



Francis and Clare

The 800-year jubilee of the Franciscan movement and the original rule of the Franciscan order are on the finishing straight. Since more than 5 years now the CCFMC Family commemorates this with the slogan "Charism 2008 / 09", by combining the two events „Beginning of the Franciscan Movement in February 1208“ and „The Confirmation of the Original Rule In 1209“. And we are already beginning with the preparations for the 800-year jubilee of the Foundation of the Order of Saint Clare in 1212. This had already been part of the deliberations 5 years ago on how to get back on the track of the founding charism of the Franciscan Family.

Indeed the founding figures of the Franciscan charism cannot be dealt with separately. St. Clare of Assisi typifies the female dimension of this new foundation. Her influence on Francis is unmistakable. His motherly care for his brothers, his ability for compassion, his tenderness and intuition, his brotherly-sisterly solidarity, and his oneness with all living creatures are an expression of the "female side" of his character.

On the other hand, we can find the synthesis of contradictions also in Clare: Energy and tenderness, obedience and creativity, self-will and compliance, loyalty and resistance, joy and penance. These are all attributes that are a result of the deep friendship with Francis and that demonstrate the uniquely holistic character of the Franciscan charism. Both served the same purpose, the Kingdom of God; together they had the desire for a radical life of the Gospel, which they wanted to convey to the people as a life-giving force; they were steadfast in their devotion and loyalty for the poor in the call to follow the poor Jesus of Nazareth. This is our legacy, but also the great chance for the future.

Indeed Francis and Clare are like two sides of one coin. Completely balanced they represent the male resp. female manner to live the Gospel, in fact in different forms but with the same love and passion, with the same intensity and radicalism.

This exactly makes up the balance of their friendship. They never wanted anything from each other; they rather lived for each other. Their relationship was made up and lead by "the spirit of the heavenly Father, who had inspired both of them notwithstanding in different ways" as the legend of Saint Clare puts it.

Francis loved Clare and she returned this love. They loved each other tenderly always thinking of the well-being of the other. But this love for each other was surpassed by the love that both of them felt for God, for Jesus Christ and his Kingdom. This is the secret of the pure and balanced love between Francis and Clare. Both dared this love as they completely trusted in their primary love for Jesus. Clare called herself "the little plant of Francis" and she also felt accordingly. This child-like relationship is clearly stated in Clare's scriptures. She almost exclusively calls him "our Father Francis".

This is the vivid dynamics of our spiritual roots. Not Francis or Clare alone, but Francis and Clare together are the founders of our movement. This is our identity as Franciscans which we can only experience entirely within a brotherly-sisterly relationship of men and women. This is the special feature of our charism. Nowadays we call it the Francisclarian charism that is still able to inspire men and women to follow Jesus. This is our chance, but only if we understand to live this holistic charism as Sisters and Brothers on the Way, who are sharing their needs and who help each other to live this holistic charism in a convincing way.

Andreas Müller OFM

Australia:

Big celebration of the Francis Jubilee Year

With numerous events the Franciscan Family of Australia celebrates the 800th anniversary of the foundation of the Franciscan movement. Father Paul Ghanem OFM, who is responsible for the training of the Third Order Regular reports:

The festivities for the Anniversary Year 2009 started on 2 February and will come to a festive close on 18 November at Padua College in Kedron in presence of the Provincial Father Paul Smith OFM,

One of the events that have already taken place and should be specially noted was the Conference on the 100-years existence of the Franciscan Schools Australia (FSA). True to the motto "our Sister, Mother Earth: Franciscan Creation Spirituality" the Conference took place from 6 to 8 May at the Centre for Reflective Living in Baulkam Hills in New South Wales. Among the 70 participants from 22 of the total of 32 Franciscan schools in Victoria, New South Wales und Queensland were also members of three Franciscan orders.

Sr. Ilia Delio OSF, a Franciscan from Washington D.C., USA and Professor for spirituality at the Washington Theological Union, was one of the keynote speakers. Her topic „Creation as Sacrament“ was complemented by a presentation of Fr. Denis Edwards on "Ecology and Eucharist".

In various workshops the participants could deal with a variety of topics, which ranged from „Setup of ecological and effective communities“ to "Christian meditation in schools", „Franciscan Sanctuaries: where are they and what do they mean? ", "Franciscan Saints: what we have to know and have never asked" to "Planning of a Franciscan Pilgrimage" and "Meditating on the San Damiano Cross".



Further highlights of this Anniversary Year will also be the presentations on the following issues: „What does it mean to live the Gospel in the 21st Century?“, "Contemplation in a world of action: The Franciscan Way" and "Christian Life in an evolutionary world" These presentations will be held by Sr. Ilia Delio OSF in various Franciscan facilities; furthermore there will be a colloquium on the spirituality of the aborigines of Australia and a series of programs on justice, peace, and integrity of creation.

Europe

Germany

Franciscan thinking – acting - living

True to this motto, the INFAG (inter-Franciscan Association) conducted a weekend seminar to introduce the comprehensive course on Franciscan mission charism (CCFMC) at the education centre of the Tertiary Franciscan Sisters of Reute. From 26 to 28 June 24 participants got acquainted with this international and intercultural Franciscan course program. There was a feeling of lively interest right from the beginning, Sr. Margarethe Mehren states in her report and continues as follows:

Fr. Anton Rotzetter OFM Cap and Sr. M. Hanna Loehlein (Reute convent) lead us through this event. In the introductory round Sr. Hanna invited the participants to tell each other how they had come to know about the Franciscan spirituality and what had inspired them to occupy themselves more closely with the subject. This request led to a lively exchange of information.



Father Anton then illustrated the contents of the course and its fascinating history of origin being the result of an international and inter-Franciscan dialogue which contributes to a growing cooperation of all branches of the Franciscan Family worldwide.

He introduced the course using four theses:

1. The Franciscan Comprehensive Course is a biblical, and therefore also a mystical and messianic project.

Mysticism = experience with God.

Messianic dimension = mission to the world. The world belongs into the relation with God. The world has to change. Peace and fullness of life is God's will for the world.

Messiah = the Anointed One. Christ. Anointed for a mission to the world. The Poor Clares also have a mission for the world, however, in a different way. Meditation – prayer is the place where great inspirations can develop.

2. The Franciscan Comprehensive Course is a Trinitarian project. An interpretation of the world. The Trinitarian structure is contained within ourselves: soul, spirit, and body.
3. The Franciscan Comprehensive Course is a consequently incarnational project. The word became flesh. Discover the logos in every human being!
4. The Franciscan Comprehensive Course is a "Catholic" project in the original sense of the word, i.e. comprehensive, universal, excluding no one. In the Canticle of the Sun there are only Brothers and Sisters. Global communication that requires the willingness to listen to everyone. That the people in the North take note of the problems of the people in the South and vice versa. The same applies to East-West problems. I might have a hearing problem towards myself, towards God, and towards others. The problems within Church and society are mainly caused by not being willing or able to listen.

Unconditional solidarity with the poor on the ground but also over and above. To be en route with the poor.

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These are some highlights from an abundance of presentations. Following these basic insights we formed four groups and dealt with the contents of the first lesson unit: "Christianity - a Religion of the Incarnation". This is the guiding theme throughout the whole course and unfolds in the various lesson units.

The highlight was the inspired way of celebrating together the Eucharist which united us all and brought the weekend to a close.

Before we left, we decided to hold regular meetings in the four regional groups and to elaborate lesson units together. In one year we will come together again for another weekend to broaden our knowledge, to ask questions, to share ideas and inspirations and so to support one another on the way. After yet another year, i.e. in 2011, we will finish this course with a trip to Assisi.

Our sincere thanks go to Sr. Hanna and Fr. Anton for this unique weekend!



CCFMC-Centre

Franciscan Greetings from Zambia

Cordial greetings from Zambia were delivered by Father Richard Mwaba OFM Cap to the CCFMC Center in Würzburg. Among other things he writes: "... we would like to send you greetings and wish you all the best for your life and your work. We regularly receive the CCFMC news that is our inspiration and source of information. Although we do not have any topics at the moment we could send for publication, but we feel connected with you in the Franciscan spirit and charism ..."

Latin America

Bogotá

Congress on the 50-year Existence of CLAR

The Latin-American-Caribbean Confederation of the Religious (CLAR) celebrates its 50-year existence this year. On this occasion the Congress on "Religious Life" took place in the Columbian capital of Bogotá from 20 to 22 June with lectures on „Contributions of the Religious Life to the Latin-American and Caribbean Theology – on the way to the future“. The large number of young people among the more than 800 participants was quite remarkable. However, The Congress was



mainly especially characterized by the attendance of superb theologians from Latin America and the Caribbean to report on their experience of faith and their experience as companions of CLAR, but also to activate a hopeful future of religious life through their suggestions. The 26 presentations during the Congress will be well remembered by the members of the 17th CLAR Plenum, the religious from various Latin-American countries and from other continents and not to forget the numerous, mainly young guests from Columbia and will give them hope on their way „to a mystical-prophetic religious life, which produces new energy and creates new life.“



Among the guests of honor were a number of important Latin-American CCFMC-Promoters who had played an important role in the history of CLAR: e.g. Fr. Luis Patiño OFM from Colombia, Fr. Luis Coscia OFM Cap from Argentina, and Fr. Guido Zegarra OFM from Peru who held the office of President in times of conflict. The following keywords from Luis Coscia's presentation underline the close interconnection of the main goals of CLAR with the concerns of the CCFMC. The entire presentation is available as download.

Option for the poor: Religious life consists of the call to follow the poor Jesus, who had clearly made an option for the poor. This does not exclude the rich, but it is a decision for the poor of every description. The prophetic novelty that the religious had followed after the II. Vatican Council was to personally and jointly pursue the way of poverty in order to serve the poor in Latin America and in the Caribbean region. This decision for poverty is simultaneously the prerequisite to be a follower of Jesus. In this day and age where two thirds of humanity live below poverty level, it has become more important than ever for order members to have the courage to live in real poverty for the service of the poor.



Reading of the Word of God: For the renewal of religious life it is of utmost importance that reading of the Word of God inside the convents and with people has gained a new importance. Regular reading of the Bible contributes to be faithful to the Gospel, to nourish the courage and the energy for one's personal commitment, to experience joy even in difficult times, and to serve to the final consequence just as Jesus has done.

Charity and Compassion: Religious life within the Church has to be the visible expression of God's charity; if charity is not the top priority there, it is the betrayal of Jesus' cause. In times when poverty and suffering has so many new faces, the readiness for charity, for service, to listen and to accompany the suffering has to be clearly intensified. Otherwise the prophetic future of religious life would be put at stake.

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The prophetic dimension of religious life in Latin America and the Caribbean: It defines itself by its prophetic character. However, this does not mean that one has to constantly act prophetically or one has to excessively cultivate this aspect or even act as the ultimate authority. The prophetic aspect has to show especially in one's personal and mutual everyday life. In the years following the II. Vatican Council, especially after Medellín, the demeanor of large parts of the religious life has led to incomprehension, conflicts, and persecution, within the Church as well as in society suffering from military dictatorship in many countries at that time.

Martyrdom as attestation of the call to follow Jesus: When speaking of the prophetic aspect of religious life it also means to speak of martyrdom. Prophecy is always interlinked with persecution, conflicts, and martyrdom. In Latin America and in the Caribbean region the blood of numerous Christian laymen, of religious, priests and bishops has been shed. Today people are no longer killed because they believe in Jesus, but because they stand up for the crucified people of our times, the poor. This involves a new theological view of martyrdom: Being a martyr due to the option for the poor also means to die for the true call to follow Jesus. Nowadays there is a distinct tendency to move the cross into the background and to forget the II. Vatican Council at the same time. The criterion of the call to follow Jesus, however, should be the identification with the weak.

Witness of the manifold confraternities within the Church, with other Churches and with the world: Church-related conflicts often emerge within hierarchal structures or with Church officials; it is not a conflict with the Churches – as it is often said. It is quite unfortunate that within the religious life our love-borne confraternity with the Church as a whole as well as the passion for the welfare and the holiness of God's people are being weakened. Sometimes there is the common misconception that the confraternity within the Churches only means to avoid the conflict with hierarchy. The secret of confraternity can only exist where integration in its diversity can be valued, be respected, be cultured, and primarily be practiced. In the end one is not judged by one's political attitude but if one has honestly accepted people that are different from us.

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Good News for the dignity of women: One of CLAR's important and lasting contributions in the 50 years' of its existence is the theological contribution on the issue of the equality of the dignity of men and women. Since the foundation of CLAR there has always been mutual respect as well as equal job opportunity in all areas of duty.

Bare-footed in the foot-prints of Jesus

The Christ-Experience of Francis and how he followed Him

Br. Niklaus Kuster OFMCap



5 In the footsteps of the Son of Man:

Evangelic freedom (Part 1)

The following story, which Jordan of Giano tells in his chronicle is an impressive illustration how Francis and his early brotherhood transcribe the Gospel into their own reality.

It is the year of the Lord 1219 for the chroniclers of the crusaders. It is late autumn, and in Palestine the harvests have been brought in. Francis wanders through the Holy Land with the permission of the sultan, who had become his friend in September. Moved and awestruck the Poverello will have wandered the route that had seen the "footsteps of his Lord". One day at noon – Jordan of Giano tells us – Francis sat down at table somewhere in Judea or Galilee.

As already many times before he and his companions Pietro di Cattaneo, Elias and Caesar of Speyer had been invited by someone. This time, the hosts might have been crusaders, a simple family, maybe also Muslims, or Maltese in a pilgrim's hostel. As they were sitting together, a Brother disturbs the lunch round – he is sweating and agitated and has the restless wish to find Francis. He has come from Italy in a great hurry to report to Francis what has happened there in September. Gregorio of Naples and Matteo of Narni whom the Poverello had appointed as his proxies had called the most experienced Brothers of Italy for a chapter.

Among other things this chapter had established severe dietary rules. The Brothers could not seriously only just obey the fasting rules that apply for all laymen: no meat on Wednesdays and Fridays all year! The Brothers could by no means take second place behind the orders that had become old and easygoing! What is the norm for monks should be the minimum for the Lesser Brothers. Thus the chapter decided on rules for fasting and abstinence that clearly specified the time of prohibition for meat as well as dairy products. Francis is startled by the report of the hurried messenger. He certainly loves poverty, more radical than anyone else, but for him it is certainly no ascetic doing, no effort where the sacrifice can be weighed in grams or be measured in what has been conserved. And his reaction is just as telling as it is liberating: he calmly asks his companions who are sitting perplexed in front of their plate filled with meat and who do not know whether they are allowed to continue eating, what kind of advice the Lord had given to the disciples, when he had sent them through this country. Luke had passed on the following (10, 5-8): "Eat what is set before you"! Just as the poor who gratefully accept what is given to them, who are not used to choosing... And who are hopefully able to enjoy what the kindness of the people is giving to them.

The Brother's reaction - who continues eating - fasting rules or none - is path-breaking and speaks for the basic decision of his spirituality: the Gospel, not any norms have to be followed and only the human life of Jesus alone is the yardstick and not the rules of monks however holy they may be : the rabbi is the sole Lord and Master, - He, who was no ascetic, who loved life and showed himself so much as the friend of mankind, that he multiplied wine and that the Son of Man came eating and drinking and they say 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard' (Mt 11,19).

Evangelic poverty is not about measurable sacrifice or self-imposed achievements. It is far more radical and more liberating at the same time. Jesus' rule to the rich young man confronts the first basic step. He, who would be prepared to do anything, is encouraged by the Rabbi: "Let go of everything! Give what you have to the poor and follow me with empty hands!" Francis experienced that the promise is fulfilled for all those who will follow this rule: And whoever has observed this rule may be filled in heaven with the blessing of the Most High Father, and who even gives up his home, family, profession, and carrier, who follows Christ with free hands and feet, with body and soul and with a free heart, releases a lot of things, however, he will receive hundredfold!" [...] This is the confession of a kind of poverty that is far more daring than the poverty of the monks, who live a regulated and secured life in the concealment of a convent: unsecured and with empty hands poverty of the disciples leads the Poverello through Italy not knowing in the morning where he will get some bread at noon and where to lay down at night. A kind of poverty that completely puts its trust in the graciousness of human beings and the care of God, he wanders as a Brother to France and Spain, yes even to Egypt and to the Sultan's army camp – with the belief of empty hands and abiding to the Easter mission to the disciples, „to proclaim the Gospel to all creatures to the boundaries of the earth“. Even alleged enemies will then turn into friends as is the case with Sultan Malik al Kamil.