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Without doubt, one of our dreams has become reality. We wanted to promote awareness and defense of the rights of the weak and oppressed in Colombia. To this end, the Office of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC), in collaboration with the University of Saint Bonaventure at its main campus in Bogotá, organized a seminar entitled “Peace-Building: Human Rights and Religion.” It was held at the university August 21-24, 2012.

Sixty-three (63) people participated: friars, members of the Franciscan family, lay people committed to JPIC who work in various Franciscan ministries in Colombia, and students from Saint Bonaventure University. Also present and offering support for the seminar were two members of Franciscans International (Michael Lasky OFM Conv and Amanda Lyons) and Caritas Colombiana. The seminar dealt with:

**Introductory ideas for the study of human rights:** the seminar began with a look at the anthropological perspective which provides human beings with Natural Rights, offering as foundation the Christian experience of Saint Francis of Assisi. He understood the human person as unfinished in a world that was always evolving and changing. The human person is concrete and situated, immersed in a specific, historic, social, political and cultural context, directed toward the service of others and the valuing of life and nature. The seminar then considered the concept of human rights through history; a panel discussion dealt with the question of conflict in regard to human rights.

**Human Rights in a biblical perspective:** In looking at Sacred Scripture we read the story of a people who find their dignity in God, an attitude that makes the defense of Human Rights more effective. Against this background we considered our current history of violation of people’s rights, and the normative citations that constitute our Christian hope.

**Religion in the Public Sphere:** As a human community that is built up in specific historic circumstances, we promote a society that is fraternal, just, in solidarity, respectful of Human Rights, capable of dialogue with others, and of living proactively in the midst of challenging and enriching plurality.

**Workshops offered.** Analyzing the situation of Human Rights in Colombia; national case studies:
- Promotion and defense of Human Rights through the Universal Periodic Review of the UN, run by Franciscans International
- Defense of Human Rights, environmental justice and means of rural subsistence, run by Caritas Colombiana
- Defense of Human Rights, assistance to victims of conflict and support for the most vulnerable, run by Caritas Colombiana.

The workshops provided each participant the opportunity to carry out an analysis of reality and to deepen his or her reflection through a presentation of the results of the research, and included study of the role of defense and denunciation in specific cases of violation of Human Rights in Colombia.

We would like to highlight the following expected results of the seminar:
- Strengthen critical/religious thinking to help promote social transformation.
- Strengthen political/religious analysis in Colombia.
- Strengthen the national scientific capacity to appropriate knowledge about Human Rights and democracy, in relation to religion.
- Strengthen the ability of communities and of political and religious movements to formulate public policy.
- Provide support to Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue through political and religious analysis.
- Find more effective ways to share the results of the evaluation of Human Rights in Latin America and the Caribbean, obtained through the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).
- Strengthen the ability to highlight the challenges and tasks that belong to politics, religions and religious communities in Colombia, with respect to the recognition and guarantee of Human Rights.

Br. Dairon Hinestroza Ramos OFM
JPIC Animator
Franciscan Province of Santa Fe, Colombia
The Province of the Holy Spirit recently invited Joe Rozansky OFM to Australia and New Zealand to assist with animation of friars in the area of JPIC. Friars throughout the Province had an opportunity to attend a Formation Session and meal with Joe to discuss their involvement in issues of JPIC.

The sessions were held in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Auckland. Joe also met with the Poor Clare Sisters in Campbelltown (west of Sydney) and the staff at St Francis Retreat Centre in Auckland.

The focus of the meetings was seeing how JPIC is an integral part of our everyday living. We were able to discuss such issues as spirituality and animation.

Public presentations were given in each place Joe visited. Participants included secular Franciscans, religious, youth and people working in the area of JPIC in Australia and New Zealand.

These presentations were titled: Peace with People, Peace with our Planet: A Franciscan Perspective.

This visit proved to be an opportunity for the Province and others in Australia and New Zealand to assess and evaluate JPIC practices and to make decisions about the future direction of JPIC using the tools outlined by Joe:

- Reading the signs of the times;
- Using scripture from the Franciscan perspective of the poor;
- Reflecting on the stories of St Francis and
- Working with social movements.

Sarah Menassa-Rose
JPIC Animator
Holy Spirit Province
Australia
The biennial meeting of the Provincials of Latin America and the Caribbean (UCLAF) was held in Vitoria, Espirito Santo, in Brazil, 5-11 August of this year. The theme for the meeting was “Vocation: living the Gospel as Minors in Latin America and the Caribbean.”

The JPIC office of Rome received an invitation; we were asked to update participants about our JPIC work and some challenges for JPIC on the continent.

Br. Fabio L’amour represented the Rome Office and spoke about our vocation as minors and the prophetic dimension of our Franciscan charism.

In the discussion afterwards, the provincials highlighted the importance of the JPIC Course in Rome, the publications prepared by the Rome office and some dynamic initiatives like the Rio+20 event involving the Franciscan Family.

The Conference concluded with the decision to continue the exchange between our JPIC committees, and to schedule our 5th Joint Conference in Korea in 2013.

Br. Peter Keita ABE, ofm
JPIC Committee,
Franciscan Province of Japan
Chiapas is one of the richest states in Mexico for natural resources. But these resources are unjustly exploited, lining the pockets of the rich and leaving the poor in rural areas and the forest with the consequences of the extraction process. Because of this, the OFM Province of San Felipe de Jesús, through its JPIC Commission, has made a clear option for human rights and for the environment. Although it is true that we are not highly engaged in the Chiapas – Tabasco region, we nonetheless work to raise awareness about human rights and foster ecological education. For this reason we organized the third regional Ecological March.

More than 2000 people attended the first march on July 18, 2009. It sent a direct message against the Canadian mining companies in the area, and managed to suspend exploration. Perforations were being made to depths of 400 to 600 meters, and this was logically polluting the water of some of the local rivers. The second march was held on June 4, 2011, with the presence of about 600 people, including a large number of young people. Its main goal was to raise ecological awareness. Over the ten mile route participants collected the trash at the side of the road, and took part in moments of prayer and reflection which promoted care for the environment.

The third march was held on June 9 of this year. More than 400 adults and young people were present. The chosen route covered 18 kilometers, starting at the Franciscan parish of Saint Bartholomew in Rayón, Chiapas, and ending at the diocesan parish of the Holy Cross in Ixhuatán, Chiapas. Its two principal objectives were to raise ecological awareness, and to speak out against a mining company that is exploring in the region, reminding the government about its responsibility for the ecological impact of the mining project.

Along the same lines, the provincial JPIC Commission has insisted on recovery of the Selva Negra, an important forest area in Chiapas. The state government is aware of the mining project but has done little until now. However, our work concerning ecology has created a good deal of interest in the communities of the region regarding care for Mother Nature. An important achievement for us has been to stop, at least for the moment, the exploration proposed by the mining company, thus benefiting more than 50 thousand inhabitants of the municipalities of Rayón, Pantepec, Tapalapa, Tapilula, Ixhuatán, Solosuchiapa y Chapultenango, all in the state of Chiapas.

We thank God our Creator, who, in the person of our Father Saint Francis, has bequeathed us an environmental spirit that encourages us to defend Mother Earth. We want to continue to follow this spirit, giving our own lives if necessary, as we work to give life to future generations.

Br. Adín M. López
Animator of JPIC
Province of San Felipe de Jesús of México
INTRODUCTION

The current provincial animation team for JPIC decided to draft a short plan. Its object is to continue to strengthen animation of this service in the province. The plan was divided into five sections: I) a brief history of JPIC; II) questions emerging from today’s reality (signs of the times); III) theological/ Franciscan elements in a JPIC perspective; IV) guidelines and/or concrete proposals for action; V) organization of the Service.

THEOLOGICAL-FRANCISCAN ELEMENTS IN A JPIC PERSPECTIVE

As a contemplative fraternity of minors in mission, we want to list some basic theological-Franciscan elements, specific to our charism, that orient our interaction with current reality. Beginning with the presupposition that the GGCC are an updating of the Rule of Saint Francis, we focussed on Chapter IV, where we find the foundational elements for JPIC (see the article Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation: Dimensions of Franciscan Life – Fr. Nestor I. Schwerz., in the book Instruments of Peace, Guided by the Holy Spirit. Vossenack, Germany – October 2000).

The key is found in our vocation to minority (GGCC 64-67), inspired by the example of Saint Francis, based on the following of the poor, humble and crucified Jesus Christ. In this personal relationship with Jesus we become his disciples, and as disciples we become missionaries, sent into the world as servants and subjects of all, peaceful and humble, promoters of justice, heralds and builders of peace, announcing it through our witness and our word.

Thus we are challenged to:

1. Defend the rights of the oppressed;
2. Denounce all war-like actions and the arms race (GGCC 69,2);
3. Take up the task of defending, respecting, caring for and reverencing nature, and building Universal Brotherhood, for the glory of God the Creator (GGCC 1,2; 71);
4. Foster the attitude of “sine proprio” (GGCC 72, 1-2), living in a simple and sober way, in the spirit of poverty and the sharing of goods with the poor;
5. Value work (GGCC 76-82) as the principal means of supporting ourselves and to foster solidarity with the poor;
6. Use money according to the criteria of service to the poor, as servants of God and followers of most holy poverty.

These foundational elements make up the life of the Friar Minor, and primacy falls to witness, to the way that we live. It deals above all with the question of lifestyle, founded on justice, peace and reverence for creation. Our attitudes, the web of relationships, positions, commitments, actions and projects all flow from our way of being.

This form of life is permeated with a spirituality that springs from the fact that we are followers of Saint Francis: listening to and meditating on the Word; celebrating the Eucharist; communal and individual prayer; contemplation on the life and mysteries of Jesus Christ, God, the Church, the people of God, current events and creatures, in a continuous process of conversion and reconciliation.

Human relationships are carried out within this lifestyle, along with a constant effort to cultivate such relations in a fraternal spirit of justice, reconciliation and reverence for all creatures. This practice begins in our local fraternities and extends into our evangelizing mission, through our innumerable contacts and services, in harmony with all creatures. They become even more relevant when we are dealing with attitudes of solidarity and mercy toward the poor, the excluded, those who suffer, the abandoned and the various victims of society.

We are called to cultivate dialogue and respect for that which is different in regard to culture, religion, politics and gender. This form of life becomes part of history and a force that is symbolic, prophetic, evangelizing and socio-political, offering a spectrum of options.
GUIDELINES AND/OR CONCRETE PROPOSALS FOR ACTION

Reading the Signs of the Times in the beginning of the 21st Century leads us to pay greater attention to the ecological question; in theological/ Franciscan language we are concerned with the Integrity of Creation. This does not mean that we lose focus on the option for the poor and on work for justice. On the contrary, the two questions become one.

As Antônio Cechin so wisely notes, “the model of development which excludes the poor is the same one that is destroying nature.” Forecasts for the near future speak of environmental refugees, victims of natural disasters caused by climatic imbalances brought on by the greenhouse effect. It is the same in regard to peace. More and more conflicts will arise over water and habitable lands, creating new types of fractures in the social fabric and communities, increasingly putting the ecological question at the center of the defense of life.

Concrete proposals for Action:

1 – Solidarity with the peoples of Amazônia and of the Cerrado, and defense of these biomes;
2 – Articles in the newsletter and on the webpage of the province on this theme;
3 – Public stands by the JPIC team and by the Province against events and actions that attack human dignity, social tranquility and nature;
4 – Promote in Initial Formation more direct contact with situations and activities of the Province and of other groups related to this theme and to other practices of JPIC;
5 – Foster a greater culture of love for the poor and for Mother Nature among the friars and among whose with whom we work;
6 – Prepare friars both academically and practically in JPIC-related areas;
7 – Promote daily practices in our fraternities that are related to ecology, simple living, less consumption of industrialized goods, food that is healthier and raised without use of chemicals, concern for biodiversity, saving resources like water and recycling;
8 – Organize “Popular Ecological Missions”;
9 – Create a “Witness-Fraternity” for the protection of nature and for promotion of biodiversity, based on the Canticle of the Creatures. It will offer formation for lay pastoral agents, and be a type of “Ecological Sanctuary. It will be a project of ecological insertion;
10 – Work on conflict mediation, peace-building, strengthening of community ties;
11 – Promote actions that foster economic solidarity;
12 – Train lay leaders in the values of JPIC;
13 – Promote activities concerned with good nutrition, with mental and physical health...

ORGANIZATION OF OUR JPIC SERVICE

- The animation team will meet periodically to study the issues and to promote dynamic activities related to the JPIC Service;
- The animation team should work with the Secretariat for Evangelization and the Secretariat for Formation and Studies; more specifically, it should organize together with the Ongoing Formation team, annual concrete action proposals to be developed at the Guardianates.

Br. Blasio Kummer ofm
JPIC animator
Saint Francis Province—Brazil
We, Christians of different ecclesial traditions from all continents, met in Madrid from the 6th to the 9th of September, 2012. We reflected on the theme Christianity, the Market and Social Movements, shared experiences and sought alternatives. We would like to share the following message:

1. Market-centrism is the supreme institution of neoliberalism. It turns people into merchandise and insignificant cogs in the system. It identifies justice with fulfillment of legal obligations, and these obligations are dictated by the market. It reduces human rights to the right to property. The market generates situations of death for millions of human beings and for nature.

2. We are especially concerned and indignant with the consequences of the crisis which has been brought on by the financially powerful. They unjustly punish the most vulnerable sectors of society throughout the world, in particular some countries of Europe like Greece, Spain and Portugal, where there is spectacular growth in poverty in societies that have the means to satisfy the needs of the population.

3. In the midst of this context, we see as positive the gestures of solidarity practiced by some members of the clergy and of the ecclesial hierarchy. However, we are upset and indignant at the silence of the Spanish Episcopal Conference, which has spoken out forcefully on other issues. Society sees this silence as scandalous, and as a sign of complicity with those who have caused the crisis. We judge this attitude as insensitive to injustice, distant from the liberating message of the Gospel, and lacking in compassion for victims. We believe this posture is due to the comfortable situation of privilege that the institutional Church enjoys, and it stands in contrast to the stories that we hear from around the world.

4. We, the participants of this Congress, are not exempt from contradiction and inconsistency between our alternate way of thinking and our comfortable lifestyles; between our critical attitude and our practical conformism; between our criticism of consumption and our consumerism; between our option for the poor and our lack of witness to poverty.

5. A response to the current crisis requires a new paradigm that will translate into structural change, a revolution in subjectivity and conscience, a change in our habits of life and personal relationships. We need to be guided by and give priority to the ethical values which are present in all religious, moral and spiritual traditions, even though they are frequently not practiced. Among the values which stand out are: human dignity in face of the inhuman treatment of millions; respect for life; action against violence in all its forms; global justice; truth, honor and equality in regard to gender issues.

6. We recognize the importance of social movements; they are necessary intermediaries to promote the transformation of reality. They offer an alternative to one-way thinking and to neoliberal globalization. They help to rediscover values that seemed to be heading toward extinction, and rebel against a world characterized by exploitation, domination, and a tendency to reduce reason to mere calculus.

7. This Congress has recognized the special meaning of feminism as a theory of emancipation and equality between men and women. It promotes international sisterhood and defends the demands of women, which are often passed over in the name of “greater general interests,” even in the social movements themselves.

8. But we cannot become enmeshed in historic pessimism and fatalism. Alternatives do exist. For this reason, in order to get beyond the crisis, we support and make our own the following initiatives: creation of a constitutional assembly; civil disobedience; ethical banking; the Tobin tax; division of work; promotion of the general availability of social services; recognition of citizenship for all those residing in our land; mutual assistance pacts without subordination; food sovereignty; transformation of models of production; etc.

9. As Christians we commit ourselves to:
- Reclaim the inheritance of Jesus, which is characterized by an option for the excluded and marginalized, by compassion as a principle of action, and by an affirmation of the authority of those who suffer.
- Follow the spirit and the practice of Jesus, which includes humanizing the world starting with the last, and struggling not to forget victims while standing beside them.
- Affirm the incompatibility between God and Money, and struggle against the Empire of Money.
- Resist the system with active non-violence.
- Participate actively in social movements, both old and new. Give special attention to the various Social Forums which promote “another possible world.”
- Participate also in the movement of those who are indignant; Jesus of Nazareth is found on the horizon of this movement, he who was indignant with the religious authorities, patriarchy, political powers and economists of his own time.

(Taken from Eclesalia, published in Madrid, Spain. The bulletin encourages and authorizes dissemination of its articles, requesting acknowledgement of their source.) Madrid, September 9, 2012.

ECLESALIA, For more information:
http://www.congresodeteologia.info
Many animators have asked information about the UN International Days. We are sending you the UN webpage where this information is available, in English and Spanish. You can check these dates to see if you can highlight them in your work or communities.

http://www.un.org/spanish/events/calendario/


Best wishes for the Feast of Saint Francis!

NB: If you are interested in contacting an author of any article that appears in this Newsletter, please write to us at pax@ofm.org and we will be happy to put you in touch.