**OFS NATIONAL FRATERNITY OF OCEANIA**

**The National Fraternity of Oceania is the union of all the Catholic Secular Franciscan Fraternities that exist in Australia, Singapore-Sabah and Papua New Guinea. This is a large geographical area consisting of four nations and very diverse cultures. It consists of (7) Regional Fraternities: 37 local fraternities in Australia (within 6 Regional Fraternities which are determined by the State boundaries of the country); 10 fraternities within the Regional Fraternity of Singapore-Sabah (plus 5 emerging fraternities in Sabah); and 11 fraternities in Papua New Guinea which receive support from the National Fraternity of Oceania, but which has not yet been constituted as a Regional Fraternity. Regional Assemblies have been held most years in Papua New Guinea since 2007. Finding suitable leadership in all areas of Papua New Guinea continues to be a struggle. There are approximately 1093 permanently professed members in the national fraternity, of which over 700 are active; there are also 145 persons in formation. There is also one (1) constituted Franciscan Youth Fraternity.**

**Implementation of General Chapter’s Conclusions**

**Since the holding of the 2008 General Chapter our National Ministers and International Councillors have emphasised the need for our National Fraternity to concentrate on the subjects of:**

* **Formation**
* **Communication**
* **Franciscan Youth**
* **Presence in the World**
* **Emerging Fraternities**

***Formation***

* **From 21 - 23 September 2012 a live-in National Formators Workshop “Forming the Formators” was held in Sydney, Australia with members from all Regions within the National Fraternity taking part. Formation Days and Seminars have been held in a number of Regional Fraternities in the past three years and the Provisional Regional Minister from Singapore attended the Formation for Formators Course delivered by CIOFS held in Taiwan in June 2011.**

***Communication***

* **As International Councillor for Oceania, I have assiduously forwarded on to our National Executive and Regional Ministers all correspondence received from CIOFS. The Regional Ministers in turn pass the correspondence on to their Local Fraternities. At our National Council meeting in May 2012, I reported to the Council on my impressions of the General Chapter held in Brazil in October 2011. I also alert the Regional Ministers of the availability of the *Ongoing Formation Dossiers* and the *Presence in the World* *Commission’s* monthly articles on the CIOFS website. Also each member on the National Executive is assigned a Regional Minister to liaise with and to bring any matter they wish to have raised at our quarterly National Executive meetings. Another means of communication is the quarterly newsletter of the National Fraternity - *The Oceania Newsletter -* and the exchange of Regional Newsletters.**

**Franciscan Youth**

* **Our attempts at promoting Franciscan Youth in Oceania over the years have not proved fruitful. As can be seen from our demographics earlier in this report only one (1) Franciscan Youth Fraternity has been constituted. Efforts have been made to include Franciscan Youth members at our National Council Meetings. Most recently two members attended some sessions of the National Council Meeting held in May 2012 and joined in discussion groups and shared a meal. The National Fraternity has also assisted members of the Franciscan Youth Fraternity financially to attend the International Gathering of Franciscan Youth and World Youth Day. The one Franciscan Youth Fraternity we have was quite active for a number of years mainly because the Spiritual Assistant was very dedicated to the fraternity. However that friar has now returned to his home country.**

**Presence in the World**

* **The National Fraternity of Oceania has as its National Apostolate *Project Adoption*. For the last forty (40) years, the National Apostolate has been supporting some of the world's poorest families in two (2) dioceses in southern India. Oceania currently supports 243 families, sending money to assist them with basic necessities, things we take for granted like housing, medicine, clothing and education. The National Fraternity of Oceania is also active in supporting justice, peace and integrity of creation through the Bangkok Office of Franciscans International. In one of the Region Fraternities of Oceania members are reaching out to their parish by presenting to Year 7 students (aged approx. 12 years), the school leaders in the parish school, Tau Crosses and booklets at the beginning of the school year, and with a San Damiano Cross and booklet as they leave the school at the end of the year. The students respond by enquiring further into the Tau Cross and even looking into the Secular Franciscan Way of Life. The fraternity also presents a San Damiano Cross (with booklet of explanation) to the newly baptised adults and those who have just been received into the Catholic Church in their parish at Easter.**

**Emerging Fraternities**

* **The National Fraternity of Oceania has encouraged and supported the New Zealand National Fraternity and the emerging Regional Fraternities of Singapore and of Sabah and, in time will support and encourage the emerging National Fraternity of Malaysia-Singapore.**

**Strength of National Fraternity**

* **The strength of the National Fraternity lies in the dedication and commitment of its members to the charism of Francis and Clare in their lives of service to the Church and to their neighbour.**

**Issues and challenges being faced by the National Fraternity**

* **In July this year the National Fraternity is holding its National Elective Chapter and one of our challenges is having willing and capable members to offer themselves as candidates for election.**

**Another challenge is the working relationship between some Regional Executives and the National Executive.**

**Spiritual Assistance**

* **The three branches of the First Order provide spiritual assistance to the OFS in the National Fraternity of Oceania. With regard to the OFM, the Custos in Papua New Guinea and the Custos in Singapore appoint the Spiritual Assistants in their respective entities.**

**In Australia, eighteen friars and ten non-friars assist thirty-seven local Fraternities. There are eight OFM Assistants, five Capuchin Assistants, and five Conventual Assistants.**

**The Friars Minor have appointed nine non-friars as local Assistants. One secular priest and one married deacon are members of the OFS. One is a professed Secular Franciscan. One local Assistant is a Salesian priest, another is a secular priest, three are Franciscan Sisters, and one is a Sister of Mercy. The Capuchins have appointed one Franciscan Sister.**

**In Papua New Guinea, the OFM Friars are responsible for eight local fraternities, one on the South Coast, in Port Moresby,  six on the North Coast at Aitape and inland, one on the island of West New Britain, and, from a distance, a ninth in Lae (North Coast). The Capuchins assist one fraternity at Wabag, Central Highlands. An MFIC Sister in Aitape and another in Madang also provide spiritual assistance alongside OFM Friars and Capuchins.**

**The OFS Regional Fraternity of Singapore-Sabah is comprised of ten established local Fraternities, four of them in Singapore and six in Sabah. There are currently five emerging local fraternities in Sabah. One FMM Sister, two FMDM Sisters, nine FSIC Sisters and one Friar Minor provide spiritual assistance at the local level. Singapore and Sabah are working towards being constituted as two separate Regional Fraternities by the OFS National Council of Oceania.**

**An OFM friar is the Regional Assistant for Singapore. An FSIC Sister is the Regional Assistant for Sabah. A Capuchin friar is the Regional Assistant for West Malaysia. The three Regional Fraternities aim to be constituted by the International Council as the National Fraternity of Malaysia-Singapore.**

**Conference of National Assistants OFS –Oceania**

* **Until February 2013, the Conference comprised three National Assistants, OFM, Capuchin and Conventual. The Conventual National Assistant resigned in February 2013 and has not yet been replaced.**

**As a Conference, the National Assistants try to meet monthly. Individually, they attend the National Executive meetings. The Conference delegates its members to make pastoral visits to the regional level, and settles arrangements to witness at Elective Chapters.**

**The Conference makes decisions collegially regarding spiritual assistance to the OFS above the local level. They coordinate their spiritual assistance and service to the Oceania National Fraternity and its governing bodies: the National Chapter, National Council, and National Executive.**

**The members of the Conference are delegated to various National Committees, e.g., for Evangelization and Promotion, for Care of Inquirers, for the Revision of Statutes. The National Statutes have been amended and await approval by the National Chapter and promulgation by the Minister General.**

**The National Executive has been given the use of the Edgecliff parish hall for meeting, and storage space under the church at 14 Albert Street, Edgecliff, for the Office of the OFS National Secretariat.**

**On behalf of the Conference, the National Assistants take turns in publishing a *Monthly Spiritual Message*.**

**Courses for OFM Friars in Formation**

**The OFM National Assistant has presented to his Province’s postulants and novices courses in the Franciscan Family, as outlined for postulants and novices, in the *Guidelines for the Formation of the Friars for Understanding and Assisting the SFO*, published by the Conference of General Assistants, in 1992. These courses have been posted on the OFM Province’s website:** [**http://www.franciscans.org.au/sfo,**](http://www.franciscans.org.au/sfo,) **to which is added /sfo19/19.htm for Postulants, /sfo8/8.htm for Novices, and /sfo15/postnov.htm for Junior Professed Friars.**

**Courses for the formation of Secular Franciscans as Spiritual Assistants**

**Six Secular Franciscans and one Franciscan Sister completed a course of formation but none has been appointed as a local Spiritual Assistant as yet. Two Secular Franciscans in South Australia are following the course, “Franciscan Family Connections”, Revised Edition 2011. The National Executive requires that Secular Franciscans complete the course before being appointed by a friar major Superior.**

**Web sites**

**The web site of the National Fraternity OFS-Oceania is:** [**http://www.secularfranciscansoceania.com.au**](http://www.secularfranciscansoceania.com.au)

**The web site of the OFM National Spiritual Assistant is:** [**http://www.franciscans.org.au/sfo**](http://www.franciscans.org.au/sfo)

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**Helen Britton ofs**

**OFS International Councillor - Oceania**