

CONCLUSIONS OF THE XII GENERAL CHAPTER

OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER

November 15-22, 2008

The XII General Chapter took place in Hungary in order to conclude most appropriately the biennial celebration of the 8th centenary of the birth of the beloved Patroness of the OFS, Saint Elizabeth of Hungary. The closing celebration in the impressive setting of the primatial Basilica of Esztergom was a strong call to verify our lives as Secular Franciscans, on the backdrop of Saint Elisabeth's sanctity, under whose intercession the works of the Chapter took place.

The Chapter put itself in harmonious continuity with the two preceding General Chapters in the fundamental process of gaining an ever increasing awareness of the identity of Secular Franciscans and of their mission in the Church and in the world.

The key themes of the Chapter, the Profession of Secular Franciscans and their Sense of Belonging, masterly developed by the lecturers, Fr. Felice Cangelosi OFM Cap. and Emanuela De Nunzio OFS, offered full and expectant stimuli and precious indications to continue in the direction already undertaken.

The rich and vibrant report of the Minister General, Encarnación del Pozo, bore a strong witness to the commitment of the Presidency and to the great quantity of work accomplished in the past six years. The report provided a cue for the following reflections, which resolutely aimed at a continued commitment to formation and on a full assumption of the secular dimension of our lives with all the consequences that ensue from it. The OFS is the part of the Family that lives this dimension in all its fullness and it cannot fail in contributing this essential element to the mission of the entire Franciscan Family.

The Chapter was blessed by abundant gifts of spiritual and concrete reflections and suggestions: the report of the Minister General, Encarnación del Pozo, the report of the President of the Elective Chapter, Fr. Marco Tasca, OFM Conv. Minister General, on the "Beginning of the Charism", the report of the Conference of the General Spiritual Assistants presented by its President in turn, Fr. Irudaya Samy OFM Cap., the reports on the Emerging National Fraternities, on Formation, on the Presence in the World, and on the Franciscan Youth.

The Chapter acknowledged with joy that the Order is still in existence or is starting up in many countries, including in those areas where religious persecution, atheism and secularization have reduced the presence of the Church to a bare minimum or even wiped it out completely .

The Order has also made a strong reflection on itself. The exponential increase of activities, the service to be offered to the Emerging Fraternities and the increasing needs of the Order, also from the economic point of view, demand a firm commitment by each and everyone and a more effective and incisive communication.

It was also acknowledged with joy that Franciscan Youth is growing and strengthening in several countries but that the Order must also commit itself more actively and with more determination at all levels to responsibly fulfill its essential role in animating Franciscan Youth in their Christian and Franciscan vocational journey.

The Chapter was a great experience of sharing and fraternity. The fraternal joy, the happiness of being together with brothers and sisters from all over the world, especially from the poorest and persecuted countries, was for all a privileged moment of grace.

The sincerity and depth of the feelings shared by all during the Chapter is a concrete wealth that each capitular will have to share with all the brothers and sisters of their own countries.

The presence of several observers, including Franciscan religious from a number of countries, bore witness to the interest for the Order and for its development.

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At the conclusion of its works, the Chapter indicated the fields of action and the priorities to be implemented by the whole Order during the next six-year period.

The priorities of the General Chapter are as follows:

1. Formation
2. Communication
3. Franciscan Youth
4. Presence in the World
5. Emerging Fraternities

FORMATION

Formation remains the top priority of the Chapter for the entire Order.

The Chapter recognized the importance of the Formation Project, which has already been initiated, and has decided to continue in the same direction so as to fully implement the initial formation course in every part of the world. Great importance is attached to the formation of formators, and to the necessity of making sure that local Fraternities are reached by the Formation Project.

In addition to the topics already proposed, it is requested that the Formation Project include the following topics:

1. Social doctrine of the Church;
2. Better understanding of the significant social and political problems of the day;
3. Social and political commitment of Secular Franciscans in the world;
4. Development of aids for a more focused and deeper study of the SFO's own legislation - Rule, General Constitutions and Ritual; and
5. Most important documents of the Church and of the Magisterium.

The Chapter further recommends that the Presidency promote permanent Formation by proposing, to all the fraternities in the world, a central theme of annual formation and provide the necessary indications and aids to develop and study this theme.

Moreover, it is recommended that formation be implemented, not only at an intellectual level, but also on the practical level of concrete charity.

The Chapter recognizes that the sense of belonging, vocation to fraternity, and the importance and nature of the commitment of Profession are all fundamental elements in the life of Secular Franciscans that must be undertaken, underlined and re-proposed with strength in initial and permanent formation.

It is recognized that strong and qualified projects to promote vocations to the Secular Franciscan Order are urgently needed at all levels.

It is also recommended that joint formation meetings be organized between Secular Franciscans and Franciscan religious.

The Chapter also requests that the Presidency prepare adequate instruments for the formation of lay spiritual assistants and assistants who are not members of the First Order or the Third Order Regular.

COMMUNICATIONS

It is recognized that the Order “communicates” too little, both within and outside the Order.

Inside the Order, every effort has to be made to increase communications for the purpose of better knowing and understanding each other, and to implement initiatives both inside and outside of the Order.

It is essential that the International Councillors enter fully into their roles with respect to their own national fraternities and the Presidency, and that they communicate regularly in both directions.

It is also recommended that particular care be taken in the formation of International Councillors in this respect by developing specific materials that can be provided to all newly elected International Councillors by the Presidency Councillor for the area. It is necessary that fraternities at all levels open themselves to one another, most of all by way of accompaniment and “twinning” projects, especially towards “new” fraternities and fraternities in need. It is necessary that the Presidency undertake an active role in promoting and constantly urging support for this objective.

For the purpose of favouring a greater understanding and knowledge of the Order, inside and outside, the excellent work done on the website is recognized by the Chapter who formulates the wish to improve it by assuming all the necessary initiatives, including those of soliciting funds for this purpose.

Improvements are also requested to the database containing postal addresses and email addresses that can be accessible by all, including YouFra, to facilitate communication at all levels.

Outside the Order, it is necessary to establish effective and permanent contacts with the Church in all of its expression. Particular attention should be given to the local Churches so as to realize an active presence in the Church where people actually live their lives.

It is deemed important to identify contacts and ways to establish a fruitful collaboration with Catholic Third Orders, with non-Catholic Franciscan Third Orders and with all ecclesial movements and other movements of good-will that share the objectives of the SFO.

The moment has come to be courageous and visible for the service to and the witnessing of the Franciscan charism. For this reason, at all levels, the Order must take up its own responsibilities to be actively present in all the qualified social events and in the promotion of human rights, as well as Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation. The privileged instrument to achieve this end, which must be supported in every possible way, is Franciscans International.

FRANCISCAN YOUTH (YouFra)

The Chapter has recognized the excellent work performed during the past six years within Franciscan Youth and requests the Presidency to pursue this essential commitment in favor of Franciscan Youth by underlining the responsibility of the SFO towards YouFra so as to enhance its awareness and so that it may actively assume its responsibility.

It is recommended that a thorough distribution of fundamental YouFra materials, produced by the Presidency during the past six years, be undertaken.

It is requested that adequate tools be prepared concerning the selection and adequate preparation of fraternal animators at all levels.

Particular care and attention should be dedicated to emerging YouFra fraternities and that due care be taken in the formation of YouFra members as well as members of YouFra who have made their profession in the SFO.

It is essential that all members of YouFra be invited to all the significant events of the SFO and that a true communion and sharing of common projects be undertaken.

It is also requested that the necessary information to understand where the YouFra exist and the number of its members in different parts of the world be compiled.

PRESENCE IN THE WORLD

In this Chapter, the necessity for Secular Franciscans to fully assume their secularity has emerged with strength: to be present in the world with their “being” and their “doing” - in the political debate and in the courageous forming of just laws, in the promotion of the rights to life at all its stages, from conception to natural death - and to ensure that all those who suffer, those who are poor and those who are marginalized may enjoy conditions of life worthy of people redeemed by Christ (Rule 13 & Gen. Const. 18 &19).

For too long, the Order has not fully entered into its active mission in the world. The moment has come, and it can no longer be deferred, to “enter the city”, to exercise with determination and full visibility its own responsibilities to witness, and to promote justice, peace, human rights and the integrity of creation.

It is essential that the entire Order be present as such, and not only through the worthy initiatives of its individual members. It is important to re-discover the importance of recognizing oneself and of being one single body for the service of the Kingdom and the world so that it may be redeemed in Christ. The Order has begun to become fully aware of its world dimension and of the potential socio-political pressure that it can exert. It is its duty to use this presence in every corner of the world to effectively operate everywhere, and to become visible by promoting strong and courageous initiatives, including those in national and international government organizations.

EMERGING NATIONAL FRATERNITIES

Emerging Fraternities are the richness of the Order, which grows and expands for the evangelization of the world. They are the sign and the qualified contribution of the vitality of the Franciscan charism and of the Secular Franciscan charism in particular. They constitute a Christian and Franciscan witness, at times the only one in a number of countries in the world. It is often a fruitful presence, though persecuted and hindered, even to the point of risking its life, which maintains and nourishes the heart of faith in all corners of the world.

The emerging national fraternities must be followed with very particular care and attention.

The Presidency is requested to designate a Presidency Councillor for the purpose of concretely assuming this responsibility for the emerging national Fraternities.

It is necessary to ensure that each emerging national Fraternity be accompanied by another established national Fraternity. Unfortunately, up until now, established national fraternities have not always been sensitive to this need for accompaniment. It is strongly recommended that each established national fraternity respond, with generosity, promptness and a sense of responsibility, to meet this essential need.

It is also requested that the possibility of raising specific funds to support the journey of poorer emerging national Fraternities be studied.

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The themes on which capitulars concentrated in this Chapter are not new. Actually, it would suffice to re-examine the Conclusions of the two preceding General Chapters to realize this. For this reason, it seems important that each Secular Franciscan and all Councils at all levels go back to the Conclusions of the two previous Chapters to compare them with the present ones.

The Chapter has insisted on the very same themes and with the same arguments because evidently it was felt that the previous Conclusions were not satisfactorily implemented in the whole Order, and because there is the awareness that it is not at all possible to change priorities until the desired changes and actions have been implemented and consolidated.

The Conclusions demonstrated that the Order, at its highest level, wants to abandon the stage of generic and academic declarations of intent to proceed with determination to a concrete and courageous phase of implementation and witness. It is not sufficient to enunciate high, noble and necessary objectives which, after all, are already the foundation of our own Form of Life, the Rule and the General Constitutions. Once the objectives are set, it is necessary to continuously bring them back to memory and challenge ourselves with them so as to verify their faithful and complete implementation.

The Presidency,

* shares, makes its own and receives with attention all the requests and recommendations of the Chapter and commits, for whatever falls within its responsibilities, to implement them to the best of its ability;

* formulates the following observations and recommendations for all the Fraternities of the whole world:

1. The Conclusions of all Chapters are binding for the Presidency but also, and perhaps even more, for all the Fraternities of the whole world at all levels and for each and every Secular Franciscan. Therefore, they must be the object of a continuous and attentive consideration by all. The entire Order, as a single body, has to strive in every possible way to implement them. It is, therefore, requested to do everything possible at all levels to make known, implement and verify the objectives set by the Chapters.

2. The effort to deepen and assume the proper identity of Secular Franciscans must continue more intensely than ever according to what has been indicated by the Chapter and by the Formation project.

3. The commitment to work in order to achieve a true communion of “being” and “doing” as Franciscan Family must grow and the OFS must be a qualified actor in this process.

4. It is fundamental that the International Councillors, in the process of gaining awareness of their essential role, realize that their responsibility goes beyond their own National Fraternities and towards the Presidency to include the whole Order in its entirety.