

End of Term Letter, outgoing National Minister, September 2018.

Dear All,

On this lovely feast of the Archangels, two weeks after our national electoral chapter, I wanted to write a few words to mark the completion of my two terms of office as National Minister. I can only write about a few of the memorable experiences I have shared and even this will be too wordy, I know.

I want to thank all members of both councils, 2012 - 2015 and 2015 – 2018, who have been good and faithful servants, driven hard, but rising to the challenges faced.

Looking back, I have many memories:

Sad: particularly the death of Fr Peter Hall OFM

Joyful gatherings - the Chapter of Mats was a very joyful event and the Youth Gather led to the beginning of Youfra and the amazing work developing Youfra in Gibraltar; we had a later period when many of us managed to go to Gibraltar for a gathering in which we were very well looked after and welcomed.

Events – there were a few other national events – a day on trafficking which taught us so much about this terrible abuse; collective prayer such as the novena for peace, prayer for care for creation; events for the Year of Mercy.

Other projects – in the last few months well4africa was launched and will continue (as we learned at the OFS/Youfra congress in Lithuania) since there is so much need in fraternities in poor countries. A personal joy was when an 11-mile walk, undertaken by a handful of people but sponsored by Ashford, St Teresa's parish raised 1000 euros! My parish was generous because they saw a way to help people with very real and basic needs that they knew they could trust to be used as intended.

Living Fraternity – over the past 6 years we have run out of handbooks and considered what members wish. Work on this has been delayed because we are still awaiting approval of the revised translation of the Rule which a team of members have collaborated to produce. This ended up being part of a major work especially during the last three-year term, as we were also asked to revise the translations of the General Constitutions and the Ritual. At the same time, national council members have also worked hard on the new National Statutes which have been approved and already circulated to regional ministers, for circulation to every member.

We introduced a new website which needs constant work also requires the support of members. Communications have changed at a pace we certainly do not keep up with but the councils of both terms recognise that we need to learn how, effectively, to use today's communication possibilities. A lot of work has gone into developing the website but there is a constant call for help from members as it is a huge task.

Capitation has been increased. Attention has been given to the needs of members who find themselves in situations where they seek withdrawal, sometimes permanent, sometimes temporary

Formation – we have seen major work on changing our initial formation, a major effort, undertaken by John Power, to whom we owe great thanks. The time taken to prepare for Profession has been extended to ensure those who are professed have a vocation to the OFS, and the new material is designed to give enough understanding to candidates who decide to make a lifelong commitment.

Finding a permanent seat – which really means an office. This led to 18 months at Barton – many of you contributed to this whether by generous donations or by physical help at the seat. This January saw our move to Arkley which Michael Martin, Roger Yelland and Xavier Frendo equipped with furniture and where Pam Thornton and I, with occasional other helpers, have started office work.

Visits: I have many warm memories of the many people I met whether at elections or at the various other regional events I had the privilege and joy of attending. Yes, there were eye-openers and a visit often provided a learning opportunity, for me as well as for those concerned.

I leave office with joy and excitement as you have a fresh and hard-working new National Council for which I thank God. I have met many members belonging to my Franciscan family and I have the sense that we all belong to something unique that we cherish and so must nurture, in the way that is right for each member, in the context in which each one lives. In my visits I notice how we choose which of our emblems we prefer– a Tau around our necks, our national badge/pendant or the international badge. It is good to have a choice so members choose the one they like best.

I know how much my own office depended on prayer – mine and that of all of you. As we have continued to decrease in numbers, each of us can ask discernment so that we can promote the Order. It can feel like we are a secret Franciscan order when people ask what do we do? Who are we? Thanks to our new formation materials, we have the tools we need to know and understand our particular nature and identity, our charism and our vocation. If we apply what we understand it will become much easier to answer questions. If we take our mission seriously, however small we feel our own contribution, we will witness to those around us and we should attract their attention, as Francis attracted others because of the graces and blessings he received and was willing to act upon.

We need to pray for Pope Francis, give time and attention to the documents he has written, especially as we recognise how much his work and concerns resonate with the concerns and life of Francis of Assisi. It is a time when the labourers who work to repair /rebuild/restore the Church as we are specifically called to do, are few. How can we start afresh in our local experience of church?

I greet everyone with fraternal affection. May our Lord bless our efforts to be faithful members of OFSGB. St Francis, St Clare, St Elizabeth pray for us.

Paula Pearce, September 2018.