

## The Capuchins in India

Br. Michael Fernandes, General Councilor OFM-Cap



The arrival of the Capuchins in India dates back to the year 1632 when a band of foreign Capuchin Missionaries landed in Pondicherry. Their intention was to extend their missionary thrust to Tibet and Nepal; however it turned out that they continued their missionary ventures in the Vicariate of Agra and Patna. After slogging as missionaries for about two and half centuries, the idea of implanting the Order in India was considered as a possibility. Hence in 1880 a novitiate house was opened in Mussoorie. Just ten years later, however, this novitiate was closed down for want of vocations. A second attempt at beginning the Order in India was made on 26 February 1922, at the instance of the then General Minister of the Order, Br. Joseph Anthony of Persiceto. He inaugurated the novitiate personally at Sardhana, which could be said as the cradle of the Capuchin Order in India for many years to come. Two Indian novices were vested on this occasion in the novitiate named after St. Fidelis of Sigmaringen, the Protomartyr of the Capuchin Order. The Superiors Regular of Agra, Ajmer, Allahabad and Lahore were jointly responsible for the success of this venture. The early Capuchins were then sent to Europe to pursue their further studies with the French friars at Breust, Tours and Nantes.

India is a federal parliamentary democratic republic in which the President of India is head of state and the Prime Minister of India is the head of government. India follows the dual polity, i.e. double government which consists of the union at the centre and states at the periphery. As compared to other democratic countries India has a large number of political parties, it has been estimated that over 200 parties were formed after India became independent in 1947.

The lack of homogeneity in the Indian population causes division between different sections of the people based

on religion, region, language, caste and race. Indian society is absolutely miscellaneous in terms of social diversity compared to any other of the world's great civilization. Particularly there are disparities between social structures in the North and the South, especially in the realm of kinship systems. Wealth and power varies considerably in India. The poor and the wealthy live side by side in urban and rural areas. Distinctions of class are found in almost every settlement in India.

Indian religions have deep historical roots that are recollected by contemporary Indians. The ancient culture of South Asia, going back at least 4,500 years, has come down to India primarily in the form of religious texts. Devotees of Hinduism, a varied grouping of philosophical and devotional traditions, officially numbered 687.6 million people, or 82 percent of the population in the 1991 census. Buddhism and Jainism, ancient monastic traditions, have had a major influence on Indian art, philosophy, and society and remain important minority religions in the late twentieth century. In fact, with 101.5 million Muslims (12.1 percent of the population), Sikhism, which started in Punjab in the sixteenth century, has spread throughout India and the world since the mid-nineteenth century. Christianity, represented by almost all denominations, traces its history in India back to the time of the apostles and counted 19.6 million members in India in 1991. Judaism and Zoroastrianism, arriving originally with traders and exiles from the West, are represented by small populations, mostly concentrated on India's west coast. A variety of independent tribal religious groups also are lively carriers of unique ethnic traditions.

The General Chapter of 2012 decided to have a separate General Councilor for India for various reasons. Indian Circumscriptions are fast growing numer-

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ically as well as in charism and spirituality. After my election as the Councilor I have been able to visit all the Provinces. It is satisfying to animate 14 full-fledge provinces with two custodies and 4 delegation including Sri Lanka. There are many positive signs of vibrant Capuchin life lived in this part of the world: There are presently over 200 fraternities (friaries, communities or houses) in India with their presence being in some other places to. This rise in the number of brothers called to a religious way of life is in complete contrast with the scarcity of vocations in the Western countries. There are at present nearly 1400 brothers in India itself, with some others already working as missionaries in other countries. The phenomenal rise in the number of vocations has made the Order and the church at large to look towards India. It is a journey which began way back in 1632 when the first Capuchin missionaries set foot in India. Now India turns its steps to the West.



# The word is solidarity!

Interview with Br. Aklilu Petros, Promoter of Solidarity



**B**rother, can you present yourself in a few words?

My name is Aklilu Petros. I am from Wolaita, in the south of Ethiopia, and a member of the Custody of the Capuchins in Ethiopia. I have been in Rome for a few months as a member of the Office of Economic Solidarity. I work as the Promoter of Solidarity.

What does Promoter of Solidarity mean? In what does your work consist?

It's first of all about seeking and maintaining contacts with private agencies, benefactors, and with our Provinces and Custodies, making known what we do on the level of the solidarity of the Order and consequently soliciting their generosity.

Can you help me to understand what the Solidarity of the Order means?

It's first of all not about collecting money or goods. Solidarity consists in creating a spirit of sharing among all: between those who have more with those who have less. One of the challenges is to understand how the resources we have can be utilized and developed; land, social works, and parishes, for example.

Therefore, before everything else it is important to communicate, to form.

The brothers must always learn more to live the fruit of their work. This need, beyond our friars, regards also the people who share their same condition.

Today we can no longer, as in the past, have recourse to the help of the so-called developed countries.

When you meet benefactors, how do you present the project of solidarity?

I explain to them that in many countries of the world we have to face the needs of friars in mission, the formation of young brothers, and social projects. The poor have the right to a decent life. The young generations have the right to formation, the sick to appropriate care, the population to drinkable water. Today, however, the mentality is a little changed. Benefactors are more interested in projects of development. For the formation of candidates to the religious life, for the support of missionaries, the tendency is to respond: "It's your turn to provide." On the other hand they trust us in projects of development.

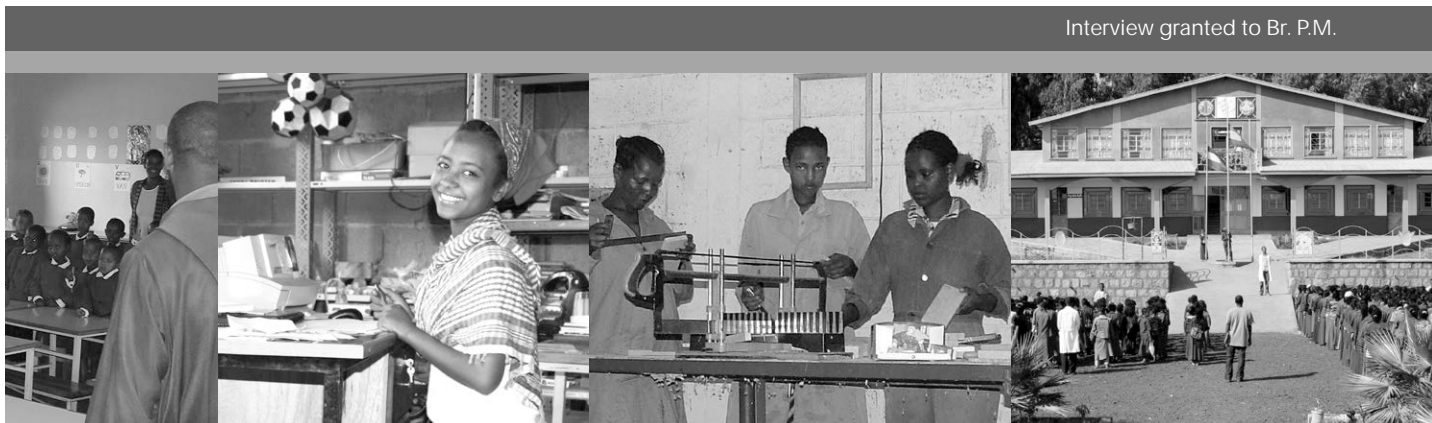
Faced with the increase of requests by many organizations and associations, the benefactors are wary and want to be certain to whom they are giving their money. There are many cases where people are tricked. For this reason when we receive

help for a project, we keep the benefactors informed, from beginning to end, with letters, photos, and documents.

How did you come to be interested in this need for sharing and solidarity?

When I was in my land, in Wolaita, they sent me to work for the development of social works. Then in 2006 I was called to direct one of our schools in Soddo. This school, for girls, responded to a great need in education, because generally girls are deprived of study. Unfortunately, this school was almost abandoned and the teachers were little qualified. I said, "A poor school and a poor people!" Then I made it my challenge. I succeeded in motivating some benefactors who gave me their trust and supported me.

They believed that this project was for a better future. With my own eyes, I saw what human solidarity can do in a reality without hope. Today thirty-five competent teachers put their energies at the service of 1200 students. Thus, if you are convinced, if you are motivated by a strong desire, joining others that share the same dream, it is possible to humbly sow and one day see with amazement the unexpected fruits.





## Curia: from the Collegio to Via Piemonte

**R**OME, Italy – The official inauguration of the renovated building is planned for this coming September 13, but on August 4 the fraternity of the General Curia returned to its headquarters at Via Piemonte 70. On Au-

gust 14 First Vespers of the Assumption was celebrated in the renovated church, and on the next day the first Eucharist was celebrated. A barbecue lunch followed in our courtyard.

A photographic record of the events is visible on the page: [www.ofmcap.org](http://www.ofmcap.org)



## The OFS General Assistant elected Provincial

**A**SMARA, Eritrea – Our confrere and member of the fraternity of the General Curia, Br. Amanuel Mesgun Temelso, of the Province of Eritrea and up to now General Assistant to the OFS, was elected Provincial Minister of Eritrea on this past July 24 during the recent Provincial Chapter. The four General Assistants, appointed by the General Ministers of the Friars

Minor, Conventuals, Capuchins, and TOR, are members of the Presidency of the International Council, with which they share the responsibility of coordination and animation of the OFS at the worldwide level. Their specific task is the pastoral and spiritual assistance to the whole of the OFS, carried out collegially. Our best wishes to Br. Amanuel for success in the new mission.



## Meeting for Peace: "Fly for Peace"

**D**uring 18-20 July, an event for peace was held in Erica, Trapani, entitled, "Fly for Peace", in which Br. Benedict Ayodi, Director of the GPIC Office of the General Curia, together with various conferes and members of the Franciscan Family participated. The meeting was organized by the association "Fly for Peace" presided by Br. Antonio Tofanelli, Capuchin, in harmony with

the "spirit of Assisi" and builds roads towards dialogue and love of neighbor in the Mediterranean. At the same time many men and women of different ages, races and religion, experience the suffering and death that war produces, many others came together to share in the cultural diversity of creeds and professions, the experience of dialogue and respect for others able to

## An Encyclical on Creation and respect for the environment?

**VATICAN CITY** – Pope Francis has reported that he spent months drafting a new encyclical on creation and respect for the environment. According to Vatican sources, the text will come to light at the beginning of 2015. In the month of March, during an audience with superiors of the Franciscan Order, the Pope expressed himself on this topic, and asked their advice. Br. Michael Perry, General Minister of the OFM, clarifies: "The Pope himself brought up the issue of the environment. And he talked about his deep concern that we need, the Church needs, to find the way to respond, using the best of science. But also using the best of goodwill of all of humanity, to bring together a consensus on trying to respond to the crisis, the ecological crisis. "To help him reflect on this issue, the Franciscan leaders gave him a copy of their 'Franciscans for Ecology' text. In it, they cite several initiatives within this field that the Order has promoted, alongside people of other faiths...Keep in mind that the Pope, the Church, in October, will have a Synod on family life. There will be a pre-Synod and then the Synod. So the Pope is going to be very busy preparing for that Synod. So, sometime after October, maybe November. He might wait until the beginning of the new year." ([www.ofm.org](http://www.ofm.org))

## Capuchin honored by the King of Spain

**NAVARRRE, Spain** – On July 1, 2014, the royals of Spain, Don Felipe and Doña Letizia, gave the 'Prince of Viana' prize for 2014 to the historian Tarcisio de Azcona (in religion, Br.



Jesù Esteban Morràs) in a ceremony held at the friary of San Salvador Leyre where then took place the inauguration of the restored organ and the traditional annual tribute to the King of Navarre. The Prince of Viana prize, which is in its twenty-fifth year, is assigned by the government

of Navarre as a recognition of individuals whose horizon of reference is creative research in art, music, literature, and science. The President of the Navarre region, Yolanda Ginger, thanked the presence of the Royal Highnesses in Navarre and presented the winner, describing him as "a key figure in understanding the complexity of our history, above all in deciphering one of the most important processes, namely the conquest of Navarre in 1512." In his acceptance speech, Br. Jesù recalled some of the stages of his family of origin and his experience as a historian which included in a particular way, the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella, the biography of Isabella I of Castile, the history of the Capuchins, and what he called the "native interruption," the little story of the Yerri Valley and of his native city, Azcona.

### "Mamma Africa": Art and traveling performance

PORTO, Portugal - The traveling show held in various places during the month of July was called "Mamma Africa 2014" and was to help the projects coordinated by the Capuchin Br. Fernando Ventura in Africa at São Tomé and Príncipe and Mozambique. The show, produced by the Alma Mater Artis Association, seeks to support the humanitarian cause of the milk bank of São Tomé and Príncipe. The show carries us toward the African continent, made up of various artistic performances that involve dance, theater, and live music.



The cast included 80 children and young people, of dance groups from various Portuguese schools. Beyond the milk bank, Br. Fernando accompanies closely different projects of support for children and adolescents in difficulty, orphans and the illiterate in Milange, Mozambique. Involving institutions and people of good will, at various levels, they succeed, "not in removing hunger from the world but in removing one person from the world of hunger," as he likes to repeat.

build bridges of communion for a peaceful world. The days for Peace began on Friday 18 at the Center for Scientific Culture "Attire Majorcan" in Erica, with the "Dialogue of Peace" with thematic panels until noon Saturday 19, with the following core elements: Abraham, Father of Believers; the gift of peace; the Mediterranean sea of peace; to the Confines of Peace. On Saturday afternoon, the Pepoli Tower was inaugurated in Erica, restored to be a Lighthouse of Peace, through an interactive

museum multimedia. From the early hours of Saturday, the "Village of Peace" was opened in the square of Vittorio Emanuele of Trapani, where the show, "Together for Peace" was shown. On Sunday 20 at 11 AM Mass was celebrated in the square of Trapani, presided by Msgr. Pietro Maria Fragnelli, Bishop of Trapani, with a community committed to pray for peace. Lastly, starting at 15,00, the "Air Show" ended with the present passage of the "Frece Tricolori" along the coast of Trapani.

## Franciscan Missionaries "camped out" to evangelize Rome



ROME, Italy - "Let us give a human, social, and spiritual face to Roman summer on the Tiber," is the slogan of the Franciscan Missionary Center ONLUS to sensitize tourists and visitors to Rome to live moments of growth in the hot summer evenings and also to make known the missionary activities that the Franciscan Conventuals promote in a good forty countries of the world. The initiative is in collaboration with the "La Vela d'oro" Cultural Association of Rome that wishes to enrich free time with cultural, artistic, and promotional content, welcoming the invitation of Pope Francis to encourage believers to "leave their own structures" to go into the "existential peripheries of humanity" where people live times and spaces of healthy culture. The occasion was born from the prestigious "Roman Summer on the Tiber" initiative, which also this year, from June 12 to September 2, attracted more than two million Romans and

tourists to live strong moments of gathering, not only of pleasure and business, but also humanitarian and cultural. In this context the stand of the Missionary Center at the various summer activities has the purpose of promoting opportunities for reflection by means of video, posters, shows, and personal contacts. In addition to the stand there are highlighted the missionary realities and the works of charity that the Conventuals carry out in various places of poverty in the world and in the peripheries of big cities: the initiative is also a good occasion for relationships for which meeting a friar, a missionary, a sister, or a volunteer is a means to dialogue and reflection and is also a response to the hope of a community that wants to grow, deepen, and give value to free time with means that are able to contribute to the construction of a world more to the measure of humanity.

([www.missionariofrancescano.org](http://www.missionariofrancescano.org))