



## The Rights of Mother Earth

On 1 June, a twelve-day Conference on global climate protection began in Bonn, Germany. About 3.000 delegates from 190 countries are preparing the UN-Convention on Climate Change, which is to be passed in December in Copenhagen. Participants are Government delegations, commercial representatives, climatologists and environmentalists. The Conference is not a local event but a global balancing act in maintaining planet earth habitable for the coming generations.

The Head of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK), Mr. Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, has defined dealing with the climate crisis "an unexampled challenge of human civilization". If global greenhouse gas emissions cannot be reduced by about 20 % by 2020, the climate catastrophe can hardly be prevented. What this means has been adequately described and has been scientifically proven: A considerable rise of the sea level, an increasing number of droughts, more freak weather situations, water and food shortages etc. 20 % of the world population live near the coast, i.e. many will only survive by a gigantic internal migration. But where to? Many experts and environmentalists fear that politics and economy will not have the courage to take the necessary measures, unless the pressure by the population will be heavy enough forcing them to reroute. This, however, would ask for an immense change in awareness.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> April, the President of Bolivia, Evo Morales Ayma, said during the UNO General Assembly of the UNO when this day was declared as the International Mother Earth Day: "When the 20<sup>th</sup> Century has been recognised as the Century for individual, social, political, and cultural human rights, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century will be recognised as the Century of the rights of Mother Earth, the rights of animals and plants, of all living creatures and all beings whose rights also have to be respected and protected. Evo Morales speaks as a member of the Amerindians, the indigenous people of Latin America, who have maintained this deep awe for Mother Earth and all the living

creatures throughout all the centuries in which sophisticated Caucasians in the northern continents regarded themselves and acted as masters of creation. The vision of the rights of Mother Earth is far off the consumption-oriented concept, which we have believed in and lived for years: seeing the earth as a reservoir of natural resources, which can be exploited at will. There was a complete lack of the perception that earth is really our mother who has to be respected, honoured and loved. The indigenous peoples have maintained the connection with nature and Mother Earth. We now have to relearn that we can only operate in harmony with her rhythm and we can only produce with maximal respect of all habitats. This starts with our consumerist' behaviour and ends with the rediscovery of creation spirituality where we perceive Mother Earth as a true God-given gift, which we have to keep and preserve.

As Franciscan people we would have had the chance to keep and convey this mission of Mother Earth as a gift by a loving God throughout the 800 years of Franciscan spirituality in a world that regards nature as a value in use that could be exploited for the sake and advantage of the human species. We could have kept and conveyed the unity of God, humans and nature as one of our most important inheritances if we had truly internalised and lived the mystery of Francis' Canticle of the Sun. We should admit that we also were sometimes infatuated with the lustre of science and technology and offered too little resistance. "Our Sister, Mother Earth who feeds us in her sovereignty and produces various fruits with coloured flowers and herbs." The entire Canticle of the Sun is permeated by the grateful revelation that all this is not to be taken for granted: the whole world with its horrors and its beauty in the splendour of God, the presence of God in all things, in the four elements and especially in human beings, who follow Jesus. There is nothing godless in this Franciscan mysticism of the open eye, everything in this world is filled with God and is blessed and secure. This is our mission that we have to rediscover.

Andreas Müller OFM

## Africa

### Rwanda

*Two Franciscan events took place simultaneously in March 2009 in Rwanda. Jean François Isia Amundala OFS reports on these events:*

„From 21<sup>st</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> March 2009, the first CCFMC Meeting of the Franciscan Family of Rwanda took place in the Franciscan parish of Kivumu situated 40 kilometres from the Rwandan capital of Kigali. 20 delegates of all branches of the Franciscan Family from all parts of the country had accepted the invitation. Father Joseph Bishyanuka OFM and Father Mathias Kule OFM chaired this meeting.

During these four days the participants shared information on the following topics: Introduction and general presentation of the CCFMC; appointment of a national coordination office for the course, and the elaboration of a programme. In an open, dynamic and brotherly and sisterly dialogue the participants presented their ideas, visions, and suggestions and discussed current difficulties. The discussion mainly focused on the worry about the possibilities of education and procurement of the lesson units. At the end of the meeting an eight-headed provisional national committee was elected; the coordinator will be Father Joseph Bishyanuka. It was also clearly expressed that the Brothers and Sisters had not known each other beforehand. For this reason it was decided to organise meetings on the level of the individual dioceses in order to foster cooperation and to have the chance to get personally acquainted.

There were a number of suggestions for the improvement of education opportunities:

- The setup of a place of assembly in each diocese;
- Cooperation with the Friars Minor OFM;
- More involvement of the OFS Members;
- Translation of the lesson units into a simple style of the local language;
- The inclusion of the Franciscan Youth (YouFra) and the Poor Clares.

*The second event was the assembly of the Franciscan Family in the Region of the Great Lakes (FFRGL) during the visit of Father Andreas Müller from 25<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> March 2009. A supplementary report informs about this second important Franciscan event:*



Following the welcome address by the Guardian of Kivumu, Fr. Mathias Kule OFM, and reports on the current situation in the individual countries, the coordinator gave a short overview on the development of the FFRGL since its beginnings as well as on the difficult phases on the way gone so far. He emphasized that the visit by Fr. Andreas gives us an important assistance for our orientation. Fr. Andreas, in turn, expressed his preparedness to accompany the FFRGL on its long journey. He

reminded us that Saint Francis had sent the Brothers into the world to teach Pax et Bonum, that is peace and all good. This should also be the central theme for those assembled here. Throughout the meeting he repeatedly inspired and enriched the discussions with experiences from his international encounters.



The reports by the individual commissions of the FFRGL were yet another important issue on the agenda of this meeting:

Fr Mathias, representative of the *Committee for Justice and Peace*, outlined the three-year programme incorporating the specific conditions of the individual countries. The intention is the elaboration of an action plan, the education of skilled personnel as well as discussions with local staff in order to set the terrain. The active cooperation by all members of the Franciscan Family is very important including the involvement and co-operation of the youth.

Fr. Joseph Bishyanuka, responsible for the *Commission for Education and Studies*, pointed out the importance in putting across a culture of peace especially to those people in the Region of the Great Lakes that is haunted by conflicts. The programme that he introduced comprises a close synergy between human, Christian and Franciscan education. His commission is already working with former inmates, with people having escaped the genocide and also with people working for the public interest. He suggested that all countries should establish the Committee of the Franciscan Family in their region; all commissions should also be represented on local level.

*The Commission for Communication* headed by Mr Pierre Gahunga Kemayire pointed out the necessity of a well-functioning communication network in order to reach as many people as possible. It is the intention to create a website, to issue a regular information brochure, and to broadcast Franciscan programmes via radio and television.

*The Commission for Inter-religious Relations and Evangelisation*, represented by Fr. Jean Baptiste Tabaro, sees its task in an in-depth dialogue with various religious communities and social groups in order to get to know one another better, to respect each other, to appreciate one another, to respect each others' dignity, and to enable reconciliation among the conflicting parties.

Leopold Fiston Gacuririzi, Head of the *Commission for Programmes, Projects and Financing* described the main task of the FFRGL „to contribute in the consolidation of peace in the region of the Great Lakes. “ Major topics are: Peace and reconciliation education in Burundi. In Rwanda: Setup of an education facility for the peaceful coexistence of the peoples. Democratic Republic of Congo: Peace education as well as construction of an assembly room in Nyantende. Uganda: Further training programmes to strengthen the Franciscan brotherly - sisterly relationship.

Francis Isia, Head of *Finance*, considers it useful to found our own enterprises which would create jobs and would contribute to self-financing.

## Tororo/Uganda

### The Youth of Uganda on its Way to Francis

*Father Hermann Borg OFM reports on the positive results of the CCFMC coordinator for Uganda, Sr. Margaret Awor Lsof regarding the education of Franciscan youth:*

In the past years Sr. Margaret Awor has been working untiringly with the youth to turn them into mature and responsible people. On April 18<sup>th</sup> 2009 the results of her efforts became apparent and vivid for a larger public.

The town of Tororo in Western Uganda, only 20 kilometres from the border to Kenya with 300,000 inhabitants, does not only have a booming cement industry providing jobs for the local population; there have also been great changes regarding spirituality and renewal.

During a festive mass in the Cathedral of Tororo on 18<sup>th</sup> April, 40 young people were inaugurated as leaders of the first 40 Franciscan Youth groups in the 40 parishes of this Archdiocese. The decorated sanctuary was filled with two bishops and a dozen priests as well as a group of about 15 Franciscan Sisters. The Cathedral was filled to capacity, above all with youth. The

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Auxiliary Bishop Charles was the main celebrant. One of the readings was proclaimed by a blind boy in Braille reading the text in a loud and convincing voice. Fr. Hermann from Kenya delivered the sermon and described the meaning of the Franciscan vocation.

The way towards Franciscan spirituality and renewal, which is now given a new impetus, was not always easy in the past decades; it also had to master times of war and suppression. The efforts that have finally been crowned with this marvellous success by getting the youth interested in and acquainted with the Franciscan spirituality will not only foster the renewal of the spirit of Saint Francis among the Ugandan youth; these efforts will also have a positive effect on many young believers and on the vivid Church. Thus some priests have been thinking about making contact with the Secular Franciscans.

The year 2009, celebrating the 800<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Franciscan Charism, may help especially the younger generation in finding the meaning of life.

## Latin America

### Mexico

#### Vibrant development of the CCFMC since 2004

*Sr. María Gabriela Alarcón Contreras OFS reports about the encouraging developments and new approaches on the studies of the CCFMC and its implementation in the past four years:*

New paths have opened and valuable goals have been met. This is the short resume that can be drawn from the activities of the CCFMC in Mexico in the timeframe since the last CCFMC evaluation meeting in Cochabamba/Bolivia in 2004. The points listed below are an indication for this development:

- New animators and promoters are now active in Mexico for the CCFMC.
- The presence of the CCFMC in the ever more important media has grown. Thanks to the efforts of Father Luis Patiño and the support of Father Manuel Figueroa OFM, a course advertisement is now being broadcast on the television channel (SKY and Cable TV) and published in the magazine 'Ideales Franciscanos'. In this way the course is introduced to a larger public.
- For one year now the CCFMC has become a permanent feature in the education of the YouFra in the Province of the Holy Gospel. This way the young people gain access to the Franciscan aspect of the mission. We are convinced that the Brothers implement the missionary charism in their own lives all the better, the earlier they become familiar with it.
- The course is taught in various areas: in the facilities of the IFEM (Instituto Franciscano de Espiritualidad en México/Franciscan Institute for Spirituality in Mexico) always in the summer of the past three years; last summer 39 persons participated in the course. It also takes place as an itinerant course during which the participants visit convents of the OFS/YouFra as well as the convents of the Poor Clares. The course duration varies and depends on the dynamics and the activity of the group. The course, respectively individual lesson units, is finally also integrated into the programmes of retreat houses.
- It is due to the efforts of Father Gerardo Moore OFM, Head of the Franciscan Centre in Guatemala that the ties to the CCFMC animators in Central America could be strengthened and allowed a joint experience of the Franciscan mission charism. In September 2008 he had extended an invitation and 50 Brothers and Sisters from various branches of the Franciscan Family had come to participate in this workshop.



- Through the counselling and help of Father Samuel López Padilla – but also especially motivated by the new challenges of the Franciscan mission and enlightened by the occurrence of „Aparecida“ – we succeeded in the introduction of the study course for a „Diploma for Pastoral Work in Cities.“ This diploma can be obtained at the Ibero-American Jesuit University. Two positive results of this study course are to be specifically emphasized: 1. It was suggested to issue a new CCFMC lesson unit entitled „New Challenges for the Franciscan Mission: the Pastoral Work in Cities“ and leave its evaluation to them. We have elaborated and also used new methods to include them in the mission work of those Brothers and Sisters, teaching the CCFMC and who are closely linked with the City Pastoral Work of the Brothers of San Diego. The Brothers of San Diego themselves live in utmost poverty and primarily work in ghettos at the periphery with street children, emigrants, drug addicts, and prostitutes.
- The issues reflected and discussed in the CCFMC course, we try to put into practice when taking care of the ill. We do this together with the Franciscan community „El Cristo“ in Coyoacán. The Brothers and Sisters engaged in this work receive a special briefing on the end-of-life care.
- We have taken up the idea of the „Franciscan Awakening“ of our Brothers in Costa Rica and established a group offering coffee and bread in the waiting rooms of the national oncology centre. Furthermore, we also have access to the clinic in the evening hours to comfort the ill and their loved ones.

Our way during the past four years was difficult. Many doors we knocked on remained unopened. In other cases open doors were closed in front of us and we were even chased away. Nevertheless we try to achieve „perfect joy“ day after day.

The means we have available are the love for the Franciscan charism and the savings of those working as CCFMC animators.

„We ask all those reading these lines for the sake of God’s Mercy to graciously receive with divine love the delicious words of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## Argentina

### „True contemplation through the CCFMC“

*Towards the end of her professional life, the now retired teacher Ms Alicia Teresa Ciardelli from Rosario learned about the course on the Franciscan Mission Charism and drew great profit from it for her personal life and spirituality. This is her report on her experience:*



“After working for 35 years as a teacher at the grammar school „Nuestra Señora de la Asunción“ in Rosario, I went into retirement at the end of May 2008. The school is an institution of the Tertiary Sisters of Charity devoted to the education of children and youth. The institute was founded in 1880 by a simple Franciscan Sister, Sr. Mercedes Guerra, who had understood the importance of education and upbringing for children from poor families, but also orphans as well as children

abandoned by their parents. True to the charism of our foundress my educational task as a teacher, and later as assistant director, I followed the principles of faith and culture meaning to treat and respect every individual as a human being and as a child of God. As a teacher I



educated my students „ in liberty and for liberty. “ In doing my job I was always aware that all of us need moderation and respect; that we need to be heard, appreciated, and loved.”

Ms Alicia Teresa Ciardelli literally writes about her encounter with the CCFMC: “In 2006 I decided to take a correspondence course on the condensed version of the Franciscan Mission Charism at the Martin Cunz Centre.

This course has helped me to renew and refresh my task and mission as a Franciscan educator. I discovered the true meaning of the term contemplation for Francis and Clare. This contemplative dimension enabled me to open my heart even more to the love of God and to my Brothers and Sisters. I attempted to allow contemplation to enter into all areas: within the family, at work, in dealing with my superiors, with my colleagues, with the students, with the parents of my students, but also during leisure time in proclaiming the Gospel and expressing my love relationship with God. I attempted to perceive God as the source of all reality, even of what often burdens or hurts us.

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This course brought me to a new dimension regarding mission, contemplation and bearing witness; it also influenced the love towards my siblings, the solution of my own and other conflicts; to master suffering and disappointments with faith and hope.

This course also gave me the chance to meet the CCFMC Coordinators Vanessa and Mabel, with whom I share a sisterly love, which in turn helped me to grow within the Franciscan spirituality ...“

Today, almost one year after her retirement, Alicia Ciardelli continues writing that she is sad that she can no longer be part of this Franciscan community, although she would have loved to share her experiences in counselling and accompaniment of the teaching staff, especially of the young teachers.

„ ... I no longer work as a teacher, but I live my Franciscan spirituality as a special reward; this past year I attended the training course for family consultants of the Instituto Superior Don Bosco in Rosario and took up a voluntary job at the family counselling service of the diocesan Caritas of Rosario Archdiocese. There I am trying, as far as it is possible to me, to show families with very little income, their way to God and to their Brothers and Sisters. I work within a group of six and I feel well and happy. The Lord has ignited a light on my way. “

## Bare-footed in the Foot-prints of Jesus -

The Christ-Experience of Francis and how he followed Him

Br. Niklaus Kuster OFM Cap



### 3 „The Highest has led me among the Smallest“:

#### Key experiences of a long search (Part 2)

During the time of his search, the merchant had so far been praying to a high God. When meeting others down in Assisi, he gradually realises that the Highest acts surprisingly: at the very bottom. “God Himself has led me among the lepers” (Test). The embrace of a leper opens up the seeker for the mystical encounter in San Damiano. God appears to him there – as a friend of the lowest - unexpectedly at eye level. Giotto has illustrated this surprising encounter at eye level in a masterpiece: the wealthy man finds himself in front of the bare Christ, the well-off man (with 8 houses in Assisi) in front of God hanging in the rain, - and overwhelmed he falls to his knees.

In the upcoming conflict with his own father, the Damiano Cross teaches Francis to take a look at Jesus’ heaviest conflict with human beings. Threatened by his father, Francis lives near San Damiano for weeks, where most likely the local priest takes care of him and probably also offers an initial companionship. On the table cross Francis discovers the hand of the Heavenly Father, leading his son – the “ Son of Man” – into His light through rejection, hatred and suffering. Only a few weeks later Francis will confess the Father of Jesus as his own: the only Father in and above this world. “From now on I will no longer say “Father Peter Bernardone” but „Our Father who art in heaven“(Comp 20). [...].

Decisive threshold experiences in winter 1205/06 within few, moving months mark a way of manifold discoveries. The „Highest“ leads among the Smallest, responds through the bare-footed son on earth and becomes visible as Father of all mankind. The discovery of Jesus’ humanity on earth turns the Romanic ruler of the world into the „God at eye level“ - a God who reveals himself to the young merchant outside of town and its churches, at the edge of society, among the poorest, in silent caves and inside a Church ruin.

The experience of the one Father of all Mankind and of the one Son, who becomes brother to the Smallest, leads Francis to a radical brotherly and sisterly view of the world. He becomes more revolutionary than the Republic of Assisi itself and transverse to Church-hierarchic thinking. [...]

At the age of 16 Francis having experienced during the urban revolution that the commune order is breaking with patriarchal rules and developing democratic ideas, in 1206 his image of humanity and the world becomes more radical evoked by a moving experience of faith. God Himself chooses the downward career; the Highest makes Himself equal to the Smallest. [...].

The social and clerical revolutionary aspect of this spirituality shows its consequences compared with the patriarchal model of Benedict leading the hierarchic Church till this day. Francis possibly gets to know the renowned prologue of the Rule of St. Benedict already in spring of 1206 right after his disinheritance during service of the Benedictines of Vallingegno, at the latest, however, as a hiking Brother regularly enjoying the hospitality of monks. During his last years he portrays a remarkable contradistinctive version in a letter to his own Brothers:

#### **The Rule of St. Benedict**

*Listen, O my son, to the precepts of thy master, and incline the ear of thy heart, and cheerfully receive and faithfully execute the admonitions of thy loving Father.*

#### **Francis to the Order:**

*Listen, You Sons of the Lord, and my Brothers, pay attention to my words, Incline the ear of your heart and obey the voice of the Son of God. Observe His commands with your whole heart and fulfil His counsel with a perfect mind.*

Whereas for Benedict of Nursia the monastery is a school of love and perfection „beneath abbot and rule“, Francis will be wandering about, in search of a community of faith in the discipleship of a brotherly Son of God.