

Thank heavens to the women!

The 30-year success story of the CCFMC is largely owed to the courageous and competent input of women in the world-wide Franciscan Family. The basic idea of returning to the Franciscan charism and present significance in the light of the "signs of the times" was certainly brought on the way by the OFM Mission Council, but soon everyone realized that such a worldwide project could only be initiated and implemented by including all branches of the Franciscan Family, and especially the large majority of female convents. II Vatican Council gave the impetus with its demand to the orders to return to their own sources. Nowadays it is hard to imagine for many what that had meant at the time: putting aside old views and certainties, an open Church towards the world, mission that is understood as an offer of the concept of the Kingdom of God of a comprehensive liberation from all disasters, salvations even in non-Christian religious beliefs. All this required the fundamental rethinking of our comprehension of mission.

Almost every community introduced chapters of renewal; the regulated communities of the Third Order joined together in 1982 to the "International Franciscan Conference" (IFC-TOR); that same year, for the first time in history, Brothers and Sisters from the Franciscan Orders to revise our mission calling from the perspective of the third world. We were able to sense the downright juvenile openness of the Sisters and Brothers from the southern continents in the process of rethinking the challenges that Francis and Clare had brought about for their situation. And just this euphoric mood is the starting point for the bold project called CCFMC with a comprehensive course that has been elaborated on a worldwide and inter-Franciscan basis, which aims to make available these tendencies and movements to everyone.

From the very beginning, women have played a significant role, both during the development phase and also in the international propagation of the course. Structures have been set up for this purpose – initially on the administrative level in Rome (1985), which later on became the international

board (1987). Great supporters were Sr. Alma Default and Sr. Christiane Wittmers, the Sisters of the "intercultural team", in the elaboration of basic texts, and also in the redaction team. The Sacre Coeur Sr. Malina Hoepfner needs to be especially mentioned in this regard, who had been working at the CCFMC Secretariat in Bonn from 1984 to 1994. Without her highly professional work, her manifold talents and her engagement, the elaboration and the propagation of the initial version of the course would not have been successful in such a brief period of time. She has just recently passed away. A detailed note of appreciation can be found at page 4. Her successors as General Secretary - Sr. Margarethe Mehren till 2002 and Mrs. Patricia Hoffmann till 2011, thenceforth managing directress – took over her passion and preserved her inheritance.

On continental and regional level this experience counts even more. Without the untiring and competent input of committed women, men would have clearly failed. Sr. Dorothy Ortega and Sr. Jeanne Luyun in Asia; Sr. Maria Aoko and Sr. Alphonsa Kiven in Africa; Sr. Vilani Rocha, Sr. Maria Fachini and Ms. Mabel Moyano in Latin America; Sr. Judith Putz and Sr. Lydia Feheta in Europe; Sr. Marietta Vega for the Order of the Poor Clares and Ms. Marianne Powell for the Third Order are only mentioned as examples for many hundreds of Sisters all over the world, who have turned the Franciscan idea of the CCFMC into the fundamental spirituality of our times.

Such a project can only be authentic through constant and fruitful dialogue of men and women. Francis and Clare are the prime examples for it. "They did this in such simple manner, because they realized in themselves and in their counterpart that God's spirit was seeking to impact. They had, at the same time, respect and curiosity in the search for their individual calling" Ms. Kreidler-Kos writes in her Council stimulus in the following pages. If we show courage again today, we will be able to help the Church on her way to a brotherly-sisterly Church.

Andreas Müller OFM

“One and the same spirit moved the Sisters and Brothers” The people of God as a brotherly-sisterly Church

Martina Kreidler-Kos



Francis and his first brothers were given a special kind of chance: by meeting Clare and her sisters, they encountered women that were aware of their own calling. In turn, these women met men on the serious and modest search for a way in the discipleship of Christ. Thus, they all had the chance to learn from each other if they wanted to. They were able to do so by mindful observance, loving respect and in astonished recognition of God's spiritual action and took courageous steps that we are only able to dream of in many places of the Church today: mutual spiritual companionship, leadership responsibilities of men and women, joy in a brotherly-

sisterly form of the discipleship of Christ. "The same spirit moved the sisters and brothers", Thomas of Celano, in his second biography of the Saint, sums up this joint experience and understanding (2 C 204).

Today, just as during the years of II Vatican Council, the issue of women is one of the "great questions of our time", which the Church authorities wanted to listen to in a sensible manner and to react decisively. But first of all a sobering statement: II Vatican Council was not a Council of women, it was also not a Council about women, and initially it was not even a Council attended by women: only during the third period of sessions, in September 1964, women were admitted as female listeners – first of all eight religious sisters and seven singles being Presidents of large women's organisations. During the fourth period of sessions, a married woman was called, together with her husband, for the first time. It has to be regarded as a big step forward that in the end there were 23 female listeners as well as some *female visitors*, who had been permitted to take part in the Council for one day. In the early 1960s it was still unproblematic to think about the renewal of the *entire* Church solely among men. No wonder, as one could read in the encyclical "Casti connubii" (1930) by Pope Pius IX regarding the efforts of women's emancipation "*This wrong liberty and an unnatural equality with man will have an effect to the own ruin of the woman.*"

In the years of John XXIII, tangible with the his encyclical "Pacem in terris" (1963), a change was visible regarding the perception of women within the Church. This change towards the recognition and basic equivalence and equality of all human beings that is based on the dignity of being children of God was decisively addressed by II Vatican Council. And thus for the first time, there was discussion about the issue of women during a Council. This was a new situation that gave hope and was path-breaking. "Since all men possess a rational soul and are created in God's likeness, since they have the same nature and origin, have been redeemed by Christ and enjoy the same divine calling and destiny, the basic equality of all must receive increasingly greater recognition...Nevertheless, with respect to the fundamental rights of the person, every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, color, social condition, language or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent." (*Gaudium et spes* 29) This change of perception also affected the life within the Church. The Council states in *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*: "Since in our times women have an ever more active share in the whole life of society, it is very important that they participate more widely also in the various fields of the Church's apostolate" (*Apostolicam actuositatem* 9).

The various Council documents remind of the basic mission of the Church: In all its performances and with all baptized it must, should and can be a vivid testimonial for the Gospel. This ardent desire to live together in the footsteps of Jesus has inspired also, and especially, the Franciscan-Clarean initiative. This can only be authentic at all times by brotherly-sisterly dialogue between men and women. It is for this brotherly-sisterly experience that we have to fight for today just as fifty years ago. But also Francis and Clare did not just get it by doing nothing. At the beginning of the 13th Century Gender differences were specified, roles were clearly defined and assigned. Clare, for example, had to depend on Francis as a male companion to move along her unconventional way, Francis on the other hand "did not need" Clare at all. She deserves a lot of credit that she did not get intimidated by the perception of women of her time. It is also quite impressive to see how adaptive Francis was. Let alone the individual courage that each of them had to have to accept and value the gender differences, the social circumstances and the personal possibilities. In the early stages this experiment which transcended sexes was of high risk. Nevertheless, they both were in a position to cross certain limits and to overcome stereotypes. Simply due to the fact that they recognized in their respective counterpart, that the spirit of God was at work. They had equally demonstrated respect and curiosity in their search for their individual calling.

This type of Franciscan-Clarean courage, and taking the dignity of *all* baptized seriously, was also proven by the Council. It still requires a consequent rereading of the path-breaking texts and also the consequential implementation of these guideline documented by the Council. Thus one main thing is required: people, who are aware of this dignity as a gift and task. It also requires courageous women like Clare, her fellow sisters or the listeners at II Vatican Council. This should not at least continue the status they had during the Council: "*Guests in their own house*"¹. It also requires networks such as the Sisters of San Damiano or Prague in lively interaction with their brothers to support and encourage each other on their – sometimes still adventurous – way to a brotherly-sisterly Church: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave^[a] nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:27-28). We should take it from the Franciscan sources and the documents of II Vatican Council, and last but not least, from the Words of God: it is one and the same spirit that moves men and women in this Church.

¹ cf. Carmel Elizabeth McEnroy, *Guests in their own house. The women of Vatican II*, New York 1996.

