

Report of the CIOFS Presidency and the Minister General to the XVth Ordinary General Chapter of the Secular Franciscan Order

Rome, Seraphicum, 2017. November 5th.

Introduction

My dear Sisters and Brothers, I welcome you here to Rome for the XVth Ordinary General Chapter of the Secular Franciscan Order. This is a very important moment in the life of all of us. The purpose of a Chapter is to study, review, and make plans concerning our life and apostolic vocation. It is therefore a time for all of you to take responsibility, and be creative, listening attentively to the will of the Holy Spirit who will speak to our hearts, if we are able to find an inner silence.

We have to consider our own vocation, our secular Franciscan identity, and we have to work on the main theme of the Chapter: what does it mean, that Jesus Christ has sent me into the world, in the same way that our heavenly Father sent Him into the world? What is our identity, vocation and mission? What does it mean to be secular, and what does it mean to belong to an Order, that has an organization, a structure, and that our life that has many secular aspects: organization, finances, activities, technical.

As I have often drawn to your attention, while it is very important to know what we have to do, it is of primary importance to know who we are. What is the main focus of our secular Franciscan vocation? When we talk about the Order as a structure, we always have to bear in mind that the Order is first and foremost a fraternity: a place where we live our vocation, where we can love one another, and where our priority is, above any other thing, to build the Kingdom of God. Today we see that living in a fraternity and belonging to a fraternity is often an important apostolic activity in itself. For people who are lonely, or feel isolated or abandoned, we can offer a fraternal spirit, contacts and communication: first with God, then with each other, also helping each of us to maintain a good relationship between ourselves. This means developing contacts, sharing fellowship, and above all, there must be openness in these relationships. I invite you to live this openness here, too.

We are going to live as the international fraternity here at the General Chapter, so discover the beauty of the life this kind of fraternity will bring!

Be ready to live in deeper communion with God here: be joyful participants of the liturgies, and be ready to accept the opportunities offered by God, to be alone with Him in silence and in prayer. Discover Him in your neighbor, always try to see Christ in others, have a respectful and affectionate manner. Ask the guidance of the Holy Spirit in order to be able to work at this General Chapter in a fraternal way, being attentive and, at the same time, effective, collected and practical.

Be ready to be open with each other, to pay attention to each other, and also to give counsel to each other, if appropriate. Do not be afraid of being weak or fragile; this is a part of fraternal life. Love one another, and also be attentive, tender, and patient with each other. Do not be afraid of conflicts, it is a part of the fraternity, but be always ready to celebrate the reconciliation!

I hope the Holy Spirit can fill all of us and fill the entire General Chapter, so that we will do what God is asking of us.

Now, as required by the Statutes of the International Fraternity, Art. 17.2.d, I present the report on the activities of the International Fraternity during the last three years. I will invite some of the Presidency Councilors to share in this presentation.

PART I

To begin: the Conclusions of the General Chapter 2014.

Let us specifically address the priorities identified by the Chapter, in the order in which they were approved:

Overall theme: Management of the Order

1. Formation
2. Family
3. Presence in the world
4. Communications
5. Youfra
6. Emerging fraternities
7. Finances

Subsequently, the Presidency proposed to the Chapter that we bring the following observations and recommendations to the attention of the whole Order:

1. The Conclusions of the Chapters are binding for the Presidency but also, and perhaps even more so, for all the fraternities in the world, at all levels, and for each individual Secular Franciscan.
2. The effort to deepen and appropriate the identity of Secular Franciscans should continue more intensely than ever, along the lines indicated by the Chapter and the Formation project.
3. The commitment to work for a community of "being" and "action" as a Franciscan Family should be developed and the Secular Franciscan Order must take an active part and become a good member of the family
4. It is essential that the International Councilors are fully aware of their own essential role, assuming responsibility within their own national fraternities, the International Presidency and the whole Order.

These have not changed since the last General Chapter.

In the following sections of the report we can see to what extent, and by what means, the decisions of the Chapter, and the recommendations and observations of the Presidencies, incoming and outgoing, are being carried out.

PART II

The Situation of the International Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order and Youfra

The General situation of the OFS

As you can see from the attached list (Annex 1), the Secular Franciscan Order is present in 112 countries around the world:

- 70 constituted National Fraternities
- 18 emerging national fraternities (according to the criteria established by the presidency, i.e. at least 3 local fraternities, a draft of formation program and a group of coordination)
- 19 places in which the OFS is a presence: some local fraternities are in the process of canonical establishment some are in the initial phase of creating a first local Fraternity.
- There are 5 special cases, that for various reasons have to be under the direct care of the CIOFS Presidency

The major reason for the decrease in number is that, in some countries where there was a secular Franciscan presence, the initial small group could not grow, and/or the first Order has abandoned the country, and members left because there was no prospect of forming a secular Franciscan life. We have to note here, that unfortunately there are some national fraternities that do not meet the criteria of an officially constituted national fraternity. We have to face the fact that while in some parts of the world there is continuous growth in the number of national fraternities and in the number of the members, in other parts of the world the numbers of both the fraternities and the individual members is decreasing.

Franciscan Youth is present in 75 countries. There are 34 constituted national fraternities, 28 emerging national fraternities of Youfra, and 13 Youfra presences.

To be highlighted

With special reference to the actual numerical composition of the OFS we cannot provide definitive data, because a significant part of the constituted and emerging national fraternities are not responding to the demographic questionnaire. This is leading the International Fraternity into a situation where, not only do we not know the exact number of members all over the world, but national fraternities are suffering, through their own fault, by not providing data, thereby making it very difficult to establish a three year budget. This also makes it impossible to have a fraternal, open dialogue concerning the financial situation of some national fraternities, including the question of their financial contributions. It is even more sad to discover a discrepancy in the data provide, which varies according to the purpose: it has often happened, that data provided for the financial contributions is accompanied by explanations as to why the number to be considered as the basis for financial contributions is lower than the widely reported number.

However, we can say that the total number of Secular Franciscans worldwide is more or less 300,000, and the Franciscan Youth is around 50,000.

When we visit national fraternities, we see that the number of the sisters and brothers in the various fraternities has decreased. While ageing may be the main cause, we shall not deny the problem of a lack of interest and the lack of promotion of the OFS and Youfra. This poses a question to each and every member of the Order: do we really live an authentic Christian life? Are we true witnesses of Christ, following him in a manner that appeals to others and is

attractive in the way that characterized the life of Saint Francis? This is true particularly for the situation in Central, Western and Southern Europe, but we can see similar tendencies in other parts of the world. Some national fraternities on other continents, which were good examples a couple of years ago, sharing a vibrant fraternal life that involved many sisters and brothers, are struggling with the same problem. The fact that the world is changing, becoming more and more globalized, does not only provide easier ways of communication and sharing what is good, but also enables those ideologies to spread quickly that seem attractive at first glance, but are so destructive: consumerism, relativism, having the wrong priorities, a misconception of freedom, false understanding of human dignity and the role of humanity in society. Now this has a strong impact on those fraternities, and individual members, who are living in areas where some years ago these were not a reality, but remote dangers confined to the so called 'developed first world'. This causes fatigue and discouragement in the national councils, as was previously expressed by Encarnita some years ago. We must not be discouraged, but we have to face up to these facts. It is more relevant than ever to maintain clear evangelical values, to have a clear vision of the Gospel way of life, and to use contemporary means and tools to strengthen fraternal bonds, on the various levels, all over the world. This is our response to the cry of isolated people today who flounder because they lack sure and certain values and seek immediate satisfaction in material goods, and are moving further and further away from the invisible, transcendent and eternal God, who offers us his eternal love and eternal life.

We are certain that God is so good and that he does not let us down. We also see a lot of encouraging signs in many national fraternities. Commissions relevant to OFS rule and life are coming into being, together with various projects and activities, and it is so good to see, how talented, creative and inventive our secular Franciscan sisters and brothers are! It gives us great hope for the future. There are also good examples such as taking care of new members, working together with Youfra, and many others, that more of us could follow . We have to learn from each other!

The Situation in the different Geographic areas

1. Europe

In spite of the experiences three years ago, the difference between the situation in Eastern and Western Europe is lessening. We see that there are examples of great hope in Western Europe, while some National Fraternities in Eastern Europe share a situation very similar to that in Western Europe: struggling with ageing and facing great and rapid changes around the world.

I want to mention here the generosity and dedication of some national fraternities and individual members, who, regardless of their own difficulties and real problems, are giving support to fraternities at every level, and offering their abilities and goods to the Order.

One persistent problem remains, namely the generation gap. Except for a few good examples, the generation of the 30s-50s is missing in our fraternities. We should pay much more attention to those who are at that stage of life when the temptation of 'feeling I have made it' while, at the same time, experience a growing sense of isolation within the great mass of people - workmates, community fellows, sometimes even family members! There are many temptations that endanger life, that can strike people at this stage of life unaware. Temptations are often disguised, appearing to be good things. It fills us with joy that some national fraternities have already recognized this problem, and are offering formation, programs, meetings, activities for more and more families with young or teenage children.

Europe 1, the English-German area, includes 17 national fraternities of the OFS: 12 of them are constituted national fraternities, 2 are emerging national fraternities and 3 are fraternities with a Franciscan presence. For national fraternities of Western Europe, the norm is a relatively small number of Secular Franciscans, mostly elderly, who cannot dedicate themselves to many OFS activities, thus the OFS presence is limited mostly to local parishes. The lack of spiritual assistants is another challenge they are facing, and Franciscan Youth is not present in that area. The national fraternities of Middle and Eastern Europe have a greater number of OFS members, who are also rather old, but there are some fraternities where young people enter the OFS wanting to be witness to Franciscan spirituality in the world (e. g. Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lithuania) and they are thus more active and present in the Church and society. In this part, there are many more spiritual assistants and there are several strong Franciscan Youth fraternities (Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lithuania, Poland). In some national fraternities there is an effort to create groups of Franciscan Youth (e. g. in Austria, Germany, Hungary); this process is going slowly but the first steps have been taken.

In Europe 2. the English-Italian area, the work of the last three years began with a circular letter to the national fraternities, sent by the Presidency councilor for the area. With regard to this, it should be noted that many fraternities never responded, despite the various invitations. A visit to the Fraternity of Rhodes in Greece was very helpful, rediscovering fraternity, where it was possible to retrieve the Fraternity establishment decree, the record of the minutes, and the list of those professed. Of these, only two are still living but now seven or eight people are coming forward to find out how to join OFS.

There are two local OFS fraternities in Bulgaria and both are very old and small in number. The difficulty that they encounter, in a country where Christians are a small minority, can be clearly perceived. The OFM Friars are very young and open, but the pastoral work demanded of them does not allow much time for them to respond to an OFS and/or a YouFra proposal. We must pray and hope that the lay Franciscan presence will not disappear.

There were two meetings with the OFS members, the Franciscan Movement and the Franciscan Group of Switzerland, to be by their side during the process of constituting the

Swiss National Fraternity. There is a long way to go, it will take a lot of patience, but we are confident it will have a positive outcome. Switzerland is one of our great hopes for the future.

2. Latin America

This continent is going through great changes in our times. Latin America has become a continent of great differences. There is a wide diversity and great variety of political-social systems, some giving more, some less, space to the Church and also to our Order. The economic situation is very different in the various countries.

However, many of our members and fraternities have discovered in this situation a moment of grace, and we have heard about some initiatives with truly great joy. Since our members usually belong to those parts of society which are closer to the poorest and the most needy - even many of our members are also in the same situation! - we have heard how much the fraternities and members of the Secular Franciscan Order commit themselves to the help of the poor, of the sick, of the outcast, of the marginalized.

We have to see also, that big differences sometimes makes it very difficult to bring the national fraternities closer to each other. Another consequence is that mutual understanding becomes more and more difficult. International gatherings and congresses play a very important part in this regard, to help the goal of building a really international fraternity. Ageing is increasingly a daily challenge, and some fraternities seem to have lost hope of revival.

We have had to face grave problems and very difficult situations in some national fraternities during very recent times, requiring direct intervention from the CIOFS Presidency. I can specify one particular reason for some of the problems: the election of inexperienced persons. If national chapters elect council members, particularly national ministers, without any skill or experience in animation and guidance, it may cause problems when different ideas have to be confronted.

Unfortunately, we have had very bad experiences in some situations, where there has been a lack of respect and humility, and there has been no willingness to collaborate or to listen to each other.

3. Africa

Project Africa, initiated by the previous Presidency, has been continued. The General Chapter 2014 agreed a strategy that included the following:

- A. Formation
- B. Franciscan Youth
- C. Organizational Structures (local, regional and national)
- D. Relations between OFS and First Order/TOR, and with the Church
- E. Communications
- F. Meetings, Gatherings, Congresses

The strategy was implemented through the following:

- The Project Africa Team met at the Seraphicum, prior to the Presidency meetings in October 2015, 2016, and, before this Chapter, in 2017. Unfortunately, there has been no Portuguese representative, the French and English speaking national fraternities were represented. Fr Francis took over from Fr Amanuel Mesgun ofm cap as Spiritual Assistant on the team after the first meeting.
- Communications with some of the team have been very challenging. In addition, having to use the official languages of French/English has been difficult.

- Attention was paid to the development of OFS, Youfra and Spiritual Assistants in Africa despite the great difficulty of communication with some countries. This work has continued: there is ongoing communication and fraternal sharing; formation workshops have been facilitated; resource material is being prepared and more extensive formation in the countries has been encouraged. To begin with, the directory of the different language countries was updated.

It was agreed that it would be helpful to have formation workshops in the different regions, inviting as many of the neighboring countries (OFS, Youfra and Spiritual Assistants) as possible to attend. These would be designed to cover the different areas that need attention. This was partially achieved, in that the English countries had a good response, but the French which was divided into 2 regions, only had a small attendance.

In June 2016, an English Formation workshop was organized, at St Bonaventures' College, in Lusaka, Zambia. There were 76 participants, from 11 countries (14 Spiritual Assistants, 3 Youfra, 59 OFS). 9 English, and 2 Portuguese (Mozambique and Angola) attended.

The first French Formation workshop was organized in May 2017 at the Padre Pio, Spiritual center, in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. There were 49 participants from 4 countries (4 Spiritual Assistants, 45 OFS).

A second French Formation workshop was organized for August 2017, Chad. It was supposed to be held in Cameroun, but, unfortunately, the preparation was not done, and at the last minute, as Chad was the only country attending, the venue was changed to Chad.

As travel is very expensive in Africa, the brothers and sisters who made an effort to attend did so at their own expense, which was a great sacrifice of time and finance, especially for the English-speaking workshop. We were very fortunate to have been given aid from CIOFS and MZF (Missionszentrale der Franziskaner, a German-based Franciscan Missionary Charity Aid) to assist with the fixed costs of the workshops. This enabled us to reduce the registration fee. The USA donated as well. This was used for French workshops.

Formation workshops have continued on a national basis, and good reports been received from Malawi, Uganda, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Namibia.

The English Guidelines for Formation Booklet has been translated into French and then into the local dialect in the various countries.

A Pan African Congress is being planned for July 2018 in South Africa

A great challenge is the French-speaking part of Africa.

During the past 3 years, elective chapters have been held in the French-speaking countries where the OFS is located: Rwanda, Madagascar, Lebanon, Togo, Ivory Coast, and Chad. Some countries in difficulty, such as the DRC, had to cancel their chapter and postpone it to a later date for financial reasons.

There are several common traits: active fraternities are growing in the number of members and the number of those in formation. There are more spiritual assistants from the Franciscan family. However, the financial problems and the long distance to be traveled pose real obstacles for the brothers and sisters to participate in fraternal life. These fraternities especially lack resources, such as resources on Franciscan spirituality and appreciate any help in this area, given that access to the Internet is not always possible.

In some of the National Fraternities in Africa, some groups of secular Franciscans still insist on wearing a religious habit, in spite of clear guidelines from the different councils, including the OFS General Chapter in 2011 in Sao Paolo. This is thought to be caused by a lack of

knowledge about our secular identity. The International Fraternity continues to struggle with this situation.

4. Asia and Oceania

We have to share with joy, that there is a significant and visible growth of the Order in Asia-Oceania. The total number of OFS members, for both those professed and those in initial formation in Asia-Oceania, shows a small increase of about 4 % during the triennium, thanks to the growth in the national fraternities in China, Philippines, Malaysia, Taiwan, and Korea. The other national fraternities showed a decrease in numbers of OFS members in the three years. In an effort to cope with ageing and the decreasing membership, some national fraternities created the position of a Councilor in charge of vocational development within the national council.

All national fraternities in Asia Oceania celebrated elective chapters, while no national fraternity in the area had fraternal and pastoral visits, during the triennium. Myanmar OFS was born in 2016 as the first 8 members made perpetual profession, followed by the canonical establishment of the first local fraternity in the country.

Responding to the requests of the respective fraternities. the former emerging national fraternity of Malaysia-Singapore has been split into two, and the Presidency has recognized the emerging national fraternity of Malaysia, and the emerging national fraternity of Singapore.

The 5th OFS and Youfra Asia-Oceania Congress was held with the theme, "Conversion to be carried out Everyday" in Bali, Indonesia, during the week of 29th-27th April 2017, jointly hosted by Indonesia and Malaysia. There were 81 participants from 16 national fraternities and CIOFS. All the participants joined in a dialogue on important subjects such as formation, communications, family, financing, membership administration, YouFra, and JPIC and the results of the dialogue have been summarized and distributed to all the national fraternities in Asia Oceania, for reference and, possibly, for application as well.

China Project

We are glad to tell you, that the China Project is going on and is developing. To concentrate on the field activities of the China Project Team, the Project Team has been made up of Chinese speaking members only, with the exception of the Coordinator, who is the Presidency Councilor since 2016. This is to increase momentum in the growth of OFS in China, to empower local resources, and to speed up the establishment of regional fraternities and national fraternity. The 1st Order has been able to appoint local spiritual assistants to all the local fraternities for the first time ever for the China Project. This will improve the formation of all the members in China substantially and it will positively help us in our efforts to further develop vocation and to continue renewing old fraternities in China in the future. At the end of 2016, both the total number of the canonically established local fraternities in China, and also the number of the members has increased significantly, multiplying the number of both.

The situation in the state has improved, but there is still significant risk in some areas, while in others, activities can be better extended.

We have to express our gratitude to everyone, who has been supporting this very important project, with work, with prayers, with personal commitment, with dedicating time, money, and other things. I will not here mention those who are helping a lot, but you know that everyone is in my prayers. The entire Order is grateful to you, and God will reward you.

5. North America

North America basically means two big countries: Canada and the USA. (Mexico is considered to belong to Latin-America.)

The great joys are the involvement and participation of the Franciscan First Orders and TOR in assisting with formation in emerging fraternities. The fraternities and the individual members are becoming involved in the apostolate, there are fraternities becoming involved in promoting Family and Life Issues, protecting the unborn and managing a home for pregnant mothers in distress and involvement in JPIC in Canada and USA.

The development of a Youth Program that addresses the needs of USA youth and young adults has been an ongoing challenge and opportunity.

Fraternities in the USA want to work together with struggling countries, and both Canada and USA are creating formation programs making use of the internet, so that other nations can make use of information.

There are several major challenges, too. There are long distances to travel between fraternities and for Spiritual Assistants, together with a shortage of Spiritual Assistants. Also, sometimes it seems there is both a lack of knowledge of the essential documents and of the Franciscan charism and a lack of a sincere lifelong commitment to living intensely the Gospel life of Christ in the footsteps of Sts Francis and Clare. In the US a concern has arisen among some members of the OFS family as to whether the National Fraternity should support the Franciscan Action Network (FAN). We have to give adequate answers to these questions and respond to these challenges, but we see a growing fraternal life in these National Fraternities.

6. Special area: the Arabic world

The councilor of the French-speaking area is responsible for the project of the Arab countries trying to create a fraternity in Dubai, in the parish of St Mary. After several visits and a formation period we have just celebrated the Mass of Admission for about 35 people.

In Jordan, many contacts were created with the Franciscan presence. But due to lack of availability this project is suspended.

We also received a request from some members in Kuwait, asking for some assistance and organization because they cannot find any spiritual assistants or formators. They have been referred to the OFS in the Philippines, since they are all from that part of the world, to provide them with manual of formation and some assistance.

In 2016, a trip was made to Alexandria in Egypt to re-establish contact after a long period of cut-off and absence of the OFS. The OFS in Egypt is in a difficult situation due to bad organization and bad management of their council that was almost absent. This visit enabled the Presidency to schedule a formation session that could lead to an elective chapter and thereafter to a new national council, that, hopefully, can be the beginning of a new revival.

YouFra

The YouFra Coordination Team has regular communication with YouFra national fraternities. During 2017 the team conducted a survey on various topics concerning the YouFra situation in the world. Here is some data:

- membership of YouFra: 50,000 members
- number of recognized national fraternities: 34
- number of emerging national fraternities: 28

- fraternal animation: the situation is improving, but we must continue to work on fraternal animation. While at the national level there is a someone who is the fraternal animator, locally it is often not the case.
- spiritual assistance: almost all fraternities have spiritual assistance at the national level, but there are fraternities at the local level who do not have assistants.

The other commitment of the Coordination Team was to disseminate YouFra documents, which was one of the priorities of Chapter 2008 and reaffirmed in 2011 and 2014.

During the period of 2014-2017 the Commission prepared a document 'Celebrations in the fraternity of the Franciscan Youth' which was approved by the YouFra International Assembly and the Presidency. It was circulated to national YouFra and OFS fraternities.

After several years of effort, the YouFra Commission was able to prepare the new YouFra web page in 2014 with a new design that should be more attractive and accessible to young people. The address is: www.ciofs.org/youfra. The intention behind the website is to gather all the data and documents on YouFra, as well as information on events and national YouFra fraternities. The administration and improvements on the page should be developed over time. In this triennium we had 2 severe hacker attacks to the CIOFS webpage (and consequently to the YouFra page) thus there was a period when it was not functioning.

At the Second International Assembly YouFra international delegates elected, for the first time directly and not by mail, five international councilors, and the sixth international councilor, representing African fraternities, was named (for only the first time) by the CIOFS Presidency. The international YouFra councilors for the 2014-2017 triennium were:

- 1) Michat Legrand-Raout (Mauritius) - Africa
- 2) Jenifer Christla Josephine (India) - Asia-Oceania
- 3) Arlene Naya (Philippines) - Asia-Oceania substitute
- 4) José Carlos Mancinas Casas (Mexico) - Central America, Mexico and Caribbean
- 5) Judith del Rocío Tinajera Vidales (Mexico) - Central America, Mexico and Caribbean substitute
- 6) Marcos Ezequiel Villagra (Argentina) - South America
- 7) Shirley Liz Ramirez León (Paraguay) - South America substitute
- 8) Joanna Sochor (Poland) - Central and Eastern Europe
- 9) Božica Ivanković (Bosnia and Herzegovina) - Central and Eastern Europe substitute
- 10) Ghislain Knepper (France) - Western Europe (and North America)
- 11) Katia Dâmaso (Portugal) - Western Europe (and North America) substitute

During June and July 2017, the elections for the new YouFra international councilors for the period 2017-2020 was made by e-mail. The newly elected YouFra international councilors for the period 2017-2020 are:

- 1) Gilbert Muhumuza (Uganda) - Africa
- 2) Judith del Rocío Tinajera Vidales (Mexico) - Central America, Mexico and Caribbean
- 3) Francisco Antonio Loaiza Mena (Costa Rica) - Central America, Mexico and Caribbean substitute
- 4) Emanuelson Matias de Lima (Brazil) - South America
- 5) Rebecca Nascimento de Oliveira (Brazil) - South America substitute
- 6) Božica Ivanković (Bosnia and Herzegovina) - Central and Eastern Europe

The YouFra Coordination Team for this triennium (2017-2020) consists of only 4 YouFra international councilors, plus the two members from the CIOFS Presidency. However, the YouFra Coordination Team also appointed contact persons for those areas that didn't have any candidates for elections. Those contact persons will help the Coordination Team to maintain communication with the national fraternities of the area, but are not considered to be International Councilors.

YouFra is present in 75 countries. Many fraternities have existed for many years without having contact with the other fraternities in the world. In the recent years, much has been done at the level of organization and unification of YouFra, especially internationally. The result is that the contacts and communication with and between national fraternities have improved. Young people have become more aware that there is a YouFra internationally and they want to participate in this.

One of the biggest challenges remains the relationship between the YouFra and the OFS, especially the idea of double belonging (simultaneous belonging to the YouFra and the OFS) and appointment of dedicated fraternal animators from the part of the OFS.

Some of the most important aspects of the Life of the International Fraternity

Formation

Formation is one of the major priorities. It is nearly always the first matter that has to be raised. It is not only a priority that the General Chapter has determined, but it is also an immense joy and a great challenge.

The Presidency has organized formation courses, but we are really happy to hear that some national fraternities have organized courses as well, not only on the local level, but also on regional and national level. This expresses the recognition of formation as a real priority.

The formation courses in Africa deserve a mention here. The Presidency organized one course for the English-speaking National Fraternities, and two for the French-Speaking National Fraternities. The good participation and the feedback on these courses have encouraged us to continue. We always look for where the greatest need is and where we can best serve our sisters and brothers.

We are going to complete the editing of a special formation handbook, a project that was launched by the previous Presidency.

Formation materials are being published regularly, and the Formation Commission is working in close collaboration with the Family Commission.

Communication

In every fraternity - whether local, regional, national or international - communication between members is essential. This is another one of the priorities of recent General Chapters. This requires effort, not only because the CIOFS Presidency has to publish formation materials, documents and circulars, but also effort is necessary to create a well-structured communications network that will reach brothers and sisters in their local fraternities. Translation of documents has always been an important challenge for the CIOFS Presidency, but also for those fraternities that do not use one of the 4 official languages. Commitment to strengthen communications will also increase the spread of vocation.

The Presidency has worked hard to make the national fraternities aware of the situation of the Order, the joys and difficulties alike of our sisters and brothers living all around the World. There have been some natural disasters that have urged the Presidency to send a message to the National Fraternities and to the sisters and brothers. Also, the wars and the grave political situations in some countries cause us concern, particularly over the persecution of the Christians. The Communication commission and the JPIC commission have done a lot of work on these issues.

Communication also means bringing sisters and brothers closer to each other, building relationships, encouraging National Fraternities to get to know one other and to find out about fraternal life in other fraternities. Continental Congresses were intended to help achieve this goal: likewise, with some other events, like formation courses for secular Franciscans and for spiritual assistants.

Another way that communication can be fostered and facilitated is through organizing Congresses in the different continents, (Asia, Africa, Europe, America) and through the various Formation courses, workshops and courses on Assistance. These are also excellent opportunities to immerse the emerging National Fraternities into the life of the International Fraternity.

It is important to note that all communications are sent and published in the four (4) official languages. We could not manage without the service of our volunteers, who have been helping the Order in different countries all over the world. We have to mention, that translation is never a one-way street: we have to be capable of providing translation from any one of the official languages to any of the other the four.

Emerging National Fraternities

There are currently 18 emerging national fraternities and an additional 19 nations in which there is an emerging presence of Secular Franciscans but where a national entity has not yet emerged.

The Presidency has taken particular care to animate and guide emerging national fraternities all over the world and to have more or less reliable data on all emerging national fraternities. Fraternal accompaniment is a principle, and we have good examples of how constituted national fraternities can accompany emerging fraternities. The fundamental point of this fraternal accompaniment is fraternal and spiritual support, but, in some cases, it also means personal presence and financial help as well.

The Presidency's efforts have been focused primarily on identifying contact information for each of these emerging national fraternities, so as to enable regular communications with them, particularly through the Presidency Councilor of each language area as well as the Presidency Councilor for Franciscan Youth. During the past three years, the Minister General, or his delegate, has visited some of the emerging national fraternities. In June 2017 the Presidency gave a positive response to the request of the Emerging National Fraternity of Malaysia-Singapore and has recognized the Emerging National Fraternity of Malaysia, and the Emerging National Fraternity of Singapore. It should also be noted that Project Haiti, Project China and Project Africa all give special attention to the needs of the emerging national fraternities in these areas.

The Presidency continues its work of "accompaniment" is permanent for the Emerging National Fraternities, either sustained by the same Presidency, or by other national fraternities to which this accompaniment has been entrusted. There are now guidelines for this fraternal accompaniment which have been distributed among the National Fraternities.

The First Orders and Third Order Regular are also actively involved in facilitating the accompaniment of these emerging national fraternities, especially through the Conference of General Assistants.

Emerging Fraternities are a great source of richness for the Order, and are a living sign of the growth of the Order in the world. They are vivid symbols of the presence of the secular Franciscan spirituality, many times in countries where catholics are in the minority, often living in difficult circumstances or suffering persecution.

The Congresses and formation courses in different continents (Asia, Africa, Europe, America) are an important sphere that enhances communication among the national fraternities, constituted and emerging alike.

Special project of the translation of the basic documents

The work of producing new translations of the basic documents of the OFS was started during the time of the previous presidency. During the years some mistranslation and some incoherence were discovered in the translations into the different languages. This has led to the request, and highlighted the need, to provide a revision of the translations. Many experts and volunteers have been working on this, and we are really grateful to them. Their contribution is greatly appreciated by the entire Order. Now I can report you that the work has almost been completed, and within a short time the new translations will be published.

PART III

The service performed by the CIOFS Presidency

1. Day to day administration:

The Presidency, during this triennium has sent 36 circular letters, with their accompanying documents, to recipients who are all brothers and sisters in the Order, but most of them also to the International Council, the National Councils of the OFS, and the Franciscan Youth.

We have done all the planning required in order to preside over the National Chapters and make the fraternal and pastoral visits requested. Or on our own initiative when the actual situation of some national fraternities require it.

We have responded to many requests for interventions from either national or international councilors or from National, Regional, Local Councils, or from brothers/sisters as individuals, when they had a problem, complaint or wanted to make an appeal. In these cases, our approach, whenever possible, has been to facilitate fraternal dialogue and to resolve the problems within their own area. When this has not been possible, the Presidency intervened through the most suitable Councilor for the case, or in the person of the Minister General. The Juridical Commission has always given robust support with their unbiased point of view and with their expertise.

Meetings during the triennium

The Presidency has met in regular session:

- ✓ 14-21 March, 2015, a meeting which made 52 decisions, as recorded in the register of decisions.
- ✓ 7-14 November, 2015: 55 decisions were made
- ✓ 2-9 April, 2016: 42 decisions were made
- ✓ 15-22 October, 2016: 46 decisions were made
- ✓ 18-25 March, 2017: 38 decisions were made
- ✓ 28 October - 3 November, 2017: 33 decisions have been made

The Presidency enters into dialogue and exchanges on various issues and makes final decisions in two ways: through the official minutes of each meeting and in a record of decisions, which is faster and keeps the members up-to-date immediately after the Presidency meetings.

How the Presidency worked and lived its responsibility

At the beginning of the triennium we had to face the challenge of the lack of continuity: though beside the seven new members, three of the ten secular members had already served in the Presidency before, but each of us had a completely new position, in which we had never served before. However, this was also provided a good opportunity to retain the good practices but also to establish a proper way of work and service. So, in the beginning we tried to formulate the method of work and had long conversations, first to gain a better knowledge, and then to see how best to respond to the requests of the International Fraternity. These were formulated in the General Chapter in the priorities for the three years, and decisions made about which of the Presidency Councilors was to be responsible for the different areas.

Special emphasis was placed on the collegial way in which our meetings and especially the decision-making should unfold. Each one had his/her own responsibility in the appointed

area, but the Presidency has to live and work as a small fraternity, in the spirit of sharing, consulting, praying and working together. Living together for a week twice a year at the Presidency meetings has always been a good opportunity to live this kind of fraternal life.

Spirit of the meetings

First of all, we have always been able to feel the presence of the Holy Spirit in our meetings, in our discussions and in our decisions. We usually work in fraternal harmony, without any great tensions. Difference of opinions is a normal part of life, but we managed to resolve every problem in a peaceful manner, in prayer and in fraternal dialogue.

During the meeting of March 2016, we were able to start our week's work with a spiritual retreat, in the same place, the Seraphicum. This was a very enriching experience, filling all of us with new enthusiasm, and allowed us to get to know each other even better. Sharing these kinds of moments of prayer greatly helped us to deepen our love of God and of each other.

The celebration of the Eucharist and the Church's liturgical and contemplative prayers every day before starting work and every evening after we finished, provided a framework for each day, making the presence of Christ a strong reality in our fraternity and in our service. Also, the fraternal sharing in the evenings deepened our fraternal spirit and brought us closer to one another.

In this way, we have the experience of living and working in a real fraternity, where we can share our joys, but also where we can accompany the brothers or sisters who, at times, were experiencing some difficulties or suffering in their lives, or in their family, In this way we even feel a link with brothers or sisters in other parts of the world.

List of the Councillors of the Presidency with their proper areas.

- Ana Fruk from Croatia, Presidency Councilor for Europe Area 1 (German-English);
- Attilio Galimberti from Italy, Presidency Councilor for Europa Area 2 (English-Italian);
- Ana María Raffo from Peru, Presidency Councilor for Latin America & Spain (Spanish);
- Silvia Diana from Argentina, Presidency Councilor for Latin America-Southern Cone, (Spanish-Portuguese);
- Jenny Harrington from South Africa, Presidency Councilor for North America and Africa (English);
- Augustine Yoon Young Hak, from Korea, Presidency Councilor for Asia and Oceania (English),
- Michel Janian from Lebanon, Presidency Councilor for French speaking countries,
- Andrea Odak from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Presidency Councilor for the Youfra,
- María Consuelo Núñez from Venezuela, Vice Minister General,
- Tibor Kauser from Hungary, Minister General;

Fraternal contacts

During the last three years the Presidency has maintained continuous contact between the members of the Presidency Council and likewise between the Presidency and the national councils. We use various channels and tools of communication. Sometimes an immediate decision is required, sometimes the preparation for a coming meeting or journey needs an urgent exchange of ideas, sometimes information has to be shared among the Presidency members. Also because of living as a fraternity, we follow with interest and affection whatever happens to each of us and to our respective families.

The relationship of the Councilors of the Presidency with the International Councilors and National Councils of the respective areas varies greatly, and we must differentiate according how our life in the Order is really being lived out. And I have to emphasize that this difference between the realities of our life has not changed in the least during the last years:

- There are those who can communicate easily because they have the necessary means and they are ready to maintain regular contacts.
- There are those who cannot communicate, because they have virtually no modern means of communication and have to use, where possible, a cyber-cafe to attempt any communication, but they want to maintain regular contacts.

And we have to mention also the difficulties:

- There are those who want to communicate and cannot afford to do so.
- There are those who do not respond to any request almost never, despite having all the means at their disposal.
- There are those who communicate but not on time, who are late in sending their reflections and responses, leaving it to the last minute or even later.

Sometimes it is very hard to understand why some councils or members almost entirely block the communication. Concerning this, we have to dedicate more effort to improving the situation, including the development of more fluent communication, asking our sisters and brothers to maintain regular communication.

The mutual relationship has almost always been fraternal. The Presidency Councilors fully intend to accompany the national councils in their respective areas, and even beyond the administrative borders, consonant with personal relationships and contacts, not only to respond to their needs, but also to accompany them in every sense, monitoring communications and documents sent to the Order, in order to provide a better service of animation and guidance. Sometimes they have not had great success, but step by step we could improve the situation. The Holy Spirit is helping us a lot also in these practical things.

Topics and key decisions:

Ordinary Administration

We inherited good methods of working during and after the Presidency. We are really grateful to the previous presidency for having established the working method which is still in practice today.

We regularly attended to many issues that were presented to us, developed initiatives, in order to put the priorities of the General Chapter 2014 into daily practice and to take them as cardinal points for our life all over the world.

In between these, we had to mediate conflicts, formulate concrete proposals to help develop initiatives, and so forth.

Problems in the national fraternities:

During the triennial, many - in our view too many - appeals have arrived at the Presidency, presenting problems and seeking support that, in the first place, should never occur, and should certainly not appear at the highest level of the Order, without having tried to resolve them, in the spirit of subsidiarity, at a lower level. The roots of these conflicts are: lack of knowledge of our spirituality, our proper legislation, or are simply caused by strong personalities, authoritarianism- centralism on the part of those responsible for animating and guiding the fraternities, lack of communion or collegiality in the service.

Supporting documents

During these first three years of our service two of these documents have been offered:

- Supporting document for the annual report from the National Fraternities
- Supporting document and guidelines for the fraternal accompaniment

Conduct of fraternal and pastoral visits (Annex No. 2)

During the three years there have been 16 fraternal and pastoral visits, almost always performed together. This was an opportunity to express the unity of the Franciscan Family and the importance of both the fraternal and pastoral aspect as well. However, compared to the number of the National Elective Chapters, we have to state that there are many national fraternities that have not requested the Fraternal and Pastoral Visits that are due at least once every six years.

Presiding at Elective Chapters (Annex No. 2)

One of the duties of the Minister General is to preside over National Elective Chapters. Even though it is a personal responsibility, in order to express the collegiality, the Presidency members, as delegates of the Minister General, took their share in providing this service to the National Fraternities. This also gave an opportunity to learn more and better about the fraternal life of the National Fraternities. The delegation included also some international councilors, or other suitable persons, in conformity with our General Constitutions.

The number of National Elective Chapters presided at in this triennium is 78.

Participation in Continental Congresses and others

The Presidency Councilors have participated at the different continental congresses of OFS and Youfra, organized under the responsibility of the CIOFS Presidency:

2nd European OFS and Youfra Congress, 17-23 August 2015, Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina

9th Latin-America OFS and Youfra Congress, 25-29 May 2016, Cumbayá, Quito, Ecuador

5th Asia-Oceania Congress, 20-27 April 2017 in Bali, Indonesia

Besides this, the Presidency Councilors and the Vice-Minister General and the Minister General have participated at different national and international congresses, formation courses and workshops. The Secular Franciscan Order was present through Presidency Councilors at other important events, like the COP21 in Paris, France, or at the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia, U.S.

Work in the commissions

Communications commission

The communication commission is composed of members of the Presidency (Michel Janian, Ana Fruk, Fr. Francis Dor OFM Cap, together with Bob and Mary Stronach from the USA. Originally the coordinator of the commission was Michel Janian, but due to his numerous commitments in his family and professional life, Ana Fruk took responsibility for coordinating this work.

The principal medium of support for the communication commission is the web page. We are working on the challenge of improving this means of communication. Here we have to let you know that we have been struggling with a grave problem regarding the website, which was hacked, and almost totally destroyed. We have also started to use social networks,

especially Facebook where CIOFS has its own profile and regularly publishes important and interesting news for the OFS and the Franciscan Family. In addition to this, the CIOFS Presidency has decided to create an e-magazine that by 2016 was being sent to all international directors worldwide, by email, with the news and decisions of the Presidency and the various Fraternities. The E-newsletter carries the name Franciscan Vox and is published twice a year in 4 official languages. We are always looking for help from brothers and sisters who can help us with translation into the 4 official languages. Some other priorities set during the last General Chapter are being implemented.

JPIC commission

The following were members of the Commission from the beginning: Attilio Galimberti, Coordinator and Member of the Presidency, Ghislain Knepper, YouFra, France, Carolyn Townes, USA, Gustavo Neri, Argentina. Agnes Yong Hye Kim, Korea who has not been part of the Commission this year and unfortunately, up to now, it has not been possible to find a substitute for her from that geographical area.

Unfortunately, due to new personal commitments, the JPIC guidelines for YouFra that should have been developed by the Youfra commission member are not yet ready.

The preparation for a proposed course on social/political commitment, which will have a good number of dossiers published on the web, has reached the stage where we are looking for collaborators. Consideration has been given to the themes that will be developed, now we have to move to the operational phase.

In collaboration with the Inter-Franciscan Commission of JPIC (Romans VI), there is a plan to develop the theme of Nonviolence that Pope Francis emphasized in his message for World Peace Day 2017.

From 7 to 11 November 2017, COP 23 is going to be held in Bonn on how to implement the Paris Accord (COP 21). It is good to know that the Capuchin proposal, from the Philippines, on how to calculate the carbon footprint, was presented during COP22 in Marrakesh, and to realize that, based on this calculation, concrete steps were taken to reduce it (response to Earth's cry and cry of the Poor). Unfortunately, the date of COP 23 coincides with our General Chapter, making it impossible for us to be present.

Roman VI is also considering the possibility of getting in touch with the World Council of Churches (WCC) to make a common commitment to the environment.

Contact with the Global Catholic Climate Movement has been developed even more. CIOFS is in collaboration with this movement, supporting and adhering to their initiatives and proposals.

We participated in two meetings organized by the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of New Evangelization which set out to define effective proposals to be submitted to Pope Francis for the celebration of the World Day of the Poor, scheduled for November 19, 2017.

These facts clearly demonstrate how firmly OFS members are committed to the care of creation and must continue to be.

Family commission

The members of the commission are Silvia Diana, Jennifer Harrington and Fr. Francis Dor OFMCap.

The motto of the work of the commission is "Family Life as a Testimony of Trinitarian Love (2015-2020)"

First we have to mention that the theme of the World Meeting of Philadelphia 2015 families was *Love is our mission. The Family Fully Alive*, emphasizing the impact of the love and the lives of families in our society. Being present at this congress was a very enriching experience, above all the vocational promotion work for our Order and its proposals for young people.

The commission has edited annual formation topics:

2016 "Family and marriage", the topic was sent to all national fraternities OFS and Youfra in January.

2017 "Care of human fragility: Mercy and discernment", the topic was sent to all national fraternities OFS and Youfra in January.

The target: To make OFS Fraternities to be places of care and support for those members who live in situations of particular difficulty or who live in difficult family situations.

The commission made contributions at conferences, in courses of formation and at chapters. Some examples for this among others:

- II. European Congress Ofs-Youfra, Bosnia and Herzegovina, August 2015: The teaching of the Church on the family in the light of the new evangelization. Presented by Chelito Núñez.
- IX. Latin American Congress Ofs-Youfra, Ecuador, May 2016: "Current Family Situation in America, Secular Franciscan Response". Presented by: John Palacios
- V. Asia-Oceania Congress Ofs-Youfra, Bali, Indonesia April 2017: "Family" presented by Chelito y Richard Núñez.
- English-speaking Formation Course in Africa, Lusaka, Zambia - June 2016: "Family and marriage"

As we celebrate the memorial day of Blessed Lucchesius and Buonadonna of Poggibonsi on April 28th, we recommend this day will also be considered as a day for the family, encouraging us to "share the important moments of family life" (Cost.24) by giving this opportunity for sharing share with Youfra and their family members (Cap. Gen. 2014)

As a help to national fraternities, materials on the family are published on the website every two months, from which the brothers and sisters can learn about the new document of the Conclusions on the Family Synod. The new "*Amoris Laetitia*" exhortation is included in this material since May 2016.

Formation commission

The members of the formation commission are Anna Maria Raffo Laos, Jennifer Harrington and Fr. Pedro Zitha OFM.

The major task of the commission is to provide formation materials and to help the efforts of the National Fraternities in forming the formators. Brand new ideas have emerged since the beginning of the work. We are working on how to implement online formation, in order to facilitate formation also in areas where, due to distances or lack of transport, personal participation is difficult. The Presidency also has edited small formation booklets for African national fraternities, in French and in English. A new idea is to start to produce short formation videos, which are thought to be more helpful and are easier to understand. Certainly, the four official languages pose a great challenge, also when translating formation materials.

An ongoing formation program has been edited by the commission, which is being published on the website.

Juridical and patrimonial commission

The CIOFS Juridical and Patrimonial commission was set up in March 2015 at the Presidency meeting and formed of the following members: Tibor Kauser Coordinator, Danijela Rebac, Mariette Fleur, Manuela Berciano Travesi, Noemi Paola Riccardi and Fr. Alfred Parambakathu OFMConv for CAS (February 2017). Since October 2016, the Coordinator of the Commission is Noemi Paola Riccardi.

It is a working group serving the Presidency and mainly deals with:

- 1) Review of national statutes
- 2) Study and preparation for the Presidency's opinion on appeals submitted to the CIOFS;
- 3) Study and preparation of decrees and letters of accompaniment for the Presidency;
- 4) Preparation of documents, guidelines, explanation of the norms of the GG.CC. OFS, and anything else useful for fraternal life;
- 5) Preparation of juridical answers to the questions and/or subjects that are forwarded to the Presidency by the various national fraternities;
- 6) Organization and insertion of circulars and official CIOFS documents on the website.
- 7) Translation into the four official languages of documents, guidelines and anything else of a juridical nature, approved by the CIOFS Presidency;
- 8) Any other matter that the Presidency shall present to the Commission
- 9) Relate the work done to the Presidency, to comment on the documents prepared or the opinions drawn concerning complaints, to answer the legal questions advanced by the members of the Presidency (commission coordinator).

The Commission meets twice a year, one or two months before the Presidency's meeting, to deal with the various issues raised by the Presidency or, in some cases, that the Commission shares the opinion that it should suggest raising certain matters (in strictly legal matters). In addition to the revision of the national statutes, that requires a lot of time throughout the year, undertaken by every member of the commission according to the respective languages (which is not always his own). Work is carried out, not only during the meetings, but throughout the whole year, according to different needs and emergencies. This is a very delicate and important service for the Order because it is not simply a question of applying rules but of understanding the meaning of these in the light of the holy Gospel and Secular Franciscan spirituality, being always aware of its impact on the lives of sisters and brothers. It requires great preparation, study, meditation on the Word and continuous prayer. The norms of the life of the OFS often mean giving practical suggestions on how to live the Gospel, and how it should be read and interpreted in the light of the entire OFS legislation. In addition, since justice and mercy always go together, the Juridical Commission also pays particular attention to the pastoral aspect, especially in the resolution of appeals presented to the Presidency.

The Franciscan Youth Commission

The Franciscan Youth Commission of the CIOFS Presidency is composed of: Andrea Odak (Presidency Councilor for YouFra), Ana Fruk (Presidency Councilor, as Fraternal Animator) and Fr. Amando Trujillo Cano, TOR (General Assistant). The Commission had several commitments relative to YouFra in the world.

The representatives of YouFra Commission (or their delegates) participated in various meetings organized by both the Pontifical Council for the Laity and the CIOFS Presidency. The meetings organized by the Pontifical Council for the Laity involved preparations for World Youth Day in Poland, which happened in Kalwaria Zebrzydowska from November 25 to 29 in 2015. The members of the Commission also participated in the Continental Congresses that occurred in the period from 2014-2017 (European Congress in 2015, Latin American Congress in 2016, Congress of Asia and Oceania in 2017,) where there was also YouFra presence from the area.

Before WYD in Poland, the CIOFS Presidency and the YouFra Commission organized an International Gathering of YouFra in Krakow from July 22-25, 2016, with the help of YouFra and the OFS in Poland, where about 100 members from 24 YouFra national fraternities were present. During WYD, the organizing committee representing the Franciscan Family of Poland organized the Franciscan Village on July 27, 2016. The meeting with all the General Ministers of the Franciscan Family took place on that occasion.

The next great challenge we are facing is the WYD in Panama in the year of 2019, including the presentation of the Franciscan Family.

Economic Commission

The Economic Commission today consists of three members – Augustine Younghak Yoon, Presidency councillor, Coordinator, Lucio Monti, General Treasurer, and Roberto Falzago, Assistant Accountant, working harmoniously on the accurate and prompt output of economic data.

The accurate and prompt output of the economic is also attributed to the use of “Cash System” which works well to produce all related data simultaneously with the source input.

From the 2015-2017 budget cycle, indices such as minimum wage and average wage were added together with GDP per capita in calculating contributions of each national fraternity to better reflect the financial means of OFS members in each national fraternity. This is because most of our members were perceived to be in the low-income bracket or to depend on a pension. Continued efforts in this direction will be made in the preparation of the future budget.

With the support of entire Presidency Councilors, the Economic Commission has continued to emphasize the importance of observing Rule 25 and GGCC 30.3 and, in response to its efforts, the numbers of national fraternities who paid the annual contributions to CIOFS increased from 44 in 2014 to 72 in 2016 and the number of national fraternities who paid the contributions to CIOFS in 2017 up to June stood at 41. Many national fraternities paid the contributions to CIOFS **for the first time ever** during the past three years. I am also happy to see evidence of a growing awareness of unity and autonomy of OFS, reflected in the financial contributions to the fraternities of higher level.

PART IV

Relationship with the Franciscan Family

The Conference of the Franciscan Family (CFF)

During these three years the relationship with the Conference of the Franciscan Family has grown and matured. The CFF met 6 times, coinciding with the feast of Saint Francis and Easter. It has been a great joy that for the first time ever the OFS could host the meeting of the CFF in March 2016, at our General Secretariat in Rome, and will next host it in March 2018.

It is important that the Conference show the unity as a Family to the Church and Society. In this regard, our presence is significant because it is constantly encouraging this union.

It is important to note that -- in terms of national fraternities -- the respective Councils should insist on their presence in the organizations of the Franciscan family in their respective countries, sharing equal dignity. It is not easy, but we must persevere in expressing our intention. We have to take the initiative ourselves. In some countries there does not even exist a formal organization of this kind, therefore we encourage national councils to take initiatives towards this.

Relationship with the First Order and TOR.

At the International Council, the relationship with the Ministers General of the First Orders and the TOR is still excellent. The MMGG appoints one of them so we can deal with any eventuality or need in the OFS requiring fraternal or canonical intervention on the part of the MMGG.

I have observed decreasing participation in some countries with regard to the presence of Secular Franciscans in the common activities and the events of the First Order and TOR. Or, it may be that the OFS is included, but when projects have been agreed involving the Order or Family, they have not been invited to participate in the programming or in making decisions that affect the entire Franciscan family. We should be more active and more visible in order to express our readiness to serve and to be recognized as members of the Franciscan Family, as an equal member. Certainly, we our capacities are different, and we have different skills, but this provides a beautiful variety and diversity in the family. Often it seems that this is not very much respected or acknowledged as an advantage or benefit, but rather considered to be a difficulty.

OFS cannot just be pushed along, or forced to keep up with the pace set by the other components of our Family. We must have confidence in ourselves and be prepared to make our presence visible, as we have our own projects of life in the secular world, and we want to, and are capable of, participating. We have to express the need for a united presence of the Franciscan Family in the Church and in the world, aware that the Church is the center and focal point of our family.

There are some significant projects in common:

- Celebrating the Spirit of Assisi, trying to give continuity to this event.
- Continue to organize the common Franciscan presence during the World Youth Days, both in the content of our meetings, and in their organization.
- Continuing to maintain Franciscans International as a key organization for our family.

We have to note here that we are still struggling, too often, with an attitude, that characterized the Third Order Secular, living the Rule of Leo XIII, leaving all the responsibilities,

initiatives to the First Orders and TOR, waiting for their instructions and guidance. We have to discover our own proper role in the Franciscan Family, and to find our place in the common work and mission. There are special areas reserved for us, seculars, in the Church. We have to intensify formation in order to deepen the spirituality of our Rule given to us by Bl. Pope Paul VI., and be active members of the Franciscan Family as it should be today.

Spiritual Assistance to the International Fraternity

Due to the deep commitment of the Ministers Generals of the Franciscan First orders and TOR, four General Spiritual Assistants have provided us with their generous service throughout the three years. Initially they were Fr. José Antonio Cruz Duarte OFM, Fr. Martin Pablo Bitzer OFM Conv, Fr. Francis Bongajum Dor OFM Cap, and Fr. Amando Trujillo-Cano TOR.

In October 2016 Fr. Marco Tasca, General Minister OFM Conv, appointed Fr. Alfred Parambathu OFM Conv as the new General Spiritual Assistant to replace Fr. Martin Bitzer OFM Conv (after twelve years of service). In January 2017, Fr. Michael Perry, Minister General OFM, appointed Fr. Pedro Zitha OFM as a new General Spiritual Assistant to replace Fr. Jose Antonio Cruz Duarte OFM (after almost four years of service).

As members of the CIOFS Presidency, they have always been at our disposal and at our service, through their counsel and their advice, with their experience, thereby helping all of us to remain faithful to the Catholic Church and to the Franciscan Charism, as is stated in our General Constitutions. Also their knowledge and presence has been demonstrated in the liturgies and in their sacramental service. General Spiritual Assistants are members of the Presidency with all the rights and duties of other members, the only limitation is that they cannot vote at any elections or on economic issues, but this limitation does not apply to bringing their opinion to a discussion of problems, when moral decisions are to be taken or simply a response needs to be formulated.

Their membership in the Presidency is that of individuals, as delegates of the Minister General of the respective Order, and not as a Conference. However, in order to better perform their service in a collegial way, they form a conference, that has regular meetings. You can hear more about this in the report of the Conference of the Spiritual Assistants.

They are General Spiritual Assistants not only to the OFS but also to the Youfra. One of them therefore is a member of the Youfra Commission, while others participate in the work of other commissions. This is also an expression of the close communion and collaboration both inside the CIOFS Presidency and also among themselves. A special way in which this communion is expressed is at the National Elective Chapters and the Fraternal and Pastoral Visits, where the CIOFS Presidency Councillor with a General Spiritual Assistant (or the respective delegates) perform the service hand in hand, in very close collaboration. On behalf of the Presidency I wish to express our immense gratitude.

About Franciscans International

A special arena for visible signs of the common Franciscan charism is in the organization of the Franciscans International. This is an NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) alongside the United Nations, with the goals of advocacy for the poorest, also care for creation, justice, peace, and with the aim of making Franciscan Spirituality present at this forum.

The International Board of Directors is composed of members from the entire Franciscan Family. Formerly Doug Clorey was the Director on behalf of the Secular Franciscan Order, now it is Ruth Priscilla Marcus from Malaysia, who represents our Order in this board.

This is a very important organization, offering a platform where we can be present at the highest level of public life, making Franciscan spirituality visible in areas where it is unusual to have even a Christian approach and where advocacy is not always the norm.

On an ongoing basis, FI publishes bulletins on its website.

The operation of this organization depends on the financial support of benefactors from the Franciscan family and others outside it. Many of our members and fraternities have expressed their generosity giving significant support to this unique instrument of the Franciscan missionary presence and work in the world.

PART V

The General Secretariat and General Treasury, Blessed Raymond Lull Foundation

The General Secretariat

The General Secretary of the OFS is Isabella di Paola, who offers her tireless work to the Order as a member of the National Fraternity of Italy, and has served the International Fraternity for years. The General Secretariat is in Rome, at Via Vittorio Putti 4., on the 2nd floor in an apartment. This is our home, where all the documents are kept, where sometimes commissions meet, and where the two young ladies, Isa Rimauda and Laura Busaglia are continuously at work. Their expertise and skill enable work to flow and they can provide translation of the documents into the four official languages in their normal day to day administration.

For the translation work involved in special projects, and in case of large materials, we use volunteers from all over the world. Here is the opportunity for me to express our gratitude to all of them. We could not accomplish our service without their tireless efforts.

The project of digitalization of all the documents has been completed, and now we have a good, reliable administrative system.

Almost all the communication has been moved to an electronic platform; circular letters and other documents are being sent out in e-mails. However, in the case of the most important official documents, the original hardcopy is always available.

The General Treasury

Lucio Monti and Roberto Falzago are responsible for the general management of the finances. Thanks to their work, together with the coordinator of the Economic Commission, Augustine Younghak Yoon Presidency Councilor, we have managed to sort out the economic and financial situation of the International Fraternity and of the Presidency. They work tirelessly, calling on the collaboration of the national councils to ask for their financial contribution.

We still have a lot to do. Some national councils have expressed their generosity many times, while others are struggling, and we cannot avoid mention of the difficulties, since we experience the lack of a sense of belonging in some national fraternities, which certainly has its roots in the lack of a sense of belonging of individual members to an international fraternity.

The Presidency and also the General Secretariat offer their help in order to enable each national fraternity to establish regular financial management achieve this it is necessary to accept and acknowledge, that we are an Order, and its organization needs to be managed properly, with annual budgets and financial reports, particularly on the national level. We still have experienced, that national fraternities are living without this, struggling, as a result, with the lack of resources and with the lack of proper transparency, in which we, as secular Franciscans, should be good witnesses. This will also highlight the problem of failure to budget for the expenses of those in charge, what results in the unacceptable, namely that the council members, delegates, international councilors pay for their fraternal service and sometimes even for their participation at congresses or chapters out of their own family resources.

When the International Fraternity claims contributions, we do not have the mind of "tax collector", but rather to get each national fraternity and each individual member to face up to

their own responsibility. Contributions should be made according what is possible for each one, giving a real contribution, which is not an 'easy donation from what is leftover', but a sensible contribution which has an impact on our lives.

However, the situation of the International Fraternity, in terms of finances, has improved a lot. Every year a greater number of National Fraternities send their fraternal contributions to CIOFS, and these contributions correspond to the approved budget fully or at least in a part. This makes us feel more calm and more secure regarding the financial situation of the Order.

The Foundation "Beato Raimondo Lullo"

The Foundation "Beato Raimondo Lullo" (hereinafter "Foundation") was established on the basis of the last will and testament of Emanuela De Nunzio, former Minister of General Secretary of the Secular Franciscan Order (1990-2002). The Foundation is based in Rome, in accord with Emanuela De Nunzio's wishes. There is no time limit for the Foundation.

The Foundation is not for profit and pursues exclusively interests and social interests, organizing and supporting study, research, education and activities aimed at promoting and enhancing Franciscan tradition and culture. In particular, the correct interpretation of what was the intention behind the details of the will, means that the Foundation has the purpose of funding certain formation activities for the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order (CIOFS), with priority for the countries of Eastern Europe and Latin America and grant scholarships for secular or religious Franciscans who submit graduate theses on the nature, history or spirituality of the Secular Franciscan Order. Projects can cover a vast panorama - special formation programs, presentations, research, texts, and other educational resources that can help to improve Formation and Presence by animating and informing members of the Fraternities.

The following bodies of the Foundation have been established:

- The Board of Directors (C.d.A.)
- The Committee of Consultants and Financial Auditors
- The President and the Vice President.

The Board of Directors and the Committee of Consultants and Financial Auditors were appointed in 2015. The Councils convene at least twice a year (during the CIOFS Presidency meetings) to verify the situation and the Foundation's development. After establishing the organs of the Foundation, the International Fraternity was informed of the existence and purpose of the Foundation. On this occasion, the application form was prepared by the Foundation.

You can apply for funds that can be accessed by each Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order, National or Regional or Local, and by each individual person who is working in the formation of SFO members. Individual requests will have to be approved by the relevant National Council, which will then be the guarantor for the entire amount received in case of failure to carry out the project by the recipient.

Acknowledgments and conclusion

Brothers and sisters, we come to the end of the first three years of this six-year long mandate of the Presidency. It has been a challenge to do our job properly, but we have always felt the loving care of God wherever and whenever we intended to serve the Order.

For the entire Presidency and for me, it has been a privilege to offer our service in the way the Chapter has entrusted it to us. We have had to overcome many challenges. But the Lord has been at the center of our being and our actions. All our prayers and contemplation have strengthened us.

So first and foremost, we must thank the Lord, the giver of all good gifts received and returned, because it is only He who can give.

I personally thank all the members of the Presidency and all who have been around us with their commitment and dedication to the harmony and the good fraternal spirit in which we have exercised our own responsibilities.

To all the brothers and sisters with whom we have met during these three years of our lives and who are already part of them forever: Thank you.

To you my brothers and sisters, thank you. We have felt your love, and your support, encouraging us to carry on the service you have entrusted to us, and thank you all, who have been elected to a service and are thus serving our beloved Order, regardless on which level of the Order you are performing this service. We have to respond to the call of the Lord in an active and creative manner, because we have to discover day by day, how many gifts the Lord has given us, and how inventive and talented the secular Franciscan sisters and brothers are. The dedication and commitment of each of you is moving the Order ahead and is facilitating the life and the development of the Order. This is the responsibility of us all, united in one effort to revitalize our Franciscan and secular vocation.

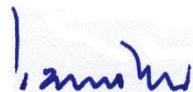
I know that only God is perfect, and in spite of all our good intentions, we must have made mistakes and omissions. Therefore, I ask you to forgive our shortcomings and our failures. We always wanted to serve the Order the best way we can, and we never had any intention to hurt anyone or to do any harm. However, if in any case where this has happened, I beg your pardon and I kindly ask you to forgive us.

As St. John Paul II teaches us in *Christifideles Laici*: we have to go out to the vineyard of the Lord, and build the Kingdom of God. This is our goal and the foundation of our secular Franciscan vocation. We have to do it in permanent communion with Christ, who says: "I am the vine and you are the branches". We have to do all what we do in close contact and close relationship with Christ, who is nourishing us through his Holy Spirit, with the caring love of our Heavenly Father.

With these words of the Holy Father that I have been praying during the last few days, I conclude the Report of the Presidency to our Order of the last three years, recommending all our efforts and work to God and to you, sisters and brothers.

Rome, November 5th 2017.

Your brother and minister



Tibor Kauser

CIOFS Minister General