



From My Corner of the World

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My dear brothers and
sisters,

One of my New Year's resolutions, as far back as I can remember, is to tell *myself* the truth, as I perceive it. Now that's my resolution - not necessarily reality. Although I don't always live up to my ideal, it remains my desire. So here's to TRUTH and its marvelous ability to set us free.

When I attended the Elective Chapter in Hungary - my first International gathering - I was incredibly ignorant of procedure - literally a fish out of water. I knew it was an elective chapter, and I knew that elections require a fraternal presider and a spiritual assistant from a **higher level of fraternity** to officiate. Since there is no higher level than CIOFS, I wondered how they would conduct an election? I imagined all sorts of complex regulations.

The answer is simple; since there is no higher level of fraternity, there is no fraternal presider. (See: GC Art. 76.2).

Now would you have known that? A General Minister from the First Order or TOR conducts the election alone. The general minister is the next higher level for the general spiritual assistants. At this election, the General Minister was Fr. Marco Tasca, OFM Conv. He gave an inspired address. See: www.nafra-sfo.org/FrMarcoTascaOFMConv_Hungary.html

Everyone scram-bled for a copy. Alas, it was written in Italian and had not been translated. All we had was our recollections, but we knew it was good, and we wanted it.

Resource Material

Wonder of wonders! Fr. Tasca's message has been translated, and I have it in my possession. Since it is about 20 pages I can't reproduce it here—however, I will make it available to the regional ministers who, in turn, will make it available to your local fraternities. Fr. Tasca entitled his talk, *The Beginnings of Charism*, and he addresses it to you, as one of the 430,000 professed Secular Franciscans and 50,000 Franciscan youth in the world today. It is a valuable resource on our charism, and it will provide a wonderful ongoing formation focus.

It is divided into three parts: (1) Conversion: The Road to Repentance; (2) The Evangelical Life: Our Form of Life; and (3) Conformity to the Paschal Christ.

Presence in the World

At the beginning of this New Year, let's take a look at the SFO presence in the world. There is a secular Franciscan presence in 110 countries throughout the world. Of that number, 65 are established national fraternities, and 42 are emerging national fraternities. Three nations are in the process of developing a secular Franciscan presence. Franciscan youth are present in 64 countries. Thirty have established national youth fraternities and 34 nations have emerging national youth fraternities. The United States is one of the emerging national youth fraternities.

An observable trend in Western Europe and North America is a reduction in the number of Secular Franciscans, and an aging of our membership. Just the opposite seems to be happening in Asia, Africa, the Slavic nations and Eastern Europe where sustained growth is seen. The numbers reveal that growth in vocations is greater in the so-called "third" world countries.

The current outlook is not promising for the Western world. Yet, I believe this trend can be reversed. As I write this, unemployment is above 10% nationwide, health reform has caused bitter division, we have increased our armed forces in Afghanistan, and a host of problems assail us daily. What can we do? We can pray. We can ask God to form us into authentic witnesses to the gospel - witnesses that will attract others to our Order.

Each of us can make a difference. Fr. Irudaya Samy—former Capuchin General Spiritual Assistant—tells this story.

One evening a man took a small candle from a box and began to climb a long winding stairway. 'Where are we going?' asked the candle.

'We're going up higher than the house to show ships the way to the harbour.'

'But no ship in the harbour could ever see my light,' said the candle. 'It is so very small.' 'If your light is small,' the man said, 'just keep burning brightly and leave the rest to me.' When they reached the top of the lighthouse, they came to a large lamp. Then he took the little candle and lit the lamp. Soon the great polished reflectors behind the lamp sent beams of light out across the miles of sea.

Paraphrasing Fr. Samy - we are God's candles and our job is to keep shining, because our usefulness lies in God's hands. We can do something to reverse this trend. We can keep our lights burning brightly, so that others see clearly that it is possible to live the Gospel today.