



International Franciscan Conference - TOR

LIVING THE GOSPEL INTERCULTURALLY

In the diversity of the one human family and respecting the people of all cultures, we commit ourselves in unity to living the Gospel interculturally

February 8, 2016

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Peace and all good!

The greatest joy of any human being is to be loved and accepted, respected as they were created, in the context of their existence. Pope Francis has called the Church to be the “beating heart of the Gospel,” to be the face of God’s mercy and to proclaim by word and deed the loving-kindness of our God. He states in *Misericordiae Vultus* #10:

“Mercy is the very foundation of the Church’s life. All of her pastoral activity should be caught up in the tenderness she makes present to believers; nothing in her preaching and in her witness to the world can be lacking in mercy. The Church’s very credibility is seen in how she shows merciful and compassionate love. ... The time has come for the Church to take up the joyful call to mercy once more. It is time to return to the basics and to bear the weaknesses and struggles of our brothers and sisters. Mercy is the force that reawakens us to new life and instils in us the courage to look to the future with hope.”

As Sisters and Brothers of the Third Order Regular the approval of the Statement of the last General Assembly set as one of our priorities, the effort to leave our comfort zones and move to new places, all peoples and cultures, in order to be and live the message of the Gospel:

*In the diversity of the one human family
and respecting the people of all cultures,
we commit ourselves in unity to living the Gospel interculturally.*

The stories in this edition of *Propositum* are examples of this commitment. Let us pray for one another during the Jubilee Year of Mercy that the heart of the Gospel will continue to beat ever more strongly.

Let us go...Let us begin!

Sr. Deborah Lockwood, President IFC-TOR
Sr. Celestine Giertych, Vice-President
Sr. Klara Simunovic, Councilor
Sr. Maria do Livramento Melo de Oliveira, Councilor
Sr. Marianne Jungbluth, Councilor
Sr. Sinclare, FCC, Councilor

LIVING THE GOSPEL INTERCULTURALLY

*Essayist: Sister Martin Flavin, O.S.F., PhD
Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity
Original Language: English*



*Sister Natalie Binversie, Community Director,
meets with International Sisters.*

From its very beginning in nineteenth-century mid-America, the Congregation to be recognized in the Roman Catholic Church even to this twenty-first century as the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity of Manitowoc, Wisconsin, has lived "the Gospel interculturally." Through its members and leaders among them, in its ministries located in these United States and beyond, serving and "respecting the people of all cultures," with whom they have lived "in unity," the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity continue to respond to the call to serve others. Young women, one born in Dayton, Ohio, of parents of Germanic origin, three others claiming Germany as their birthplace and, with their families, seeking livelihood and religious freedom in a new world, vowed to live the Franciscan way of life in the soon-to-be-designated new diocese of Green Bay, Wisconsin. This little group attracted

other women who willingly absorbed the culture of the pioneer group, among them American-born women of Irish, Polish, French, Dutch and Czechoslovakian parentage, all of whom shared their own heritage to enrich community life and the lives of those whom they served.

From one small country parish schoolroom a few miles from the family farm of one foundress, to the cosmopolitan metropolis of twentieth-century Honolulu, Hawaii, the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity shared their cultural inheritance with all to whom they proclaimed the Gospel. And in turn, the culture of each group of people has enriched the Franciscans' understanding and practice of God's gifts to His people. On the islands of Oahu and Kauai, the Sisters from the United States' mid-continent learned Hawaiian ways; in Arizona's deserts, the various Native American tribes sent their children to boarding and day schools, trusting that the Sisters would encourage their belief in the Father Who loved them all. From the northern shore of Lake Michigan to the Andes of Peru, the Franciscans and native inhabitants learned the cultures of one another and participated in Gospel living through their knowledge. While most of the Sisters left their Wisconsin motherhouse to minister in nearby states in country villages, small towns and some large cities, others had the privilege of working with people of other cultures now citizens of the United States, among them Japanese Americans, African Americans and immigrants from Mexico and Central America.

Having the foresight to provide for the education of those who became members of the Congregation, its leaders very early in its history established Silver Lake College of the Holy Family where members received professional degrees preparing them for their ministries. As opportunities arose, religious women from the African and Asian continents were invited to come to the United States to live with the Sisters and study. The presence of these Sisters with all their gifts of various cultures, languages and ways of life has been of benefit to all with whom they have spent four to six years living in the Franciscan community. The African Sister students from Northern Nigeria, Tanzania and Uganda and the Vietnamese Sisters have given of themselves and their cultures to the benefit of their sponsors in being truly living examples of the universality of the Church.

LIVING THE GOSPEL INTERCULTURALLY

by: Carolyn Meyer and Jane Schaefer Associate Co-Directors
Sisters of St. Francis, Oldenburg IN 47036 (USA)
Original Language: English

The Sisters and Associates of the Sisters of St. Francis, Oldenburg, Indiana, USA, brought the Gospel message of Jesus to life interculturally with a Franciscan Festival of Cultures. The Oldenburg Franciscans have houses of prayer in Montana and St. Louis, along with a Mission in Tohatchi, New Mexico.

The intent of the weekend was to bring Sisters and Associates home for a collaborative and cultural experience.

Friday evening's gathering of Sisters and Associates from Montana, New Mexico and Missouri was hosted by the Congregation's Leadership Team and Associate Board. This informal gathering allowed out of town guests to get reacquainted. The evening's prayer was led by a group of Navajo women along with Sisters Marlene Kochert OSF, and Pat Bietsch OSF. Dressed in Navajo attire, the women sang and prayed in both Navajo and English using sage-based incense to raise prayers to heaven.

Saturday's festivities were led by Sr. Andre' Burkhart OSF whose multicultural background includes ministry: in Meridian Mississippi, in Kenya East Africa, in Tohatchi, New Mexico, with the Navajo of Arizona, and among the Appalachians, Hispanics and Philipinos of America. Sr. Andre' facilitated Saturday morning's gathering with a discussion about how Franciscan values are lived by each participant. Franciscan values highlighted included prayer, care of creation, right

relationships, dignity of each person, as well as peace and justice. Sr. Mary Ann Stoffregen OSF, and Associate April Martin-Chalfant, led a Thanksgiving prayer based on several Native American Nations. Seventeen different components of Creation were used.

Highlighting the weekend were table displays designed by members from different cultures. Each table displayed articles of importance or interest to various native cultures. Included in the displays were: cookies, linens,

moccasins, peace pipes, sculptures,

dolls, clothes, hand-made tapestries, and jewelries, and instruments.



Saturday afternoon offered opportunities to share ways the values Sr. Andre' described, were being lived within each one's ministries. In addition, participants were given the opportunity to make crafts. Saturday evening's prayer was led by Sr. Marian Boberschmidt, OSF and the African-American Associates of St. Louis, Missouri. Dancing dressed in native clothing and keeping time to the drums of an African-American spiritual, dancers randomly selected on-lookers to join them. A communal anointing of one another followed the dance.

The evening concluded with a multi-cultural talent show. Performances included: a ukulele duo, pianist, dramatization of the Creation Story, Native Song, and a recitation of the Lord's Prayer in Navajo. Associate, Teresa Bland was vibrant and enthusiastic as the hostess. She shared her experience of the weekend saying, "It was like a huge family reunion because that is what we are to each other, family! It is a warm feeling of acceptance and love, I never want to leave. It gives me goosebumps!"

When asked about her experience Rosanda Willeto (Gallup, NM) responded, "Culture is one of the most important assets in life and without it, we are a lost people. There are many who are still trying to hang on and pass on their cultural and traditional ways. The Festival of Cultures was a small way to keep it alive.

AN INTERCULTURAL GOSPEL – WHAT MORE CAN WE DO?

by Sister Rosemary Stets, OSF – USA
Bernardine Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis
Original Language: English

As Bernardine Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis, we strive to imitate our Father Francis who models for us a deep understanding of the Gospel as a transcendent cultural reality that includes both challenges and joys. Francis was a man of his time and his world. As a carefree youth living in 12th century Assisi, he lived extravagantly as the spoiled son of a rich middle-class cloth merchant, the heir to his father's lucrative business. By grace and through prayer, Francis discerned the challenge God presented to him in his encounter with Jesus in the poor Church of San Damiano – to divest from the wealth of the world and embrace the poverty of the Cross.

As a TOR congregation, we too struggle to embrace the challenge of Franciscan simplicity and to be minimal in our possessions, acquisitions, and our consumption of the world's resources. We yearn, in a country of plenty, to be poor like St. Francis and we are encouraged by the example of Pope Francis. His simple lifestyle as Cardinal Archbishop of Buenos Aires in Argentina has touched the heart of humanity. More importantly, his determination to continue this standard as Pope, and to reach out with a loving embrace to the poor and marginalized, is a gesture that is *waking up the world*. We, the Bernardine Franciscan sisters, are blessed to have communities in the developing world. Our sisters in this reality share the poverty of those they serve. As joyful, humble women of faith, they are challenged by their circumstances without ever losing heart. They appreciate every gift, every donation however small, and they unfailingly share everything with those in need. As Franciscans, they are teaching the world, and the congregation, that this is the simplicity that brings freedom and peace.

In the *Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis offers beautiful insights that explain the true meaning of intercultural evangelization. He speaks of the challenge of *finding and sharing a 'mystique' of living together, of mingling and encounter, of embracing and supporting one another. . .of stepping into this flood tide which, while chaotic, can become a genuine experience of fraternity* (*The Joy of the Gospel: Evangelii Gaudium*, 87).

Living the Gospel in fraternity can sometimes carry intercultural overtones that are rarely simple, and often feel very much like a "chaotic flood tide." The nuances of communication, unfamiliar customs, misunderstood expectations, not to mention day to day challenges of common life can stretch the bonds of an intercultural community yearning for fraternal unity. Again, Pope Francis reminds us that if consecrated persons tolerate enmity, division, jealousy, and the desire to [dominate] . . . *whom are we going to evangelize if this is the way we act?* (*The Joy of the Gospel: Evangelii Gaudium*, 100). A true example of intercultural unity can be found in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is the Christian response to the wars, divisions, betrayals, and injustices that afflict our 21st century world. In the face of so much suffering, we have so many opportunities to make a difference. *Let us begin, brothers and sisters, for up to now we have done nothing; surely, we are called to do more.*



HOW DO I SEE MYSELF WITNESSING TO THE TOR CHARISM?

By Sister Monica Weedon FMDM, Australian
Congregational Leadership Team in England
Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood

Recently the words of the following song have come to mean a great deal to myself as a Franciscan sister and to our congregation as a whole as we continue to evolve in our understanding of our charism and mission:

The Presence You Are

It's not what you do, but how you do it.

It's not what you see, but how you see.

It's not what you say, what you know or achieve,

but it's the Presence, the Presence you are.

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As we, as a congregation, have explored and discerned what it means to live the Franciscan Evangelical Life through our Third Order Charism, we have come to a much deeper understanding that our primary 'mission' is to be 'sister' to one another and to all creation. The word is not a title or a symbol of prestige or power but is about living in right relationship – about being a presence which radiates the love and joy of the Gospel and which incarnates The Christ Presence here and now.

Giving witness to our Third Order Charism, I believe, does not depend on what I am 'doing', 'achieving' or 'accomplishing' – but on the quality of my presence in whatever community or ministry I am called to at this time. And if I find my reality is that I am aged, infirmed or not able to participate in 'active' ministry I am still just as much on 'mission' as any other sister if by my presence with others I am bringing the Risen Christ to birth in my particular circumstances.

To live in this spirit of 'right relationship' is a daily challenge to each one of us, it is also a great source of hope as it does not matter whether we as a Congregation are big or small, young or old, vulnerable or strong – we are on mission and witnessing to our Third Order charism by the very nature of our daily living.

My present 'circumstances' find me on our Congregational Leadership team. I can sometimes feel caught up in the hectic day-to-day tasks that come with this role and feel that I am not contributing much at 'grass roots' level. However, if I truly embrace the spirit of mission as being 'sister' and a Christ Presence to all, then I can be confident that I am also witnessing to our beautiful Third Order Charism to observe the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.



TO EMBRACE THE DIFFERENCE: A PROPHETIC WAY OF LIVING THE GOSPEL INTERCULTURALLY

*Sr. Silvia Corado do Amaral, SMIC, Brazil
Member of the Congregation Common Formation Team
Original written in English*

The Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God (SMIC), conscious about its role of reinforcing the value of being an international congregation called to live the Gospel interculturally, decided to develop a formation program to prepare the junior sisters for their final vows.



The first program took place in Namibia, Africa, in 2014, and had a group formed by 8 temporary professed sisters: two from Namibia, two from China and four from Brazil, plus two formators; one Brazilian and one Namibian. The community was formed and the challenge of embracing the cultural differences and give a witness of Jesus and his Gospel became a reality.

To build a community in the diversity was at the same time a challenge but also a very important life-giving experience for the group and a prophetic sign for those who are able to recognize the action of the Holy Spirit among us. As the formators stated:

“The way of thinking, feeling, seeing things, doing and reasoning was totally different due to cultures and customs differences. The adjustment of living together and accepting each other came along the year with being patient and forgiving. Even though sometimes it was not easy for them in some way to accommodate and accept each other fully.”

The young sisters also had their own way to express their experience. Some of them said:

“The relationship among us was a very important life-giving experience because we were together for everything, we supported each other, we were challenged by each other, and we learned things from each other. Through all we experienced together, I got to know myself deeper and recognize that we grow together.”

“We were different people with different backgrounds. We all have our customs and beliefs, especially when it comes to food, way of talking, way of celebrating feast days, etc. The most

important thing is that we come to live together, to know each other and to share our lives with each other as SMIC Sisters, and to realize that we are an international congregation.”

“I enjoyed learning new things from different cultures and customs. It helped me to understand and respect the different cultures. As a group, we were excited in doing things together. For this reason, I felt that we were really living with an open heart, mind and soul. It brought awareness for me to feel that we are one family.”

In a world where intolerance and exclusion are so strongly felt, to embrace cultural differences and be able to build a community in order to live the mission we have received from God becomes a prophetic sign. From this experience as SMIC family, we can say that it is possible to live the Gospel in an intercultural community and be an inspiration for those who dream with a more inclusive and compassionate world as God has dreamed. We agree with Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, CFM that affirms,

“We try to create spaces where the different generations, the different cultures and races live and grow together. The hospitality towards the other has made us more compassionate... We are gradually discovering that we are supposed not only to learn how to live with the other, that we have to give the dangerous and costly step of opening ourselves to the other, but, above all, that we have to include the other within the same hospitality with which we feel ourselves welcomed by God. The God of the cross is the supreme manifestation of hospitality towards the different, the other. There, all of us are welcomed in the same and only embrace.”



LIVING THE GOSPEL WHERE YOU ARE

Sr. Paula Nasenbeny, ssfc
School Sisters of St. Francis of Christ the King
Lemont, IL, USA

The immigrant experience has influenced my life story from the beginning. The first Sisters of our Province were immigrants from Slovenia who came to serve the Croatian immigrants in Kansas City, KS. The majority of those first Sisters never returned to their homeland. My own grandparents were immigrants who also never returned to their homeland.

Early ministerial experiences took me to parishes where new immigrants were entering the neighborhoods of immigrants from the previous generation. Within the schools, I learned to adapt to a mix of cultures, not placing one above another, but celebrating the possibilities of introducing one group to another. I learned about the similarities between cultures while teaching respect for the different expressions of the one faith.

Presently, my challenge is living the Gospel within and beyond the 'walls' of my local house. As I juggle service as the local administrator of our provincial house community, provincial councilor and our peace and justice representative, I must be creative in living and sharing the Gospel in an intercultural setting.

Our local community consists of sixteen Sisters. Two are Carmelites from Kerala, India, another is from our Bosnian Province. Living our Gospel values within our different backgrounds and cultures and sharing our experiences and traditions in daily life, we find that we have much in common though we represent different expressions of the same Gospel. Daily communication is a challenge as Sisters work together to learn and to express their ideas and faith. I see that even within the best of situations, for those outside their homelands, there is always an underlying loneliness for family, language, communities, and all things familiar. It is here where being the *Mercy of the Father* (cf. Lk 6:36) is lived most concretely. It is from these experiences of our struggles and similarities that the Sisters go to serve the 'body of Christ.'

Beyond the 'walls' of my local house, as the peace and justice representative I meet others of various nationalities and backgrounds. Encountering people who are in need of help with the immigration process or who are victims of human trafficking teaches me that suffering is experienced across cultural groups. It is from my work with these inter-cultural committees, who set out to encounter the other and make people aware of their plight, that I have learned the most about the boundless love required of me by the Gospel.



Coming together to live this Gospel compels me to share my experiences with others moving them toward a greater awareness of those in need. I strive to make our Sisters and Associates aware of these issues and the conditions of these people. I work to offer opportunities to get involved. According to availability and abilities some are writing to legislators, others attending meetings and rallies, while others help with some of the daily necessities of life. Most importantly, the Sisters and Associates make these needs known to others and encourage them to get involved in living the Gospel beyond 'walls' of their experiences.

THE MAYAN ALTAR: “THE WORD WAS MADE FLESH AND DWELLS AMONG US”(Jn. 1,14)

Sr. Maria Elena Martinez, OSF
Sisters of St. Francis of Penance and Christian Charity
Original text: English

As the native peoples arrive early in the morning for a faith community gathering in a village of Chiapas, Mexico a pot of hot soup welcomes them, offering nourishment after a long journey from their village communities. Having eaten, with great familiarity the people move in reflective silence into another type of welcoming activity: preparing the traditional Mayan Altar. Simple first fruits offerings are placed in the center of the gathering space: corn, beans, honey, eggs, flowers, oranges, tortillas, bananas, squash, coffee beans, etc., all are sacred gifts brought from their fields. A simple wooden cross adorned with flowers is ceremoniously placed in the center of the Mayan Altar by a designated Deacon or Catechist. Various candles placed around the Altar are lit and a Pentecostal moment takes over as everyone, each in their native dialects, directs their words of praise toward God, Heart of Father Sky and Heart of Mother Earth. **“The Word was made flesh and dwells among us.”** (Jn. 1,14)



Mayan Altar

The Sisters of St. Francis of Penance and Christian Charity will soon celebrate 25 years of Franciscan Presence (2017) in Palenque, Chiapas, Mexico. The local community of Sisters is made up of three Mayan Indigenous women (Cho'l and Tzeltal tribes) and two mestizas (born in Mexico). Sisters from our three provinces in the United States planted the seeds of our Dutch foundress, Mother Magdalen Daemen, in Chiapas and this profound relationship of our sisterhood on American soil continues to deepen, each within our given realities. We belong to an international congregation that gives testimony to the unity that resides in our diversity. The

richness of this heritage is what supports us in our experience of accompanying diverse Mayan peoples on a sacred journey of One Heart as we daily embrace the blessing and challenges of incarnating the Gospel interculturally.

In February, 2016, Pope Francis will visit Chiapas because it has one of the largest and most diverse indigenous populations in Mexico. He will celebrate an inculturated Eucharist, the sacramental expression of the fullness of communion. Our languages, customs, faith expressions and ways of relating with each other do not compare to the powerful ways in which each culture lives out a unique experience of the mystery of LIFE. We may not always understand one another, agree, nor accept our different viewpoints, yet we know deep in our hearts that our strength is in each other.

Our efforts to live the Gospel in Chiapas are further challenged as we walk with the marginated of our society. Chiapas is known to be the poorest state in Mexico. The suffering poor live the consequences of a culture of death that alienates us from each other. Yet the light of

Goodness can never be overcome by darkness. During this Year of Mercy we embrace with tenderness all of the life-giving and destructive forces that move us toward one human family, entrusting one another with our joys, brokenness, vulnerability and needs.

As sisters and brothers in Palenque we gather the first fruits of our diversity, our intercultural living of the Gospel, and place them on the Mayan Altar with reverence and gratitude. ***“The Word was made flesh and dwells among us.”*** (Jn. 1, 14)



Sisters of the Community in Palenque, Chiapas, Mexico

LIVING THE GOSPEL INTERCULTURALLY

*Sr Mirabilis Visic,
School Sisters of St. Francis of Christ the King
Bukavu, Kivu / R. D. Congo
Original language: French*

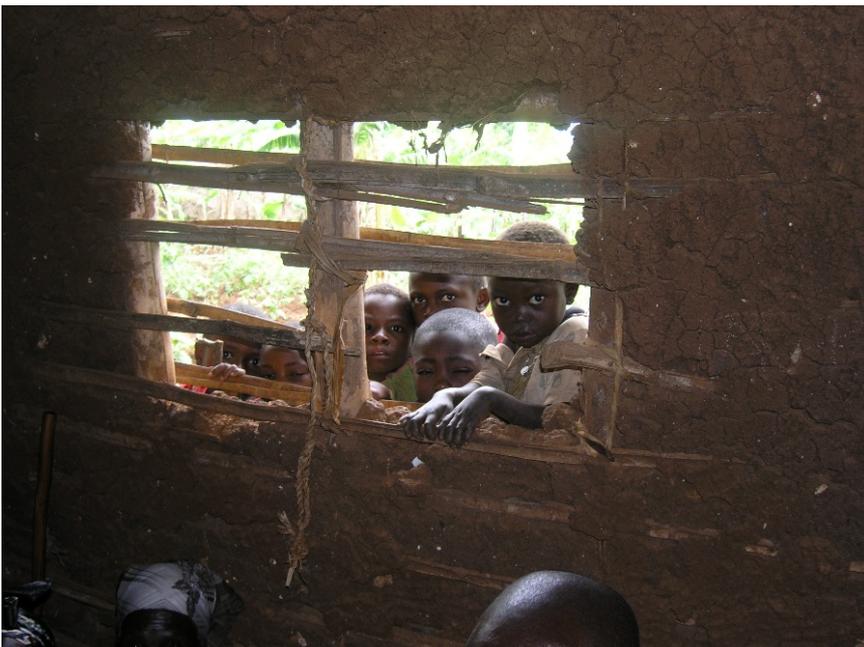
The little experience that we would like to share comes from Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo, a country that has suffered enough for several years.

Our congregation, School Sisters of St. Francis of Christ the King, came in this country about 40 years ago, and we live in intercultural, international, interracial fraternities, ... trying to proclaim the Good News. It seems to me that this interculturality helps us to respect each other, and to make us understand that the differences really are a richness.

The French language is used to communicate among us. Once a week we pray rosary in five different languages. During the Eucharistic celebration there are present 3/4 languages. As for the food, we try to alternate so that we can all get used to different tastes.



Another particular experience in our ministry is related to a huge prison built in our city. It was built for 300-400 people, but at present time, in it are present between 1,300 / 1,400 persons, in inhuman conditions. There are about 12 cells where 'cohabit' men, women, children ... sometimes even mothers with their babies, soldiers and civilians together.



So we religious, men and women, belonging to a dozen congregations and diocesan priests have formed a volunteer group of about 30 people of different nationalities. Our aim is to live the Gospel with the prisoners so that they may discover another way of living, another way to behave. To help them to understand that brutality, injustice, punishment ... do not have the last word. And as far as possible we would also lessen the misery around us, especially for those who find themselves in situations of extreme need. God is love and mercy. He does not love evil.

To accomplish all this, we have divided ourselves into sub-groups: some of us are involved in catechesis, others teach the French, Kiswahili, English, Computing, or cutting and sewing. In this way the prisoners can acquire knowledge. They choose the course according to their affinities, freely. Some of us are dedicated to listening ... perhaps the most difficult aspect of our ministry, but also the most important. Being able to trust is a relief, especially when there is not consideration, being ill-treated, or when one is in a very bad human conditions. We support prisoners offering them the help of professionals to solve their cases, such as lawyers, judges, intercessions.

Once a month we come together to discuss the problems encountered, to find together the solutions. And when we realize that the forces are running out we retire for a day in a monastery to regain strength to be able to continue the journey for the glory of God and for the good of the world.



“We have to be there for one another, because God has shown us that He is there for us.”

(St. Elizabeth)

KRASŇANOVÁ Mária, MUDr
Sisters of Saint Elizabeth (OSE – Ordo Sanctae Elizabeth)
Original written in English

We are the Sisters of Saint Elizabeth (OSE – Ordo Sanctae Elizabeth) and we have been operating in Bratislava, Slovakia, since 1738. We live according to the Rule and life of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis. We take three religious vows: poverty, chastity and obedience.

As well as our patrons, St. Francis and St. Elizabeth, we strive to follow Jesus Christ according to the Gospel by serving the sick and needy. Our specific mission is the care for patients in the Oncological Institute of Saint Elizabeth in Bratislava and service to those in need.

The life example of St. Elizabeth and St. Francis with their mercy, compassion and loving service to those in need is a challenge also for us not to be afraid of forgetting oneself and giving priority to others. How it is possible to make this requirement vivid and real today? The Lord has called us for services in which we liken ourselves to him. ***“I was sick and you visited me ...”*** (Mt 25:36) - these words of the Lord invite us to care for the seriously ill and suffering and thus becoming the ***“Good Samaritan”***. (cp. Lk 10:29-37). ***“God has shown us that he is here for us.”***

Saint Elizabeth was filled with God and was opened to His presence in her life. Her inner strength rose from her intimate and deep relationship with Him. She derived from this the power, happiness and courage to serve others. From this intimacy she drew her strength, joy and courage for her service towards her neighbours. Elizabeth invites us to rediscover Christ, who is true love, to believe in Him and let Him love us and transform us. ***“We have to be there for each other.”*** When we are filled with God, we try to be there for each other. ***“Let us make people happy!”*** (St. Elizabeth)

Our mission is also to see the face of Christ in the face of every person we meet in our life, and bring the Lord's joy and peace to their life. St. Elizabeth fulfilled this great mission of love to which the Gospel calls each of us: ***“Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me.”*** (Mt 25:40). We pray to the Lord for sympathetic and receptive hearts for the needs of our neighbours in order to behave with attention and kindness to experience the richness of God's goodness and man's humanity. We are inspired by the example and witness of St. Elizabeth and St. Francis to "pour balm" into the wounds of our brothers and sisters and treat them with respect and tenderness as Jesus also did.

Sister Elizabeth, OSE, shares her experience

I have worked in the clinic of oncological surgery, where I meet patients who experience fear and anxiety due to the uncertain prognosis of their disease. The sick often face a change of their lifestyle and are separated from their families because of the hospitalization. Therefore, they expect us to offer empathy, respect and acceptance. If we devote our time, and listen to them willingly and attentively, they will open their hearts and allow us to enter the field of their needs, which helps them to mobilize all their power. The period of the disease may become a time of personal prayer, seeking and deeper union with God. Many of the sick had experienced relief, support or liberation through prayer and were able to carry the burden of disease and within themselves accept everything that they hadn't been able to accept before.

Let us help the sick to discover the meaning of suffering in order to be able to adopt their own difficulties and connect them with Christ's suffering! It is difficult to find the words of consolation in the time of pain, sorrow and grief. Nonetheless, they can be replaced by attention, personal interest, prayer for the sick or direct prayer with them - these are seemingly small, yet great and tangible demonstrations of true love.

REFLECTIONS ON MY EXPERIENCE OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES 21 (COP21)

*Sr. Patricia McMahon, OSF
Sisters of St. Francis of Penance and Christian Charity
Originally written in English*

The Franciscan delegation to the **Conference of the Parties 21 (COP 21)**, held in Paris on December 4-10, 2015, was a diverse and wonderful group of people. Our core group was made up of three women from three different congregations within the Third Order Regular, from the Philippines and the United States; three members of the Third Order Secular, one from the Netherlands, one from Italy and one from France. There were OFM friars from Brazil and Ecuador, as well as Capuchins from Ecuador, India and Kenya. In addition, there were two lay women who worked for the Justice and Peace offices of the Friars Minor in Australia and the Capuchins in Detroit, Michigan, and a man who is part of the staff for the Franciscan Action Network (FAN) from the United States. Periodically during the week we were joined by Franciscans from around the world who were participating either as actual negotiators (representatives of Franciscans International) or as presenters at various sites around the city.

I learned a great deal during this time in Paris and the first thing which I learned is that COP 21 was not a single meeting. While most of the world was rightfully focused on the official meeting where the negotiations were taking place and the decisions were being made, there were many other parallel venues around the city, where people could go to meet with those who are deeply involved in issues of climate justice and/or who are most impacted by climate change, to hear their stories and to receive more education regarding the issues. During our time there we had the opportunity to visit several of these sites. One site which we visited was a tribunal where people from around the world were giving presentations on crimes against Mother Earth. At this session I learned that a large percentage of the green house gasses currently being emitted come from agri-industry and pesticides. Factory farms and our modern food processes, GMOs and pesticides are not only killing us, they are killing the earth. This was brought home to us when during the week we were together massive flooding occurred in the city of Chennai, India caused to a great extent by the erosion of the nutrients in the soil.

Hearing the stories of what the warming of our planet has done to some of the most vulnerable places in the world from the mouths of those who live there touched my heart. I have heard the stories before but never from the people who are living through them. I had heard about the damage done by mining companies and how governments often turned a blind eye to the misdeeds of the companies, but seeing the videos of the damage caused by the BHP Billiton-Vale dam collapse in Brazil and hearing of the minor fines which were levied on the corporations made it very real.

I had heard about land grabbing from indigenous people and the deforestation of the Amazon basin. This time I heard men and women from South America speak about trying to work with their governments to get communal land rights, because they love the forest and want to protect her. I heard them speak of not having a voice at the official venue and yet they are the main litigators of climate contamination.

I met women from a number of different countries in South Central Africa, who have come together to form the Rural Women's Assembly. The Assembly works for rural women's access to land, food sovereignty and climate justice. Through the Assembly rural women of Africa have gained access to farm unions and political processes to which they never before has access.

Most of all I learned the truth of what Pope Francis expresses so beautifully in chapter three of *Laudato Si'*. The care of the earth and the care of the poor and the marginalized can not be separated. We must put all of our efforts into healing creation and eradicating extreme poverty.

I am very grateful that the nations of the world were able to come to such a positive agreement. However, this agreement is only the beginning. We, as Franciscans, must continue to work for climate justice. During the next several months the group of us who were present at COP 21 will be developing suggested strategies to help us to do this.

I am deeply grateful to have had the opportunity to participate in this experience and I strive to make the prayer of Pope Francis, my own: “God of love, show us our place in this world as channels of your love for all the creatures of this earth, for not one of them is forgotten in your sight . . .The poor and the earth are crying out.” (*A Christian Prayer in Union with All Creation*)



Franciscan delegation to the COP 21

P.S.:

Report and Resolutions of the Franciscan Delegation at COP 21 by Roman VI: **See Attachment**

**Report of the Franciscan delegation that participated on the World Climate Summit from 2-10
December 2015 in Paris (COP21)**

Introduction: For the first time in history, world leaders have made a public commitment to reduce global emissions and to take a hard look at the impact of climate change. For us Catholic Franciscans, the Paris COP 21 Agreement is a significant step forward on the road that leads us to care for and protect the poorest and most vulnerable people in the face of the damage resulting from climate change which by now, most scientists agree, is caused by human activity and the use of energy sources fed by fossil fuels.

The Paris COP 21 Agreement is but the beginning of a journey and we wanted to keep watch over this journey with great involvement and attention. Responding to our commitment to follow St. Francis and his spirituality in our life, we Franciscans will not rest until the vulnerable are protected, the poor achieve a better standard of living, and our common home, our Sister Mother Earth, is cared for and treated with the dignity that she deserves.

Key elements of the Paris Agreement:

- i. The objective of holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and to pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C. above pre-industrial levels;
- ii. A non-binding decision for the member nations to review their objectives in 2020, and every five years after that, with a goal to increasing their cuts in the projected greenhouse gas emissions and to have regular and periodic global reporting of the progress made towards the common goal of containing temperature increases.
- iii. A recognition that the 100 billion US Dollars annually promised by 2020 should be the basis of a permanent fund and that the financing should be reviewed regularly along with the national objectives of reducing greenhouse gases, with the objective of new financing, the amount of which should be agreed upon by 2025.
- iv. The acknowledgement that many countries are suffering loss and damage because of climate change, for which, however, the Agreement specifically excludes any responsibility or the possibility of requests for compensation.

We recognize that the Paris COP21 Agreement is an important development in the debate on possible solutions to the environmental crisis, especially in comparison with previous COP's. Although this advancement, the agreement is weak because totally voluntary and does not address important aspects such as how to create and guarantee the financing that will allow the poorer nations to respond to the damage caused by the effects of climate change and also it doesn't address themes related to the defense of human rights of the peoples concerned. These are some of the aspects which Pope Francis called to our attention with his Encyclical, "*Laudato Si*".

The Franciscan delegation at COP21

Continuing our commitment of presence at these moments that are so important and vital for the world¹, the members of the Interfranciscan JPIC Commission, commonly called Romans VI, organized and coordinated the participation of a Franciscan delegation in the work of COP 21, which resulted in the presence in Paris of 20 Franciscans from various parts of the world representing various branches of the Franciscan family. The Franciscan participation was a collaboration with Franciscans International, whose delegates participated at the official gatherings organized by the United Nations.

The goal of the delegation's work was, through conversation and dialogue, to bring the contribution of Franciscan spirituality to existing discussions on these topics and to show that Franciscans are active and want to be increasingly and more concretely involved in the care "of our common home", and to have a pro-active advocacy role on behalf of environmental justice and for the change of those structures that create conditions of extreme poverty and injustice.

As a result, the delegation decided to prepare a number of proposals that could be worked on together throughout the Franciscan family, which would continue and develop what was decided after our participation in RIO + 20. The proposals relate to the three areas as they relate to climate change:

- Extraction industries – a response to the cry of the Earth
- Economy – a response to the cry of the poor
- Lifestyle (personal and collective witness)

We encourage one another to engage with civil societies, groups from other religions, and all people of good will in the dialogue on these topics with a goal of creating:

- Greater awareness
- Coordinated of action
- A human rights based approach
- Grass-roots involvement to influence governments
- Advocacy actions.

As a follow-up to its participation in COP 21, the delegation created working groups to define the points on which to focus attention and offered the following:

Mining and extractive industries - Industries (such as mining, lumbering, industrial fishing, agribusiness) that extract large quantities of natural resources, with their effect on the poor, or which deplete natural resources and impact the environment negatively. The group recommends actions such as:

- Increasing awareness;
- Sharing information and providing informed reflections;
- Fostering networking among indigenous populations and other groups effected;
- Dialogue with all;

¹ This presence began with an official delegation-s participation in the Rio +20 summit and continued with the World Social Forum in Tunis at the beginning of 2015.

- Advocacy at all levels

The working group proposes a special focus on mining, industrial fishing and deforestation.

Economy – After our days at COP21, we have come to believe that the current system of economic development is flawed. Rather than helping the most vulnerable people on earth, it creates a widening gap between those who are wealthy and those who are poor. Inspired by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'*: “there is a need to change models of global development; this will entail a responsible reflection on “the meaning of the economy and its goals....

(194)”.

In the light of these two statements we are committed to engaging the whole Franciscan Family in a process of responsible reflection which will lead to actions for climate justice.

Lifestyle -

The proposal for a life-style change begins with small actions, (voluntarily renouncing “I want”

- Recycling of renewable resources
- Reduction in the use of non-renewable resources
- Rejection of the “throwaway” culture
- Production by the masses rather than mass production

and grows into committed involvement and advocacy at all levels of society.

Participants evaluated the experience of COP 21 very positively and everyone especially appreciated the involvement of the French Franciscan family, with whom we shared intense moments of prayer, interchange and fraternal joy in sharing food.

The times we shared with civil organizations and representatives of other faiths also helped the delegation to become more aware of how extremely important it is to network our own resources, energies and talents for a common effort on behalf of our “common home’.

Speaking after the Angelus prayer the Sunday following COP21, Pope Francis said, “With the hope that special attention for the most vulnerable populations is guaranteed...I exhort the whole international community to proceed on the path undertaken in the name of an ever more effective solidarity.” As Franciscans, care for the most vulnerable populations is an integral part of our charism. We have already begun this work; now, at this time of worldwide transformation, in the light of the example of St. Francis, we must reflect on our own lifestyles (personal, community, and social/political) and deepen our commitment to living out our solidarity with those who are most impoverished of humanity and of the rest of creation. The climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all; we are all called to be good stewards of our mother and sister Earth.

The Romans VI