

XIV General and VI Elective Chapter Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) Conclusions

Introduction

The XIV General and VI Elective Chapter of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) was held at the *Domus Pacis in Santa Maria degli Angeli*, Assisi, Italy, on November 1 to 9, 2014. This Chapter took place during the celebration of the Jubilee Year of St. Louis IX King of France, co-patron of the OFS, which commemorates the 800th anniversary of his birth. The opening liturgy was celebrated at the lower Basilica of Saint Francis and it was presided over by Archbishop Domenico Sorrentino, Bishop of Assisi-Nocera Umbra-Gualdo Tadino. At the end of the celebration, the Minister General, Encarnación del Pozo, led the Capitulars in a prayer to consecrate the whole Order to the Virgin Mary. The Chapter was attended by International Councilors and observers representing approximately seventy-five countries, including both constituted and emerging fraternities.

The Chapter ran very smoothly thanks to the hard work of the Presidency of the International Council of the OFS (CIOFS) and coordination team. Brothers and sisters from all around the world were informed of Chapter activities, almost instantaneously through social media, and were able to participate in some of the liturgies by live feed.

The Chapter expressed its appreciation to the Minister General, Encarnación del Pozo, and CIOFS Presidency members for their generous and tireless efforts on behalf of brothers and sisters worldwide. The CIOFS Presidency, in their witness of service and collaboration, gave evidence of a living fraternity.

The Minister General's report outlined successes and challenges. Much was accomplished through the CIOFS Presidency's guidance. Several initiatives such as Project Africa, Project China, and development projects in Haiti give evidence of the solidarity with our international family. The organization of OFS and Franciscan Youth (YouFra) Continental Congresses strengthened connections among neighboring national Fraternities and among YouFra members.

The Minister General also encouraged all OFS brothers and sisters to keep up an unconditional love for the Church and the Pope, and to give witness to life in fraternity. She also exhorted Capitulars to live simply and with moderation "*so as to be better able to share spiritual and material goods with their brothers and sisters, especially those most in need*". (Const. 15.3)

She also encouraged the new CIOFS Presidency to guide and animate the International Fraternity with love and conviction, keeping in mind the essence of the Order, thus giving reason for its own existence and role on behalf of the latter. She exhorted International Councilors to take their role and responsibility seriously, both at the national and international levels.

The Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS) is currently formed by Fr. Martín Bitzer, OFMConv., Secretary in turn, Fr. Amando Trujillo Cano, TOR, Fr. Francis Bongajum Dor, OFMCap., y Fr. José Antonio Cruz Duarte, OFM, President in turn. The latter presented the report, colegially prepared by CAS, which was received with particular attention, considering the relevance of this fraternal service to the OFS and YouFra fraternities throughout the world, which is marked with diverse hopes and challenges at the present time. The report presented a summary of the great variety of activities done in collegiality by the four General Spiritual Assistants as members of the CIOFS Presidency and within their respective Order.

The report from CAS also introduced some proposals and projects, which included the commitment to intensify their animation of friars of the First Order and TOR in their service of spiritual and pastoral assistance to the OFS and YouFra. The CAS also informed the Chapter of their proposal presented to the Conference of Ministers General of the First Order and TOR, asking them to promote the creation of a Conference of Major Superiors in those countries where they do not already exist. Such Conferences will help provide better coordination to the service of spiritual and pastoral assistance to the OFS and YouFra, and will facilitate the creation of new Conferences of National and Regional Spiritual Assistants to the OFS and YouFra, where these do not already exist.

Entrusted by the CIOFS Presidency, Benedetto Lino and Tibor Kauser led the Capitulars in an exploration of the central theme of the Chapter, “*How to manage an International Order like the OFS*”. This presentation was intended to stimulate a deep reflection on the living experience of brothers, sisters, and Spiritual Assistants throughout the history of the Order. It was followed by a discussion on diverse approaches to some points of the presentation. The rich sharing and fruitful discernment among Capitulars led them to conclude that Secular Franciscans are all called to holiness, and their Rule and General Constitutions provide them with a basis for this. They live out this call in their day-to-day experience as Christians in the world.

The General Chapter determined new areas of responsibility for the seven Councilors of the CIOFS Presidency. The change was made due to the previous uneven distribution of national fraternities and to establish a configuration that is more equally distributed, aligns more neighboring fraternities within the same group, and respects language groups, as far as possible.

Fr. Marco Tasca, OFMConv Minister General, paid a visit to the Capitulars and conveyed a message to them at the Chapter Hall. Fr. Michael Perry, OFM Minister General, sent a letter of greeting to the participants that was read to the assembly. Many other greetings arrived to the Chapter from members of the Franciscan Family, some in person and others in writing.

The elective session was presided over by Fr. Nicholas Polichnowski, TOR Minister General, on behalf of the Conference of Ministers General of the First Order and TOR. He also presided over the Eucharistic celebration at the upper Basilica of *San Francesco*, where the newly elected members of the CIOFS Presidency were installed. Elected members of the CIOFS Presidency were:

Tibor Kauser of Hungary, *Minister General*;

María Consuelo Núñez of Venezuela, *Vice Minister General*;

Ana Fruk of Croatia, *Presidency Councilor* for Europe Area 1 (German-English);

Attilio Galimberti of Italy, *Presidency Councilor* for Europa Area 2 (English-Italian);

Ana María Raffo of Peru, *Presidency Councilor* for Latin America & Spain (Spanish);

Silvia Diana of Argentina, *Presidency Councilor* for Latin America-Southern Cone, (Spanish-Portuguese);

Jenny Harrington of South Africa, *Presidency Councilor* for North America and Africa (English);

Augustine Yoon Young Hak, of Korea, *Presidency Councilor* for Asia and Oceania (English),

Michel Janian of Lebanon, *Presidency Councilor* for French speaking countries.

Capitulars were overwhelmed with the love and support shared among everyone participating in the Chapter, including the brother and sister from the Third Order of the Society of St. Francis of the Anglican Church. At the same time, everyone joined in the pain and suffering of so many people in the world, especially those Christians who are still persecuted in all continents, including OFS brothers and sisters.

Priorities

Management of the Order - Overarching Theme

After the presentation of the main theme and the subsequent discussions in work groups and in plenary sessions, the General Chapter approved the proposed project for reflecting and proposing alternative ways to guide and animate the OFS at the international level. It will involve the participation of all national fraternities for the next three years, as decided by the Capitulars. This theme now becomes the object of reflection and study by all fraternities of the OFS and YouFra, and is the overarching theme of all of our priorities.

This work of reflection and study will be based on the documents corresponding to the main theme of the Chapter and the conclusive reflections coming from the working groups, herein included. The result of the reflection and study by all professed brothers and sisters in the OFS, as well as proposals, should be sent to the CIOFS Presidency, which will then appoint an *ad hoc* Commission to integrate the most significant proposals in a document that will become the *Instrumentum Laboris* for the 2017 General Chapter. This document shall be sent to all National Fraternities in due time, before the said Chapter, and will have to circulate among the largest possible number of brothers and sisters, for its review and analysis, in preparation for the 2017 General Chapter.

Throughout the whole 2014 Chapter nine work groups were formed to discuss the different topics of the Chapter agenda, starting with the main theme, the General Minister's report, the round table and the new areas of the Presidency Councilors. The reflections from the working groups and the content of the main interventions during the Chapter have been analyzed and assembled by the Conclusion Commission as follows:

➤ **Formation**

Formation plays an essential role in both conversion to Christ and deepening our secular Franciscan vocation. The lack of authentic conversion is, by far, one of the most serious problems we are confronted with in our Order. One task would be to rediscover the richness and the call of our vocation which gives space to all vocations, including the call for a married life or to commit oneself with one or more private vows (cf. *Const.* 36).

To accomplish this, formation, both initial and ongoing, should be accessible to everyone, and national fraternities should engage in this uppermost priority. Capitulars have agreed that ongoing formation developed by the CIOFS Presidency has been a very important tool which reaches out to brothers and sisters at all levels of the Order, so each of the National Councils should look for the best way to make this material accessible to all members of their National Fraternity. This material should also provide a balance between the academic and the spiritual content.

The General Chapter recommends that:

1. The CIOFS Presidency continue with International Formation Courses for formators.
2. The CIOFS Presidency complete the initial formation Manual.
3. The Councils at different levels offer online resources for initial and ongoing formation and virtual teaching, including workshops for newly elected National Ministers and International Councilors.
4. The National Councils promote the ongoing formation of Spiritual Assistants.

➤ Family

Family was a significant topic during the General Chapter. A round table was dedicated to this topic presenting the testimony of Secular Franciscans from around the world in the service of those in the peripheries of society. Capitulars were very appreciative of this opportunity to know these experiences. During the interventions, the life of communion within the Trinity was presented as a model of love and communication for families.

The General Chapter strongly recommends the promotion and strengthening of the family life of Secular Franciscans through the following proposals:

1. To include the significance of sexuality and the sacrament of marriage in all OFS and YouFra formation programs.
2. To make OFS Fraternities places of caring and support for members living in particular difficulties or challenging family situations.
3. To encourage OFS Fraternities to organize family gatherings and in general “*share the important moments of the family life*” (Const. 24) giving opportunities to also share with YouFra and their families.
4. To promote praying and constructive dialogue in family. Whenever it is convenient and necessary “*the formation of groups of married couples and of family groups should be fostered*” (Const. 24, 2).

➤ Presence in the World

During the Chapter, the work groups reflected on the fact that “*it is about time for us to fully live up to our mission and to the expectations of the Church both as individuals and as an Order*” (Message of Saint John Paul II to the OFS General Chapter, 22 Nov. 2002, mentioned by B. Lino in his presentation). In regards to the participation in the mission of Evangelization, secular Franciscans are reminded they should give witness in words and actions.

In this spirit, Capitulars reflected on what the OFS Constitutions state: “*Participation in the service of sanctification, which the Church exercises through the liturgy, prayer, and works of penance and charity, is put into practice by the brothers and sisters above all in their own family, then in the fraternity and finally through their active presence in the local Church and in society*”. (Const. 17.4)

In addition, from the Minister General’s report we learned that the “Presence in the World Commission” of the CIOFS Presidency has become a privileged channel of information among national fraternities, especially when countries are affected by natural disasters or grave social conflicts. Therefore, National Councils are encouraged to establish a similar commission at the national level to maintain an ongoing communication and collaboration with the CIOFS Presidency Commission.

The Chapter also recommended the continuation of the diverse development projects that the CIOFS Presidency has promoted in Haiti, after the devastating earthquake that took place on January 12, 2010. The CIOFS Presidency’s visits and collaboration with other entities have made a difference for our affected brothers and sisters.

The General Chapter recommends that:

1. National Councils promote the study and implementation of the apostolic exhortation of the “*Joy of the Gospel*” (Evangelii Gaudium).
2. Active participation of the OFS at major church events, not only at diocesan but also at national and international level, be promoted.

3. The work on the postulation of the cause of saints of Secular Franciscans be continued. In order to do this, the CIOFS Presidency shall appoint the necessary members of this office and provide them with support and guidance to strengthen their work.
4. Special Projects: Projects being carried out by the CIOFS Presidency show how much the Order needs to pay attention to those national fraternities in which professing the faith is a challenge for Christian minorities.
 - Africa Project. The Chapter congratulates the members of the Africa Project, whose Phase II was approved by the CIOFS Presidency just before the General Chapter. This project will require hard work from its members and guidance and support from the CIOFS Presidency.
 - China Project: The Chapter also congratulates the CIOFS Presidency's work and commitment on behalf of China Project, and recommends that it continue supporting it.
 - Holy Land Project: The Chapter recommends that the CIOFS Presidency continue discussions on the logistics of having an international Fraternity in the Holy Land.
5. Secular Franciscans should intensify their participation and commitment to effectively care for God's creation in our world, considering the growing deterioration of ecological systems around the world, caused by human activities and manifested in diverse ways that are threatening the sustenance of all peoples -- especially the poor, their physical and social security, and the healthy development of present and future generations. (cf. *Const.* 18.4)

➤ Communications

Work groups concurred on the importance of having good communication at all levels. This demands an effort, not only in the publication of formation material, documents and Circulars on the part of the CIOFS Presidency, but also in creating a well-structured communication network reaching out to brothers and sisters at local fraternities. Translating documents has always been a very important challenge for the CIOFS Presidency. Strong communication efforts will also reinforce vocation outreach.

The Chapter recommends that:

1. The CIOFS Presidency establish a team to work on getting brothers and sisters with translation skills to help with this important task.
2. The CIOFS Presidency develop an official form, which would serve as a template for the annual report National Councils have to present. This will make it much easier for the National Councils and improve the likelihood of the completion of the report.
3. The CIOFS Presidency assess the possibility of producing an international magazine.
4. The CIOFS website be dynamic. This would be accomplished by:
 - Establishing parameters to manage the web page and social media
 - Updating the webpage more frequently
 - Including prayer intentions on the website
5. Secular Franciscans use social media to improve communication at all levels: Internet, Skype, Facebook, etc., mindful of their high responsibility, as members of the OFS, to be watchful for the content that they publicize on behalf of the Order, (cf. *Can.* 823.1)
6. Communication among national fraternities be strengthened by:
 - Better communication among International Councilors
 - Promoting activities among National Fraternities from the same geographic area to build stronger relationships among them

- Producing a National Ministers and Formators, and International Councilors Directory
- Twinning: Sharing the diverse gifts and talents of our fraternities

➤ **YouFra**

International YouFra Councilors worked throughout the Chapter in every subject discussed and presented recommendations to the General Chapter. They emphasized that OFS members should give testimony to YouFra in order to reaffirm the fraternity life between them. In this regard, they asked that special attention be given to the challenge of improving OFS-YouFra relationships, which should entail:

1. Training/forming OFS members and Spiritual Assistants so that they become familiar with their responsibilities and role towards YouFra, based on the many documents published by the CIOFS Presidency on this regard.
2. Giving opportunities to YouFra members to participate in responsible roles when they have expertise in those areas, such as websites, social networks, charity projects, design, secretariat accounting, etc.

➤ **Emerging Fraternities**

In her report, the Minister General stated that special attention should still be given to emerging national fraternities. This topic was also a main issue discussed during African Congresses.

The Chapter recommends that:

1. The CIOFS Presidency continue to support and guide emerging fraternities.
2. The CIOFS Presidency help emerging fraternities to find another OFS national fraternity with whom they can twin.

➤ **Finances**

The financial report of the General Treasurer and the budget of the CIOFS Presidency for the upcoming three years were presented by the Economic Commission and they generated a lively and healthy discussion among the Capitulars. Many clarifying questions were raised and several proposals were made. As part of the reflection on this issue, Capitulars were invited to turn to the principles and directives provided by the OFS Constitutions, in particular the following: *“In a family spirit, each brother and sister should make a contribution to the fraternity fund, according to each one's means, to provide the financial means needed for the life of the fraternity and for its religious, apostolic, and charitable works. The brothers and sisters ought to provide the means necessary for supporting the activities and the operations of the fraternities at higher levels, both by their financial assistance and by their contributions in other areas as well”.* (Const. 30.3)

As a result of this sharing of financial facts and reflections, the Chapter recommends that:

1. OFS brothers and sisters make a stronger commitment to supporting the Order financially
2. Fraternities develop income-generating projects to sustain their own national fraternities as well as the International Fraternity and poor national fraternities, based on the fact that brothers and sisters respond well to specific projects or funds

3. The CIOFS Presidency identify people who could assist National Councils in developing projects and writing grant proposals.
4. Volunteer donations from individual Secular Franciscans be promoted -- emphasizing to local fraternities the sense of belonging to an International Order to help improve the financial situation.

Epilogue

At the end of the XIV General Chapter and VI Elective Chapter of the OFS, all participants were thankful to the Most High and Glorious God, for giving them the opportunity to come together to celebrate the gift of such an international fraternity, gathered to pray, share, reflect, and discern the ways of the Lord for the OFS, in communion with YouFra, for the upcoming years. Blessed by the pilgrimage to Mount La Verna, where the closing Mass was celebrated, the Capitulars experienced a renewed grace to live the gospel in fraternity.

This fraternal sharing was framed by *the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties* (Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 1965) of all participants and the OFS National Fraternities they represented. Our brothers and sisters brought to the Chapter their sense of being part of the human family at the present time in our history, and their sense of belonging to the Secular Franciscan Order and the Franciscan Youth. They also celebrated and reflected on their communion with the Church and its pastors, especially with Pope Francis, which has brought, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, new hope and inspiration to many people, both inside and outside the Church. His example and *magisterium* bring a special motivation and challenge to the Franciscan Family.

Let these conclusions be a faithful companion to all the fraternities of the OFS and Franciscan Youth during their prayerful reflection, a torch that illuminates their meetings and chapters, as well as a compass to guide their commitment to live the gospel according to the secular Franciscan charism, in their family, in society and in the Church.

May our *great and wonderful Lord, God almighty, and merciful Savior*, grant his abundant grace to all secular Franciscans and Franciscan youth so that they may carry out God's holy and true command, with simplicity, true joy and perfect charity. May our Virgin Mother, Saint Mary of the Angels, intercede for us along with St. Francis, St. Clare, St. Louis, King of France and St. Elizabeth of Hungary.

Assisi, Italy, November 9, 2014