



Fr. José Rodríguez Carballo
Ministro Generale OFM
Curia Generalizia
Via S. Maria Mediatrix, 25
00165 Roma
tel.: +39 - 0668.49.19
Fax: +39 - 0663.80.292

Fr. Marco Tasca
Ministro Generale OFMConv.
Curia Generalizia
Piazza Ss. Apostoli, 51
00187 Roma
tel.: +39 - 06699.571
fax: +39 - 06699.57321

Fr. Mauro Jöhri
Ministro Generale OFMConv.
Curia Generalizia
Via Piemonte, 70
00187 Roma
tel.: +39 - 064620.121
fax: +39 - 064620.1210

Fr. Michael Higgins
Ministro Generale TOR
Curia Generalizia
Via dei Fori Imperiali, 1
00186 Roma
tel.: +39 - 066920441
fax: +39 - 06678.4970

Encarnación del Pozo
Ministro Generale OFS
C/Alenza 8-5° A
28003 Madrid
tel e fax: +34-91-5340990

Fr. James Puglisi
Ministro Generale Atonement
Piazza S. Onofrio, 2
00165 Roma
tel.: +39-066864498
fax: +39-066893404
Presidente di turno CIF-TOR

Conference of the Franciscan Family

To all Sisters and Brothers of the Franciscan Family,
may the Lord give you Peace!

It is with great pleasure that we write to you on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the historic day of prayer and fasting held in Assisi on October 27, 1986. For more than a year we have been preparing this special event. It is a reminder of the beautiful celebration held a quarter of a century ago; however, even more importantly, it is an opportunity to renew the fervor of our Franciscan vocation, which challenges us to walk in the footsteps of Jesus in the manner of Francis and Clare.

Deeper Meaning of the Celebration

In his opening talk at the celebration of the *Spirit of Assisi* 25 years ago, John Paul II said: "I have chosen this town of Assisi as the place for our Day of Prayer for Peace because of the particular significance of the holy man venerated here – Saint Francis – known and revered by so many throughout the world as a symbol of peace, reconciliation and brotherhood." During his Angelus talk on January 1, 2011, Benedict XVI announced: "...next October I shall go as a pilgrim to the town of Saint Francis, inviting my Christian brethren of various denominations, the exponents of the world's religious traditions and, ideally, all men and women of good will, to join this Pilgrimage. It will aim to commemorate the historical action desired by my Predecessor and to solemnly renew the commitment of believers of every religion to live their own religious faith as a service to the cause of peace."

The theme of this year's celebration in Assisi, to be held on October 27, is *Pilgrims of truth, pilgrims of peace*. In the footsteps of Francis and Clare, we are all called to walk the path of peace as pilgrims, to pray and fast for justice in our world, and to dialogue with one another in an effort to discover creative ways to build peace in our own day.

The original celebration of 1986 captured the imagination of the world because it brought together religious leaders from so many different traditions in an atmosphere of dialogue, prayer and the search for peace. Participants were invited to come to the place where Francis had spent much of his life in loving communion with God. Like Francis, they were invited to pray fervently for peace, to enter into a spirit of silence, fasting and pilgrimage, those practices which accompany sincere prayer. Prayer allowed Francis to stand in truth before God; he was led to interior purification, to greater understanding

and respect for others.

The *Spirit of Assisi* reminds us that, just as for Francis and Clare, prayer is an essential element in the search for peace. But also like the two saints of Assisi, prayer should lead us to dedicate ourselves to the search for peace in concrete and effective ways.

Response of the Followers of Francis and Clare

The 1987 letter of the Conference of the Franciscan Family, on the first anniversary of the *Spirit of Assisi*, asked: "...how can we, today, daughters and sons of Francis, be authentic witnesses of peace wherever we live?" To respond, we must first work to remove all obstacles to peace and harmony in our communal life. If we cannot face the problems that arise in the context of community, we will not be able to face the problems that arise in society. We must find concrete ways to promote better communication and effective ways to manage conflict, and to foster a willingness to share in the life of those who are poor and defenseless.

Second, like Francis and Clare, we must confront contemporary issues and discover how God is calling us to build peace in our world today. Francis did not simply pray for peace, but he worked actively to address conflict and bring people together. The stories of the wolf of Gubbio, of Francis and the Sultan, of the bishop and the mayor of Assisi, of Arezzo and Perugia, all serve to highlight the great desire of Francis to foster peace, which he felt was a task conferred on him by God. We must see the urgent need to address the problems of our own time.

We recognize that the world has changed much over the last 25 years. If anything, the plight of men and women today is even more dramatic than in 1986. We must again "read the signs of the times" clearly and effectively. New conditions have emerged that threaten the unity of the human race, its well-being, and its very existence. They challenge the ability of the Church and of our Franciscan family to be effective signs of unity. Popular movements for freedom are sweeping through many countries and changing the political landscape. Natural disasters have brought destruction and suffering and raised perplexing questions about future scientific and economic development. Climate change is causing great disruption in the life and livelihood of many peoples, and is a primary contributor to the escalating environmental crisis we face. Major movements of peoples across traditional geographical boundaries give rise to conflicts and threaten the stability of societies. There is an increasing sense of urgency that new pathways for intercultural dialogue be created or existing ones be strengthened in order to promote peace, reconciliation, care for creation, and integral human development.

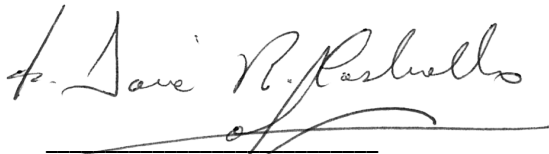
Invitation to Celebrate in Assisi and Around the World

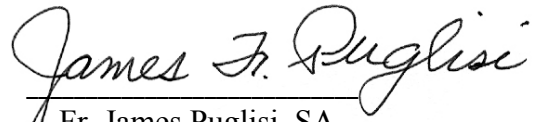
In this context we invite the Franciscan Family to celebrate this important anniversary. The event in Assisi will surely be inspiring and transformative. But not everyone can be present in Assisi. We are aware that over the course of the last 25 years many have been conducting local celebrations of the *Spirit of Assisi*. We invite you to continue this practice. We also encourage you to visit the website prepared by the Romans 6 (see <http://spiritodiassisi.wordpress.com/>). The materials found there are presented in various languages. They offer some background on the event and suggestions for prayer and other gatherings. Use them creatively in your own country, Congregation, region, local fraternity, parish or school, in all places where we are present as Franciscans.

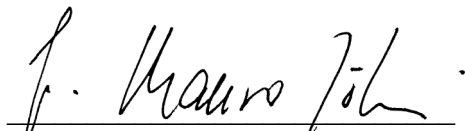
We must promote the work of peace at all levels of society, and our Franciscan presence in so many different settings is a perfect opportunity to move it forward. In the spirit of Francis, we challenge world leaders to seek the ways of dialogue, nonviolence and peace (cf. the *Letter to the*

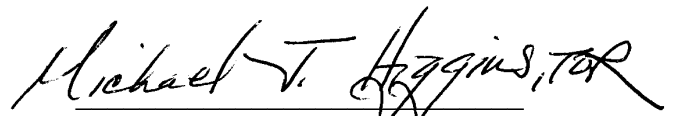
Rulers of the Peoples, written by Francis in 1220). Franciscans International, our joint presence at the United Nations, is an example of how we, as a family, have worked to influence our world. Let us continue to search for other concrete ways to promote justice, peace and care for creation.

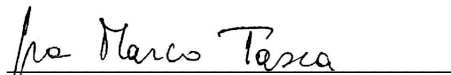
Brothers and sisters, may this celebration of the 25th anniversary of the *Spirit of Assisi* be an opportunity for all of us to renew our commitment to the Gospel life proposed by Jesus Christ. May we, like Francis and Clare, be consumed by love for Jesus, for all humanity, and for our sister, Mother Earth.

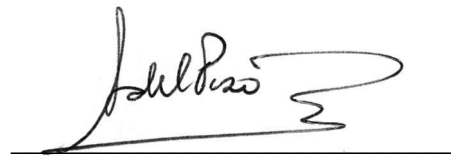

Fr. José Rodríguez Carballo, OFM
Minister General
President CFF


Fr. James Puglisi, SA
Minister General


Fr. Mauro Jöhri, OFM Cap
Minister General


Fr. Michael Higgins, TOR
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Fr. Marco Tasca, OFM Conv
Minister General


Encarnación Del Pozo, OFS
Minister General