

**CONCLUSIONS
FROM THE XIII GENERAL CHAPTER
OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER
October 22-29, 2011**



INTRODUCTION

The XIII General Chapter was held at the Centro Pastoral Santa Fé in Sao Paulo, Brazil. It was attended by brothers and sisters from all over the world who reflected on the theme, *Evangelized to Evangelize*, and the sub-theme, *Specific Vocation for a Particular Mission*.

We were overwhelmed by the affection of the brothers and sisters from the hosting National Fraternity of Brazil and by the fraternal attention of the whole Franciscan Family of Sao Paulo, giving testimony to the life-giving union made possible by our common Seraphic Father, St. Francis of Assisi.

The comprehensive report of the General Minister made us aware of the tremendous amount of work performed by the CIOFS Presidency and the collaboration offered by some of the brothers and sisters of the Order during the past three years. At the same time, it was frustrating for us to hear of the lack of cooperation from some of the national fraternities.

As this Chapter unfolded, we experienced moments of great intensity during which we became painfully aware of the incredibly difficult realities lived in different parts of the world by the brothers and sisters who suffer from extreme poverty, from religious persecution, from natural calamities, and even from genocide. All of these moments disturbed our consciences, and called us to rise from our complacency and inward-looking tendencies to reach out in solidarity to those who suffer. In this regard, we drew inspiration from the story of our Lady of Aparecida who chose to identify herself with the ones who suffer.

As we come to the end of this Chapter, our hearts are filled with gratitude to the Lord, but we also feel challenged to carry on the commitments which we have undertaken, especially to renew our particular mission of evangelizing as Secular Franciscans in all the areas of our lives. The Lord of our History continues to speak to us through the signs of the times and calls us to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom to all, especially to the poor, the persecuted and the oppressed; to cure those who are blind because of their lack of faith and love; to set our

globalized society free of the structures of sin that dehumanize millions of brothers and sisters. Our Order is therefore called to a renewal, from the inside out, that will lead us to be more faithful and generous instruments of God's Kingdom, and a more credible and efficacious presence in temporal affairs, casting upon them the light of the Gospel and ordering them according to God's plan for the world.

1. FORMATION

This Chapter has declared once again that formation is fundamental to the life of the Order. It is necessary to deepen our sense of belonging to the OFS and our identity so that we can project our mission to the world. This sense of belonging should become more concrete in the new realities upon which the Chapter has reflected, taking into account the difficulties that occur within the Order.

1.1. On Going Formation

This sense of belonging should help to sensitize us to the economic needs of those around us and to engage us in a spirit of co-responsibility and solidarity; firstly, deep into the Order at its various levels; and, secondly, in our projection outward, especially to those who suffer from the unjust structures of a global society that excludes and exploits. The creation of a formation process for fraternities in Africa is urgently required.

This Chapter has understood that our mission in the world today consists of living and witnessing to a life characterized by fraternal love because, as we reflect on our vocation, we conclude that indeed it consists in being authentic Christians and Franciscans. In this task, knowing the Church's Social Doctrine is indispensable, ecumenism is a necessity, and family values are a priority. Franciscans must be agents of social transformation.

A serious ongoing formation should enable fraternities to be open to the human realities in which they find themselves (family, work, community building, ecology, etc..) so that they will be able to project outward in a social context that is challenging and which is characterized by violence, hunger, poverty, and the suffering of millions of people. This formation, however, must also be aimed at becoming aware of the proper administration of the Order's financial and human resources.

The family

The OFS desires to place the family at the centre of its attention and to give it a more prominent position in the life of fraternities.

This Chapter encourages fraternities to facilitate the growth of families by offering support and formation and, if necessary, forming small groups of families within individual fraternities (refer to *OFS Const. 34*).

Young people who are concerned, and rightly so, about the important issue of sexuality, need help from Secular Franciscans. In response, Secular Franciscans must begin by offering a concrete witness to these young people by their way of life. The Chapter suggests that Blessed John Paul II's writings on *The Theology of the Body* be included in the formation programs of the OFS and YouFra in order to enable its members to rediscover the beauty of sexuality, marriage, and family, and the living of these gifts according to God's plan.

The sharing of the experiences of married members of the OFS, mature and prepared, with YouFra during their meetings, will help these young people to become true prophets and signs of contradiction in the world.

1.2. Initial Formation

Initial Formation should place its emphasis on human formation, affectivity, solidarity, and the experience of love in fraternity, supported with a practical methodology and a pedagogy that uses example as a primary learning tool.

1.3. Promotion of Vocations

Finally, the promotion of vocations continues to be necessary within all national fraternities, as the General Chapter of 2008 exhorted. In this sense, the orientations of the CIOFS must allow for the promotion of the OFS, especially in those regions where fraternities are suffering from the process of aging.

1.4 Spiritual Assistance

A wider distribution of the *Statutes for the spiritual and pastoral assistance to the OFS* is recommended, with a particular emphasis on the role of Secular Franciscan Spiritual Assistants.

2. COMMUNICATION

The following themes are presented in this section:

1. The role and duties of the International Councillor; and
2. The Web Page.

I. The role and duties of the International Councillor

In answer to the appeal from the 2008 General Chapter (Hungary), the CIOFS Presidency recommended to the Capitulars a document entitled *The Role and duties of the International Councillor*. This Chapter strongly recommends the distribution of this document to all National Councils as well as to all International Councillors (including those who were not present at this Chapter) so that it can be studied and put into practice.

II. The CIOFS Web Page

The great work done until now requires not only a word of thanks to all the brothers and sisters who are committed to it, but also an active collaboration with them. This Chapter asks all Secular Franciscans from around the whole world who have blessed with the necessary skills to work with this technology, to offer, according to their possibilities, concrete support to those who are already working on the Web Page.

There is also a need for persons who can translate documents and articles into the four official languages of the OFS: Italian, Spanish, English, and French.

3. FRANCISCAN YOUTH

Franciscan Youth, being a beautiful presence from which we can learn and not just a promising future of the OFS, remains a priority for the Order at all its levels.

This Chapter continues to insist on the responsibility of the OFS to accompany youth in YouFra in accordance with the documents that define their relationships, and which are available on the website of the Order.

To foster communion between the OFS and the YouFra, the Councils of the OFS must include representatives from YouFra, both in the organization and the holding of joint meetings. This Chapter invites both the OFS and YouFra to take advantage of these joint meetings in order to study the *OFS Rule*, the *General Constitutions* and YouFra Documents.

In accompanying youth, Fraternal animators should promote content and a formative methodology that will enable youth to assume the responsibilities of family and social life.

Similarly, respecting "the diversity and complementarity of forms, levels, tasks and responsibilities" (CL 42), the Councils of the OFS should seek to involve YouFra in the conduct of political and social initiatives.

This Chapter invites the Presidency and the OFS national fraternities to pay greater attention to the emerging fraternities of YouFra and to facilitate their growth.

To improve communication and exchanges among the fraternities of YouFra, the Chapter invites YouFra National Councils to assist in the maintenance of an international YouFra website which will be released soon.

4. PRESENCE IN THE WORLD

Since "the lay faithful are never to relinquish their participation in 'politics'" (*Christifideles Laici*, 42), it is necessary to underline the importance of political education for citizen advocacy, based on the social doctrine of the Church.

This Chapter urges OFS Councils, at all levels, to organize regular political education classes that will help members to acquire the skills necessary to respond without delay to what the Church asks of us at this time.

This Chapter invites Secular Franciscans to implement initiatives aimed at the integral development of individuals and peoples who suffer from poverty, who have been denied their human rights, and who have experienced natural calamities.

Secular Franciscans should pledge themselves to the protection of the family, of social rights and education that promote the integral development of children and young people, using all socio-political means that may be at their disposal.

In their efforts, they should look for and include all the brothers and sisters in different disciplines and specialties who are prepared to offer the talents that they have received from God for the common good. When appropriate, collaboration with other institutions or church and civilian organizations should be explored.

With prudence, the Order should strive to be visible within the public sphere, utilizing social mass media as appropriate but always in a wise and non-improvised manner.

5- EMERGING FRATERNITIES

Among the five priorities of the Order, the Chapter identifies the opportunity to support emerging national fraternities as a work area that needs immediate attention. Currently, there are 42 emerging national fraternities.

Particular attention should be given to the commitment of established national fraternities to support emerging national fraternities, so that these emerging realities are accompanied in order to decrease the sense of isolation that they may experience. The distribution of resources, including formation materials, and visits between fraternities should play an important role in this effort.

Similarly, this Chapter endorses that emerging fraternities represent a richness for 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 Secular Franciscan charism present in the world.

São Paulo October 29 2011