

REPORT OF THE PRESIDENCY
Of the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order
to the GENERAL CHAPTER 2008

"The Church expects from the Secular Franciscan Order ... a great service to the cause of the Kingdom of God in today's world ... that It presents itself to the world as a "community of love" (Rule, 26). The Church expects from you - Secular Franciscans - a brave and coherent testimony of the Christian and Franciscan life that lends itself to the construction of a more, fraternal and more evangelical world for the realization of the Kingdom of God.

*You Secular Franciscans, live- through your vocations - your belonging to the Church and to society as inseparable realities ... **Perhaps martyrdom of blood is not asked of you, but certainly, what is requested of you is a coherent and firm testimony of the fulfilment of the promises made at Baptism and Confirmation, renewed and confirmed by Profession in the Secular Franciscan Order. In virtue of it is Profession, the Rule and General Constitutions must represent for each of you the point of reference of daily experience, stemming from a specific vocation and a precise identity.***

If the Spirit truly encourages you to reach the perfection of charity within your secular state "it would be a contradiction to be content with a mediocre life, lived according to a minimal ethic and superficial religiosity" (Novo Millennio Ineunte, 31). It is precisely in committing oneself with conviction in favor of this "high degree of ordinary Christian life to which I have invited the faithful at the end of the great Jubilee of 2000." (JP II.)

Introduction

Six years have passed since the General Chapter, in which this Presidency - which is ending its time of service - was elected. It began its task under the strong influence of the Message from Pope John Paul II, to the Chapter and to the entire Order, which marked with an indelible sign the passing of those six years. Now, in accordance with Article 17.2 (d) of the CIOFS statutes, we present ourselves in order to render an account of our performance and to inform you of the situation of our Order at this very moment. As in the previous three-year-period, there have been achievements and frustrations that we have had to share with you, so that the General Chapter exercises its maximum responsibility in the animation and guidance of the Order, as well as confirming or rectifying the directions undertaken.

We also believe that it is this Presidency's responsibility - as a consequence of the lived experiences during these years - to propose some challenges for the future of our Order for the purpose of being considered and enhanced by the Chapter and, as the case may be, of being commended to the new Presidency with the aim of continuing on the path of

coherent and progressive continuity undertaken by the Order such as Pope John Paul II also exhorted us in 2002.

These six years have been lived with a sense of trepidation by all the members of the Presidency. At first it seemed like an eternity but, as we have become intimately involved in the life of the Order, our service seemed to last but the time of a whisper. Some projects have been completed, some are works in progress and others have not even begun.

This report will specially focus on the three-year-period 2005-2008, because exhaustive information has already been presented for the previous three-year-period in the Chapter previous to 2005 that you already have in your folder. We are not going to present everything that is written there because there is not enough time; we will present the main points, leaving the remaining ones to your responsible sense of duty to become fully acquainted - individually or as a group - with the information we deem basic as a starting point for the following six years.

PART I

1. Starting Point: Conclusions of General Chapters 2002 & 2005

As you may remember, the previous Chapters led - through their conclusions - to the action to be taken at that certain time of the Order's history. In 2002, the conclusions focused on the following:

- Formation
- Presence in the world
- Franciscan Youth
- The Economy
- Spiritual Assistance
- Vital reciprocity in the Franciscan Family

Those goals, on which we have provided extensive information in the previous Chapter, have continued stating the priority activities of the CIOFS Presidency together with the decisions and conclusions of the last Chapter from 2005, which were the following:

- _ The SFO's mission and witness in today's world
- _ The maturation of the Order's own identity
- _ To enrich our Order's information and communication
- _ To find solutions to the CIOFS economic shortages by defining the contributions of each national fraternity in cooperation with International Councillors
- _ To promote the Web Page as an indispensable tool of communication for the SFO, thus eliminating the printed Bulletin.
- To promote and consolidate the emerging national Fraternities and also the new and beginning cells of the SFO in several countries around the world.
- _ To develop training materials to facilitate and promote the journey of young Franciscans toward the SFO.

Below, we will be able to see how the decisions of both Chapters have been developed and to what extent, especially regarding those referring particularly to the period 2005-2008.

2. SFO International Fraternity Situation

a) Presence, consistency, initiatives:

Such as it is reported in detail in the chart the SFO is present, at least, in 110 countries in the world with:

- 65 constituted national fraternities
- 42 national emerging fraternities [[amended at conference to 44](#)]
- 3 entities working towards canonical establishment of the first local fraternities

The numeric consistency of SFO stays at around 400,000 professed active members but we cannot confirm this with accuracy because - as you will see at the time of the statistical presentation - only 51 national Fraternities, 43 established ones and 8 emerging ones, out of the 105 existing ones, have responded to-date. We are attaching the report on the countries that, in spite of multiple requests, have not responded.

Another comment we must make is the feeling that, in some national Fraternities, the SFO numeric consistency is "covered" due to the economic repercussion, which brings another severe problem that must be responsibly considered by the General Chapter.

The Franciscan Youth is present in 64 countries in the world with 30 recognized national fraternities and 34 emerging national fraternities.

We are able to observe a reduction and aging of the Order in the so-called "Western world", being more evident in Europe. This phenomenon provokes tiredness and discouragement in the National Councils, which don't know how to face what seems to be a charismatic and spiritual crisis. In countries of the so-called "First world", for many people, the priority seems to be possessions (consumerism), comfort and the hedonism and not the "being" and spiritual values. We have to place more strength to our adhesion to the Lord and to the fidelity to our vocation and to be missionaries for our own Order.

Even in Latin America, although not in all National Fraternities, the aging of many Fraternities is observed, in contrast with the vigour and rejuvenation of some others Fraternities. I have been surprised at finding in some National Councils (Brazil, Peru', etc.) that the Regional Ministers are in their twenties!

Nevertheless, the SFO lives, with great joy, a solid and sustained growth in Africa, Asia, and the Slavic countries. It is obvious that the situations are very diverse in these areas. In Africa we find the most noteworthy and booming development, but the formation of brothers and sisters has to be taken care of in depth, particularly in some national, emerging and established Fraternities where it is deficient.

But not all realities are like that. In Africa, we have stimulating examples, some of which are here with us at the Chapter. Meanwhile, in Asia, the commitment of lay Franciscans is based on a more solid and demanding training. What must draw our attention is the development of the Order and of the Franciscan Youth in the countries of Asia, especially in Southeast Asia and in the Middle East where Christianity is a small minority and many of its political regimes are not democratic.

Thus, we can see with astonishment how some countries have a numerical decrease and others have an increasing number that we may call spectacular and that must be accompanied with special care. However, the Presidency deems that we have touched bottom in regards to the decrease in numbers and that an evident, sustained and solid restart is beginning to take place.

2. Omitted

3. Centenary of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary

Since November 17 2006, we have been celebrating the 800th Anniversary of the birth of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, which we will close tomorrow at the Esztergom Cathedral and which has been followed with great interest by the entire Order. Both the circular letters, which have given details about the life of the patron saint and the formation course concerning the values lived by Saint Elizabeth, were well received, and have made a great impression in all the National Fraternities.

It's a pleasant duty to thank the Commission appointed by the Presidency for having assumed the responsibility of making this event an effective tool in the life, formation and spirituality of our Fraternities. Thanks then to the brothers and sisters, Tibor Kauser, SFO, (coordinator), Lori Piper, SFO, medieval historian specializing in Saint Elizabeth and author of the formation topics, to the marriage of Francesco and Antonella Mattioco and to Fr. Michael Higgins, TOR, the current Minister General of his Order, replaced on the commission by Fr. Amando Trujillo Cano, the new TOR General Assistant.

4. Relationship with the Franciscan Family

The Conference of the Franciscan Family

The General Minister, represented three times by Benedetto Lino, either because of serious family reasons or because of the topic to be discussed at a particular meeting, has always participated actively and with her own proposals in the 13 CFF meetings.

Significant issues have been discussed at the meetings in order to continue the process of growth as a Family and with the awareness that it is necessary to show ourselves united

in the world and in the Church as the Family of Francis of Assisi in its single, charismatic expression and origin.

Things are not easy. The path has slopes and it requires effort, strength and conviction on the part of all its components, since we were all born contemporaneously from the same Francis of Assisi. However, in order to progress on this journey, the SFO has to be fully convinced of the equal dignity of all the components of the Franciscan Family and not limit itself to being passive members of that Family. The SFO has the same responsibility as the other members of the Family in order for it to be significant in the Church and in today's world.

I would dare to affirm that, in this historical moment, the SFO feels more responsible than the other members of the family, and more aware of belonging to the same Franciscan Family called forth by the Holy Spirit (R.1) on the basis of the "unifying" role promoted by our Rule. We fully believe in our Family and we are willing to grow and mature within a path of mutual conversion and affirmation of our charismatic identity.

Through the capitulars, I invite the entire Order to live and defend with conviction and without any kind of inferiority complex, the equal dignity of charism, belonging, and identity of each according to their particular vocational expression of the Franciscan family.

Relationship with the First Order and the TOR

Through the Ministers and vicars general, the relationship with the First Order and the TOR has been fraternal, fluid and stimulating. We have always been treated with delicate sensibility and several details which demonstrate to us their interest and the awareness of their responsibility, whether through the direct attention to the General Minister and the CIOFS Presidency or by means of the exercise of Spiritual Assistance and the pastoral care to the International Fraternity. We have been taken care of in all of our needs and even in our "dreams" for the Order. The Conference of the Ministers General of the First Order and the TOR have so far developed harmoniously the implementation of the "Altius Moderamen" even under particularly difficult circumstances.

During this three-year-period, the CIOFS Presidency has received the Pastoral Visit from the Conference of General Ministers, made by Fr. Jose Rodriguez Carballo, OFM General Minister on April 28 2006.

The General Minister had been invited to participate in the respective General Chapters. In regards to General Chapters of the OFMConv. and TOR, we have been expressly requested to directly address the Chapter about the SFO.

At the Chapter of the OFM Conventuals, the Minister General gave an address, together with the Conventual General Assistant - Fr. Martin Bitzer, OFM Conv, after which followed a dialogue with the capitulars lasting a full hour.

Doug Clorey, in the name of and on behalf of the General Minister, participated in the TOR Chapter.

Regrettably, we could not participate in the OFM Extraordinary General Chapter, due to the unexpected unavailability of the SFO General Vice Minister, caused by his wife's last minute urgent surgery. It was not possible to get a substitute for him. Due to the unexpected and untimely absence at this Chapter to which she had been invited, together with the entire CFF, during the last evening of the Chapter, she prepared and sent a message to the Capitulars regretting our unfortunate absence and expressing the SFO's hopes and dreams and thanking them for the spiritual assistance that so many local fraternities receive from the OFM brothers throughout the world.

During the General Chapter of the OFM Capuchins, the original "Apostolic Papal Bull" by which Paul VI approved the 1978 Rule, was returned to us. It had been kept in the historical archive, as requested by Manuela Mattioli, first SFO General Minister, due to the lack of an International Council Headquarters. We hereby thank Fr. John Corriveau, Fr. Mauro Johri and Fr. Felice Cangelosi for the extreme diligence employed to retrieve this significant document and for delivering it to the SFO, who will now be its new guardians.

8th. Centenary of the Birth of the Charism

We are fully living that precious time corresponding to the commemoration of the birth of our charism. We are approaching the time when the Church had officially acknowledged, for the first time, one of Francis of Assisi's basic "forms of life", by the approval of the Rule of the "First Order".

I hope, wish and strongly commend the new Presidency to make sure that the SFO be present in these events as actively as possible by "feeling" and "being" authentic main players so as to render them life-giving events capable of re-founding our charism by returning to the source of the evangelical, ecclesial, fraternal and social intuition of Francis of Assisi.

I beg of you: **the SFO must not and cannot trail behind, or move at the pace allowed by, the other components of our Family.** The SFO has to re-claim, and I'm consciously using "re-claim", its own place in these family events. The life experiences of our Order must be known and well present to the rest of the family. I do believe that the First Order, the Second Order and the Third Order Regular (at all levels) need the knowledge that we can offer about the feelings and needs of the present world where all our brothers and sisters are concretely and fully immersed as people who live in the "ordinary" circumstances and problems related to work, family, politics, education and science, including situations of extreme poverty and all kinds of misery, remaining steadfast in their vocation and dedicating without limit to the neediest and the "lepers" of our day.

Dear capitulars, we must play our role convincingly and credibly, because we need to bear witness to our vocation by being exemplary citizens, Christians and Franciscans so

as to be "heard" inside our family by all its components, to be able to project ourselves and live our vocation as "one" before the Church and the society of our times. We do not want to, or can we afford the luxury of losing another historical opportunity to present ourselves as the Family of Francis in its entirety, capable of offering today a word and witness of authentic evangelical fraternity. Therefore, all of us have to insist, with the necessary conviction, time and time again, when necessary - you, in your countries, the Presidency, before the Conference of the Franciscan Family and the Congregation, if necessary.

Franciscans International

During the last year, in Franciscans International, some changes have occurred in accordance with the statutes that govern this institution, which is very much cared for by our Family. The SFO, by means of its members (Attilio Galimberti, Ana Maria Olmedo, John F. Pacelli, and including Benedetto Lino, Doug Clorey, and the General Minister) has cooperated so as to render this transition phase in the executive management as serene and smooth as possible. We have gone through some strong tensions but the Lord's spirit has prevailed and we have concretely experienced "His Holy Operation".

The situation we've gone through has had many positive aspects, the first of them being the enhanced awareness of the Conference of the Franciscan Family in regards to the promotion, development and sustainability of this institution, which is the only one where our entire Family is simultaneously represented. We hope and wish that the new opening stage, including the creation of the "Franciscans International Foundation" promoted with the consistent donation of a person from Singapore (Mavis Khoo), may imply a new launching of the founding goals of Franciscans International with a spirit of fraternal understanding at the service of the most needy in our society, of their unalienable rights of dignity and of respect for their lives.

I think the SFO, in each national and international Fraternity, must strongly commit to Franciscans International, even if we cannot provide economically support, as all of us live out of our own work and have to primarily take care of our own families and our Order. We must, at least, with the generous donation of persons, offering our talent and of time, to be at the service of the causes which are proposed by Franciscans International. And, those who may economically cooperate must know they have the duty to do so, not only as individual persons but also as members of the Order to which s/he belongs, bearing in mind that our profession commits us and involves our entire life and actions.

PART II

1. Activities of the CIOFS Presidency:

The CIOFS Presidency, through its mission of animating and guiding the International Fraternity (CC.GG. 73.b) and for the best compliance with the priorities of the 2002 Chapter, decided to organize its work through Commissions because the concrete issues requested a continuous dedication during the entire six-year-period. It also decided to

develop certain projects having very concrete purposes to be complied with according to precise deadlines:

- A project for the accompanying and development of emerging national Fraternities
- Headquarters Project

The following were the constituted Commissions:

- Formation
- Presence in the World (that includes Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation; Franciscans International; Mission and Testimony)
- Franciscan Youth
- Economy and Patrimony
- Juridical
- Communications

Each Commission presents the summary of performed works:

2. Formation Commission

In November 2003, the Presidency constituted a Formation Commission composed of Benedetto Lino (Italy), coordinator; Tibor Kauser (Hungary), Marie-Odile Blanty (France), Marie Amore (USA), Fr. Irudaya Samy (India) and Fr. Martin Bitzer (Argentina.), a truly international and transcultural composition.

The Commission has held meetings 6 times in Rome since February 2004.

The general guidelines and priorities decided by the Commission and approved by the Presidency have been the following:

1. **A new foundation of the initial formation** for the entire Order, in order to assure a **common basis** regarding the **essential elements** of Christian doctrine and of Franciscan and Secular Franciscan identity, in particular, through the **formation of formators** at a national level who, in turn, will have to form the regional and local formators in their respective national fraternities.
2. **Training course for formators**, designated by the National Councils, 8 days in Rome, on 7 initial topics that are deemed to be essential, that are generally absent from the usual formation courses or because there is no easy access to material on these topics.
3. **Assistance from the Presidency to National Fraternities** which make a request to allow the National Fraternity to organize this course in their own countries.
4. **Collection and use of existing material** around the world to be shared among the countries of the same language.

5. **Full implementation of the Guidelines for Formation** issued by the Presidency in 2002

6. **Preparation of a Formators' Formation Manual**, for initial formation, based on the International Course and its successive developments.

Two International Formation Courses have been held in Rome: in 2006 in Italian and English, and in 2007 in French and Spanish. Forty-five brothers and sisters from the 5 continents, from 33 national Fraternities (out of which 7 are emerging) have participated in the courses. Apart from the Commission members, experts in theology and other specialists, both religious and secular, have contributed to the courses with texts and lesson presentations. The *ratio formationis* (basic principles of the formation plan) was verified by professors and deans of Pontifical Theological Colleges, Franciscan and non-Franciscan.

Brothers and sisters from very poor fraternities have been able to participate in the courses, thanks to some benefactors. First among these is the Central Franciscan Mission of the Friars Minor in Germany. To them, our deepest appreciation and thanks.

The formation projects have been launched in almost every country of the participants.

Furthermore, the course has been held, whether totally or partially, in 8 countries on 3 continents at the request of the respective National Councils, which had difficulty in holding similar courses. The results obtained in these countries have been excellent and the training renewal has been strong and convincing.

The experience obtained in all these years, in so many culturally diverse contexts and very different traditions, has demonstrated that the chosen path is the proper one and the offered courses and the chosen presentation method have been the most efficient and necessary to help brothers and sisters to re-found the initial (and permanent) formation throughout the world.

The material used in the courses has been compiled in order to prepare the Formator's Manual. Further material will be added over time to improve and broaden the scope of the manual. The biggest problem has been, as usual, the translation into four languages.

Guidelines for the Further Development of the Project:

- Intensive training of **continental formators** for more languages (at least 8-10)
- Maintenance and consolidation of schemes already approved.
- Completion of the **first phase** in order to include all national fraternities (including those who have not participated or responded.)
- **Second phase** of realization
- Further Development and Dynamic Improvement of the Manual

Ongoing Formation (including a **transition phase** that will make available to the already professed members the topics in the formators' manual) and concrete instructions and materials for the definitive phase.

3. Presence in the World Commission

The "Presence in the World" Commission was co-ordinated by Doug Clorey (English Area I Presidency Councillor, Europe and North America), and included members Wilhelmina Visser-Pelsma (German Area Presidency Councillor), Maria Consuelo de Nunez (Spanish Area Presidency Councillor) and Fr. Michael Higgins (TOR General Assistant). During the term of the Commission, Maria Consuelo de Nunez was replaced by Herve Sylva (French Area Presidency Councillor) and Fr. Michael Higgins was replaced by Fr. Amando Trujillo Cano, TOR (General Assistant). The Commission was established in March 2003 in response to the 2002 General Chapter's desire that Secular Franciscans be present and visible in the world as a Christian witness to the charism of St. Francis. The engagement of Secular Franciscans in the areas of family and family life, work and workplace, community and society and the Church were identified as priorities.

To establish a baseline, a survey of the Order's 57 national fraternities and 33 emerging national fraternities was conducted in late 2003. The survey reinforced that the work being undertaken by Secular Franciscans across the world is exemplary in nature but that Secular Franciscans often lack the sense that they belong to a single Order and that all of their activity is linked worldwide. As a follow-up to the survey, a series of articles was published in the International Bulletin summarizing the work of Secular Franciscans in family and family life, work and workplace, community and society, and the Church. Along the same lines, a number of presentations were made during the 2005 General Chapter by Secular Franciscans which outlined how they are living and witnessing their mission in the various continents and cultures around the world.

During its term, the Commission also published a number of statements and position papers. Of particular note was a statement on the War in Iraq which called Secular Franciscans to express their opposition to violence and to commit themselves to the building of a more peaceful world. A statement was also circulated regarding the importance of the Earth Charter as a declaration of fundamental principles for building a just, sustainable, and peaceful global society in the 21st century.

During the past six years, the Commission also advanced a number of specific initiatives including the promotion of collaboration with Franciscans International, the development of special forms of association with Secular Franciscan fraternities, and a clarification of the role of Secular Franciscan spiritual assistants.

Extensive dialogue was undertaken with Franciscans International to explore ways in which the Secular Franciscan Order could work more closely with this organization in its engagement across the world.

During its mandate, the Commission also requested an interpretation of the provisions of the General Constitutions that provide for special forms of association with a fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order. Building on work already begun in this area, the Presence in the World Commission prepared a draft document to address the subject of association that subsequently led to the present interpretation by the Juridical Commission of Article 53.5 of the General Constitutions.

During its mandate, the Commission also requested clarification of the role of Secular Franciscans as spiritual assistants. A discussion paper was prepared by the Commission that led to the formulation of an interpretation by the Juridical Commission of Article 89.4 (b) of the General Constitutions. This interpretation clarifies the role of the secular Spiritual Assistant (lay person or cleric) and the conditions under which this service is offered.

In the future, the main challenge in supporting the presence of Secular Franciscans at the international level appears to be in creating a balance between encouraging already existing national, regional and local fraternity initiatives and providing international advocacy and education in the areas of justice, peace and care of creation. A further challenge is the need to actively communicate the variety of initiatives undertaken across the Secular Franciscan Order to increase awareness and motivate Secular Franciscans across the world. Throughout its mandate, it has been the Commission's view that, rather than creating additional organizational levels to support justice, peace and integrity of creation initiatives, the Presidency should endeavour to encourage national fraternities to establish their own structures dedicated to pursuing these initiatives within their respective nations. And, at the international level, the Presidency has been committed to working more closely with Franciscans International in exercising mutual responsibility to act with justice and to speak forcefully on behalf of the poor and the disadvantaged. It is also the commission's view that one of the significant challenges facing the presence of Secular Franciscans in the world remains the development of a strong sense of belonging to the Secular Franciscan Order world-wide and a living awareness of the grace of profession that has made us Franciscans. The reflection of the General Chapter should be invaluable in this regard. Much has been accomplished; much more is required.

4. Franciscan Youth Commission (YOUFRA)

The YOUFRA Commission, constituted by: Xavi Ramos (coordinator), Lucy Almiranez and Fr. Ivan Matic, OFM, has worked on three main aspects during the six-year-period and particularly, during the last three years.

The **first** aspect has been to give a response and direct support to the YOUFRA national fraternities experiencing some kind of difficulty or doubt, particularly the YOUFRA emerging fraternities, whether through the friars, seculars or the same youth.

The **second** aspect has been to give a response to common needs from the national and international fraternities through the preparation or adaptation of documents such as "The

YOUFRA, A Way of Franciscan Vocation", the proposal of National Statutes or that of the Formation program.

In some cases, there has been cooperation with other CIOFS commissions, such as the Juridical Commission for the decree on YOUFRA International Councillors and the YOUFRA International Regulations, or with formation for the "Incorporation of YOUFRA members in the SFO."

We would like, however, to underline the **third** aspect on which the YOUFRA Commission has worked and of which we feel particularly satisfied. During the last years, the international gatherings have been more frequent and have created a "special" feeling of universal Fraternity among the YOUFRA members.

The YOUFRA Commission has directly organized the International Gatherings in Cologne and Sydney and the assembly in Barcelona while other area gatherings were organized by the host countries with the support, advice and accompaniment of the Commission.

These gatherings have allowed the participants, to a certain extent, to broaden the horizon of Fraternity, to know that there are brothers and sisters in remote and completely different places, to network with some local Fraternities which in some cases are twinning among themselves. We are convinced that these experiences significantly influence the Franciscan Formation (which includes the human and the Christian one) of YOUFRA members, whatever their vocation in life is.

The gatherings, and in a very special way, the International YOUFRA assembly in Barcelona have proven YOUFRA's desire in regards to the formation and future work, with the goal of offering youth, at a certain time in their life, the possibility to more deeply examine their call and to discern their life's vocation.

5. The Economics Commission

The Commission has been coordinated from 2002 to 2005 by Carlos Moura from Portugal, and from 2005 to 2008 by Maria Aparecida Crepaldi from Brazil. In 2003, the accounting was transferred from Treasurer Italo Lunetta (who passed away in the said year) to Carlo Ceru.

In the 2005 Chapter, an initial Budget was prepared for the three-year period 2005-2008 but without having enough data, which has prevented the Commission from making an annual update.

In the Commission's gathering held in Fatima, Portugal from April 19 thru 21st, 2006, with Rui Silva from Portugal, Koos Simons from the Netherlands and Carlo Ceru, General Treasurer, it was decided to change the accounting system in order to enable a better understanding of financial and economic statements on the part of the International Council and, in particular, of the CIOFS Presidency.

At this time, Carlo Ceru committed himself to implement the new system as of 2005. This working method and the budget control allow an easier reading in order to better understand the economic situation.

Under the decisions of the 2005 General Chapter, the Presidency, during its meeting in October 2006, decided on the new contribution formula for the contribution of national fraternities to CIOFS for 2007 through 2009.

As of 2007, a procedure was started for the purpose of following the Budget, in order to establish a clearer control of the CIOFS Presidency's expenses and income and in order to have actual data at the time of preparing a proper budget for the three-year-period 2009-2011 (FIOFS Statutes, Article 21,a-b.)

This system is used for the monthly control of the budget, which is now performed at the Secretariat by the Vice Treasurer, who controls the cash and the accounting documents.

The Presidency proposes to the Chapter that this experience should be introduced in the International Statutes of the SFO.

The flow of accounting documents has been transferred from the Treasurer to the Vice Treasurer. Carlo Ceru, with the professional and necessary technical skills, is the General Treasurer and is responsible for the preparation of the official balance-sheet, including the Italian State official financial statements.

The person responsible for the day to day operations is the Vice Treasurer, Enrico Tavazzani. With this change and after the verification of all banking data and cash out of the Bank, everything is transferred to the General Treasurer for the official accounting.

This system allows the Presidency to keep all the data and financial documents in its own headquarters, to keep track of the actual situation daily and consequently to control the available resources efficiently.

The General Treasurer will present the three-year period balance-sheet that all members have in their folders, together with an annex to widen and clarify the global situation.

The current financial situation allows us to state that there has been a significant improvement.

a. The fact of having obtained the **Headquarters** is a great joy for all the SFO. With the donations received, this Presidency may pass on to the incoming Presidency, a clear, controlled and more reassuring situation.

b. It is necessary to have a greater awareness and sense of duty when it comes to the ordinary expenses. The National Fraternities that have not made their contribution must commit themselves to complying to their obligation to contribute by reaching a reasonable agreement with CIOFS. It is important to be aware that it is very difficult to carry on the ordinary management work of the CIOFS Presidency, and what needs to be

done for both established and emerging Fraternities in greater need, who cannot be neglected by CIOFS due to lack of economic resources.

c. The "Saint Elizabeth Fund" has helped the project related to the Headquarters and other projects in favor of some needy Fraternities.

d. It can be observed that the deficit of previous years has decreased with the positive economic results of the Balance sheets.

It is our duty to acknowledge and thank the National Fraternities that have fulfilled their duty and most of all the great generosity of those that have contributed more than their ordinary contribution in order to sustain the International Fraternity's responsibility. With the presentation of the documents that you will receive in this Chapter, it can be affirmed that the Commission, with the Presidency, has complied, in great part, with the decisions made in the 2002 and 2005 Chapters, and that it has given the CIOFS the working instruments to control the economic situation. If economic contributions are not made, the Chapter cannot hold us responsible, as we have insistently requested those contributions.

6. Juridical Commission

1. The mission of the Juridical Commission consists in ensuring that the organization and operation of the SFO conform to the SFO's own law and to the law of the Church. In this sense, the Commission has kept on complying during 2005-2008 with the following tasks, traditionally foreseen:

- a. Review of National Statutes
- b. Investigation of Appeals
- c. Opinion on juridical matters requested by the Presidency
- d. Collaboration in the preparation of documents on juridical issues
- e. Collaboration with the General Minister in matters involving juridical issues

2. The Commission is made up of the General Vice Minister Rosalvo Goncalves Mota, Coordinator, Emanuela De Nunzio, Fr. Valentin Redondo, OFMConv. and Fr. Martin Bitzer OFMConv. On the most complex juridical matters, it has availed itself occasionally of the cooperation and juridical opinion of canonist Fr. Fiorenzo Fiore, OFMCap.

With regards to the review of the Statutes, the Commission avails itself of a team of Reviewers composed of Tibor Kauser, Benedetto Lino and the General Assistants, in accordance with the four official languages of the CIOFS. The Commission has provided these collaborators with the necessary tools to ensure a uniform and adequate review of the statutes on the basis of the criteria established by the Presidency. We refer to: a model for National Statutes, "a review procedure" and a "Table of Contents" of articles of the General Constitutions which ought to be considered in developing the Statutes.

3. The Commission has held meetings coinciding with the Presidency meetings, three days before the said meetings, and has also had some extraordinary meetings. The General Minister usually participates in these meetings.

4. Twenty-nine [corrected to 33] National Statutes have been approved in accordance with the present Constitutions and twenty-three are being reviewed. The Commission has given different opinions about questions related to juridical matters, even for the CAS. (Conference of Spiritual Assistants)

Furthermore, it has drawn up the proposals to modify the International Fraternity Statutes; it has set up Guidelines for the Celebration of the National Fraternity Chapter and the Regulations for the General Chapter. It has followed the relationship with the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life and with the Apostolic Signatura (highest Vatican court). It has also worked on the Statutes of Franciscans International.

It has prepared the "Determination" to elect SFO International Councillors for YOUFRA and several Decrees, among them that of the "Use of the Habit", the Transitional Norms for the SFO in Italy, the Practical interpretation of Article 89.4 of the General Constitutions on Spiritual Assistance provided by Secular Franciscans and of Article 53.5 for the Adhesion of individuals to an SFO Fraternity.

7. The Communication Commission

The Members of the Commission are: M. Consuela de Nunez (coordinator), Emanuela De Nunzio (narration and contents) and Fred Schaffer (Webmaster). About 20 people collaborated with translation, some of which are not SFO members. The CIOFS Web site has been maintained in 4 languages with the consequent collaboration of the "Webmaster", Fred Schaeffer from the USA and many volunteers, including a team of translators from different countries.

In this site, www.ciofs.org, the following sections are published:

- Quarterly Bulletin (first publication July 2006).
- Koinonia, publication in charge of the CAS (Conference of Spiritual Assistants)
- Two-year formation program on Saint Elizabeth, monthly lessons, starting as of November 2006.
- Data update of National Elective Chapters including photos.
- Publication of the General Minister's circulars and/ or those from the CIOFS Presidency

The web page receives a monthly average of 1000 returning visitors. Through the section "contact us", it is proven that the Web page is a means of vocational promotion throughout the world. Through this page, support has been given to Fraternities in times of catastrophes, for example when a fundraising campaign was organized to help those damaged by the Tsunami, the earthquake in Peru and other SFO needs.

PART III

1. Meetings held during 2005-2008.

The Presidency has held 6 meetings: in April and October 2006, February and November 2007, April and November 2008, which when added to the previous 6 meetings during 2002 to 2005, gives a total of 12 meetings. Meetings have been 7 days in length which are characterized by intense work, prayer and sharing. This means that many members from the Presidency have had to give up vacation time with their own families in order to participate in these intense work meetings. Several members of the Presidency, including the General Minister, have also held sectional meetings, which is not included here in the interests of brevity. We have had to restrict our meetings, even when they were necessary, due to the well-known economic shortages that we have experienced.

2. How the Presidency has worked and lived out its responsibility and spirit of the meetings.

The Presidency has usually had to go through a long Agenda that normally includes more than 20- 25 items. In the summary of the decisions made, sometimes, we have reached 73 decisions in a single meeting! (February 2007.)

In order to facilitate communications, in some meetings, we have received the help of the brothers of the First Order for simultaneous translation and, in others, some members of the Presidency have offered their service.

The Presidency has worked with great zeal and collegiality when coming to agreement on decisions, usually done by consensus. On a few occasions, we have had to resort to a votation in order to reach a decision on a concrete theme. On the other hand, there have been tensions, as there can be in any group, because the Presidency is composed of 14 brothers and sisters plus the General Secretaries, the General Treasurer and Vice Treasurer coming from 12 countries, speaking 9 different languages - each of them having their own formation and cultures. Each are also acknowledged professionals in their own field.

Sometimes, it has not been easy to be attuned to each other, but the effort has been great and the difficulties overcome by the fraternal love and the willingness to look at the good of the Order and avoid the prevailing of our own personal points of view. I must thank the Lord for His help insofar as we have never gone to bed with sorrow or resentment, but have always sought in the final prayer and, in the fraternal sharing at the end of each day, the necessary fraternal meeting point to fulfil our responsibilities with calm and serenity. It is one of the most beautiful testimonies I think that each one of us will keep from this period of shared service and of fraternal life.

Stimulating issues and projects have been presented for our consideration, as well as problems and distressful situations, personal and collective, whether from the National Councils or from individual brothers and sisters.

We have tried to respond to all of them by promoting dialogue, by offering fraternal mediation, by being present when the significance of the issue so demanded it. Some experiences lived by some of us in promoting peace and fraternal understanding in some parts of the world, have certainly been shocking and unforgettable, and not exempt from risks, even physical risks. But the Lord has always sustained our service and He has taken care of us with His inexpressible Love.

3. Relationship of the Presidency Council with their own area.

Presidency Councillors have kept regular contacts with International Councillors in their respective areas in order to keep them informed of the Presidency's decisions, in particular, after the meetings held by the Presidency, and in order to enable and enrich the communication between the International Fraternity and the CIOFS Presidency.

4. Permanent Contact

We, the members of the CIOFS Presidency, have kept permanent contact with each other during the entire time of our service. At some significant times where it was impossible for us to meet, we have made decisions via email, exchanging opinions and reaching an agreement in accordance with the dialogue and the majority sense of its members.

Obviously, and given our secular condition, there have been difficult times for all, where work obligations, family duties or health or the commitment to our own local Fraternities (where we have attempted to participate actively as a source and nourishment for the service we have been commended) have temporarily left us out of service.

But the sense of shared responsibility and collegiality has made the "miracle" of multiplying the availability of other members in order to assist those who needed help and, with their effort, stand in when there were the temporary shortages of brothers or sisters, having experienced beautiful moments of fraternity, in communion and in solidarity with each other. In the end, we have always found love and friendship - the basis of the vocation and spirituality that we profess.

5. Themes and Principle Decisions

a) Ordinary Administration

The Presidency, during its six-year period, has:

- sent 72 circulars with their corresponding documents annexed to all the brothers and sisters in the Order, to International Councillors, the SFO and YOFRA National Councils, jointly or separately, always attempting to involve the SFO Councils, concerning the Franciscan youth, about whom we feel particularly responsible;

- implemented what was necessary in order to preside at the National Chapters and to do the requested Fraternal and Pastoral visits, on request or on its own initiative when concrete situations in some National Fraternities required it;

- responded to every request of intervention which was received from National Councils or International Councillors, and from individual brothers and sisters, who had some problem, claim or appeal to file. In these cases, our attitude - whenever possible - has been mediation in order to enable dialogue so that the problems could be resolved in its own environment. When it was not possible, the Presidency has intervened through the most appropriate Councillor for each case.

b) Formation Project

Since the 2002 General Chapter, the CIOFS Presidency has been concerned about making effective the chapter decision of giving priority to SFO formation on all levels. I do not have to linger on this point except to confirm that the major part of our energies was dedicated to formation by way of circulars, presence at Chapters, visits, congresses and seminars.

c-1) Accompanying of emerging Fraternities

This Presidency has taken to heart the "rediscovery" of Secular Franciscan presence in the different parts of the world and have succeeded in getting in touch and/or identifying 14 [\[corrected to 17\]](#) emerging national Fraternities with whom we are actively working. For some of them, we have received the support and accompaniment of other established national Fraternities. Others are directly accompanied by the Presidency due to the delicateness of the situation. Detailed information will be presented in one of the Chapter sections.

From now on, I hereby request you to place the maximum interest in this issue of vital importance to our Order and I also request that you pay attention to the "situation" where you can find some emerging Fraternity to accompany in their journey of formation, maturation and consolidation. This could result in a mutual advantage. The accompanying Fraternity may offer its life experience and become enriched by the new sense of vitality that our Order is experiencing, spurred on by these young, stimulating and enthusiastic realities. Emerging Fraternities may receive the support, fidelity to vocation, the transmission of the spirituality and of the history of our Order, as well as the accompaniment, advice and even formation materials they need and which are not always available to them.

c-2) Established National Fraternities

During the six-year-period, the following national Fraternities have been Canonically Established:

Sweden

Indonesia

Democratic Republic of the Congo
Ukraine
Romania
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Malawi
Angola

d) SFO Unity in Italy

The SFO in Italy has almost completed its unification process. In 17 out of 20 established regional Fraternities, the regionally united Councils are active and working well. The results are excellent. The adhesion to the unity of the "Minor" component has been completed in almost all of these Fraternities. Work continues in order to celebrate the remaining 3 remaining regional Chapters as reasonably soon as possible.

The CIVCSVA has assumed a very determined position and has made a final call to the "dissidents", whether lay or religious dissidents. The Apostolic Signatura has rejected the last of many appeals presented during the course of last 8 years. None of them have obtained a positive outcome for the dissidents. The position of the last remaining "dissidents" doesn't seem to be softening. In spite of the 9 years of failure and until now, nothing has been effective to cause a change in their position - neither the intervention from the Holy See nor the CIOFS Presidency nor the appeal of Order's General Chapter nor the lost appeals nor the positions taken by the Supreme Pontiffs for the purpose of leading them again toward the paths of love and fraternity.

e) Other national Fraternities to which we have offered help and mediation:

Belgium, Honduras, Denmark, Norway, Bolivia, Canada, Guatemala, Japan, Peru, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Central-African Republic - These Fraternities have been having - and some of them still have - difficult situations because they cannot adjust to our Constitutions, or because they have filed appeals for several reasons.

Let's pay some attention to the situation in Belgium:

The SFO in Belgium has existed for centuries and has a long Secular Franciscan tradition. In 1991, after the delivery of the General Constitutions *ad experimentum*, the Presidency established two regional Fraternities in Belgium - the French speaking and the Flemish speaking Fraternities, hoping to be able to establish a national Fraternity in a short while. Problems linked to political claims to autonomy prevented us from advancing with these plans. However, due to the pressures and on the basis of the interpretation of Article 65.1 of the General Constitutions *ad experimentum* on the nature of National Fraternities, in 1995, the Presidency established, as a National Fraternity, only one of the two regional Fraternities in Belgium, the Flemish one.

The new and definitive General Constitutions approved by the Holy See in 2000, considering the lack of clarity in the previous definition of a national Fraternity which did not express clearly the will of the legislator, modified Article 65.1 of the GGCC: *"The national Fraternity is the organic union of the local Fraternities existing within the*

territory of one or more States, which are joined and coordinated among themselves through the regional Fraternities, where they exist." Therefore, it is clear, without possibility of doubt, that it is not possible to "split" one national state into two or more parts in order to constitute different national Fraternities within the same State. Now, a complex process has begun in an effort to bring together and integrate the three components which is taking its first steps in bringing about the establishment of a single national Belgian Fraternity while the current political situation remains.

f) Aids offered during the six-year-period:

- For formation (circular 6)
- For those who live their SFO life in isolation (circular 11)
- Update of YOFRA documents: The YOFRA, A Way of Franciscan Vocation; YOFRA formation program, model of statutes for the national YOFRA Fraternity (circular 16)
- Dealing with non-active members (circular 18)
- Use of the habit by Secular Franciscans (circular 41)
- Introductory and preparatory document on the Central Theme of the Chapter of 2008 (circular 64)
- For the celebration of an elective Chapter (circular 70)

Furthermore, the Presidency has approved the first YOFRA International Regulations.

g) Presidency of Elective Chapters and Fraternal and Pastoral Visitations

During 2005-2008, the following Chapters and Visitations have been held in the 63 constituted national Fraternities:

- 36 Elective Chapters
- 11 Elective Chapters and Fraternal Visitations made jointly
- 7 Fraternal Visitations performed separately from Elective Chapters;
- 4 Chapters coinciding with the establishment of national Fraternities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ukraine, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Romania
- A provisional Council in Honduras due to lack of quorum in the Chapter
- A non-authorized Chapter (Flanders)
- A Fraternal and Pastoral Visitation lasting for more than two years to the SFO in Belgium due to the exceptional circumstances they are experiencing.

In the emerging national Fraternities, the following has been held:

- 5 Chapters presided over by the General Minister or her delegates
- 2 Fraternal and Pastoral Visitations
- 7 Fraternal Visitations of support and accompaniment.

In other emerging realities:

- 1 Fraternal Visitation of support and accompaniment: Antigua

h) Initiatives in dramatic situations

The Presidency has made efforts for the Order to be sensitive to the most significant catastrophic situations, inviting national Councils to promote initiatives in favour of the affected people in the respective national Fraternities.

i) Participation in Continental Congresses

During this period, the Presidency has participated and supported the promotion of the following international events:

II SFO and YOUFRA Congress in Asia and Oceania, held in Penang (Malaysia) from March 24 through 30, 2007 where 40 Secular Franciscans participated and also 22 Spiritual Assistants, representing the following:

- Established national Fraternities: Australia, (Oceania), New Zealand (Oceania) - with regional Fraternities from Singapore and Java (Malaysia), India; Korea, Philippines and Vietnam.
- Regional Fraternities under the CIOFS Presidency East Malaysia, China and Hong Kong.
- Emerging national Fraternities: Thailand, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, China, Papua, New Guinea (Oceania).

During the said meeting, the application of conclusions from the 2005 General Chapter were reviewed and hopes, difficulties and progress were shared in regards to the life of the Order in this important area of the world where the SFO is developing with strong vitality, accompanied and sustained by the established Fraternities and the CIOFS Presidency. Due to the significance of the meeting, it was strongly represented by the General Minister and Vice Minister, the English Language II Presidency Councillor (Africa, Asia and Oceania), the Presidency Councillor for YOUFRA and the entire Conference of General Assistants.

An important agreement was made to develop, within a maximum of 6 years, the establishment of the national Fraternity of Malaysia and Singapore. Interested regional Fraternities signed the said agreement: East Malaysia (accompanied by the Presidency as a regional Fraternity), Java and Singapore (integrated as Regional Fraternities in the Oceania national Fraternity), the Oceania national Minister and the SFO General Minister.

VII SFO and YOUFRA Latin American Congress, held in Bolivia from July 5 through 9, 2008, with the central theme: "Called to build a fraternal and evangelical world" where the representatives of the following national Fraternities participated: Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, Dominican Republic and Cuba, with the presence of 9 SFO and YOUFRA Spiritual Assistants and the President from the Franciscan Family from Paraguay.

Due to the fact that this Congress in Latin America (which has a long standing tradition) coincided this year with the General Chapter, the participation was limited. Perhaps other dates could be chosen for future congresses. The Congress was presided over by the

General Vice Minister Rosalvo Mota, with the presence of Fr. Amando Trujillo, TOR General Assistant representing the Conference of General Assistants. Due to the Presidency's economic shortages, it was not even possible for the Spanish language Presidency Councillor to be present, Maria Consuelo de Nunez.

Seminar in South Africa: held on May 29 through June 3 2007, organized by the South African National Council for the responsible individuals from the SFO, YOFRA and Spiritual Assistants from the south of Africa. It gathered brothers and sisters from Namibia, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Malawi, Mozambique and South Africa. The topic of the Seminar was the Formation of those responsible and of the Spiritual Assistants of the SFO. Forty-six members of the OSF (SFO) participated and 17 spiritual Assistants. The Presidency Councilor, Lucy Almiranez, was also present.

IV Anglophone Africa Congress: held on August 11-17 2007 in Kenya with the participation of 11 Secular Franciscans and 3 Spiritual Assistants from Uganda, Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, South Africa and Kenya. The topic was the SFO Spirituality in the New Millennium.

XVII Quinquennial Congress in the United States: held in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on July 3 through 8 2007 where the Presidency Councilor, Doug Clorey, was present. Around 400 members from the National Fraternity participated. The topic was: "Many cultures - through Francis - in Christ". It was focused on the multicultural aspects of the SFO in the United States and its goal was to increase the level of awareness in regards to the diverse culture of our Order.

EUFRA. The General Minister accompanied by the Presidency Counselor, Wilhelmina Visser-Pelsma and the President of the General Assistants' Conference Fr. Samy Irudaya, have participated in the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the EUFRA meetings (Franciscan Europe), that arose as an initiative from Germany.

What at first had as its goal the exchanging of ideas among members of the national Fraternities, has become an excellent time to come together for a few days to share life - prayerfully, fraternally, and leisurely.

We have recommended that EUFRA return to its origins without losing its spiritual and re-creative component and that it have as the main goal of gathering the responsible individuals from the SFO in Europe, which is going through particularly difficult times in some countries, to share situations and to engage in common projects.

EUFRA nowadays presents itself as a challenge for the European National Councils. Some representatives would like to establish a proper structure, which is not provided for in the General Constitutions. However, as I have mentioned in the meeting with the responsible individuals from the present national Fraternities, what is truly important is to find new ways to keep on advancing in the "meeting" of Secular Franciscans in Europe, such as a triennial congress where concerns, problems, hopes, and needs may be shared

and where it would be possible to reflect - as Christian and Secular Franciscan citizens - about the challenges of society and current European politics.

I International Meeting of Franciscan Youth: The 58 representatives from 25 national Fraternities of the Franciscan Youth (YOUFRA), with their hearts open to action and to God's Love, accompanied by some of the National Assistants, representatives of the Secular Franciscan Order from several national Fraternities, the SFO General Minister who presided at the meeting, by the members of the YOUFRA Commission, and by a delegation of the Conference of General Assistants, gathered in Vilanova i la Geltru (Barcelona - Spain) from June 28 through July 5 2007 in order to celebrate the First International Meeting of Franciscan Youth.

In communion with the Franciscan Family, on the way to preparation for the celebration of the "VIII Centenary of the beginning of the Franciscan charism", the statement from the SFO Rule was selected for the purpose of common reflection: "From the Gospel to life, from life to the Gospel" having in their hearts the celebration of the "VIII Centenary of the birth of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary."

During the meeting, life experiences were shared and the following was discussed:

- ✓ The young life of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, her testimony of nuptial love, of merciful donations to those isolated from society in her times, the coherence and authenticity of her life.
- ✓ The place of Franciscan youth in the Church.
- ✓ The place of Franciscan youth in the Franciscan Family and what it means to follow Saint Francis of Assisi.
- ✓ Their vocational process.

The Meeting defined YOUFRA as the communion of youth Fraternities existing in the world, an integral part of the Franciscan Family who live their experience of Christian life under the light of the message of Saint Francis of Assisi, deepening their vocational process within the environment of the Secular Franciscan Order.

The SFO General Minister, a representative of the Pontifical Council for the Laity and the OFMCap. General Minister participated as lecturers. Interesting conclusions were reached as was shared by the SFO International Councillor representing YOUFRA on the CIOFS Presidency.

6. CIOFS Spiritual Assistance

The General Assistants constitute a Conference in order to live, in collegial and fraternal communion, the organization and distribution of their responsibilities. However, their participation in the CIOFS Presidency is not corporate in the sense of acting as a Conference (CAS). It is rather an individual participation as delegates of their respective General Ministers for the Pastoral care and Assistance to the CIOFS Presidency and to the SFO International Council.

In August 2007, CIOFS spiritual assistance has experienced a change in the General Spiritual Assistant of the TOR's. Fr. Michael Higgins was elected Minister General of the TOR's and Fr. Amando Trujillo Cano (a General Definitor of the TOR's) has taken his place and has integrated very well.

The CIOFS Presidency and myself must and want to show our gratitude to the General Assistants: Fr Ivan Matic, OFM; Fr. Martin Pablo Bitzer, OFMConv, Fr. Samy Irudaya, OFMCap.; Fr. Michael Higgins and Fr. Amando Trujillo, TOR.

With them, we have lived in communion carrying out our own particular responsibilities. This communion was most felt in the meetings of the Presidency, in the Fraternal and Pastoral Visitations and in the Chapters that were jointly carried out. Both parties have always had an open attitude, respect and sincere dialogue. At some moments there has been a bit of tension which is to be expected in all human relationships. These arise from the passion with which each accomplishes the service that has been entrusted. In their report, you will note the vibrant activity of each and all of them. They have prepared with love and dedication all the liturgies of the Presidency meetings, formation seminars, those for the General Chapters ... and how many more things? It's a duty and joy to acknowledge and thank them for their service and encourage them to keep on advocating for the welfare of the SFO and that of their own Orders through the means of dialogue and fraternal understanding, of the generosity in the outpouring of co-responsibility and collegiality through which they serve.

PART IV

1. The General Secretariat

The Secretariat works under the direction of the General Secretaries Anna Maria and Francesco Crescenti and the invaluable cooperation of Irene Coccozza and Aida Badani, who have developed a service that is not easy to describe due to their skills corresponding to the command of the languages, the multiplication of their attention to correspondence, and the huge exchange of emails that are responded, even if only to acknowledge receipt, immediately all of which we can attest. The use of email extension and its immediate features requires special attention and dedication because the sender expects a prompt reply without bearing in mind the wide environment we must pay attention to.

The General Secretariat has observed a sizeable increase in its work. The Presidency is receiving requests, more and more, from every part of the world, and this has repercussions in increasing the workload. As a result, the Presidency has considered a broadening of the secretariat team with the incorporation of Elisabetta Tavazzani, for more direct work in close contact with the General Secretary, and also in view of future developments.

A challenge for the future is to provide the Secretariat with the necessary means for it to operate efficiently on a daily, full-time basis that can be continuous and regular in terms of all of its working aspects and in conformity with social justice. I am reminded of the specialized services of Irene and Aida with their special competencies in Italian and

English. They receive minimum compensation which has been accepted more out of the awareness of our economic shortages and for the love and full understanding that they have for us and the SFO, rather than on the basis of their own personal and professional interests. The General Chapter and the newly elected Presidency will have to give due consideration to this matter. Very special thanks to this very special team from the Presidency and, in particular, from the General Minister who has experienced an intense relationship with all of them.

2. General Treasury

The difficulties suffered by this Presidency during all this time of service cannot even be described. The incorporation of Maria Aparecida Crepaldi as Presidency Councilor due to her professional skills and perseverance, has achieved the goal of starting to "normalize" this significant area. We've had the technical and practical collaboration from Carlo Ceru (expert with a degree in economic and fiscal matters) who has always told us that his cooperation would be very limited due to workload from his office. But obviously, the said collaboration was not enough and therefore we had to go through confusion, tension and even nervous times.

In April 2006, the Presidency decided to bring on a General Vice Treasurer to whom we could offer a modest economic compensation, appointing Enrico Tavazzani for the said task. With this team, and more collaboration from Luz Garcia from Brazil, it has been possible to clarify the economic situation and prepare a project that has been presented to you by the Economic Commission. I wanted to insist on this issue because it's vitally significant; we cannot pretend to have consistency and our own personal identity, whether in the Church, in the Franciscan Family, in the society, if we are not willing to make effective and visible the love and the conviction of our own vocation also shown in the economic sustainability of our Order.

In the name of the Presidency, I have to seriously recommend that the Chapter pay extreme attention to all these aspects, which are essential and that represent a priority for the entire Order. It's not fair to say that the Presidency should have to reduce costs when we have made such efforts and each has contributed even what we did not have. If the General Chapter is not able to face this situation with responsibility, it will be necessary to consider a change in the structure or to turn the clock back in history and assume the responsibility for so doing. We will speak of the sense of belonging, as a keynote topic of the Chapter. We will see if we can face it, also from this perspective.

3. Status of CIOFS Headquarters

On April 22nd, 2008, we officially acquired our Headquarters, with the signature of the corresponding document before a Notary Public. The acquisition of the apartment at Via Vittorio Putti was made possible through the donation of the OFM Province of Lazio, "official" beneficiary of our sister Anita Bedini's will, in full conformity with the Ara Coeli Fraternity, actual beneficiary of the said sister Anita.

As a sign of gratefulness, the Presidency will make as soon as possible a significant donation to the Anita Bedini Foundation that the Ara Coeli Fraternity is establishing for charitable works and support to the missions, on account of the will expressed by our sister regarding the use of her inheritance. When the opportunity comes and the Foundation has been established, the CIOFS Presidency will publish on its Web page all the contributions received from different parts of the world for this purpose.

Our infinite gratitude is extended to the Ara Coeli Fraternity and its Minister, at that time, Carlo Ceru.

CONCLUSION

Challenges for the future

1. The Development of the Life of the Order

- ✓ Deepening of formation on which the life of the Order depends to a great extent, continuing the formation project with the utmost diligence and ability to adapt to the concrete needs social, cultural, political and religious realities - of each national Fraternity.
- ✓ The creative intensification and revitalization of the local Fraternity where the life of the Order and the concrete vocation of brothers and sisters are developed. This requires:
 - * That Fraternal life, as such, be the foundation of our charism and constitute a mission by itself. The Fraternity - lived and given as a testimony - is a valuable contribution to the evangelization and the most precious gift that we can and we must offer to the Church. This strong idea must increase in our entire Order.
 - *The SFO has to be aware that its life cannot be stopped because there are Fraternities that do not want to accept new ways of living and to meet in fraternity. (Pastoral Visit recommendation).
 - * Local Fraternities, in a significant majority, must have enough generosity to open themselves to new vocations, particularly to younger members, and accepting that these individuals may not be expressing their vocation in traditional ways but understanding that this does not mean that their desire to live the evangelical life and their profession is less authentic.
- ✓ **How to live the Franciscan Fraternity today** in a world where peace is threatened in thousands of ways in so many places. The vision and the experience of Fraternity was a challenge for Saint Francis. Is it for us in our times and under the concrete conditions of our lives? Do we have an open heart and availability to live and offer the Fraternity experienced by Francis? Do we have an intimate relationship with God the Father that allows us to enter and be in a relationship made of love and attention towards the other? Love and relationship: essential elements and foundations of the Franciscan Fraternity.

✓ **Increase the sense of mission**, of our presence committed in the world and with the world. Sensing ourselves as "pastoral agents" sent into the world in the name of Jesus as prophets of our times, offering the merciful love that Jesus felt upon seeing the people exhausted and abandoned. (Mt. 14: 14 11:28?) Like Francis, like Elizabeth of Hungary, have we realized how many people (children, teenagers and adults) just crawl through life without a clear reason for their existence and without a means to live? Those who look for the truth and find enigmas and darkness and who would like to live with intensity and don't know how. People who live too fast, submerged in a neurotic activism, emptying themselves interiorly, without inner peace. Jesus tells us: " ... ask the master of the harvest to send out labourers for his harvest." (Mt. 9: 38) Is the SFO in the situation of wanting to feel the call to work in the Lord's harvest? Is the SFO in the situation of being witnesses of God, who, after having a profound life experience with the "Lord of the harvest" try to communicate it to others? Brothers and sisters, there are many men and women who need to be cured in body and most importantly, in soul, who need a friend, a brother, a sister, who "restores them to life" and who helps them to live as true human beings. We are baptized and therefore doubly committed by our promise of evangelical life. We form part of a priestly kingdom, a holy nation of the New Testament and of these modern times, sent into the world in the name of Jesus to announce the Kingdom of Heaven in the manner and spirituality of Francis of Assisi who made himself little in order to be able to live with the little ones of his time. Isn't it a challenge for us, for us who are strongly convinced of our sense of belonging to a charism and to a vocation, and who feel encouraged to give ourselves fully under our particular condition as citizens, Christians and Franciscans?

✓ **Consideration of different ways of living within the SFO**

- Family groups and / or young couples (General Constitutions 24.2)
- Groups arising from the YOUFRA living within the local Fraternity (General Constitutions 34)
- Consecrated Fraternity (General Constitutions 36)

✓ **Called to holiness**

The SFO needs people who want to be saints. The testimony of a young professed has profoundly struck me. She belongs to the YOUFRA and to SFO Fraternity in Bitche (France), and when she introduced herself in order to explain to me the reason for her vocation, she said:

I want to become a saint with all the strength of my soul and of my heart. I believe that the path proposed by my profession of life to follow the Gospel of Jesus, by following Francis' spirituality, and intensely living fraternity in my secular state, will help me achieve it!!

This was the first time that someone had told me something like this during my six years of service as General Minister.

But it is the greatest challenge we must face: **wanting to be saints** because, only if we propose it with seriousness, will our lives change as well as those of our Fraternities.

2. Guidance and Animation

The Chapter has to think about the following:

- The difficulties to perform service for the SFO due to our secularity and with the present economic shortages, when the presence of the General Minister and other members of the Presidency are more and more requested.
- How to manage an Order - Franciscan and secular - which doesn't have a General Curia or the necessary officials to fulfil its mission and in which the General Minister cannot afford to have his/her own secretary who could assist in the management of the day-to-day administration and, as a result, must use his/her own resources from time to time.
- The response of the International Councillors in regards to their responsibility of animating and guiding the SFO International Fraternity.

This Presidency has gone through a great frustration due to the lack of response of a very high number of International Councillors who never replied to the issues presented to them and who are not even capable of acknowledging receipt of the communications they receive. It's not the general rule. But the number of **passive Councillors** is excessively high.

They do not only damage their national Fraternity but also the whole "mechanism" of the entire Order, due to the fact that the Presidency and the General Minister are responsible for animating and guiding the Order and this inertia has dangerous repercussions on the Order.

One of the most glaring examples is that, after more than 18 years of attempting it, we have not been able to complete the statistics of the Order, even when it has been requested by the Holy See, through the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Apostolic Life Societies, who is our hierarchical superior.

This must make us even think about the structure of the International Fraternity, because if International Councillors do not deem themselves as such with a permanent responsibility to perform between one Chapter and the other, perhaps it's convenient to make a general new planning of the International Fraternity's governing entities.

Acknowledgements

We have reached the end of our service. A tiresome and joyful path, which has lasted 6 years - we can only return to the Lord, giver and source of all Goodness, the gifts

received, the brothers and sisters found, the tasks performed, whether good or not so good, in accordance with the appraisal that each of you will make but where we have attempted to give the best of each of us.

Now it's your time - the moment of Chapter, the voice and highest authority of our Order. It is the time of brave, serene and conscious assessment - the life of the Order will depend on you and from your collegial and personal decisions for the next 6 years. Don't perform it cowardly or timidly. It would be a disservice to our Order - a lack of love and of respect to our vocation and to what the Church and society have the right to expect from us. It is the time of truth, of courage, of love, of mutual understanding and of the making of audacious, conscious and consistent decisions. It is the time to prepare the election of the new Presidency in a serene, free and responsible way, helped by fraternal exchange. It is the time of committing to **prophetic presence** in the society of our times, transmitting a new message, breaking old and bad structure, both social, ecclesial and also those in our Order.

Brother and sister capitulars, wherever I have gone during these last two years, during which we have reflected on Saint Elizabeth, I have constantly repeated: Also among us, in our Order, God keeps choosing men and women to speak to His people today. Prophets who are capable of moving us towards renewal and change in order not to remain content with our attitudes and works because it is always possible and necessary to move a step forward which will break this immobility and shake our laziness and, sometimes, cowardly condition.

The issues to be dealt with will place us before the reality of our own coherence, quality and responsibility of the free commitment made on our profession day, of our sense of belonging to an Order, which has the particularity of being secular and Franciscan. Thus, we will realize how much we need prophets such as Saint Elizabeth of Hungary who do not pacify but who shake our faith, our hope, our charity, our vocation.

Prophets who make us understand that we do not live to satisfy personal ambitions but to announce His Kingdom - HIS Kingdom. And the tools are the same used by Saint Elizabeth, faith, love, self dedication, generosity, renunciation, mercy, conversion, respect, acceptance of diversity, fraternal welcome, the passionate performance of our proper duties and the loyalty to our vocation and identity.

Brothers and sisters, I repeat: It is your time! It is the time of hope for our Order! We are in the land of our Patron Saint. Be free, courageous, and merciful! Make your decisions looking at Him, as Mary, with inner contemplative silence, which must be the battle cry for all and each of us.

For those of us who are finishing our service, it is a time of gratitude to the Lord mainly, who has given us the chance of serving you, of knowing you, of strongly experiencing your love. It is time to ask the Lord for forgiveness for our omissions, for the times we have looked out for ourselves and we have not returned to Him all the received gifts.

It's time to thank brothers and sisters with whom our lives have been intertwined, who have been the reason for our service, who have enriched us with exemplary, courageous, consistent, tender and touching testimonies. It's time to ask for forgiveness for our collegial failures, for my personal deficiencies, for the times in which we may have abused our position, for our omissions and our selfishness. We leave ourselves in the Lord's hands with a heart full of trust in His merciful and infinite Love.

May the Lord bless each and every one of you! May the Lord bless the Secular Franciscan Order and the Franciscan Youth, and may He give that which it needs to be coherent and significant according to His own plans, with the people who may bring them to fulfilment in minority and a loving spirit of service! The plans of God, our Father, author of our lives, personal and fraternal, and giver of our vocations. May Saint Francis and Saint Elizabeth of Hungary be our intercessors before Him so that He may grant us what we need even if this is not in our projects but in His.

May the Lord reward you for your patience and your love. You will always have my love and gratitude forever. Thank you for everything.

Manreza, November 16 2008

s/

Encarnaci6n del Pozo
SFO General Minister