liturgical celebrations, cultural events, and a pilgrimage to the tomb of Brother Puthenparampil Thommachan, founder of OFS in India".³⁵

IV Congress of OFS-YouFra of Asia and Oceania - 2013

The Fourth Congress of OFS-YouFra of Asia and Oceania is scheduled to take place from May 3-8, 2013, in South Chungcheong (*Chungcheongnam-do*), South Korea, as decided by the Congress of 2010. At present they are working on the preparation and organization of this event. Different topics are expected to be addressed such as, the Presence of OFS in the World; Spiritual and Pastoral Assistance to the OFS; and Franciscan Youth, etc. We invite the National Councils of the region to be attentive to the call to actively participate in this important event.

III. OFS-YOUFRA FRATERNITIES IN ASIA AND OCEANIA

Established National Fraternities of OFS: Korea, Philippines, India, Indonesia, Japan, Lebanon, New Zealand, Oceania, Taiwan, and Vietnam.

Emerging OFS National Fraternities: China (Hong Kong), Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Syria, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and the Holy Land.

New realities or in the initial phase of an OFS Fraternity: Russia and Tahiti.

Established National YouFra Fraternities: India, Philippines, Vietnam and Korea.

Emerging National YouFra Fraternities: China (Hong Kong), Lebanon, Oceania, and Syria.

New realities or in the initial phase of a YouFra Fraternity: Sri Lanka and Indonesia.

³¹ JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Oceania*, 44.

³² ALMIRANEZ, L., *The First SFO Asia-Oceania Congress*, Internet (29.12.2012): <http://ciofs.org/per/2004/lca4en07.htm#a>

³³ ALMIRANEZ, *The First SFO Asia-Oceania Congress*.

³⁴ ALMIRANEZ, L., *Asia-Oceania Congress 2007*, Internet (29.12.2012): <http://ciofs.org/per/2007/bca7en2g.htm>

³⁵ *India – III OFS-YouFra Congress of Asia and Oceania*, in *Koinonia*, 67 (2010), p. 5, Internet (29.12.2012): <http://www.ciofs.org/Koinonia/a9enkoinic.htm>

NEWS - CHAPTERS - VISITS - MEETINGS

Cameroon – OFS Elective Chapter

The Elective Chapter of the OFS National Fraternity of Cameroon in Yaoundé was celebrated in the school of Ada Mvog of the Sisters of Our Lady of Victory from July 26-29, 2012. This Chapter was chaired by Hervé Sylva, delegate of the Minister General, who was accompanied by Br. Vitalis Nyuysever Tete, OFMCap, delegate to the Conference of the General Spiritual Assistants of OFS-YouFra (CAS). The new National Assistant, Fr. Francis Dor was present at the Chapter. Before the election, the National Minister gave his triennial report. It was attended by 18 representatives of the seven fraternities existing in Cameroon. In this Chapter, Jean Francois Tabi Akono was elected as National Minister and International Councilor and Ngwainbi Generis as Vice Minister and International Councilor substitute.

Paraguay - Meeting with the Spiritual Assistants to the OFS and YouFra

On August 16, 2012 in the Villa House of St. Francis of the Daughters of Mercy in Asuncion, Paraguay, there was a meeting of Spiritual Assistants of OFS-YouFra with Sister Onoria Paredes, Provincial Superior of the Franciscan Sisters of Mercy, Br. Federico Gayoso, TOR, Minister Provincial and Br. Amando Trujillo Cano, TOR, Assistant General of OFS. The meeting was organized to share experiences arising from the Course for Spiritual Assistants to OFS-YouFra taught by Br. Amando in January of 2012.

Brasilia, Brazil - fraternal and pastoral visits to Brazil and the OFS National Chapter

The fraternal and pastoral visits to the OFS National Council of Brazil were made respectively by Maria Consuelo Nunez de Queremel (Chelito)-delegate of Encarnacion del Pozo OFS, Minister General - and Br. Amando Trujillo Cano, TOR, Assistant General and representative of the CAS, from August 22-23, 2012, at the Retreat House of the Salesian Sisters of the Sacred Hearts in Brasilia-DF. The visits included several meetings with members of the National Council and the revision of relevant books; a time of reflection and a meeting with the National Assistants to OFS and Franciscan Youth. The National Elective Chapter of OFS in Brazil was held from August 24-26, 2012, at the same venue. The number of the Capitulars included over 40 Secular Franciscans and about 20 Assistants. Additionally, there was a broad support team and some observers (several of the Secular Franciscans are also current YouFra members). Jesus Antonio Benedito da Silva was reelected as National Minister and International Councilor, while Vanderlei Suélio Gomes was elected National Vice Minister and International Councilor substitute.

Sweden - National Elective Chapter of OFS

The National Elective Chapter of OFS in Sweden took place from September 21-23, 2012, in Marielund, near Stockholm. Of the 35 participants, there were 17 Chapter Members voting, observers of OFS in Finland and Denmark, and six Spiritual Assistants. Tibor Kauser presided the elections as delegate of Encarnacion del Pozo, OFS Minister General, accompanied by Br. Amando Trujillo Cano, TOR, Assistant General, who represented CAS. The Opening Mass was presided by Bishop Anders Arborelius, OCD, and during the same, two candidates made their profession in OFS. Br. Amando gave a presentation on the topic, "The Secular Franciscans are Called to Evangelize." After the presentation of the reports of the National Council, the elective session was carried out, in which Jan-Olof Hellsten was re-elected as National Minister and Ricci Yvonne was elected International Councilor. Tibor presented a reflection on the meaning of *Duc in Altum* for the OFS in Europe. The new Board was confirmed by Tibor during the Saturday evening Mass, presided by Br. Amando. The last day of the Chapter was devoted to the discussion of evangelization in Sweden. The closing Eucharistic celebration was presided by the outgoing National Assistant, Br Roelvink Henrik OFM. The Chapter was held in an atmosphere of fraternal joy, prayer, and reflection.

Denmark - Conclusion of the Fraternal and Pastoral Visits to OFS.

The conclusion of the fraternal and pastoral visits (VFP) to the OFS National Fraternity in Denmark was conducted by Tibor Kauser, delegate of the Minister General, Encarnacion del Pozo and Br. Amando Trujillo Cano, TOR, Assistant General and representative of CAS, September 24-25, 2012. Activities included meetings with the Fraternity of Aarhus in the Church of Santa Maria and the Fraternity of Alvernia, at the Blessed Sacrament Church in Copenhagen. Members of fraternities spoke on various aspects of their life and mission as Secular Franciscans, such as formation, prayer, social service, and Franciscan parish liturgies, etc. The visitors searched how to implement the recommendations of the first part of the Fraternal and Pastoral Visit of 2010 and made several observations. Furthermore, the visitors held several meetings with members of the national council. Activities also included participation in liturgical celebrations in the respective parishes and fraternal banquets.

Norway - Fraternal and Pastoral Visits to the OFS

The Fraternal and Pastoral Visits to the OFS in Norway were held from September 27-29, 2012, by Tibor Kauser, delegate of the Minister General, Encarnacion del Pozo, and Br. Amando Trujillo Cano, TOR, Assistant General and representative of CAS. The visits included private meetings with local fraternities of

Lillestørm, Tønsberg and Oslo, and a meeting with the Bishop of Copenhagen, H.E. Bernt Ivar Eidsvig, CRSA, and a group meeting with the following spiritual assistants: Br. Falkanger Bjarne, OFM, Br. Nicolas Goryczka, OFM, and Br. Jon Atle Wetaas, OP. There was also a meeting with the Coordinating Council of the Fraternity of Norway. During the visit there were several moments of prayer and liturgical celebrations. On the last day of the visit there was a general meeting in the home of St. Rosae of Lima, a Dominican Tertiary. After the prayer of Lauds, there was a presentation by Kari-Mette Eidem, OFS, on the history of the Catholic Church and OFS in Norway; it was followed by other presentations by both visitors, after which there was a question and answer session. The day also included lunch, personal dialogue with visitors, the concluding Mass presided by Br. Amando and a fraternal dinner.

England - OFS National Elective Chapter

The National Elective Chapter of England was held from September 28-30, 2012, at Wistaston Hall, Crewe, in the retreat house of the Oblates of Mary. At this Chapter were the Minister General, Encarnación del Pozo, his delegate, Benedetto Lino and Br. Amanuel Mesgun, OFMCap, representative of the CAS. Present were three National Assistants: Br. Peter Hommes OFM, Br. Jesmond Pawley, OFMConv, Br. Stephen Innes OFMCap. The afternoon of the first day was devoted to propose candidates. In this long session, the National Fraternities had the opportunity to know each other better. The opening Mass of the Chapter was presided by Br. Stephen Innes OFMCap. During the Chapter the national statutes were reviewed and unanimously approved, which were immediately confirmed by the Minister General. The election of the new Council was conducted in accordance with the Statutes. The Mass of the second day was presided over by Br. Peter Hommes. Paula Pearce was elected National Minister and International Councilor and Helen MacGillp as Vice National Minister and International Councilor substitute. The celebration of the final Mass was presided by the Assistant General, Br. Amanuel Mesgun, OFMCap.

Croatia - Celebrating the 800th Anniversary of the Arrival of San Francisco in the land of Croatia

This year marks the 800th anniversary of the arrival of San Francisco to Croatian land (cf. 1 Cel 55). For this reason, members of the Franciscan Family in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina have promoted a number of initiatives to commemorate a significant date, as was holding a symposium from October 1-2, 2012, in Split and Zadar. Furthermore, on October 6, in the city of Split, many members of the Franciscan Family in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina gathered to participate in a large procession and celebrate a solemn Mass of thanksgiving. It was presided by the Archbishop of Split, Marin Barišić, concelebrated by other bishops and Provincial Ministers of Croatia, Bosnia, and Herzegovina. The National Fraternity of OFS and the Franciscan Youth of Croatia wanted to celebrate its National Chapters in this festive context. Therefore, they gathered from October 5-8 in the convent of the Friars Minor of Split - Trstenik. It was very significant that they also wanted to dedicate a large space to remember with gratitude the 20th anniversary of YouFra. There were several presentations on the history and development of YouFra, especially in view of the fraternal relationship with OFS, the First Order, and the TOR. At these celebrations also in attendance was Br. Ivan Matić, OFM, Assistant General OFS, who spoke about the beginnings of the Franciscan Youth and the grace that this spiritual path has been for many young people.

Italy, Assisi - Meeting of the Conference of Minister Generals of the First Order and TOR with CAS

On October 3 in Assisi, in the convent of the Capuchin Provincial Curia of Umbria, a meeting was held between the Ministers General of the First Order and TOR and their delegates, the Assistants General of OFS and YouFra. The agenda included four points: 1) Animating the Assistants General to the friars of the respective Order concerning the spiritual and pastoral assistance to OFS; 2) the relationship between *Altius moderamen* of Major Superiors towards OFS and spiritual and pastoral assistance to the Order; 3) the creation of the Conference of Major Superiors of the First Order and TOR in India; and 4) World Youth Day to be held in Rio de Janeiro in 2013.

Nigeria - Pastoral and Fraternal Visits to OFS and National Assembly

After five years of waiting, the visit and fraternal visits to the OFS in Nigeria was conducted by Doug Clorey, Vice General and delegate of the Minister General, Encarnacion del Pozo, and the Assistant General and representative of the CAS, Br. Amanuel Mesgun, OFMCap from October 8-19, 2012. On the 8th Br. Amanuel taught a course of formation to all the Assistants of the country (12 Friars) in Ibadan. The course included topics such as "Francis, the Founder of Three Orders", "History of OFS", "The Nature and Identity of OFS and Franciscan Youth", "The Spiritual and Pastoral Assistance to the OFS and YouFra". Starting on October 11, the two Visitators met daily with several fraternities of OFS and YouFra in Lagos, Benin, Enugu (Fraternities of St. Elizabeth and St. Louis), in Onitsha, where they also met with the National Executive Board of YouFra). After the fraternal and pastoral visits, there was a national assembly in which an advisory vote which served as the basis for the appointment of a Coordinating Committee of the National Fraternity of OFS in Nigeria. This Committee will have to prepare the conclusion of an Elective Chapter within a year. The fraternal and pastoral visits and the assembly concluded with a Mass of Thanksgiving on October 19.

The visitors are grateful to Br. Charles Chigbata, OFM Cap, Custos, for their generous hospitality and support during their ten-day visit.

Zimbabwe – OFS National Elective Chapter

The two delegates to the Elective Chapter OFS in Zimbabwe were Bennet Matela, National Minister of South Africa-OFS and Br. Lawrence Thavamanickam, OFM, Vicar Superior Regular. The Chapter was held at the Nyarira Cipollina Mission (in central Zimbabwe) from October 12-14. Of the 61 brothers and sisters who attended the Chapter, only 13 could vote. The latter came from two regional fraternities (Eastern and Western Regions) where two different languages are spoken, i.e., Indebelele and Shona. Elected in this Chapter were Daniel Chidemo as National Minister and Gladis Masuku as Vice National Minister. Although there were a variety of languages, the Chapter was held in a fraternal atmosphere.

U.S.A. – OFS National Elective Chapter

The OFS National Elective Chapter of the United States of America was held at the Hotel Loew in Denver (Colorado) from October 16-20, 2012, and was presided by Moses Garnet, OFS, as delegate of the Minister General, Encarnación del Pozo. The delegate of the Conference of Assistants General was Br. Carlos Reyes, OFM Cap. On day Oct. 20, the 37 delegates gathered at the Chapter, elected the following brothers and sisters: Tom Bello, as National Minister, Mary Stronach, as International Councilor, Arturo Villarreal as a International Councilor substitute and Jan Parker, as Secretary.

Honduras – OFS National Elective Chapter

From October 19-21, 2012, in the city of Comayagua the OFS National Elective Chapter was held in Honduras. The elective session was presided by Ana Maria Olmedo, OFS, Guatemala, delegate of the OFS Minister General, in the presence of Br. Anselm Maliaño, OFM, National Assistant to Guatemala as a delegate of CAS. The morning of October 20 was devoted to the presentation of the reports of the Minister, the Treasurer, and the National Formator. The Elective Session took place in the afternoon. As new National Minister and International Councilor Miguel Villela of Ocotepeque was elected. October 21 was devoted to the different priorities for the next three years of the national fraternity.

Italy, Rome (*Seraphicum*) – CIOFS Presidency

The second meeting of the CIOFS Presidency took place in Rome at the *Seraphicum* from October 20-27. The agenda included meetings of the various committees and formation team, as well as the evaluation of the work of the Presidency in relation to the priorities of OFS, and the planning of activities for the following year. The meeting had a special touch with the pastoral visit done by Michael Higgins on behalf of the Conference of Ministers General of the First Order and TOR. The visitor attended all sessions and shared his observations. The Conference of Assistants General had a special meeting with him. Later, with the secular members of the Presidency, the Assistants addressed issues relating to their role and responsibility within the Presidency. These issues led to an intense dialogue which ended with the presentation of the Visitor. On Sunday 21, the majority of the members attended the Mass of the Canonization of seven Blessed, including Anna Schäffer, Franciscan tertiary, the first Iroquois saint, Kateri Tekakwitha, and Sister Marianne Cope, Franciscan religious of the Third Order of Syracuse in the United States.

Albania - OFS National Elective Chapter

The OFS National Fraternity of Albania held its National Elective Chapter on November 10, 2012, in Scutari, in the Convent of San Francisco. Elections were held in a spirit of brotherhood, in the presence of Isabella Di Paola, delegate of the Minister General, and Br. Julio Gomez, OFM, delegate to the Conference of Assistants General of the OFS. These are the new members elected to the National Council: Ndreka Paulin, National Minister, Pretashi Lula, Vice Minister, and as directors: Flora Sterkaj, Kanto Linadi, and Vera Dedi.

Italy, Rome - Meeting with Visitators General OFM

From November 12-17, 2012, there took place at the General Curia of the Friars Minor, the formation meeting for Visitators General appointed by the Minister General for the canonical visitation of the various entities of the Order and to preside over the Elective Chapters in the Provinces and Custody. During the meeting, the Visitators General divided into three linguistic groups, visited various offices of the Curia, including the office of the Assistant General of OFS. Moreover, they had the opportunity to hear a presentation by Br. Ivan Matić, Assistant General on the situation of the OFS and Franciscan Youth as well as about spiritual and pastoral assistance to them. After the presentation there was also an expected fraternal dialogue. In addition, these formative meetings of the General Visitators are always a great opportunity to present the situation of OFS and YouFra and spiritual assistance in the Entities of the Order they will be visiting.

Zambia – OFS National Elective Chapter

The OFS National Elective Chapter was held in Ndola Zambia from November 16-17, 2012. It was presided over by the Minister General, Encarnacion del Pozo, accompanied by Br. S. Albert P. Cele, TOR, Minister Provincial of South Africa and CEO of CAS. Chapter members participating were thirty in addition to the Spiritual Assistants. The Chapter began the evening on Nov. 16 with a Holy Hour led by Br. Albert Cele, followed by an initial message from the Minister General, who invited those present to follow in the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi in poverty and freedom of spirit. This was followed by the official greetings of Br. Albert and Br. David Zulu, OFM, Minister Provincial. The next morning, Mass was celebrated in honor of St. Elizabeth of Hungary. After the session of listening to the reports, the assembly proceeded to the Elective Chapter with the following results: Honorius M. Chilufya, National Minister, and Julian C. Lamya, Vice National Minister. The new Council was confirmed by the Minister General during a Mass celebrated by Br. Albert. On Sunday Nov. 18, the Chapter members participated in the Mass in the parish church of the Conventual Friars, after which they met with the regional fraternity of Ndola in the Parish Hall.

Portugal, Fatima - Formative Meeting of the OFS and their Assistants

From November 16-18, in the town of Fatima, there was a formation meeting attended by the Secular Franciscans (National Council and Regional Councils), members of the Franciscan Youth and Spiritual Assistants to the OFS and YouFra. In total, there were about 95 people. The program was very intense, with joint meetings between YouFra-Assistants, OFS-Assistants, and YouFra-OFS-Assistants. Invited for the presentation of the subjects were Xavi Ramos, former International Director of the International Council for YouFra, and Br. Martín Bitzer, OFMConv, Assistant General of OFS. Xavi spoke of the importance of the formation of YouFrans as a contribution to growth and personal maturity. Then, turning to the Secular Franciscans and Assistants, he reminded them of their responsibilities to YouFra. For his part, Br. Martin introduced the topic of interpersonal relationships, as a contribution of the YouFrans to both the Church and society. After reflecting on the "techno-liquid" phenomenon and digital society in which new forms of interpersonal relationships are observed, the youth, in group work, made an assessment of their interpersonal relationships, based on eight parameters presented. On the last day, the leaders of the national YouFra presented the Formation project of YouFra to all those present. The various discussions held after each presentation were very lively and a great wealth for all. The fraternal exchange, the Eucharistic celebrations, and various prayers helped make this formative meeting an important step forward in the life of the Franciscan Family in Portugal.

India - Publication of the Rule, Constitutions, and Ritual of OFS in the Santali language.

It was announced in Babumahal, Bihar, on November 20, 2012 the completion of the Santali translation of the Rule, Constitutions and Ritual of OFS by Br. Daniel Kisku, TOR, and approved by the outgoing Provincial Minister, Br. Job Edakulathoor, TOR. Br. Amando Trujillo Cano, TOR, Assistant General of OFS and Franciscan Youth was invited to make the official presentation in the presence of some Secular Franciscans of the area and some assistants, including the OFS National Assistant, Br. Michael Edamanapadavil, TOR. This translation is an important contribution to the formation of the Secular Franciscans of the Santali language.

Slovenia – OFS National Elective Chapter

From November 22-25, 2012, at the retreat house in Kančevci, Slovenia, run by the Capuchins, the National Elective Chapter of OFS took place. It was chaired by Ewald Kreuzer of Austria (Director of CIOFS). Present as delegate was Br. Robert Bahčič, OFM, from Rome and 62 Capitulars with their Spiritual Assistants, namely, Br. Martin Gašparič, OFM, Br. Filip Rupnik, OFM, Br. Primož Kovač, OFM, Br. Vlado Kolenko, OFM, National Assistant to YouFra, and Br. Tomaž Pinter, OFM, National Assistant to YouFra. The opportunity to be together in the same place allowed all participants to live these days in deep fellowship, especially during the liturgical celebrations. It was nice sharing during group work on Saturday morning, which allowed participants to listen to each other and reflect on the challenges, the common life and mission of OFS and Franciscan Youth in Slovenia. Another very important thing was the approval of the National Statute of OFS, which will be sent to the CIOFS Presidency for final approval. During the elective session of the Chapter held in the afternoon of Saturday November 24, new members of the OFS National Council were elected, that is, Metod Trajbarič as National Minister and Doroteja Emeršič as International Councilor. At the end of the Chapter almost every Capitular member made a brief visit to the Poor Clares who have been in Turnisce for 5 months now. In Slovenia there are 39 local OFS fraternities divided into three regions with 750 members; YouFra has about 70 youth with about 230 little Heralds. To learn more go to: <http://fsr.rkc.si>

Vietnam - Death of Br. Joseph Dang Minh Tuan, OFM

After eight days of having suffered a stroke, Br. Joseph Dang Minh Tuan, OFM, a member of the Province of St. Francis of Vietnam, died on December 20, 2012. He was the National Assistant to OFS and Franciscan Youth in Vietnam. May the Lord grant him eternal rest and joy!