



Year of the Consecrated Life II

A while back Sr. Judith Dinkel and I went on a CCFMC tour to Austria. We visited the Generalates and Provincialates of the Franciscan Family. I noticed that the term “Year of the Consecrated Life” was mentioned in almost every congregation. At all entrances “eye catchers” were on display. The congregations also represented themselves – and provided information on the religious orders in general. This was an outward sign for the communities and their visitors.

Everywhere we went, we received a very warm welcome. As in all congregations, we were offered food and drink. We also spent the night in some of them. The discussions with the Superior Generals and the Provincials and also with the Sisters were open and fraternal. The issue that was discussed the most was the average age, religious vocation, the “ministries” as well as the changed property situation. Today the Religious are often “co-workers”, i.e. they work with other staff – in their “ministries” as well as in their communities, e.g. when caring for the ill or when carrying out services in the house. All over we met happy and balanced people, who prayed a lot, who worked and who had an optimistic outlook into the future.

What I am describing above is the situation here in Europe; it may be different in other places: young faces, young people, and a spirit of optimism, new beginnings, and experiments. There will certainly be problems that will be challenging, like in Syria or in some regions of Africa. Being Christian in many places can be dangerous. It is not all about the “clash of civilizations”, it is also the incomprehensible hatred that Christians and even people in general are faced with.

In my opinion, the Religious have a special mission in this respect. The most important feature is our traditional religious values and the repeated contemplation of our mission, which may have different aspects in the various facets and phases of life. By request of Pope Francis the “Year of the Consecrated Life” from 30 November 2014 to 2 February 2016 is to be a year of renewal of religious life.

This involves three vows, namely poverty, obedience and chastity – and I want to also add community – all these terms don’t require new definition. But we have to take a new look at them. Poverty that has been chosen freely has to be real-life. Letting go is not only a task for the beginning but for the entire life. In other parts of the world poverty is likely to be different than in Europe. But we are obliged to “share” everywhere and we also promised to do so.

Obedience – in many “stories” of our religious traditions this has been described in a rather peculiar way – has something to do with “listening”. Listening to each other, reaching a joint decision, and then to act accordingly is more important today than ever. But listening to each other and to be willing to engage in dialogue is challenging everywhere.

Chastity will be possible in a community of trust and mutual acceptance. It is not a lonely adventure. The entire community will be responsible for its success.

Today, we therefore have to newly define the term community. In times where individualism outranks communion, everyone is called to live „contrary to the trend”.

Together we have to look for responses that we have to give today. We are not any different, but we promised to be different. This testimony is the mission of the religious Christians, whether in Germany or elsewhere in the world.

Reflection, exchange, open and honest discussion is certainly also the theme of the “Year of the Consecrated Life”. It is most likely the hardest piece of work and it does require open-mindedness and – as already stated – the protection by the community. This is completely different for religious communities with older and old members than for those made up of younger members. But if you have these expectations, it should be a challenge - especially in the “Year of the Consecrated Life”.

Hadrian W. Koch OFM

Africa

Kenya

Successful Year for the CCFMC in East Africa in 2014

Fr. Hermann Borg reports from Nairobi, the centre of the CCFMC in East Africa, about the goals and achievements of the CCFMC.



The spread of the Comprehensive Course on the Franciscan Mission Charism (CCFMC) remains the main objective. Through various activities, writings, information, seminars, workshops” Franciscan entities, Franciscan Orders and Congregations and other people as Church Leaders and Lay are given the basics of Franciscan values. Due to limited financial resources the communication takes place mainly via Internet. About 2,800 email addresses are contacted on a regular basis.

For many Sisters and Brothers the centre in Nairobi has become the power station of Franciscan inspiration and guidance. In the response to the question by some Religious why Franciscans do better than other congregations, the answer may be: The Sisters and Brothers are undergoing regular CCFMC formation. The horizon of the spread of the CCFMC is continuously rising – not least because of the continuous work with this course and the cooperation with other Franciscan and social ministries, among them “Justice, Peace, Integrity of Creation” and “Franciscans International”. In conservative circles it is often somewhat difficult to accept this quite open and future-oriented Franciscan message.

Therefore, the increase of Franciscan OFM vocations has to be seen as a positive result. The originally 9 novices were followed by 12 novices; after 17 postulants another 18 postulants are to come.

All areas are suffering from lack of personnel; however, there is great hope that a number of capable Franciscan Sisters and Brothers are to continue the present initiatives. Regarding the personnel situation, Fr. Hermann Borg adds that he hopes to be able to continue this work for a number of years. Moreover, the number of co-operators and companions has been steadily growing so that motivation, participation and also inspiration are still increasing.



Sisters at the conclusion of the course programme

Regarding the financial aspects, there are attempts to not only obtain financial, but also practical assistance through the private sector via the “Mother Earth Network”.

In an outlook for 2015, Fr. Hermann Borg refers to the Papal Encyclical “Laudato Si”. He writes:

... “in this context, all pastoral, social, caritative and spiritual activities of the Franciscan Family appear in a special light of the Church and of the public. We as Franciscans have every chance to support the strategy of the Church and to put ourselves in the right perspective. We should join in even when dealing with new political strides in the political and public sectors regarding education, the social sector, in discussions about the value of family, youth, refugees, nature etc. This particular

role is taken on by Justice and Peace, Youth Alive, CCFMC Kenya/Africa within the scope of exerting an influence... This is exactly the point where CCFMC Africa starts with its work. The strong and sustainable bridge to the hotspots of our society is built by the thousands of Sisters and Brothers worldwide in so many local communities. Let us continue in 2015 what has begun in recent years! ...“

Cameroon

Annual General Meeting of the CCFMC defines a plan of activities

In February 2015 the Annual General Meeting of the CCFMC in Cameroon was held at the Capuchin Friary in Bambui. The meeting helped us to evaluate our Franciscan presence and witness in our society and the Church in 2014 and we also came up with a plan of activities for the year 2015. Sr. Mary Gladys MAHLA, Provincial and CCFMC Coordinator reports:

The most important issues of the plan of activities for 2015 are:

Days of Contemplation and Prayer:

They are to remind of the social woes in Cameroon and of the dangers through Boko Haram. It is suggested to carry out the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament every first Friday of the month as well as to hold masses throughout the month of May.

Health:

- Campaign against bleaching of skin and hair, including the warning about health damage
- Avoidance of canned food
- Use of available media to sensitize the population

Nature:

- Respect nature
- Campaigns against the use of chemicals in food products and to be careful when disposing plastic containers

Liturgy:

- Live what we preach
- Lively presentation of the liturgy. Cordial invitation of small Christian communities to actively participate.
- Joyful appearance and friendly welcome

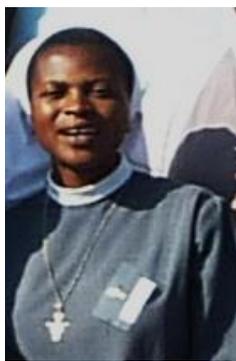


We will forward a copy of the two wonderful letters from the international CCFMC Centre in Germany and the Africa Centre in Kenya to all Dioceses to go through them during their meetings. The message can be downloaded here: http://www.en.ccfmc.net/images/Animation_Letter.pdf

The meeting ended with an urgent prayer for peace in the world and the protection from the terror of Boko Haram.

Franciscans from Cameroon visit a refugee camp in Central Africa

Sr. Appo Budzee TSSF, Cameroon reports about her impressions during a visit of a group of TSSF Sisters to a refugee camp in the Central African Republic.



Sr. Appo Budzee TSSF

Following the unrests that broke out in December 2013 in the Central African Republic and due to the extreme and very brutal violence that shocked the world, large parts of the civil population tried to escape and some of them are presently living in religious entities. The TSSF Sisters, guided by Sr. Alphonsa Kiven, decided to support their fellow Sisters in the Central African Republic, a country that is still suffering from unrests. They especially tended to the displaced persons, who had living in camps for over one year.

In her report Sr. Appo extensively and vividly describes the situation in refugee camps, where Catholic Religious are hosting and taking care of Muslim

refugees. She mainly reports in detail about the everyday camp life of 360 displaced persons, who have been living the Bishop's House in Berberati for 14 months. But she also writes about the 500 refugees, who have to live in the formation house of the Capuchins. She was especially moved by the life of the children, who are mostly left to themselves, but Sr. Appo also admires the peaceful manner that the refugees are being taken care of regarding their physical and emotional well-being.



The Sisters at the Community in Berberati

Her conclusion: Even in the midst of chaos and hopelessness, God still calls prophets and “saviours”. They proclaim the Good News and, in faith, they sow seed in the desert, which God makes grow. They take heart and stand beyond the chaos. Bishop Dennis and others are doing it.

If you estimate yourself as a “missioner” or “evangelizer” (as every baptized person is) never minimize your effort. Within God’s plan, you are either laying a foundation or putting a stone that is indispensable for the construction of God’s Kingdom.

War and violence should be condemned outright. Each individual and each system that instigates violence for whatever selfish benefit is a tyrant and an enemy of God and of humanity.

The detailed English report can be downloaded here:

http://www.en.ccfmc.net/images/Private_Report_of_my_Visit_to_Central_Africa.pdf

Latest news:

The Franciscan Family wants to strengthen its position in Central Africa

A group of Franciscans from Cameroon is planning to strengthen the local Franciscan family with a trip to Central Africa, Sr. Mary Gladys Mahla reports in a letter to the CCFMC Centre in Würzburg. In this letter she is asking for the involvement of various members of the Franciscan Family - also including SFO and the Capuchins. She also emphasizes that she is convinced that solidarity is a sign of strength. One concrete aspect of the trip includes the promotion of the CCFMC and to point out its significance for the Franciscan Family. Sr. Mary Gladys Mahla thinks that the financial aspect could be one of the weak points of this endeavour and solutions still have to be found here.

Pope's in-flight press conference: lessons learned and to learn

<http://www.en.ccfmc.net/focus/352-pope-s-in-flight-press-conference-lessons-learned-and-to-learn>

The Encyclical 'Laudato si' by Pope Francis

<http://www.en.ccfmc.net/focus/351-laudato-si-an-overview>

Pope and mayors sign declaration on climate and trafficking

http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2015/07/22/pope_and_mayors_sign_declaration_on_climate_and_trafficking/1160004

