



CONFERENZA DEI MINISTRI GENERALI
DEL PRIMO ORDINE FRANCESCANO E DEL TOR

***To the Friars of the
Franciscan First Order
and of the TOR***

Prot. N. 05/2024

Rome, 19 March 2024
*Solemnity of St. Joseph,
Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary*

Spiritual Assistance to the OFS and YouFra

Dear Brothers
of the Franciscan First Order and the Third Order Regular,

May the Lord give you peace!

The Franciscan jubilees that we are celebrating invite the entire Franciscan Family to a joyful witness of our charism with public events and with initiatives that give us opportunities to bring out the relevance of our Franciscan spirit wherever we are.

A particularly significant element that can be a sign both in the Church and in society, is the synergy between lay and religious.¹ In the Franciscan context, this richness was a result of the creativity - moved by the Spirit - that Saint Francis himself brought to bear not only in the Order of Friars Minor, and then fostered that of the Poor Sisters, but also when he “invented” the Order of Brothers and Sisters of Penance.

¹ “In different ways and manners, but in life-giving and mutual communion, they are determined make present the charism of their Seraphic Father in the life and mission of the Church” (OFS Rule, 1).

After a long historical journey, at once rich and complex, of spiritual and institutional relationships between lay and religious Franciscans, today we friars of the Franciscan First Order and the Third Order Regular recognize ourselves as called by the Church to offer the fraternities of the Secular Franciscan Order our pastoral care and spiritual assistance, “by virtue of belonging to the same spiritual family” (OFS Const. 1:4).

Spiritual assistance, which is indispensable to the brothers and sisters of the OFS and YouFra, is therefore part of our own Franciscan vocation. We believe that the celebration of the great Franciscan Jubilee can therefore also be a good opportunity to remember the commitments that bind the religious Orders to the OFS with the mission entrusted to them by the Church – that of supporting and accompanying these brothers and sisters of ours. We are happy to know that in many countries there is real attentiveness on the part of the friars towards the Secular Franciscans; in other areas, however, we also notice a certain disinterest or carelessness.

The occasion of the Franciscan centenaries, which spurs us to vigorously revitalize our charism, is the perfect opportunity for inspiring a new impetus for spiritual and pastoral assistance to the Secular Franciscan Order and to YouFra, reevaluating the relationship between all members of the Franciscan Family. Here then is your invitation, dear brothers of the First Order and the TOR, to renew the indispensable and precious service of spiritual and pastoral assistance entrusted to us by the Church, and which is accepted with filial obedience, as the Constitutions of each family well state.²

While we acknowledge that there are many reasons (some even well-founded) that can create in us fatigue or disaffection about spiritual assistance, we want to recall the importance of overcoming any individualistic attitudes, which close us off – in terms of our relationship within our particular Orders – and deprives us of the richness that comes from our relationship with the entire Franciscan Family in general.

We would do well to remind ourselves that “a revival of our secular fraternities goes hand in hand with our journey forward,”³ especially at this moment in history when the Church is also living a commitment to walk together as a “Church that goes out.”

A survey of our Orders reveals that in some areas there is a shortage of friars who can assume the role of spiritual assistant, in others the friars lack the formation and interest to do so. And sometimes, those who have assumed this service at the national level do not work together with the spiritual assistants of the other obediences (this constitute the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants), thus

² Cf. Constitutions: OFM 60-63; OFMCap 102:1-6; OFMConv 75:1; 106:2-3; TOR 157-160.

³ Br. Pasquale Rywalski OFMCap, General Minister; *Letter to the Provincial Ministers and All the Friars of the Order* (1.); Rome, 1978.

ignoring the unity of the OFS and YouFra. In this regard we would like to recall what our predecessors wrote to the ministers provincial and custodes in 2009:

“A point that we consider equally important is the collegiality of the service of spiritual assistance to the OFS and YouFra fraternities from the higher levels to that of the local fraternity. First and foremost, this feature offers us friars a valuable opportunity to collaborate among ourselves in the field of assistance and, at the same time, becomes a concrete sign of the fraternal affection that the First Order and the TOR have for the OFS and YouFra”.⁴

The formation of spiritual assistants, at every level, represents a challenge to which we are called to give meaningful and forward-looking responses, learning to work together among our Orders. Where there is a lack of friars, to give spiritual assistance to our OFS and YouFra brothers and sisters, the Major Superiors, as indicated in Art. 89.4 of the OFS General Constitutions, can “entrust the service of spiritual assistance to:

- a. religious men or women belonging to other Franciscan institutes;
- b. diocesan clerics or other persons specifically prepared for this service, who belong to the OFS;
- c. other diocesan clerics or non-Franciscan religious.”

To be effective, formation must involve not only religious, but also lay people, in order to deepen the relationship between parties in a way that is both current and meaningful. We must be aware that while we share the same root, we can build paths of growth for our own benefit and that of the Church only through our mutual knowledge and appreciation of the identity and uniqueness of our different vocations.

Regarding the autonomy mentioned in the *Manual for Assistance* (Chapter II, 6.2 and 6.3), spiritual assistants should respect it with care so that a life-giving and mutual communion and fraternal harmony are fostered.

Furthermore, for profitable spiritual assistance, it is necessary to always keep in mind our common vocation, mission and charism. If we start from this statement, in which we find the relationship of “*life-giving and mutual communion*” reaffirmed, we understand that the service of assistance to the OFS and YouFra requires “*a fraternal relationship between the members of the Franciscan Family*” and at the same time requires the friars to “*know, love and help the OFS and YouFra,*” so that they may live their vocations fully. In the awareness of living this relationship, the friars can

⁴ Letter of Presentation of the *Statute for Spiritual and Pastoral Assistance to the Secular Franciscan Order* from the Ministers General of the Franciscan First Order and TOR to the Ministers Provincial and Custodes, Rome 2009.

better experience that they “are called to pool their spiritual and apostolic efforts with the other religious branches of the Franciscan Family and with the OFS and the YouFra.”⁵

These years of celebrations can help deepen our knowledge of the Franciscan charism and at the same time give rise to that profound desire within us to strengthen the bond of unity and the sense of belonging to the same great family. It is about cultivating relationships to increase the desire for sharing the same spirituality, and to follow and imitate Christ in the footsteps of Francis of Assisi, our Seraphic Father.

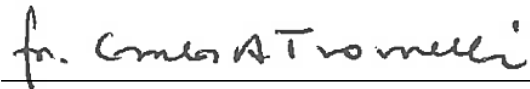
Called to serve the Church, let us not look only at our Order, but let us consider the breadth of our Franciscan vocation, with the same impetus as the Poverello, who, upon hearing the Gospel read about the sending of the disciples, exclaimed “*this I want, this I desire, this I long to do...*” Francis took good care of the Church and society by proclaiming the Gospel of peace everywhere. We can do this effectively if our voices are united, considering the same intuition of life that underlies the Regula bullata (for which we have just celebrated the eighth centenary of its approval), as well as the basis of the Rule of the TOR and of the OFS.

As we thank you for the renewed commitment you have been putting forth in serving the brothers and sisters of OFS and YouFra, we leave you with every good wish for Peace and Good!

Fraternally,



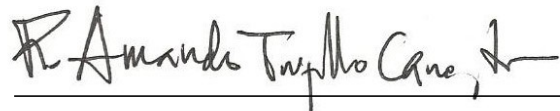
Br. Massimo Fusarelli OFM
General Minister



Br. Carlos Alberto Trovarelli OFMConv
General Minister



Br. Roberto Genuin OFMCap
General Minister



Br. Amando Trujillo Cano TOR
General Minister

⁵ Cf. *Manual for Assistance to the OFS and to the Franciscan Youth*, Chapter III, Nos. 1.5 and 1.6