



Christmas 2016

"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests".

It is a quite simple message for people with very simple ears and hearts: The Savior is born, God is glorified, and there is peace on earth for those people of His mercy.

People are not coming together for romantic reasons that very night. They are rather searching for a little bit of light. What kind of light are they looking for? Certainly not only the flickering Christmas candles. The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. (Isiah 9) For to us a child is born. What kind of child? It is not the holy infant so tender and mild; it is the Servant of God. The Prophet says that the government will be on his shoulders.

This is by far more than a child can bear. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. His birth is a sign for all those who are dealing with hopes and expectations.

Peace is on earth – not then and not now. Search for shelter then and now. But peace was born then; peace became man in Jesus Christ. And wherever people get involved with Jesus Christ, they also get involved with peace. But are we really doing so? It is the Good News itself and the skepticism of the human heart for us not to rely on the fulfillment of our deepest desires, yet we even mistrust and remain suspicious of any kind of promise which is to be understood as an invitation and not something that is forced on us. But if we are striving to renew our hopes today, we have to trust in this Good News. We have to put trust in our deepest

and innermost desire and say yes to this incredible opportunity that has now become a reality: Jesus is the light, he is the Savior, and he is peace on earth.

Wherever faith is alive, life will be created; where hope becomes alive, it will create future, and wherever love becomes alive, it will bear fruit. Life, future, and fruit are the signs for salvation and peace, the signs of growth and of blessing if people are able to live, when they are able to have a future, when people are humane.

Let us put trust in this Good News! It is a message against fear. "Trust" means to base one's life on it; trust means to be true in the darkness of distress, fear and doubt; trust means to continue the journey. Christmas is a celebration of renewal and of remembrance wanting to get people to look inside themselves; a remembrance which will help to move the often forgotten things back at the center of attention again and that will light up unimportant matters again.

Let us jointly look for the cribs of poverty and of misery and let us act like people with eyes, ears, mouth and hands!

We should not get discouraged even when this sign oftentimes seems to be ridiculous; it is God's sign. Let us embrace each other so that we will not get torn apart. It is much warmer in some stables than in many living rooms.

God became man! We should be people of his mercy, people of peace; Christmas should not just simply vanish! It is the night of hope, the night of the beginning. Only beginnings hold a future. God is with us.

Hadrian W. Koch OFM

Africa

Cameroon: CCFMC looks back on a successful year 2016



Sr. Mary Gladys Mahla, CCFMC Provincial Coordinator for the Anglophone part of Cameroon has submitted a detailed and vivid report about the key events in 2016. The CCFMC in Cameroon is divided into zones according to the respective dioceses. All Franciscans of the individual dioceses come together four times a year for the Annual General Meeting/AGM). Sr. Mary Gladys writes in her report:

Jubilee Year of the Consecrated Life:

During the Year of the Consecrated Life proclaimed by Pope Francis the consecrated members of the CCFMC decided to come together for the celebration of their own consecration. This ceremonial event took place on 30 January 2016. The Franciscans of the Diocese of Kumbo where most of the Franciscan Religious are found also celebrated their own Jubilee on exactly the same day and therefore, were not able to participate in the joint celebration. About 60 Religious came from the Tertiary Sisters of St. Francis, the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart, the Capuchin Sisters, the Franciscan Passionist Sisters and the Order of Friars Minor Capuchins.



The celebration began with a festive Holy Mass that had been animated by the Capuchin Brothers and Sisters. One of the highlights of the Holy Mass was the renewal of the religious consecration and a procession with the symbol of each congregation. Before the final blessing, Sr. Mary Gladys offered some word of thanks to all participants for their active participation in the preparation of the liturgy.

The day continued with the introduction of the Franciscan congregations present. The deep relationship among the congregations and the common Franciscan heritage was especially commended. During a contribution on Franciscan identity, one of the Franciscan Capuchin Brothers emphasized that no one had imitated Christ more closely than Saint Francis.

Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting took place on 31 January 2016 and started at 9.00 a.m. with a festive Holy Mass which was celebrated by the members of the Franciscan Family of the Diocese of Kumbo. It was held in memory of those Franciscans who had died in the course of the year as well as for those who had been ordained and finally professed in the course of 2016. In his sermon, Fr. Cornelius OFM Cap exhorted all to accept the challenges and difficulties of the discipleship in following Christ. Christ, he said, is "our model per excellence and our Seraphic Father Saint Francis of Assisi as an embodiment of a true follower of Christ. He did not give up in the face of the difficulties and challenges faced by the Order. "

The Capuchin Sisters and Brothers had been responsible for the organization of the proper Annual General Meeting. In her official words of welcome, Sr. Mary Gladys initially pointed out that this meeting would lastly be an opportunity to get to know each other and to create better understanding of each other. She especially welcomed those attending such a meeting for the first time and

asked them to bring in three more new members next time. Furthermore, Sr. Mary Gladys stated that the CCFMC Office in Kenya is responsible for Africa; the International CCFMC Office is located in Würzburg/Germany.

Sr. Bertha Ngwashi FMHS gave a beautiful input on the “Bull of Indication of the Extra Ordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy - Misericordiae Vultus” by Pope Francis. She briefly characterized this Bull with three words: **recognize, contemplate and serve**. She continued to say that God is a merciful God, who calls His children through Jesus Christ to be instruments of



mercy. In order to appreciate mercy, we have to contemplate. Finally, her input focused on the fact that there are corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, healing the sick, visiting prisoners and burying the dead are all part of the corporal works. Spiritual work of mercy involves caring for the religious and spiritual and welfare of those in need: Giving doubtful instructions, instructing the ignorant, admonishing sinners, comforting the afflicted, praying for the living and the dead.

Following the plenary session, a plan of action was drawn up as follows:

- To carry out spiritual and corporal work of mercy
- To celebrate the Sacrament of reconciliation regularly
- To practice the virtues of humility, simplicity and love
- To regard priests as ministers of Christ to create room for openness and freedom in confession
- To visit *The Holy Door of Mercy* before the Year of Mercy runs out.

Other items on the agenda were reports about the CCFMC activities in the different dioceses and the election of the member of the Executive Committee.

Asia

India:

Intensive training on Franciscan Spirituality



Fr. Nithiya, CCFMC Coordinator for South Asia and the national Coordinator of the Association of Franciscan Families of India (AFFI), reports about a challenging training program on Franciscan Spirituality for Formators in the Congregations.

This national training program took place from 4 to 9 November 2016 at the Pastoral Centre in the north-Indian town of Bhopal and was attended by 54 Sisters and Brothers from all over India, who are responsible for

training in their respective congregations. They worked with the CCFMC Lesson Units; in addition, the current socio-economical, cultural and religious situation in the region was also included.



The meeting was jointly organized by the Association of Franciscan Families of India – AFFI and South Asian Franciscan Initiatives – SAFI. Originally, Franciscans from the entire area of South Asia were planned to attend, but this was not possible due to “concrete political difficulties”, e.g. visa limitations. The countries of Pakistan and Sri Lanka had

expressed keen interest to conduct a similar event in their respective countries.

As the Franciscan Family of India already has a strong network under AFFI, through various national and regional training programs, the national training this time focused on the CCFMC Lesson Units for formators. 15 of the overall 25 Lesson Units were revised and presented with PowerPoint Presentations and were also extended taking into account the current developments regarding socio-economic, cultural and religious issues in order to edit those topics in the present South Asian context.

At the beginning of the gathering, Fr. Nithiya explained the dynamics of the whole program and also gave an overview on the background history of the CCFMC and the relevance of the Lesson Units for the Franciscan formation. In the course of the five-day training program, under the guidance of Fr. Dolphy, Fr. Divakar und Sr. Stella FCC, the participants reviewed, first of all Lesson Unit 1 (Christianity – Religion of the Incarnation), 2 (The Franciscan Family/Universality), 4 (Initial and Ongoing Formation), 5 (Biblical and Prophetic Basis) and 7 (the Franciscan Mission according to Early Sources) to serve as a basis.

This was followed by Lesson Units 10 (Contemplation and Mission), 14 (Sisters and Brothers in a Secularized World), 15 (Dialogue with Other Religions), 19 (Francis and the Option for the Poor), 20 (Liberation Theology from the Franciscan Point of View), 21 (Prophetic Criticism of Social Systems from the Franciscan Point of View), 22 (“As Man and Woman He Created Them”



– a Franciscan challenge), 23 (Franciscan commitment to Peace) 24 (Our Relation to Science and Technology), and 25 (The Permanent Role of Franciscans in the Church). The focus of working with these religious-mystically and socio-politically relevant Lesson Units was on group discussion as well as on additional inputs. Further topics were the Franciscan response to issues such as violence against women, children, Indigenous People and migrants, etc., in the South-Asian context. But also the Call by Pope Francis through *Gaudium Evangelii*, *Year of the Consecrated Life*, *Laudato Si* and *Jubilee Year of Mercy* were discussed from a Franciscan perspective.

At the end of the training, the participating formators presented a number of comments and proposals to the Provincials and Major Superiors:

- In most of the novitiates, the Ignatian Retreat lasting one month, respectively 40 days, should be turned into an intensive Franciscan retreat of the same duration.
- The participating group should definitely undergo a second training. Such a second part of the training program within one year would guarantee a full-fledged formation.
- The training modules for all Lesson Units should be made available for formators in form of booklets or PowerPoint CDs.
- The AFFI should engage a team of retreat preachers – both Brothers and Sisters – to all provincials in order for them to be able to undergo Franciscan renewals.
- The formees from all novitiates as well as other training centers should undergo a one-year training on Franciscan life, mission and spirituality.
- The formators should at least participate in two AFFI-Programs per year.

Fr. Nithiya is planning a continuation, respectively, a supplement of this training program for formators for August 2017.

CCFMC Centre

The new Managing Director introduces herself



My name is Sr. Franziska Dieterle, I am 41 years old and I have been a Franciscan Sister for 15 years. Following my training as preschool teacher, I travelled to El Salvador and Uruguay for one year in 1996 in order to work as a volunteer in social projects. This experience affected me deeply, not only did it broaden my horizon, but it also shook up my previous values and my understanding of the world. I returned with more profound faith and I had many questions about my way of living and the global responsibility. In the course of my search for like-minded people and a simple lifestyle, I finally decided to enter the order. After completing studies of social work, I worked as a consultant in various fields for seven years. At the

same time, I also acted as a coach for spiritual courses. This experience also shaped me as well. Encountering people with unfinished concepts, to be open for their desires and their questions, to be on the search together and to set out for a joint effort, all of this encouraged me to search and find God NOW – always in a different way. In order to give more room and more depth to this posture, I took up a correspondence course two years ago entitled „Spirituality and Interculturality“. This again sharpened my view for those limits that we are setting ourselves and which also marginalize others. It also encouraged me to go beyond limits and to allow the encounter with others.

I am looking forward to my new tasks with the CCFMC filled with many new experiences, meeting with people on a global level and being on the road together.

Pace e bene - Sr. Franziska

