



ORDO FRANCISCANUS SAECULARIS

Consilium Internationale

Via Vittorio Putti, 4/int. 6 - 00152 Roma

Tel. +39 06.45471722 Fax +39 06.45473094

E-mail: ciofs@ciofs.org

www.ciofs.org

Circ. 30/08-14
Prot. N. 2335/11

Madrid, 5 July 2011

To the SFO National Ministers of Europe
SFO International Councillors
SFO National Formators
SFO National YouFra Animators
SFO National Spiritual Assistants

YouFra National Presidents and Councils
YouFra National Spiritual Assistants

Dear brothers and sisters,

May the Lord give you peace!

I am pleased to announce and to convoke the **First Secular Franciscan Order – Franciscan Youth (SFO-YouFra) European Congress**. This Congress will be held **from July 9th to 15th, 2012 in Lisieux, France**.

This Congress will mark a significant milestone for the Secular Franciscan Order as for the very first time, since the birth of our Order, Secular Franciscans from the whole of Europe will meet together as a group. YouFra, even though it has existed since the early 1950s, have **already experienced 5 YouFra European Congresses**, the last one being in 2009 in Lithuania. Asia, Africa, and Latin America have all been benefitting from continental gatherings of the SFO-YouFra for a number of years.

Europe has not yet reaped the richness and fruits of such a joint gathering. During this First European Congress, some sessions will be conducted jointly with the SFO and YouFra while others will be separate sessions for the SFO and YouFra. It will be a great joy to live moments of grace together, drawing strength from one another and reinforcing our bonds of vocation and communion.

With joy, I therefore address this invitation to:

1. National Ministers, National Formators, National YouFra Animators, International Councillors and National Spiritual Assistants of the:
 - constituted SFO National Fraternities of: Austria, Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Czech Republic, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Ukraine, Hungary; and
 - emerging SFO National Fraternities of: Albania, Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Moldova, Norway, Russia; and

2. National Presidents and Councils, and National Spiritual Assistants of the Franciscan Youth of:
 - Albania, Belarus, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, France, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Ukraine; and
 - Representatives of the following realities: Cyprus, Finland, and Switzerland for SFO; Slovakia and Hungary for YouFra

This First SFO-YouFra European Congress will offer all of us the opportunity of coming to KNOW EACH OTHER and of understanding the different realities of the SFO and the YouFra which exist within the various countries in Europe. We will celebrate it with the purpose of: “*knowing each other, understanding and loving each other, so as to learn how to live together to accomplish the mission which is ours in the Europe of today*”.

We will dedicate a significant portion of our time to exchanging knowledge, and to reflecting on our secular and Franciscan identity as it is lived in the different countries of Europe. We will have to learn to appreciate more fully our common Franciscan and secular identity, and experience the unity of the SFO despite the diversity of its members, and to respond together to the challenges that face our *old* continent.

In his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Europe* June 2003, the Blessed John-Paul II posed this grave question to Europe:

« *When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?* (Lk 18.8) Will he find faith in our countries, in this Europe with its ancient Christian tradition? This is an open question, which clearly reveals the depth and the drama of one of the most serious challenges which our Churches are called to face. » (§47) ... **and to which our Fraternities are called to confront.**

« *Church in Europe*, the New Evangelization is the task set before you! Rediscover the enthusiasm of proclamation.....*let the proclamation of Jesus, which is the Gospel of hope, be your boast and your whole life!* » (§45)... **SFO Fraternities in Europe, rediscover the enthusiasm of the proclamation of Jesus!**

Let us therefore regain the awareness of our presence as Secular Franciscans and Franciscan Youth in «the various responsibilities in civil life, the economy, culture, health care, education and politics». There is a need to rediscover the truth about family, as an intimate communion of life and love, open to procreation of new persons, as well as its dignity as *domestic Church* and its share in the mission of the Church and in the life of society. (§90)

We want to accept these challenges and **to engage ourselves anew** at the beginning of this 3rd Millenium. Our Rule and Constitutions call us to undertake courageous initiatives, concrete and consistent with our faith (cf. Rule 15). This is why the Congress will deepen the relationship of Secular Franciscans with family, life in society and political life.

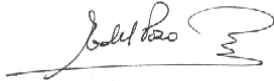
Why Lisieux? The Franciscan Youth of Europe hope to draw from the evangelical dynamism of Theresa of the Child Jesus, the *little* flower and co-patroness of missions, and discover the similarities between the doctrine of the youngest Doctor of the Church and the teachings of the *little* poor man of Assisi. Zélie Martin, the mother of St. Theresa, was also a member of the Secular Franciscan Order. The liturgical memorial day of Louis and Zélie Martin is celebrated on the date of their Wedding Anniversary, July 12th. Lisieux therefore appeared to be a special place for this common project, to reveal the grace of belonging to the SFO and YouFra, and to arouse a new missionary zeal in all of us.

To organize this congress, a Working Commission has been formed, composed of European members of the CIOFS Presidency, along with a General Assistant of the SFO and YouFra, Fr. Ivan Matic, OFM.

Details about the Congress will be provided in the near future regarding its organization, participation, etc. but, for now, please reserve these dates, and do not hesitate to share any of your suggestions and expectations.

In the meantime, we entrust the fruits of this Congress to the maternal intercession of Mary, *Spouse of the Holy Spirit*, to Saint Theresa of the Child Jesus and to the Blessed Couple Louis and Zélie Martin.

Your sister,



Encarnación del Pozo,
Minister General of the SFO

