

“Merciful like the Father“

This is the theme of the Jubilee Year of Mercy. From 8 December 2015 to 20 November 2016 this will be the topic of countless sermons, articles, symposia and pilgrimages. Thematic years are often somewhat ponderous. One year is long and the excitement flattens - no matter what it is all about – the Religious live or family questions. The bible says that God is merciful. And the Bible also states that mankind is supposed to be merciful. But how often do we read or hear something without being able to comprehend it? The reality we live in is often so different - especially in this day and age. Thus it is important to be reminded. Mercy – called *miser cordia* in Latin language - literally means: “having a heart for the poor“. This is actually an attribute of God: Yahweh is a compassionate and gracious God (Exodus 34, 6). And because he is compassionate he also wants this from us: but go and learn what this means: I desire mercy, not sacrifice (Matthew 9, 13).

The Beatitudes of the Sermon of the Mount (Matthew 5, 7) read as follows: Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. And the example of the Good Samaritan Jesus has the teachers of the law find their own answer to the question on who is closest to him: the one who had mercy on the man who fell into the hands of the robbers (cf. Luke 10, 37).

Francis writes in a letter to a Minister, who was obviously having problems with his fellow friars, that the Minister should not wish that they should be better Christians: there is not any brother in the world who has looked into your eyes would ever depart you without your mercy if he is looking for mercy. And if he were not looking for mercy

you would ask him if he wants mercy (BrMin). All of this is not new to us, but we hear it anew and also perceive it as being new. Maybe we should also ask ourselves whether we have „a heart for the poor“, what about our mercy? The understanding of mercy may be quite different in Europe compared to Asia, Africa and Latin America. But the challenge remains for those who address it. In his book „The Imperative of Responsibility“, the Jewish philosopher writes in 1979: Just look and you will know. This brief sentence touched me deeply. It is all about looking. God looks, he wants mercy and he does not want victims. The Good Samaritan also looks. And Francis advises the Minister, who is having problems with his fellows friars, to take a look.

This is the „Mysticism of Open Eyes“ Johann Baptist Metz describes in his book of 2011. Mercy is divine and but also something close to a political virtue. It takes a look. Looking away is unpolitical and thus it is merciless. Remaining on the sidelines and being only an extra in world affairs is not Christian. The “Jubilee Year of Mercy” reminds us of this fact and asks us to take a close look.

The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche once said: I do not like them, the merciful, who feel blessed in their pity....“compassion – is one of the Christians virtues where I am closest and most similar to God. This mercy does not signify weakness or helpless sympathy, or not seeing a way. This type of mercy is strong and it makes you feel strong.

Yet everything begins with taking a look, with the “Mysticism of Open Eyes“ for the merciful Father and for the man who fell into the hands of the robbers.

Hadrian W. Koch OFM

Africa

Cameroon and the Central African Republic (CAR)

CCFMC full of life, idealism and commitment



During the first days of December of 2016 a CCFMC seminar was conducted in Bangui/Central African Republic (CAR) with a very particular significance. It took place almost concurrently with the visit of Pope Francis and could be held despite enormous difficulties thanks to the outstanding commitment and the idealism of many CCFMC employees. Sr. Gladys (Provincial of the Tertiary Sisters and CCFMC Coordinator for Cameroon) produced a report and we are providing a summary below:

Preparations: Between failure and success

In order to strengthen and streamline the activities of the CCFMC in the CAR (République Centrafricaine/RCA), it had been decided after the seminar in Togo (February 2014) to group together Cameroon and the CAR in the future. In this group, Cameroon will provide the coordinator and the substitute coordinator will come from the CAR. As an initial and preparatory stage, a CCFMC team from Cameroon headed by Fr. Bertrand Sankagui, OFS should travel to the CAR in July 2015 to talk with members of the Franciscan congregations and to introduce the CCFMC.

Due to security concerns based on armed assaults on the planned travel route, the venue had to be postponed and changed to another place. Yet the initially promising second option was also cancelled due to rainy season and the inaccessible nature of many roads. Amidst this difficult preparatory phase, it was announced that Pope Francis was going to visit the CAR in November 2015. Hopes emerged that the visit by the Pope could be a good opportunity to meet many representatives of the Franciscan Family. It is owed to the insistence of one Brother to stick to the set date despite the precarious security situation in the capital of Bangui as well as many other difficulties in the preparatory phase. Eventually, Sr. Gladys and Fr. Boniface travelled to Bangui. The report states about these events that "the long dream was realized".

The type of difficulties regarding the planning and execution of such a seminar is also described in another passage in the report by Sr. Gladys: "We were so lucky to be at the Pope's visit. It was such a wonderful experience even though frightening because of the presence of the forces of law and order everywhere. There were more than 25,000 military there. At the first mass of the Pope I had the chance of meeting many Franciscans. I reminded them all about the upcoming meeting on 1st and 2nd December. Many had not heard about it. I can understand that it was not easy for Fr. Jocelyn (the coordinator of the meeting) to get to everybody, following the long distances and the enclaved nature of some areas without access to the internet. It marveled me at that mass to see the number of Franciscan congregations that exist in CAR... Some of the Franciscans would have loved so much to attend the meeting, but they had to travel back with others in a convoy for security reasons ..."

On 1st December the meeting started in a hall on the premises of a refugee camp. Sr. Gladys reports: "We were disappointed that the hall for the meeting was not ready when we got there. We took some time trying to clean the hall... From the hall where we were, we could hear children crying and others playing. We soon got used to the noise and continued with the meeting."

The Meeting

Day One: 28 participants had come for the opening. They came from seven congregations, the Third Order Secular and the Young Franciscans from different parts of the country; there were nine groups in total. An opening prayer led by one of the Friars Minor, was followed by an introductory round. Fr. Jocelyn welcomed the participants – and especially those who came from Cameroon, for their courage and the effort and sacrifices that they made to come. He used the chance to describe what the CCFMC stands for, but also to explain the purpose of the meeting – namely to ensure the smooth take off of the CCFMC in the CAR.

Sr. Gladys talked about the history of the CCFMC, in general and in West Africa, in particular. In one-on-one discussions, the participants discussed their motivations to join the Franciscan way of life and whether they would make the same decision still today.

The participants were impressed by the report on the CCFMC activities in Cameroon presented by Fr. Boniface. The determination was clearly visible that a similar development should also take place in the CAR.



During the elections of the National Bureau Fr. Jocelyn and Sr. Cecile were elected President and Vice President, respectively. The other participants were elected to work in the management team.

The next topic was the grouping of the Central African Republic. It was decided to establish five zones corresponding with one of a total of nine dioceses in the country. The representatives from the individual zones were then asked to get together to elect at least one representative, who would call the first meeting.

The subsequent prayer for peace, which had been composed in Cameroon, implores peace against the attacks by Boko Haram. It had been adapted and reformulated to suit the Central African reality and was translated into French. The participants were encouraged to repeat the provided copy of the prayer in their home communities.

Day two: The current situation in the CAR, which is affected by war, flight and losses as well as recognition and gratefulness for the help that had been given and received was the central theme of the prayers, discussions and exchange of opinions on this day. This was followed by a presentation of the different Lesson Units by Fr. Jocelyn followed by an in-depth presentation of this topic by Fr. Boniface, also in discussion groups. “What are the challenges of our time



and what should be our Franciscan vision towards them?" Fr. Boniface also talked about the work of Franciscans International and encouraged the participants to write a report wherever there is any injustice and give it to the person in charge in the locality.

Evaluation: The participants gave a positive evaluation especially on the good organization of the meeting, the active participation, the educational contents and mediation, the positive atmosphere, and the good fraternal relation as well as the fruitful exchange. They were confident that the results of the discussions would have a positive effect on the Franciscan Family in the CAR.

Negative points of the evaluation: venue of the meeting (refugee camp), the date chosen (national holiday) and the compliance with the time schedule.

The Plan of Action includes the visit of refugee camps, health training for refugees in the camps, prayers for peace in the communities and groups.

The meeting closed with words of gratitude to the delegation from Cameroon for its material and immaterial support and also to the CCFMC Center in Würzburg for its financial support and to Fr. Jocelyn for his efforts in the preparation and execution of the meeting. Finally, Sr. Gladys expressed the hope and especially the determination of the participants that the CCFMC will take roots and be successful in the Central African Republic.

Kenya

FRANCISCAN FAMILY ASSOCIATION (FFA)

Memorandum of Understanding between CCFMC und FFA



We, the Franciscans in Kenya look upon 20 years of successful work of the CCFMC Course in Kenya and in Anglo-phone Africa.

On 10 July 1997 an official document was signed that the CCFMC has created the basis for the partnership of all Franciscan communities in Kenya.

Based on the spirituality of Saint Francis all Franciscan communities will

now be working together: recollection days, retreats, pilgrimages, workshops and introductory courses will be offered and conducted for all 35 communities that have joined the CCFMC. There has been a notable increase of interest in the joint Franciscan spiritual orientation. Especially those formators who are undergoing formation as postulantes, novices live of this spiritual cooperation. It serves as a secure foundation to strive towards and live in spiritual calling.

It has been proven that other congregations are looking to the Franciscans and are gaining inspiration for their formation.

It is also true that unity, cooperation and safety within spiritual orientation has turned into a role model for other spiritual communities.

With the help of the CCFMC, we were able to purchase the property where the first building was erected 15 years ago. It was furnished with some offices and 10 single rooms.

The CCFMC also enabled the attachment to the office for "Franciscans International" as well as "Justice and Peace".

The Saint Antonius of Padua Institute (SAPIA) for Africa was the final step in the extension of the Franciscan spiritual and academic formation program in Nairobi five years ago. Thus within the past five years, this Franciscan Centre has constantly extended its range of offers and services for Kenya and Africa - all based on the initiatives of the CCFMC.

There is the need now to again expand the centre. In 2017, the centre will be enlarged by two further classrooms, two rooms for spiritual and psychological consultation, a hall, 40 additional single rooms and a chapel.

All Franciscan congregations and orders are experiencing a period of growth. Southern Africa is largely populated by Christians. The Church and the orders are growing. Thus, we are complying with the processes of growth. We are laying the foundations for our Sisters and Brothers to be prepared for the future.

The Saint Antonius of Padua Institute (SAPIA) for Africa will be able to invite for studies with a doctorate in a few years to come in order to introduce the entire rich Franciscan history and spirituality.

Touched and guided by God's spirit, the Franciscans are planning to continue to serve our Church and the world. Our initiatives for peace and reconciliation are bearing fruit. Our international connections make us strong and influential.

Our cooperation with the youth, with other religions and the underprivileged is a furthering factor of integration. Irrespective of education and status in society, we all want to be Sisters and Brothers for everyone.

The number of 31 postulants is a clear sign that God blesses our Franciscan calling and presence in Africa. God's concern for the future of mankind is apparent and noticeable.

Peace and All Good,

Sr. Benigna Aoko Fssa
Chairperson FFA

Fr. Hermann Borg OFM,
CCFMC facilitator Africa

