



NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2015 • KAUNAS, LITHUANIA

PROVINCIAL MINISTERS AND CUSTODES MEET IN KAUNAS, LITHUANIA

HOLD JOINT SESSIONS WITH TRANSALPINE FRANCISCAN CONFERENCE (COTAF)

KAUNAS, LITHUANIA – The Provincial Ministers and Custodes of the English Speaking Conference held their annual Spring meeting at the Domus Pacis Franciscan Guesthouse here from March 23-27. The meeting was hosted by the Lithuanian Province of St. Casimir.

During the course of the week, Conference members also held two days of joint meetings with the Provincial Ministers and Custodes of the **CONFERENCE OF TRANSALPINE FRANCISCANS (COTAF)**. COTAF, as the ESC, is one of 14 Conferences in the Order and its members make up friars in Germany, Austria, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Hungary and Romania.

During their joint sessions, the members of the ESC and COTAF held a daylong session with **GENERAL MINISTER MICHAEL A. PERRY, OFM**. The General Minister met to update them on the financial crisis facing the Order, as well as speak to them about the upcoming General Chapter of the Order set to take place from May 10 – June 7 in Assisi. Joining him for the discussions were Vice Economo General of the Order Friar Silvio Rogelio de la Fuente, OFM.



Members of the English Speaking Conference and the Conference of TransAlpine Franciscans met together. They also held a session with General Minister Michael A. Perry, OFM, and Vice Economo Silvio Rogelio de la Fuente, OFM

This was not the first time the members of these respective conferences have held a joint meeting. Both conferences met in joint session in October of 2008 in Chicago, hosted then by the Province of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Wisconsin). Joint conferential meetings give the Provincial Ministers and Custodes the opportunity to meet their counterparts from other parts of the world, to come to know better how the Franciscan life and charism is lived in different places, and to strengthen fraternal bonds between different entities in the Order.

During the second day of joint meetings, members engaged topics about hopes and expectations for the upcoming General Chapter, as well as, experiences in reconfiguration. While several areas of the ESC are currently engaging the question of reconfiguration – the United States, Canada, and England and Ireland (who recently completed a process of reconfiguration) – areas in COTAF

have already gone through the process, notably both France and Germany who have gone from several Provinces in each country to now only one Province in each.

Attending the week-long meeting were from the ESC: Custos Patrick Lonsdale, OFM (Immaculate Conception Province, Great Britain), Provincial Minister Marc Le Goanvec, OFM (Province of St. Joseph, Canada), Provincial Minister John Hardin, OFM (St. Barbara Province, USA), Provincial



The General Minister presides at liturgy for the gathered friars

Minister Astijus Kungys, OFM (Province of St. Casimir, Lithuania), Provincial Minister Hugh McKenna, OFM (Province of Ireland), Provincial Minister Kevin Mullen, OFM (Holy Name Province, USA), Provincial Minister Primo Piscitello, OFM (Immaculate Conception Province, New York, USA), Provincial Minister John Puodziunas, OFM (Assumption BVM Province, USA), Provincial Minister Jack Clark Robinson, OFM (Our Lady of Guadalupe Province, USA), Provincial Minister Jeffrey Scheeler, OFM (St. John the Baptist Province, USA), Provincial Minister William Spencer, OFM (Sacred Heart Province, USA), Provincial Minister Dennis Vavrek, OFM (Province of Christ the King, Canada), Custos Jozo Grbes, OFM (Custody of the Holy Family), and Provincial Minister Paul Smith, OFM

(Province of the Holy Spirit, Australia). Also present were General Definitor for the ESC Francis Walter, OFM, and Executive Secretary Thomas Washburn, OFM.

From COTAF in attendance were: Provincial Minister Cornelius Bohl, OFM (German Province), Custos Daniel De Rycke, OFM (Custody of Belgium), Provincial Minister Benedek Dobszay, OFM (Province of Hungary), Custos Raphael Fässler, OFM (Custody of Switzerland), Provincial Minister Rob Hoogenboom, OFM (Province of the Netherlands), Provincial Minister Michel Laloux, OFM (Province of France), Provincial Minister Oliver Ruggenthaler, OFM (Province of Austria), Provincial Minister Szabolcs Orban, OFM (Province of Romania). Also in attendance were General Definitor for COTAF Roger Marchal, OFM and Georg Andlinger, OFM, Financial Secretary of COTAF.

In its separate conference business, the members of the ESC also discussed:

- ✓ Issues related to interprovincial formation with Richard Martignetti, OFM (Immaculate Conception Province USA) chair of the Secretaries of Formation.
- ✓ English-speaking communication during the General Chapter. All friars are being invited to sign up to receive a daily email briefing on the activities of the General Chapter. Tom Washburn, OFM (Immaculate Conception Province USA) and Alvin Te, OFM (Immaculate Conception Province USA) will both be present at the General Chapter to provide communications for the ESC. Friars should have received information on how to subscribe from their province communication personnel, but you can also find the information on the website (www.escofm.org).
- ✓ Elected Provincial Minister Kevin Mullen, OFM (Holy Name Province) to serve as ESC Vice-President.

ESC WELCOMES NEW PRESIDENT; ELECTS NEW VICE-PRESIDENT

KAUNAS, LITHUANIA – The Spring meeting of the Conference also saw a transition in the leadership of the group as **PROVINCIAL MINISTER JOHN PUODZIUNAS, OFM** (Assumption BVM Province) concluded his two-year term as Conference President.

With the conclusion of John's term, current **VICE-PRESIDENT HUGH MCKENNA, OFM**, Provincial Minister of the Province of Ireland, assumed the role of President of the Conference for the next two years.

This regular transition in the conference leadership necessitated the election of a new Vice-President. According to Conference Statutes, the Vice-President is also President-elect and so to be eligible for election, a candidate would need a term of office that would last at least through 2019 (if elected, he would serve as vice-president for two years and then as president for two year).

The eligible candidates were Provincial Minister Kevin Mullen, OFM (Holy Name Province), Provincial Minister Richard Grech (St. Paul Province, Malta) and Provincial Minister Jack Clark Robinson, OFM (Our Lady of Guadalupe Province).

KEVIN MULLEN, OFM, was elected to serve as Vice-President and President-elect. Congratulations to Hugh and Kevin!

ENGLISH-SPEAKING LITHUANIA?

KAUNAS, LITHUANIA – With this week's Spring meeting of the English Speaking Conference in Lithuania, it begs a question that comes up from time-to-time about why Lithuania is part of the only Conference in the Order organized by language. Surely English is not the primary language of Lithuania? And, this is true. While English is spoken much more than one would suspect in Lithuania, this Baltic nation has its own proud language. So, how did this Eastern European Province become a member of the ESC?

Well, as one would perhaps guess, the answer is tied up with the history of Eastern Europe and the dominance of the communist Soviet Union over that part of the world for many decades. During the Soviet reign over Eastern Europe, and in particular Lithuania, the atheist government of the communist put severe restrictions on Roman Catholicism, indeed many religious groups. One of these restrictions was to essentially force religious communities out of Lithuania.



*Irish Provincial Minister
Hugh McKenna, OFM,
New ESC President*



*Lithuania Provincial Astijus Kungys, OFM, COTAF President
Oliver Ruggenthaler, OFM, new ESC President Hugh McKenna,
OFM, and outgoing ESC President John Puodziunas, OFM*

The Franciscans, like other groups, found refuge during these Soviet days in the United States and Canada. It was during these years of exile that the friars of the Province of St. Casimir-in-exile became members of the ESC. Once communism fell in the 1980s and a freedom of religion returned to Lithuania, the friars also returned to their former home. With their return, they also had a choice – to remain with the ESC or to join to conference more geographically close to their home – perhaps the Polish conference.

The friars of St. Casimir Province, grateful for the fraternal support during their exile, chose to remain members of the English Speaking Conference. Their continued presence remains a gift to the Conference and serves to increase its diversity, as well as serve as a testament to the interesting history of its members.

CANADIAN PROVINCES TO HOLD CHAPTER OF MATS IN SEPTEMBER

KAUNAS, LITHUANIA – The Provincial Ministers of the two Provinces in Canada met as a Canadian Sub-Conference on Monday morning during this week’s ESC meeting in Lithuania. Following their sub-conference time, they confirmed to the rest of the Conference that they have scheduled a Chapter of Mats this September for all the friars of Canada to continue the discussion of the restructuring of the Canadian Provinces.

Provincial Minister Marc Le Goanvec, OFM, of St. Joseph Province (Eastern Canada) and Provincial Minister Dennis Vavrek, OFM of Christ the King Province (Western Canada) said the meeting will take place September 20-23, 2015 at St. Francis Retreat Centre in Caledon, Ontario. The retreat centre is operated by the Ontario Foundation of the Immaculate Conception Province (USA) who are also part of the conversation on restructuring.

This year also marks the 400th anniversary of the arrival of Franciscans in Canada.



Friars hard at work in joint conference session



Friars met with Kaunas Archbishop Sigitas Tamkevicius, SJ