



## Feast of Saint Francis 2015

In the Gospel of John (13, 15) Jesus tells his Disciples: "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." Francis called to his Brothers: "I have done what was my duty to do – may Christ show you what is yours". Nowadays he calls to us – as an example and with an invitation – to read the signs of the times, and to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

We should take the time to ponder about this mission. I would like to take the last verses of the Canticle of the Sun for meditation:

*Be praised, my Lord, through those who forgive for love of you; through those who endure sickness and trial. Happy those who endure in peace, for by you, Most High, they will be crowned.*

So far Francis has sung the praise of the Creator - Laudato si – and glorified Him in all His creatures: Brother Sun, Sister Moon, Mother Earth, Brother Fire, and Sister Water. Now he takes a look at the human being. In this case he is not describing size and beauty, not reason or ingenuity. Francis is thinking about something completely different when thinking about him. He praises God for human beings who have the ability to forgive, to endure sickness and distress and to bring about peace. The reality of this world and what it needs cannot be seen much more matter-of-factly. This world is not in one piece but we can heal it – with the power of faith, hope and love. For Francis guilt and failure, sickness and distress, conflicts and war are elements of life in this world. He regards them as a mission that challenges us to deal with them ingeniously.

*e praised, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death, from whose embrace no living person can escape. Woe to those who die in mortal sin! Happy those she finds doing your most*

*holy will. The second death can do no harm to them.*

Is there anyone who likes to think of death? Francis repeatedly reminded of the upcoming "death". It is not the threat – and why should it – but the importance of life, the chance that God has given us when he loves us into being. The reminder of the upcoming death refers to what we as human beings fall short of. Love is not loved! Yet it is also an outlook onto God's great love in which none of His creations will get lost. God has loved us into being and he will also love us back the other way through his ever-present closeness and presence.

We have to learn and practice how to let go. The last farewell is only the highlight of many farewells leading from the self-centredness to absent-mindedness allowing us to fall into God's hands. Francis points the way how to include our own death into life. Francis vividly explains the "bodily" death, the initial death that no one can escape. This bodily death is the prerequisite for what life really means: communion with God. But Francis also does not exclude the terrible possibility of dying the spiritual, the "second death" that will separate us from God.

*Praise and bless my Lord, and give thanks, and serve him with great humility.*

The final phrases of this Canticle tell us to praise, bless, and give thanks, to serve and to be humble. Those who praise, bless and give thanks to the Lord will also serve Him; they will also serve mankind and all of creation.

This is Francis' legacy: we should perceive the world as an allegory in order to be able to recognize God in everything we encounter and that we will gratefully praise and bless Him – as messengers and His instruments of peace in this world.

Hadrian W. Koch OFM

## Europe

### CCFMC Centre

#### Significance of the CCFMC in Latin America



During a visit to our CCFMC Centre by Fray Luis Coscia OFM<sup>Cap</sup> and Mrs. Mabel Moyano (Argentina) from 24 to 27 August 2015 there was intensive discussion with the management of the CCFMC Centre about the situation of the Franciscan Family and the significance of the CCFMC in Latin America. It has to be kept in mind that the inter-Franciscan cooperation in Cono Sur (Chile, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay) started soon after the end of Vatican Council II. The Religious' mission by the Council to resort to their sources and thus also to their charism as well as to

transform them in the light of the Council and the signs of the times to today's circumstances quickly led to the realization in these circles that the Religious will have to actually discover their sources first.

For a long time, even within the Franciscan Family, vocation took place according to the concept by the Church and was valid for all congregations; Francis and Clare were hardly ever mentioned. And the joint Franciscan charism, which can be found in the General Chapter of the International Franciscan Conference for the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of 1982, had not been an option at all. The result was the attempt of a future joint approach in close cooperation regarding the Council's mission. CEFEPAL de Chile (Centre for Franciscan and pastoral studies for Latin America) had already been founded in 1965. Soon CEFPAL do Brasil was to follow. This led to fundamental studies of the Franciscan sources and the significance of the Franciscan basic option for our times. These were strengthened by the continental Councils in Medellin (1968) and Puebla (1979), where the Council documents of Latin America had been revised and implemented. This resulted in a new kind of Church, a liberating Church siding with the poor. Cardinal Evaristo Arns once said that Latin America had discovered its Franciscan soul there. For the Franciscan Family this was the beginning of a very intensive time of cooperation and re-orientation. The Franciscan Family was right at the forefront regarding conciliar renewal. And our two visitors have played an important role in doing so.

This soon led to a close collaboration with the Missionszentrale der Franziskaner (MZF) in Bonn, Germany, an institution of the German Franciscan Provinces, which are also an outcome of the Council. Therefore, we attempted to raise also some interest in Germany for the infectious Franciscan renewal movement from Latin America. Fr Polykarp Geiger OFM<sup>Cap</sup>, the Provincial of the Capuchin Province in the Rhineland-Westphalia Region, was our initial contact. He subsequently became First Chairman of INFAG, the inter-Franciscan consortium in the German-speaking area.

Finally, we are very grateful to announce that this close cooperation between CEFEPAL and MZF was also a stepping stone for the CCFMC. During the first meeting of the Mission Secretaries of the OFM Conference in 1980 in Assisi, the participants from Chile and from MZF proposed the establishment of some kind of comprehensive course about today's significance of our Franciscan mission. This led to the resolution to develop a „Comprehensive Course on Franciscan Mission Charism“. In 1982 the so-called "Mattli Congress" was held in Switzerland, the first gathering in the history of Sisters and Brothers from the continents of the South. The idea was highly welcomed and supported during the meeting in Switzerland. And soon after, the management levels in Rome agreed that this should turn into a joint inter-Franciscan project, as all congregations had been given the same mission by the

Council. This has meanwhile become an unparalleled success story that has lasted for a long time. It was mainly affirmed by the initial Conference of the global Franciscan Family in "Assisi '94", where 160 Sisters and Brothers from all over the world had gathered for 14 days to work intensively on the course and its supplements. This really created an overall view of the Council, the Bible, the Franciscan Sources and the Signs of the Times. Comparable texts are not available that have been elaborated in a long-term global dialogue and in close cooperation of grass root level and experts. Therefore, these texts will not become outdated on short term, because the Bible, the Franciscan Sources and the Council texts are timeless texts. If we want to really assist Pope Francis in his effort to overcome the lethargy within the Church and to revive the Council, the Lesson Units of the CCFMC do contain all the required components, which can be amended and adapted according to time and context.

With the growing distance of time of the Council event, the old way of thinking in the Church regained influence. The name Cardinal López Trujillo has to be mentioned in this respect; as Fray Luis Coscia – then President of CLAR – reports. Once in office, Cardinal López Trujillo had first attempted the gradual "deprivation of power" of CLAR (Conference of the Religious in Latin America). Although it had been mainly the Religious, that had filled the resolutions of Medellín and Puebla with life, that had taken the option for the poor seriously and thus had been the initial target group in the tough battle against liberation theology. Pope John Paul II apparently gave the deathblow with his Apostolic Letter "the Religious of Latin America" (1990), in his Encyclicals and Apostolic Letters, in which he explicitly warned about the dangers of liberation theology. At the same time, he integrated the most important positions of liberation theology in the social area, e.g. the option for the poor. Still, the autonomy and the prophetic function of the Religious were again domesticated. But mental memory blackouts also occurred within the Franciscan Family. The younger Superiors had not experienced the Council itself; it was merely a historic event. The same applies for all movements of renewal within the congregations. The flame gradually goes out. In the vocation process, congregations once again are focused mainly on the establishment of one's own identity, and no longer on the joint prophetic witness to the outside world. In reality both aspects are inextricably linked.

The dreams and the visions of the CCFMC have not become obsolete, they have just been forgotten. Whenever Pope Francis meets with young people, he reminds them of the responsibility for a more just society. In his Encyclical "Laudato Si" the Pope invokes all of mankind to understand integrity of creation and to overcome poverty as the future question of survival. The medieval mendicant movements were the response to a completely different kind of society, Mabel Moyano states. It is our Franciscan mission today to look for and to follow this kind of change. If we do not do so, we will be replaced by other movements that attract today's young people.



**Fray Luis Coscia, OFM Cap** was the Provincial of the Capuchins in Argentina, the President of CLAR (Conference of the Religious of Latin America) during the conflictive time of the Project "Word and Life" to prepare the 500th Anniversary of the discovery of America; he was also long-term President of the "Centro Franciscano" in Buenos Aires and the "Intercentros" (association of all regional centres) of whole Latin America.



**Mabel Moyano** was his closest associate in all these years, a committed and combative lay Franciscan for a liberating Church of Latin America aside the poor and with the poor.

Andreas Müller OFM

## Romania

### Meeting of the Franciscan Family of the CCFMC



The Annual Meeting of the Franciscan Family of Romania took place from 25 to 31 July 2015 in the small industrial town of Caransebes located in the Banat. In 1991, the Congregation of the Franciscan Sisters of Salzkotten (Germany) – two years after the collapse of the Eastern bloc - had begun to establish a wide range of social and pastoral work. After years of suppression it was a difficult new beginning, not only for Franciscans but for other congregations as well. The inhabitants of this Romanian region are – especially after the migration of the German population – mainly orthodox; there is only a small group of Roman Catholics. According to the General Vicar of the Diocese, little can be noticed of the dialogue campaign that had been started by Pope Francis.

The meeting, which was held and conducted by Sr. Lydia Fecheta SF, was attended by 45 Sisters and Brothers of the Franciscan Family from all over Romania. The majority of participants came from the Secular Third Order. The Sisters came from three different congregations: There was good representation from the Conventual and Capuchin Friars of the First Order. The OFM Brothers did not attend. It was highly appreciated that the Curator of the Capuchins and the Provincial of the Conventuals had come especially for a Church service and thus giving a positive sign of unity. Fr. Andreas Müller OFM and Sr. Reginarda Holzer attended on behalf of the CCFMC Centre in Würzburg.

The meetings' main focus was on the CCFMC-Lesson Unit 11 "The Option for Christ and Universality". In his Letter to the Faithful Francis writes: "Since I am the servant of all, I am bound to minister to you the fragrant words of My Lord....". Francis writes in his Letter to the Rulers of the Peoples "to all mayors and consuls, magistrates and rulers throughout the world, and to everyone who may receive these letters....". Francis also wrote to the Custodes of the Friars Minor and to the entire order. In the Canticle to the Sun (see Lesson Unit 12, page 25) Francis addresses the entire universe, all of creation! How do we perceive this universal act of Francis that is so clearly expressed in his scripture? (excerpt from Lesson Unit 11).

It shows what Francis wanted to say. The option for Christ means to decide for the humble, for the ever-loving and caring God. It is not a decision for the strict and judging God, but for the Good Shepherd who takes care of every lost sheep; not for the sovereign God, but the Good Samaritan who will bring salvation and healing. And he will bring them to all of mankind, not only to baptized Christians. This was a revolution at that time as the maxim of that time was "no salvation outside the Church". The form and structure of Francis' movement were also far ahead of time. This movement did not have any superiors, but ministers (=servants), the highest authority was not ministry, but the Chapter of Mats. Proclaiming this Chapter was Francis' mission. That is why Francis wrote the Letter to the Faithful, to the Rulers of the Peoples, to all those who held any ministry of governance. This signifies the universal act of Saint Francis that becomes evident in all his scriptures.



And finally the Canticle to the Sun should not be forgotten, which describes the brotherly-sisterly unity of all being. Pope Francis explicitly refers to it in his Encyclical "Laudato Si", which we dealt with at the end, because it was appropriate to the topic. Pope Francis conjures the whole world to take care for the integrity of creation and to overcome poverty, if we want to survive. The Franciscan Family should be his closest ally.

The joint excursion to the Carpathian Mountains and the Franciscan evening with a lot of singing and dancing and enjoying the rich culture of the Romanian people, was an important experience and showed that we are one family and that we belong together.

The Board of the Franciscan movement in Romania chaired by Sr. Lydia gave a good overview of the inter-Franciscan collaboration. And the members of the FG really enjoyed being among like-minded people.

Especially in this country, where lack of freedom and regimentation has been prevailing for a long time, the universal vastness of Francis is a true blessing and we have to get re-involved again and again. Francis' passionate temperament, his open heart and his all-inclusive mysticism become very apparent in Lesson Unit 11. And everyone seemed to have felt it.

Thank you again to all those, who have made this meeting possible through their lively hospitality and their enormous commitment.

Sr. Reginarda Holzer

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