

## The Grace of the PCO

In our Order we have a valuable tool for consultation, reflection, and inspiration in order to live our charism in the best way possible. This is the **PCO**, the **Plenary Council of the Order**.

Let us take the occasion to know and live better this important event of grace.

### THE IDENTIKIT

“The Plenary Council of the Order has the purpose of expressing the vital relation between the whole Fraternity and the central administration, to promote the awareness of the co-responsibility and collaboration of all the friars, to foster the unity and communion of the Order in pluriformity.” (Const. 143, 1-2)

“...According to the norms of the Constitutions, it has as a task to express the vital relation between the whole fraternity and the General Minister and his Council, to promote the co-responsibility and collaboration of all the friars, and to foster the unity and communion of the Order in pluriformity.” (Statutes of the PCO, 1)

### WHO PARTICIPATES

“The members of the Plenary Council are: The General Minister, the General Councilors and the delegates of the Conferences of Major Superiors, with a certain proportionality established by the General Minister with the consent of his Council. (Const. 143,4) The delegates do not necessarily have to be chosen from among the members of the Conferences of the Major Superiors.” (Statutes, 3)

### WHEN AND WHAT THEY SAY

Seven Plenary Councils have been celebrated so far. These are the dates and the themes developed:

I - (04-24.10.1971) Quito, Ecuador: *Our life in fraternity and poverty*;

II - (18.02-09.03.1973) Taizé, France: *Our life and practice of prayer*;

III - (29.08-22.09.1978) Mattli, Switzerland: *Missionary life and activity*;

IV - (02-31.03.1981) Rome, Italy: *Formation guidelines*;

V - (28.08-28.09.1986) Garibaldi, Brazil: *Our prophetic presence in the world*;

VI - (07.09-01.10.1998) Assisi, Italy: *Living poverty in brotherhood*;

VII - (01-27.03.2004) Assisi, Italy: *Our fraternal life in minority*;

VIII - (26.10-21.11.2015) Assisi, Italy: *The grace of working*.

### OUR GRACE, OUR WORK

“The apostolate of the Capuchins has many and varied expressions, and past and present history show that they know how to adapt themselves to the conditions around them in which they are called to carry out their activity. It is necessary to continue on this path with prudence and foresight, (...) with priority of being over doing. Evangelization demands witness and witness supposes an experience, that which flows from a deep life of interior union with Christ, (...) to be like Him, for Him, in Him, which little by little shines through, and now in a convincing way, even in the external form of living and working. (Paul VI, *Audience at the General Chapter*, 12-07-76).

## Mission completed in Curia

ROME, Italy – In this month of January certain members of the fraternity of the General Curia have completed their valuable service in the central offices of the Order: Br. Vincenzo Mancusi, having served a long time as General Procurator, Br. Mark D’Souza, having worked for many years in International Economic Solidarity, and Br. Oscar Fernández-Prada, Vice General Secretary and Sec-

retary for the Spanish language. We bid farewell to these who have taken on commitments with generosity and a sense of fraternity as they continue their mission elsewhere, in the spirit of itinerancy proper to our vocation. To each of these brothers we offer our gratitude for the immeasurable gift of the good they have offered to the Order, and our prayers for the path that they take up from here.



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## Meeting of the General Council

ROME, Italy - The General Council met in ordinary session at the General Curia from January 7 to 17.

The annual reports of work carried out in 2013 were heard from the heads of various Offices of the Institutions, Offices, and houses dependent on the General Minister.

In addition, certain decisions were made regarding the functions of the International College ‘San Lorenzo da Brindisi,’ International Economic Solidarity, the General Secretariat, certain Circumscriptions of the Order, two Commissions, and of the editing group for the Constitutions. ▶

## Meeting of the General Council

Regarding the International College 'San Lorenzo da Brindisi,' the study burses for the new students for 2014 were approved.

In the area of International Economic Solidarity, the draft of updated Statutes was examined and there were certain changes in responsibilities: Br. Akilu Petros (General Custody of Ethiopia) was appointed Promoter of Solidarity and Br. Alejandro Nuñez Ennabe (General Custody of Guatemala-Honduras-El Salvador) was appointed Secretary of Economic Solidarity.

In the General Secretariat, Br. Damien Philip Pereira (Province of Tamil Nadu South) was appointed Vice General Secretary in place of Br. Oscar Fernández-Prada (Province of Peru), current Secretary of the Spanish language, who will soon return to his home province.

The House of Presence of Malawi will be elevated to a custody on February 15, 2014, and the Provinces of Venice and Trent will unite on March 3, 2014, creating the one Province of Venice. The respective major superiors and councilors were named in the last meeting of the General Council and will be announced on the days that the new circumscriptions are proclaimed.

There was a discussion of the first fruits of the work of the Preparatory Commission for PCO VIII, which met this past January 4-6 with the project of a questionnaire to send to all the friars of the Order.

Appointments were made for the Justice, Peace, and Ecology Commission in the persons of James Donegan (Province of New York-New England), Darwin-Francisco Orozco Orozco (Custody of Ecuador), John Corneli Sulley (Province of Tanzania), Henryk Cisowski (Province of Krakow, Poland), and Jacob Babichan Kaniyarasseril (Province of Krist Jyoti, India).

In view of the publication of the text of the renewed Constitutions and Ordinances of the Order, a group of brothers was created to be responsible for the editing, reading, and correction of the Italian text: Br. Ermanno Ponzalli (Province of Tuscany), Br. Luca Bianchi (Province of Lombardy), Br. Luca Casalicchio (Province of Rome), and Br. Roberto Pasolini (Province of Lombardy).

Right at the beginning of this year, from January 4 to 6, we **began to work**, responding to the request of the General Minister, to **prepare this important event** of reflection and also inspiration for the Order which will take place next year, 2015. Our meeting was centered in a particular way on preparing a **working tool for the**

prepared to be sent to all of the provinces and custodies so that they **then arrive in all of your fraternities**. Already I am asking you, brother, to participate with much openness, with creativity, with a prophetic gaze towards these reflections. These will help, as a **result of your work**, the members of the Plenary Council who will



“Work in progress” ...  
And there's a place for you!

First meeting of the working group for the preparation of PCO VIII

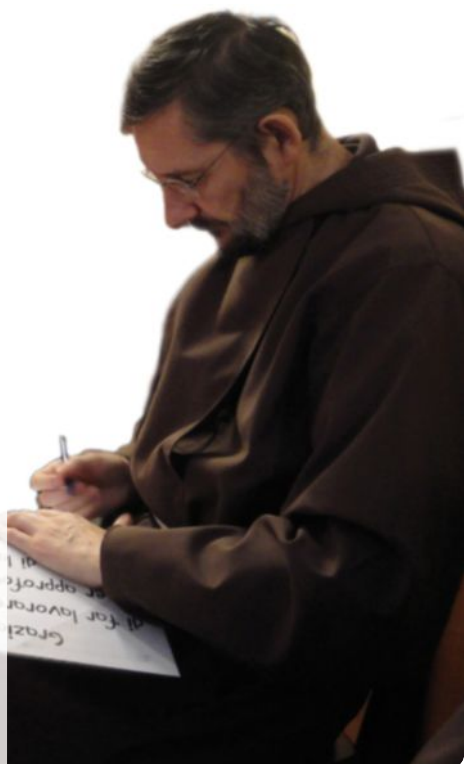
Br. Štefan Kožuh, OFM Cap  
General Vicar – President of the PCO VIII  
Preparatory Commission

**whole Order**, - and also for the brother reading this first BICI of the year 2014 – that the reflection on who we are and how we work might help us to live better and work with more fervor, more enthusiasm, and more efficacy.

We touched on certain points, certain aspects of work as something which gives *strength to our belonging to the Order; work as the fullness of my personal identity; work as a means of support – for we must earn our daily bread; work as an identification with the simple people around us; work and not activism; work as a means of formation – in the first stages but not only; work as personal initiative and expression of fraternity and of our rich tradition and spirituality*. But we are aware that **we have much more to do**, and thus we ask the receptive attention and the interest of each of the brothers for this most important **time of grace** which characterizes the preparation for the celebration of the Plenary Council of the Order. And it is our lively desire that all of our formation, pastoral, and working initiatives be marked by this sign: **“work in progress” towards PCO VIII!**

In these days all of this is being developed and materials are being

gather in October-November of next year, but first of all will help you and your fraternity to reflect – but not only – perhaps even to find **other ways, effective and prophetic, to work in this time**. Keep up the good work!





## The friars ask for the reopening of the St. Francis High School



**L**AHORE, Pakistan – The Brothers of Pakistan attended a protest of Christians in Lahore against the closing of St. Francis High School, founded in 1842 and which served first the people of the subcontinent and then at the creation of the state of Pakistan in 1947. A well-known school, where Christians flocked to support the young nation of Pakistan, a prop-

erty of the Catholic Church, it was also for many years a field of activity for the Capuchin friars. Now, the government of the state of Punjab, under the influence of powerful real estate interests, wants to build a shopping center and a plaza, and has occupied the building. Behind this, in reality, is the intention to reduce the importance of the formation and instruction of the local Christian population. The Capuchins are participating, in the front row, in the protest for the return of what has been unjustly taken from the already diminished and persecuted Christian presence in Pakistan.

## Course in Africa by the General Secretariat of Formation

**A**BIDJAN, Ivory Coast – At the request of Br. Jean-Bertin Nadonye, General Councilor for Africa, the GSF gave a course for the friars responsible for the vocation ministry and the postulancy from January 18-24, 2014. The themes developed were: human maturity, criteria for vocation discernment, and vocational accompaniment through a Franciscan lens. In addition to the General Councilor, Br. Jaime Rey and Br. Charles Alphone of the GSF and Br. Killian of the International

Formation Council participated with 16 brothers of CONCAO.

Africa continues to be a reality full of music, colors, smiles, children, and where dreams are never lacking. But war, injustice, inequality, and religious intolerance are still very present and they call us to build bridges and to transform our friaries into places of welcome and fraternity for all. Initial formation is an opportunity to begin. (Br. Jaime Rey, OFMCap.)



## Name Day of the General Minister

**ROME, Italy** – We have celebrated ahead of time also this year the feast of St. Mauro on 12 January 2014, the name day of our General Minister. The Eucharist was celebrated by Br. Mauro and followed by a festive convivium in the large refectory of the International College, which saw the gathered fraternity of the Curia, the International College, and others, the General Ministers of the other Franciscan Orders, bishops José Rodríguez Carballo, OFM, Andrès Stanovnik, OFMCap, and many other friends and guests.



## Br. Silvester and Pope Francis

**FLORIANA, Malta** – Br. Silvester Bonavia is a Maltese Capuchin priest who celebrated his 50th anniversary of ordination in 2013. Fifty years of a priestly and religious life lived intensely over five decades: Formation (Seraphic School, teaching, Philosophy Seminary, theologate), Administration (Definitor, Provincial Secretary, Assistant Provincial Bursar, and Vice-Secretary in the General Curia), Mission in Kenya (11 years), in Tanzania (10 years), and 9 years as chaplain in a cancer hospital in Malta.



When Pope Francis was elected, Br. Silvester, together with two other priests and with the coordination of a layman from the Archdiocese of Malta, Joseph Farrugia, dedicated themselves to the translation in Maltese of the speeches, homilies, and meditations of the Holy Father with publication on the site of the laity of the archdiocese and soon thereafter on the official site of the Vatican. Br. Silvester, busying himself with the speeches and reflections addressed to priests and religious, gathered these collected texts in a Maltese edition of 140 pages. On November 18, 2013, Br. Silvester was received by the Pope for Holy Mass at the Domus Sancta Marta, where he celebrated the Eucharist with the chalice that his parents had given him for his first Mass fifty years ago. On the occasion Br. Silvester presented his work to Pope Bergoglio, who thanked him and encouraged him to continue in this wonderful apostolate. He then personally signed the parchment with the apostolic blessing and exchanged the zucchetto to the great joy of the friar.

## II Stage of the Schola Fratrum for formators in Brazil

HIDROLÂNDIA, Brazil – The Capuchin Conference of Brazil (CCB) held the second stage of the Schola Fratrum, a formation meeting for formators, especially those responsible for initial formation in the Conference, from January 19-30, 2014. About thirty friars from all of Brazil took part in this year's meeting with significant participation of the twelve circumscriptions of the CCB and the presence of brothers who helped to reflect and deepen the topics: Br. Rubens Nunes, Mariosvaldo Florentino, Evaldo, and the General Councilor Sergio Dal Moro. To follow along you can go to the blog:

<http://scholafratrum.blogspot.com.br>



## A Franciscan vicar apostolic in Syria

BEIRUT, Lebanon – The new vicar apostolic of Aleppo, in Syria, was ordained bishop in Beirut, Lebanon, on January 21, 2014. We speak of His Excellency Georges Abou Khazen, a Franciscan of the Custody of the Holy Land. In his first message as bishop, he asked Syrian refugees to not abandon their land and their Church. (*Franciscans Media Center*)



ASSISI, Italy – At the beginning of each year in the world there's the race to entrust oneself to 'luck' with the buying of a local, national—or today even international—lottery ticket, waiting fitfully for the picking of the winning numbers. In friaries, naturally, this does not occur. Instead, they have their own 'picks': "the picking of the saintly protectors."

Generally this happens on the evening of January 5. Each community gathers and the Superior invites all to prayer and to ask God for the protection of a Saint who is picked at random as a special Patron for the new year. Each friar is given a little sacred image on which the name of a Saint is written on the reverse, and this becomes, from that moment, his Patron for the year. The same Saint is further proposed as a model of life to know and to imitate.

It is mainly a Franciscan tradition but is also diffused among other religious institutes and among the laity. The picking of a saintly protector is then often joined to other religious rites. In many friaries it is preceded by a blessing of the local community and the cells of the friars with holy water and incense. The Superior of the friary, together with the other friars, passes through the various areas and through the cells to bear the blessing of God for the whole year. In other places, as in Malta, the picking of saints is joined to the picking of another two names: that of a living friar and that of a deceased one for whom to pray during the year. In almost all the friaries in addition to the name of the Saint there is a maxim which contains a special task to put into practice during the year.

Very often the picking of the saintly protectors is

done in the presence of the faithful in the parish church. In some Franciscan churches the picking of saints is joined to the 'kissing of the Bambino': a very ancient popular tradition which is done on the day of Epiphany. The parishioners, after kissing the Bambino, receive a little image with the name of the Saintly Protector. The images are also carried to the elderly and the sick of the parish.

A Saintly Protector, a Saint to imitate, a Saint to know is not only a beautiful tradition but also an encouragement to live with intensity one's own life as a religious and as someone set out on the way of sanctity.

*Br. Egidio Canil, OFMConv*

## Missionary experience in East Timor

MELBORNE, Australia – From December 29, 2013 to January 13, 2014, Br. Ben Johnson accompanied four young men (Troy Surkitt, Eddie Parke, Thomas Ramsey e Daniel Belcher) to East Timor for an experience of "mission immersion" with the opportunity to participate in the Capuchin mission in Laleia, about 80 km east of Dili, the capital of the country, along a one-lane road. It is a village of 2000 people, surrounded by other villages of the same size.



Capuchin friars, from Portugal and Indonesia, have taken care of the local parish for the past ten years. In this time they have been particularly committed to organizing catechesis and to supporting the pastoral needs of the inhabitants of the village that has the church as its point of reference.

Troy, a 19-year-old student, recounts his impression: "This is not simply over-seeing a parish in the same way I understood it in Australia, but also, in this developing nation, involves supporting cultural initiatives and providing formation in the light of the gospel. ... The Friars are supported in their mission by Lay Missionaries. At this time there is one from Portugal and one who is also from Melbourne, Bernadette

*Sullivan. It was surprising to find that in this small corner of the world, I would be working with someone who went to the same secondary college as me. Bernadette is a young woman who has decided to help the Capuchin mission in Laleia after a similar immersion experience in April last year. It is a great example of how God leads us all to places and experiences, which we couldn't even imagine for ourselves. Witnessing the work which Bernadette was undertaking in Laleia opened my eyes to the diverse ways God calls his people to serve. I was motivated by Bernadette's enthusiasm and passion for the work she undertakes. Seeing the way she had tackled the cultural differences and language barriers made me aware of the fact that, in order to serve others, we are called to go beyond what is familiar and comfortable. In Bernadette's case, this was to Timor-Leste."*

[www.capuchinfriars.org.au](http://www.capuchinfriars.org.au)

## A Franciscan Tradition: Picking Saintly Protectors