



K O I N Ō N I A

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CONFERENCE OF GENERAL SPIRITUAL ASSISTANTS OFS – YOUFRA

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MERCY: TRANSFORMING GRACE AND MISSION

The four series of Koinonia this year will concentrate on the theme of *mercy*, as gift that comes from God, to transform the life of Christians, directing them towards the mission which consists in being “Merciful like the Father” (MV 13).¹

The following are the topics of articles which will be presented:

- Koinonia 2016-1: *The Jubilee of Mercy and the Pardon of Assisi.*
- Koinonia 2016-2: *To live Mercy in Fraternity.*
- Koinonia 2016-3: *OFS and the Works of Mercy in History.*
- Koinonia 2016-4: *OFS and the Works of Mercy today.*

JUBILEE OF MERCY AND THE PARDON OF ASSISI

Fr. Martín Bitzer, OFMConv

Introduction

The intuition and the intention to convoke an *Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy* by Pope Francis, - the highest expression of the style with which he is carrying out his Petrine ministry – brings our minds immediately to the saint of Assisi, who wished that divine pardon and mercy reached all, and not only a privileged few.

In fact, the *Poverello* obtained from Pope Honorius III in 1216 the Indulgence of the Porziuncola, popularly known as the Pardon of Assisi; exactly 800 years ago: what a joyful coincidence!

In approaching these two ecclesial events, I have selected four key words, which give us a glimpse of the existing harmony between the two personalities. These are gospel, mercy, fraternity and joy. Joy as fruit of living in fraternity; fraternity as fruit of mercy lived and confirmed by the gospel.

1. Gospel

For St. Francis the gospel has been the most secure point of reference which has given a definitive sense of direction to his life and the life of the friars. St. Francis listened to the gospel attentively when he transferred himself to the locality called Porziuncola, where there was an old church built in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mother of God, and which Francis himself rebuilt because it was abandoned and no one cared for it. His first biographer, Thomas of Celano, reports:

¹ *Misericordiae Vultus. Bolla di indizione del Giubileo straordinario della misericordia*, in http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/bulls/documents/papa-francesco_bolla_20150411_misericordiae-vultus.html

*One day the gospel was being read in that church about how the Lord sent out his disciples to preach. The holy man of God, who was attending there, in order to understand better the words of the gospel, humbly begged the priest after celebrating the solemnities of the Mass to explain the gospel to him. The priest explain it all to him thoroughly line by line. When he heard that Christ's disciples should not "posses gold or silver o money, or carry on their journey a wallet or a sack, nor bread nor a staff, nor to have shoes nor two tunics, but that they should preach the kingdom of God and penance", the holy man, Francis, immidiately exulted in the spirit of God. "This is what I whant," he said, "this is what I seek, this is what I desire with all my heart." The holy father, overflowing with joy, hastened to implement the words of salvation, and did not delay before he devoutly began to put into effect what he heard. Immediately, he took off the shoes from his feet, put down the staff from his hands, and, satisfied with one tunic, exchanged his leather belt for a cord. After this, he made for himself a tunic showing the image of the cross, so that in it he would drive of every fantasy of the demons. He made it very rough, so that in it he might crucify the flesh with its vices and sins. He made it very poor and plain, a thing that the world would never covet. As for the other things he heard, he set about doing them with great care and reverence. **For he was no deaf hearer of the gospel;** rather he committed everything he heard to his eccellente memory and was careful to carry it out to the letter.²*

The form of life based on the gospel undertaken by Francis and his first friars, orally approved by Pope Innocent III and later with the pontifical bull of Pope Honorius III in 1223, leaves no doubt about the radical choice of life for Francis. The approved Rule affirms:

The Rule and life of the Friars Minor is this, namely, to observe the Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ, by living in obedience, without anything of one's own, and in chastity (Rb 1,1).

The expression "to observe the Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ", is found again in the Rule of St. Clare, the Third Order Regular, and the Secular Franciscan Order.

In his *Testament*, saint Francis will later say:

And after the Lord gave me some friars, no one showed me, what I ought to do, but the Most High Himself revealed to me, that I ought to live according to the form of the Holy Gospel. And I had it written in a few words and simply and the Lord Pope confirmed it for me (2Test 14).

On the part of Pope Francis, the Gospel will be the central object of his first Apostolic Exhortation, rightly called, *Evangelii gaudium*, on the proclamation of the Gospel in today's world.³ It is a well programmed document, that is, it contains the programme of his pontificate, he says with his characteristic clarity:

I want to emphasize that what I am trying to express here has a **programmatic significance and important consequences** (EG 25).

Thus, this Pope is tireless (with concrete gestures known to all and with words easily understood) in inviting all and sundry to take the gospel into their pocket, read a passage every day, and to live it. He extends these gestures and words to personal meetings with refugees, sick, homeless, pilgrims who come to Rome or people the Pope goes out to meet in his journeys, crowds that fill the St. Peter's square and places where he goes on specific occasions, up to the Vatican diplomacy where he succeeds to reconcile realities separated for decades and centuries, such as the imprints and dynamics which he is introducing into the Vatican Curia, with strong repercussion in other episcopal curias in the world, in religious life and in the mentality of the laity.

Among the healthy consequences of such a style of exercising his ministry, we find, for example, the decentralization of power intended as service (the church is Catholic, not only European) and the declericalization which makes the lay faithful more responsible for their Christian vocation lived in the world (in the family, social, and political perspective.)

I would like to conclude this first comparison between saint Francis and Pope Francis with the words of Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini (of blessed memory) with reference to saint Francis. These words

² Thomas of Celano, *The Life of Saint Francis: The First Book*, Cap. IX, in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, Volume I: *The Saint* (New York, London, Manila 2001) 201-202.

³ Cfr. http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html

can help us to understand the significance of the ministry of Pope Francis, *Servus servorum Dei* (Servant of the servants of God):

“St. Francis is sent by God in the midst of his Church to liberate her from fear that the gospel is not feasible, that it is not a reality to be taken for serious; to liberate her from the complex of maintaining that the evangelical life is something for some people; only for certain periods and moments; to liberate her from the fear of living the gospel; and to receive it as a transforming message in its fullness; to liberate us from the fear of inserting the whole Gospel into our whole life.

St. Francis liberates the church of his time from fear, from suspicion that the Gospel is not feasible, not practicable, and he liberates it from this suspicion, from this fear, from this constant diffidence which repeats itself in history, and which even today is heavy on us. He liberates the Church not by preaching, dissertations, demonstrations, but by putting himself in the midst of the church, among his people”.⁴

2. Mercy

Mercy is the second word that the saint of Assisi and Pope Francis use in common. According to the two, we receive mercy from God, and we practise mercy in fraternity. It centres on an inseparable dynamic, as illustrated in the parable of the “unforgiving servant”, (*Mt 18,23-35*), recounted by Pope Francis in the *Bull of indiction* (Cf. *MV 9*).

In the interpretation of Celano, later confirmed by saint Francis himself in his *Testament*, conversion is linked with mercy; this latter occupied central position in his life experience.

Thus did the Lord grant to me, Friar Francis, to begin to do penance: that when I was exceedingly in (my) sins, to see the lepers seemed a bitter thing to me. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I worked mercy with them. And when I was fleeing from them, because that seemed to me a bitter thing, it was changed for me into sweetness of soul and body; and afterwards I stayed for a little while and (then) I went forth from the world (2Test 1-3).

For the Poverello to do penance was equal to working mercy.⁵

Francis seems to reread the meeting with the lepers through the filter of the parable of the Good Samaritan (*Lk 10:37*), who after seeing, with regret, the priest and the levite pass by the wounded, “treated him with mercy” (*fecit misericordiam in illum*). Francis echoes: “I worked mercy with them” (*feci misericordiam cum illis*).⁶

For Francis, who in the beginning was so self-centred, the encounter was an experience which helped him to come out of himself; giving him full joy, new meaning, full of existence. He confesses: (“*that which seemed to me a bitter thing, it was changed for me into sweetness of soul and body*). Soon afterwards, this will be concretized in his definitive choice of life: (*And afterwards I stayed for a little while and (then) I went forth from the world*).

Later on, moved by the solicitude of those people who did not have the means and the strength to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Lands,⁷ Francis asked Pope Honorius III for plenary Indulgence for the church of St. Mary of the Porziuncola. The dialogue between the two happened in this way:

“Holy Father, (said Francis) I have just finished repairing a church for you in honour of the Virgin Mother of Christ. I pray your holiness to enrich it with an indulgence without the offering of money”. The Pope responded: “It is not convenient to do this because whoever requests indulgence must merit it by lending a hand to contribute and help. However, tell me for how many years you want this and how many indulgences I should concede.” Francis replied: “Holy Father, let His Holiness concede not years but souls.” The Lord Pope responded: “And in which ways do you want souls?” Blessed Francis replied: “Holy Father, I would like, if it pleases His Holiness, that those who will come to this church repented and having confessed their sins, as convenient, and absolved by the priest, would be liberated from their pain and from their sins in heaven and

⁴ Carlo Maria Martini, *Per amore, per voi, per sempre. Parole ai consacrati*, a cura di Giuseppe Bettoni (Milano 2013) p. 187.

⁵ Cfr. Pietro Maranesi, *Facere misericordiam: la conversione di Francesco d'Assisi: confronto critico tra il testamento e le biografie* (Porziuncola, 2007).

⁶ Cfr. *Fonti Francescane. Nuova Edizione*, Nota a pie di pagina n.2 (Padova 2004) p. 99.

⁷ Joseph Ratzinger, *Il Perdono di Assisi* (Porziuncola 2005) p. 29.

on earth from the day of their baptism to the day and hour they entered into this church.” The Holy Father added: “Francis, what you are asking is too much; neither is it in the custom of the Roman Curia to grant such type of indulgence”.⁸

That notwithstanding, the Pope conceded to saint Francis the indulgence requested with the words: “It pleases me that you receive this favour, let it be done in the name of the Lord”;⁹ and this was “made public during the consecration of the church by the work of seven bishops”¹⁰ on 2nd August 2016. The sources say that “blessed Francis preached before these bishops and used to hold in his hands a document, saying: **“I want to send you all to paradise, and I announce the indulgence which I have received by the mouth of the Supreme Pontiff, and all of you who have come here today and all those who will come here every year on this day with good and contrite heart will obtain the indulgence for all their sins”**”.¹¹

As we know the bond between St. Francis and the Popes has been maintained throughout the centuries up to our days. In the Bull of Indiction of the *Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy* Pope Francis affirms:

The mercy of God is not an abstract idea, but a concrete reality with which he reveals his love as of that of a father or a mother, moved to the very depths out of love for their child. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that this is a “visceral” love. It gushes forth from the depths naturally, full of tenderness and compassion, indulgence and mercy” (MV 6).

And towards the end he invites:

Let us live this Jubilee intensely, begging the Father to forgive our sins and to bathe us in his merciful “indulgence” (MV 22).

With the theme of the Jubilee, *Misericordes sicut Pater* (“Merciful like the Father”, MV 13), the Pope reminds us that it is about a mercy to be received and to be put into practice. He affirms:

*At times how hard it seems to forgive! And yet pardon is the instrument placed into our fragile hands to attain **serenity of heart**. To let go of anger, wrath, violence, and revenge are necessary conditions to living joyfully (MV 9).*

I would like to underline the expression “serenity of heart”. To live one’s vocation with sincerity is not a far-away reality, impossible to reach; it is a gift of the Lord, offered to all through the church and a duty to all. It is a gift that should not be wasted. Quoting his *Evangelii Gaudium* 24, the Pope affirms: “The Church «has an endless desire to show mercy»” (MV 10).

3. Fraternity

Together with the evangelical poverty of those who have professed to live *sine proprio* (“without anything of one's own”), that is, they have decided to live with a continuous disappropriation (even of their own selves), St. Francis recalls in his *Testament*: “And after the Lord gave me some friars...” (2Test 14).

The Lord is the one who gives. This Lord who gives and rewards is presented at the beginning of the *Testament*, when Francis says: “Thus did the Lord grant to me, Friar Francis, to begin to do penance” (2Test 1). Doing penance for Francis is a gift from the Lord; because, as we have seen above, this style of life also means working mercy to all. And this makes people happy. Other gifts follow later: “And the Lord granted me such faith in churches” (2Test 4); “Afterwards the Lord granted me and grants so much faith in priests, who live according to the form of the Holy Roman Church” (2Test 6).

Hence, among the precious gifts the Lord gave to Francis we find the brothers. The second part of the memoir (*recordatio*, 2Test 34) of Francis relative to the birth and life of the first fraternity, begins with the celebration of the graciousness of the Father, who has given him brothers, just as once he gave disciples to Jesus (cf. Gv 17,6-12.24; Rnb 22,42-43). Similarly, “the fraternity of the friars minor is ‘gift’

⁸ Diploma del vescovo Teobaldo d’Assisi, in FF 2706/10.

⁹ *Ibid.* FF 2706/10.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* FF 2706/11.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

such as the beginning of the life of penance, the devotion to the churches, and faith in priests. In this manner the first part of the Testament configures as a singular action of gratitude in many stanzas » (F. Olgiati).¹²

Francis opens himself totally to God and receives with gratitude every gift, which obliges him to live with his brothers, inviting everyone to do the same. His *Prayers inspired by the Our Father* and *The Cantic of the Creatures* are eloquent examples.

His living the faith in Christ in the Church (not outside the church) in relation with her various components and his openness to the world, up to the meeting with the Sultan of Egypt Melek-el-Kamel in June of 1219, testify to how Francis has enriched the culture of his time.

In our time Pope Francis is doing his part when he promotes the “*culture of encounter*” with gestures and words. Enough examples are the many images we have seen in these years of his pontificate and his *Message for the 48th World Communications’ Day*, (Sunday, 1 June 2014), entitled *Communication at the Service of an Authentic Culture of Encounter*.¹³

On the contrary, the culture of well being / prosperity and the seduction of the transitory doesn’t make us follow Jesus,¹⁴ the human Person of the encounter, or better still the God-Man who comes to meet every person.

To the engaged couples, Pope Francis will say, “don’t allow the culture of the transitory conquer you.”¹⁵ We need to read again *Evangelii gaudium*,¹⁶ where it describes the drama of the culture of waste (EG 53), in which we are immersed and which produce exclusion and death. All these oppose universal fraternity to which we are all called. We can say with Alonso Schökel (a great bible scholar) that every homicide is fratricide simply because every person is a brother or a sister.¹⁷

It is interesting to recall the words of Pope Francis in his homily at the Mass “in Coena Domini”, which he celebrated with and for refugees who have escaped from war and violence, where he washed the feet of both men and women from diverse cultures and religions:

*We are diverse, we are different, we have different cultures and religions, but we are brothers and sisters and we want to live in peace.*¹⁸

We are brothers and sisters, this is the awareness which Pope Francis, who looks at himself as someone infinitely loved by God. The motto of his Coat of Arms: *miserando atque eligendo* (“by having mercy and by choosing”) taking from the homily of Bede the Venerable, when he comments on the vocation of Matthew (Matt. 9:9-13) confirms this. We read also in the Vatican website:

*This homily is a tribute to Divine Mercy and is read during the Liturgy of the Hours on the Feast of St Matthew. This has particular significance in the life and spirituality of the Pope. In fact, on the Feast of St Matthew in 1953, the young Jorge Bergoglio experienced, at the age of 17, in a very special way, the loving presence of God in his life. Following confession, he felt his heart touched and he sensed the descent of the Mercy of God, who with a gaze of tender love, called him to religious life, following the example of St Ignatius of Loyola.*¹⁹

We should not be surprised that getting to the end of the Bull he writes, “*there is an aspect of mercy that goes beyond the confines of the Church. It relates us to Judaism and Islam, both of which consider mercy to be one of God’s most important attributes*” (MV 23).

We find another example of this sensitivity in his *Meeting with the Brazil’s Leaders of Society*, when he said:

¹² Cfr. *Fonti Francescane. Nuova Edizione*, Nota a pie di pagina n.13 (Padova 2004) pp. 100-101.

¹³ Signed at the Vatican City, January 24, 2014, Memorial of St. Francis of Sales, and which can be read entirely in https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications/documents/papa-francesco_20140124_messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.pdf

¹⁴ Cfr. http://it.radiovaticana.va/storico/2013/05/27/il_papa_cultura_del_benessere_e_fascino_del_provvisorio_non_ci_fann/it1-695807

¹⁵ Cfr. <http://www.lastampa.it/2014/02/14/vaticaninsider/ita/vaticano/finanziati-non-lasciatevi-vincere-dalla-cultura-del-provvisorio-9zq72Uhf0qgbfmqzqLR2l/pagina.html>

¹⁶ Cfr. http://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium_en.pdf

¹⁷ L. Alonso Schökel, *Dov’è tuo fratello? Pagine di fraternità nel libro della Genesi*.

¹⁸ Mass of the Lord’s Supper, *Homily of his Holiness Pope Francis to the refugees*, C.A.R.A. Auxilium Castelnuovo di Porto (Roma) Holy Thursday, 24 March 2016, in http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20160324_omelia-coena-domini.html

¹⁹ Cfr. <http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/elezione/stemma-papa-francesco.html>

*Fraternal relations between people, and cooperation in building a more just society – these are not an idealistic dream, but the fruit of a concerted effort on the part of all, in service of the common good. I encourage you in this commitment to the common good, a commitment which demands of everyone wisdom, prudence and generosity.*²⁰

We can also say that the **culture of encounter** lived by Jesus Christ, made flesh in saint Francis and ardently cultivated by Pope Francis helps and encourages us on the road of fraternity.

4. Joy

Joy, as fruit of the culture of encounter, which permits us to live in fraternity is the fourth word chosen for this short comparison between St. Francis and Pope Francis.

In the *Earlier Rule*, the Poverello cites the passage of the gospel of John in chapter seventeen where Jesus says: *Holy Father... I speak this in the world so that they may share my joy completely. A kind of joy which Jesus transmits to his disciples who rejoiced when they saw the Lord* (John 20:20).

The Franciscan sources tell us that *Blessed Francis always had this as his highest and main goal: constantly to have himself spiritual joy, internally and externally... This is also what he especially liked in his brothers, and he would, moreover, frequently rebuke them because of their acedia and sadness.*²¹

In the case of Pope Francis the first thing that impresses us is his joy in meeting people, in a particular way the sick and the more fragile persons, and when he goes round in his papamobile in St. Peter's Square.

It is a type of joy which he carries inside him and which he transmits to others; he in turn receives from others. It is a joy which stays in his heart, and becomes part of his programme as the bishop of Rome, that is, as Pope.

Let us now turn to his encyclical *Evangelii gaudium* on the proclamation of the Gospel in today's world.²² It begins in these words: *The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus* (EG 1).

Joy is the fruit of an encounter with the Son of God and the Son of Mary. The text continues: *Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness* (Ibid.).

In his homily, during the Chrism Mass of 2015, Pope Francis said to the bishops and priests: "We are the friends [of Jesus]: this is our joy. If Jesus is shepherding the flock in our midst, we cannot be shepherds who are glum, plaintive or, even worse, bored... Weary, yes, but with the joy of those who hear the Lord saying: "Come, O blessed of my Father" (Mt 25:34).²³

As underlined by P. Humberto Miguel Yáñez SJ, already in the introduction of *Evangelii gaudium*, Pope Francis brings together two apostolic exhortations of Blessed Pope Paul VI: *Gaudete in Domino* (9 maggio 1975) and *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 dicembre 1975).²⁴ This simply means that Gospel and joy are inseparable.

Conclusion

Whoever does not close himself up and has the courage to hear the **gospel**, and is open to the **mercy** of God (*who always forgives*), and to the **brothers and sisters**, with whom they share the gifts received, will find true **joy** that does not disappoint; such a person will flood the world with the light that never sets.

²⁰ Apostolic Journey to Rio de Janeiro on the occasion of the *XXVIII World Youth Day*, Meeting with the Brazil's Leaders of Society, *Address of pope francis* (Municipal Theatre, Rio de Janeiro Saturday, 27 July 2013), in

https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco_20130727_gmg-classe-dirigente-rio.html

²¹ *A Mirror of the Perfection*, 95, in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, Volume III: *The Prophet* (New York, London, Manila 2001) 341-342.

²² Cfr. http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html

²³ Cfr. http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150402_omelia-crisma.html

²⁴ Cfr. *Evangelii gaudium: il testo ci interroga. Chiavi di lettura, testimonianze e prospettive*, a cura di Humberto Miguel Yáñez SJ (Roma 2014) pag. 11.

NEWS – CHAPTERS – VISITS – MEETINGS

Panama– National Elective Chapter

From 8th – 10th January, the national elective chapter of OFS in Panama took place in the Centre of Spirituality, Monte Verna, Panama City. Sarah Isabel Ruiz Manjarrez, International councillor of Colombia, delegate of Tibor Kauser, Minister General of OFS presided at the chapter; she was assisted by Fr. José Antonio Cruz Duarte, OFM Assistant General for OFS. The theme of the Chapter was “*Laudato Sii in the Year of Mercy*”. On the 9th of January, Fr. José Antonio presented the main theme of the Chapter. Thirty-five people participated in the Chapter which was held in a fraternal atmosphere. Fr. José Antonio presided over all the celebrations. Ramón Llorach was elected National Minister and Olga Mata de Angulo the Vice Minister.

Honduras – National Elective Chapter

The national elective Chapter of OFS in Honduras took off from 14th – 16th January 2016 at the Centre of Formation YUNQUE, in the St. Francis Hall of the St. Joseph of Ocotepeque. Dilian Portillo, International Councillor of Guatemala, delegate of the Minister General Tibor Kauser, presided the meeting. She was accompanied by Fr. Emilio Gavarrete, OFM Cap, delegate of CAS. The guiding theme for the Chapter was: “Contemplating the reality that surrounds us, we are disposed to renew our way of life”. Sixteen people participated in the Chapter in a fraternal atmosphere; with the support of the Franciscan Youth (YouFra). All the celebrations took place in the church of St. Joseph of Ocotepeque. The inaugural Mass was celebrated by Fr. Marco Tulio Guerra, OFM Cap. Mario Padilla and Maria Angela Ardón were elected National Minister and Vice National Minister respectively.

Argentina– National Elective Chapter

The 12th National elective Chapter of OFS in Argentina was celebrated at Cordoba in the Franciscan Friary of St. Anthony of Arredondo from 21st to 23th January 2016. Anna Maria Raffo Laos, Delegate of the Minister General of OFS, presided, accompanied by Fr. Martin Bitzer, OFM Conv., Assistant General OFS. Besides the chapter members, many Secular Franciscans (about 220) attended from different regions. They felt that a fraternal National Chapter has been organized (36th edition), with diverse formative workshops, regarding the diverse offices: minister, secretary, treasurer, formation director, communication, etc. Fr. Martin had meeting with the national spiritual Assistants, Fr. Mateo Krupsky, OFM OFM, Fr. Luis Furgoni, OFM Conv, Fr. Emilio Luis Andrada, OFM and Fr. José Enrique Fernández, OFM Cap. They spoke at length on different themes regarding spiritual direction to OFS and YouFra. Further, he met all the spiritual Assistants present, grouped together in one of the workshops intentionally prepared for them. During the elective session which unfolded in serene atmosphere, Jorge Jornet was reelected National Minister and international councillor. Gustavo Neri, was elected the Vice National Minister and a substitute international councillor.

With a joyful Eucharistic celebration presided by Fr. Martin and concelebrated by priests present, the chapter came to an end. For further information you may visit the web page of OFS in Argentina: <http://www.ofs.org.ar/index.php/fraternidad-nacional>

Zambia – National Elective Chapter

The elective chapter of the national fraternity of OFS in Zambia was celebrated at the Franciscan Centre in Ndola from 29th to 30th January 2016. The Chapter was presided over by Jenny Harrington, Councillor and delegate of the Minister General Tibor Kauser, assisted by Francis Bongajum Dor, OFM Cap, General Spiritual Director. Forty-seven delegates were present out of sixty-seven invitees with active voice. In attendance, also, were Fra Thomas Zulu OFM Cap, Major Superiore of the Cappuccin Friars in Zambia, and other eight observers. Fr. Thomas presided over the inaugural Mass of the Chapter; he gave an intervention on the identity of Secular Franciscans. He witnessed in person the process of election of the

national councillors. In his intervention, Fr. Thomas underlined that it is important secular Franciscans acquaint themselves with the fundamental documents of the Order. In the last triennio the Secular Franciscans of Zambia have lost three members: Mary Limonga (Treasurer) and Fr. Charles Chishimba OFM Cap. Spiritual Director who died shortly before the Elective Chapter. The two were remembered in special way during the closing Mass. Fr. Francis called the attention of participants to the need of daily conversion and to the urgency of being promoters of reconciliation in the local church, starting from the very fraternities of OFS.

From the result of the voting, Juliano Lamya, the recent vice national minister, was elected the national minister and according to the national statutes, an “ex-officio” international councillor substitute. Bonaventure Chembe was elected the international councillor. Fr. Francis presided over the closing Mass, in which Jenny Harrington installed the newly elected councillor. The general atmosphere of the chapter was very fraternal, however, the division which threatens some regional fraternities because of the decision to abandon the habit remains a big worry for many.

South Africa – Foramation Course for Major Superiors and Spirital Assistants

A meeting on formation for major Superiors and Spiritual Assistants of OFS in South Africa took off in two parts from 2nd to 9th February. The first part took place at La Verna Retreat Centre of the Friars Minor in the region of Gauteng (2-4 Feb.). The second part was held at the Retreat House of Marian Hill in Kwazulu Natal (7-9 febbraio). The meetings were animated by Fr. Francis Bongajum Dor OFM Cap, Assistant General, and Jenny Harrington, OFS, Councilor of CIOFS. All the three major Superiors of the First Order and TOR present in South Africa participated in the meeting, including Fr. David Barnard, OFM, Provincial Minister; Fr. Odilo Mroso, OFM Cap, Custode; and Fr. Johannes Mngwengwe, TOR, Provincial Minister; one national spiritual director, regional and local spiritual Assistants, some friars and Franciscan Sisters interested in service to OFS-YouFra. Rev. P. Sahki, Secretary of the department of lay apostolate of the episcopal conference of South Africa representing the twenty-four bishops was also present. The presence of Fr. P. Sahki was a prove that the bishops of South Africa are disposed to enter into dialogue with the major Superiors to ensure spiritual direction for OFS, according to their rules and legislation. The following themes were discussed: nature and identity of OFS, the role and responsibility of spiritual director, the programme of formation in OFS, proposed memorial and role of major Superiors. In South Africa many local fraternities do not have designated spiritual Assistants. The final advice was that everyone takes upon themselves to ensure spiritual direction to all local fraternities and to all levels of councils.

Messico– Formation Course for Spiritual Assistants OFS-YouFra

At the St. John Paul II Pastoral Centre (at San Juan de los Lagos, Jalisco), from 3rd to 5th February, the Spiritual Assistants of OFS and YouFra (Franciscan Youth) organized a formation Course for about fifty Spiritual Assistants of both local and regional levels from different part of Mexico. The objective of the course was “to reinforce the knowledge of responsibility on the part of Spiritual Assistants to animate and orientate the the Secular Franciscan Order and the Franciscan Youth decisively. Fr. Martin Bitzer, OFM Conv., Assistant General OFS, moderated an intensive discussion. In fact, after each of the ten presentations, the questions and the open dialogue gave further enlightenment to the theme. The final evaluation, was unanimous that the course has achieved its objective. On 4th February 2016 Fr. Martin met with the Minister Provincials of OFM, OFM Conv., and OFM Cap. They were happy to have confronted this real necessity of offering spiritual assistance to all the local and regional fraternities. On Sunday 7th February, at Tepojaco, Fr. Martin met with the Spiritual Assistants and members of OFS and YouFra in Mexico City; it was a conference in which they had a lively dialogue. The meeting concluded with Eucharistic celebration. In the afternoon, Fr. Martin and two other conventual friars moved to the Sanctuary of our Lady of Guadalupe.