Current events continue to document the daily drama of the Middle East. Barbarous killings in Syria and in Iraq, attacks in the Holy Land, repeated violations of human rights. We know all too well, unfortunately, these realities, hostile and cruel. Powerless, we note also that Christians, among others, are easy objects of a violence that knows no end.

In this region of the world, the Capuchins are present and share the drama of these humiliated people. Let us recall: one of our friaries in Syria completely destroyed; a million and a half Syrians fleeing to Lebanon; others – thousands – in exile in Mersin in Turkey. In such contexts our brothers, directly involved, work in silence to comfort and soothe the suffering.

In the Middle East, we are present in Jerusalem, in Greece, in Lebanon, in Turkey, in the Arabian peninsula, and in Pakistan. Thus we form ASMEN, the smallest among the Conferences of the Order. The prospects for the ‘implantatio ordinis’ are truly thin and our fraternities – in large part – are made up of foreign brothers.

The ‘common denominator’ of all of our presence in the Middle East is the condition of ‘de facto minority.’ Here, in the political, religious, and social context of these countries, ‘minority’ is anything but an abstract and theoretical concept; it is a concrete condition of life. Almost everywhere the brothers are living in misunderstood Christian communities, deprived of their fundamental rights and, at times, as prey of hate and persecution. In some situations, the brothers cooperate to maintain the life of the Church, but, in other cases, when there aren’t Christian communities, they—in the spirit of St. Francis (Earlier Rule XVI), witness to the Gospel simply with their lives.

To understand better the value of our presence (encouraged by the General Minister), the brothers of ASMEN have begun a path of reflection: “In the countries where we are, how can we live our condition of ‘de facto minority,’ imposed by the context in which we live? In relation to ecumenical dialogue, to interreligious dialogue or facing the possibility of losing our churches, what sense does our presence have? What does perseverance mean?”

The process of development undertaken by the Conference will certainly be a support not only for the brothers involved, but will also raise awareness in the whole of our Capuchin fraternity.

PCO VII clearly affirms: “Inspired by the teaching to proclaim the Good News even in the midst of trials and persecutions (cf. Mt 24:9), the Capuchin Order encourages our brothers in those countries where Christianity is a negligible minority to bear witness to the Gospel, like leaven in the dough (cf. Lk 13:21), through example and word in a spirit of minority akin to that of St Francis before the Sultan. Our brotherhood pledges to stand by and support our brothers, especially in those lands where the freedom of religion is at risk, religious intolerance is on the increase and religious fundamentalism is spreading rapidly.” (PCO VII, 16)

May these intentions, good and just in themselves, lift up the spirit of fraternal solidarity in as many forms of expression as are possible.
Y ou are the only American – and Ca-
putchin – called to counsel the Pope on
the reform of church governance. What
can you tell us about the council’s mission?
As has been announced, there is a
desire to reform the Curia, to make
it more at the service of the Holy
Father and the local Churches. The
goal is to make the Curia more
efficient and thus to allow the Holy
Father to govern more effectively.
It is important to review the func-
tions of the dicasteries and pontifical
councils, to see how they can
work better. The Holy Father is also
concerned about the pastoral care of
people working in the Curia. Many
within the Curia have given their
lives in service to the Church. But
there should not be an approach of
careerism, but of mission. The Holy
Father wants to make sure that is
the spirit of the Curia. Further, the
Church has grown so much and is
more international. So there is a de-
sire to internationalize the Curia to
some extent. The council is not only
to reform the Curia, but to advise the
Holy Father on the government.
Recently, there has been discussion
about expanding consultation within
the Church more widely. Is this council
appointed by the Pope a model for Church
governance at other levels?
The Church is not a democracy.
But the Church can only function if
there is a sense that you are trying
to discern God’s will, and we don’t
do that just as individuals; we do
that in an atmosphere of dialogue
and prayer. But ultimately, the Holy
Father will make decisions, and we
will abide by them.

Pope Francis has asked us to be a “Church
for the poor.” Does that involve leading a
simpler lifestyle?
In the Church, we have always en-
couraged people to adopt a simpler
lifestyle. The Holy Father’s interest
in ecology gives another dimension
to this concern. We need to be more
conscious of people’s needs and be
willing to forego superficial wealth
and creature comforts. The Order of
Malta has the tradition of seeing the
poor and sick as “our liege lords.”
Mother Teresa said the poor are
Christ in a “distressing disguise.” We
need to see the value of people who
might be invisible to the culture,
and that includes the unborn child,
The Holy Father, the drug
addict. Some of these people have
very challenging situations, and they
aren’t the beautiful or productive
people, the glitterati. We are called
to see their value in God’s eyes.
Socrates said, “People believe me
because I am poor.” The witness
of a simple lifestyle is important in
the Church. It doesn’t mean that
people shouldn’t live according to
the demands of their station of
life — not everybody has a vow of
poverty. When we read about the
first Christians and see how they
shared with each other, there was a
sense of responsibility for the poor,
the orphan and the strangers in their
midst. We need to do more.

In his interview in America magazine,
Pope Francis spoke about his own deep
experience of spiritual fatherhood, but he
also made it clear that all Church leaders
and pastors should reach out to others like
a spiritual father.

For any priest, it is important to see
ourselves as the spiritual father of
our people. The Holy Father, during
his chrism Mass homily, said, “The
shepherd should have the smell
of the sheep.” As the father of
the family makes many sacrifices for
his children, a priest needs to make
many sacrifices for his people. When
the father makes those sacrifices, he
doesn’t feel sorry for himself; he sees
this as his mission. And that is the
way a good priest has to function. I
fear, however, that the clergy-abuse
crisis has led some priests to stay
apart from people so their motives
won’t be suspect.

In 2012, you were elected the chairman
of the USCCB Committee for Pro-life
Activities. What are your goals for this
critical work of the conference?

In the last year, I tried to bring up
the importance of changing the
mentality of the country around
adoption. In 1988 I read Paul
Swope’s article in First Things,
“Abortion: A Failure to Communi-
cate.” Swope pointed to research
that showed how women in difficult
pregnancies ended up choosing abortion. They see three options
available to them: keeping the child,
abandoning the child or having an abortion. Keeping
the child is often interpreted as a
personal sacrifice. Giving the child up in
an adoption is seen as a terrible
option — they are a bad mother who is
exposing the child to abandon-
ment, abuse and neglect. Somehow
we have to break through that view
of adoption and help women see
that adoption is the best option for
the child. The child is often interpreted as a
terrible option — they are a bad mother who is
exposing the child to abandonment,
abuse and neglect. We need to
break through that view of
adoption and help women see
that adoption is the best
option for
the child.

In many countries and also in the USA,
there is a movement now that is
defending traditional marriage.
That is one of the beautiful things about
Pope Francis. He is showing how the
Church must be a “field hospital,”
reaching out to those who have been
deceived.

In Boston, we have a commission
set up to study the impact of same-
sex marriage. What has been the experience
of the Church, priests, and families?
In Boston, we have a commission
set up to study the impact of same-
sex marriage. What has been the experience
of the Church, priests, and families?
In Boston, we have a commission
set up to study the impact of same-
sex marriage. What has been the experience
of the Church, priests, and families?
In Boston, we have a commission
set up to study the impact of same-
sex marriage. What has been the experience
of the Church, priests, and families?
In Boston, we have a commission
set up to study the impact of same-
sex marriage. What has been the experience
of the Church, priests, and families?
In Boston, we have a commission
set up to study the impact of same-
sex marriage. What has been the experience
of the Church, priests, and families?
In Boston, we have a commission
set up to study the impact of same-
sex marriage. What has been the experience
of the Church, priests, and families?
In Boston, we have a commission
set up to study the impact of same-
sex marriage. What has been the experience
of the Church, priests, and families?
In Boston, we have a commission
set up to study the impact of same-
sex marriage. What has been the experience
of the Church, priests, and families?
In Boston, we have a commission
set up to study the impact of same-
sex marriage. What has been the experience
of the Church, priests, and families?
In Boston, we have a commission
set up to study the impact of same-
sex marriage. What has been the experience
of the Church, priests, and families?
In Boston, we have a commission
set up to study the impact of same-
sex marriage. What has been the experience
of the Church, priests, and families?
In Boston, we have a commission
set up to study the impact of same-
sex marriage. What has been the experience
of the Church, priests, and families?
In Boston, we have a commission
set up to study the impact of same-
sex marriage. What has been the experience
of the Church, priests, and families?
In Boston, we have a commission
set up to study the impact of same-
sex marriage. What has been the experience
of the Church, priests, and families?
In Boston, we have a commission
set up to study the impact of same-
sex marriage. What has been the experience
of the Church, priests, and families?
In Boston, we have a commission
set up to study the impact of same-
sex marriage. What has been the experience
of the Church, priests, and families?
In Boston, we have a commission
set up to study the impact of same-
sex marriage. What has been the experience
of the Church, priests, and families?
In Boston, we have a commission
set up to study the impact of same-
sex marriage. What has been the experience
of the Church, priests, and families?
In Boston, we have a commission
set up to study the impact of same-
sex marriage. What has been the experience
of the Church, priests, and families?
In Boston, we have a commission
set up to study the impact of same-
sex marriage. What has been the experience
of the Church, priests, and families?
In Boston, we have a commission
set up to study the impact of same-
sex marriage. What has been the experience
of the Church, priests, and families?
In Boston, we have a commission
set up to study the impact of same-
sex marriage. What has been the experience
of the Church, priests, and families?
In Boston, we have a commission
set up to study the impact of same-
sex marriage. What has been the experience
of the Church, priests, and families?
Archbishop [Salvatore] Cordileone [of San Francisco] explained in his report to the conference this week, “Every child comes from a man and a woman. Marriage recognizes that reality and binds the children to their parents.” Every study shows that the optimal circumstance for raising a child is with their biological parents in a loving, committed marriage. But at the same time, we need to communicate — and this is difficult — that homosexual persons are not unwelcome in the Church. The great threat that marriage faces is cohabitation. As Charles Murray reported in Coming Apart, almost 50% of children are born out of wedlock in the white working-class community. Cohabitation and the divorce mentality have both been bad for marriage, and I am so glad the Holy Father will give this issue more focus with the Synod on the Family. He also wants us to find ways to help people in second marriages to return to the sacraments and be reconciled and to see if the annulment process can be more user-friendly.

You have served immigrants and undocumented workers from the early days of your priesthood. It looks like comprehensive immigration reform will not go forward this year. What does that mean for people who were hoping for a reprieve in the USA?

Part of the problem is that we need immigrants; our quotas have often been far too low. There are also horror stories of someone coming into the country as a political refugee, but their children must wait 10 years to get in the country. Immigration law is very complex, and sometimes it can be very punitive. The immigration issue won the election for President Obama. His promise of amnesty for the students locked in the entire Hispanic vote. Yet Obama is the president who deported more Hispanics than any other president. He was facing that charge, and conservative Republicans weren’t anxious to take advantage of that issue because of their own attitude about immigration. We need immigration reform, but it has fallen victim to the polarization that we see in government. (National Catholic Register)

Vatican City – “Two lungs, one breath: East and West united in the same profession of faith.” This is the theme chosen by the Preacher of the Papal Household, Br. Raniero Cantalamessa, OFMCap., for preaching to the Pope and the Roman Curia beginning this Friday, February 27, 2015. The theme, he explains, means to be a small contribution to the unity of the Body of Christ that is the Church that breathes with “two lungs,” as St. John Paul II said, speaking of East and West. Given that in recent times, the efforts in finding the paths for dialogue have sought to build on what unites us, that is, the great mysteries of our faith, instead of highlighting the differences, even if, briefly, Br. Raniero wishes to note that we believe in the same Great Mystery revealed or understood in different ways. Citing for this the wisdom of pagan thinker of the fourth century Quintus Aurelius Symmachus, who reminds us of a truth that acquires all its value when it is applied to the various theologies of East and West: “Uno itinere non potest perveniri ad tam grande secretum” (One does not arrive at such a great mystery by traveling a single path.) Therefore, the image of the embrace between Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras and more recently between Pope Francis and Bartholomew, show forth more positive effect than long theological debates. And it is on this ‘embrace in the same Spirit’ that Br. Raniero has placed hand and heart in order to show us a path toward a “spiritual ecumenism that prepares for that of doctrine,” in the words of Cardinal Walter Kasper.

The Capuchin friary of Monterosso is a ‘place of the heart’ for Italians. The evocative, seventeenth century friary that dominates the bay of Monterosso al Mare (La Spezia) is the winner of the seventh national ‘Places of the Heart’ survey, promoted by FAI (Fondo Ambiente Italiano - Italian Environment Fund) in collaboration with a bank. The friary, struck by the flood of 2013, holds works of art within and is surrounded by gardens and vineyards. In second place was the Certosa di Calci (Pisa) followed by Calatubo Castle in Alcamo, in the province of Trapani. This year more than 1,600,000 Italians took part in the voting, indicating also among the ‘places of the heart’ the Cappello Borsalino Museum (Alessandria) and the Church of Sant’Agnello (Maddaloni, Caserta). (www.viaggi.giudone.it)

LA SPEZIA, Italy - The friary of the Capuchin Friars of Monterosso was elected a ‘place of the heart’ for Italians. The evocative, seventeenth century friary that dominates the bay of Monterosso al Mare (La Spezia) is the winner of the seventh national ‘Places of the Heart’ survey, promoted by FAI (Fondo Ambiente Italiano - Italian Environment Fund) in collaboration with a bank. The friary, struck by the flood of 2013, holds works of art within and is surrounded by gardens and vineyards. In second place was the Certosa di Calci (Pisa) followed by Calatubo Castle in Alcamo, in the province of Trapani. This year more than 1,600,000 Italians took part in the voting, indicating also among the ‘places of the heart’ the Cappello Borsalino Museum (Alessandria) and the Church of Sant’Agnello (Maddaloni, Caserta). (www.viaggi.giudone.it)

Br. Raniero Cantalamessa
Lenten preaching 2015

Appointment of two new Capuchin bishops

VATICAN CITY - The Holy Father has appointment Bishop of Krk (Croatia) our confiere Ivica Petanjak, OFMCap., until now Guardian of the house in Osijek and Provincial Councilor. On this past January 29 the Pope appointed bishop of the diocese of Lolo (Democratic Republic of the Congo) our confiere Jean Bertin Nadonye Ndongo, General Councilor. Best wishes to our brothers in their new and demanding service to the Church. (www.ofmcap.org)
Palestine will have two new saints

**BETHLEHEM, Israel –** The Palestinian people will have two new saints to commemorate. The Consistory of February 15, in fact, has inscribed among the saints Mariam Banourdy and Maryam Sultanah Danil Ghaṭṭas. They will be canonized on May 17, 2015. For the land of Jesus these are the first two women saints of the modern era. Mariam, who took as a religious name Sr. Mary of Jesus Crucified in the Order of Discalced Carmelites, was born of a Lebanese family in the Palestinian village of Tibilin, near Nazareth, on January 5, 1846. Her tomb is in the church of the Carmel of Bethlehem, where she died, at just 32 years of age, on August 26, 1878. After having lost both her parents, little Mariam was adopted by a paternal uncle. Running away from home at 13 in order not to be forced into marriage, she was almost killed by a Muslim who wanted to make her renounce the Christian faith. With her throat cut, the girl awoke in a cave cared for by a woman whom she identified as the Virgin Mary. After having wandered from Alexandria in Egypt to Jerusalem and Beirut and finally to Marseille, she entered as a novice, at 19 years of age, the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition in Marseille. Under the guidance of Mother Veronica of the Passion, she was directed to the Carmel of Pau in the Atlantic Pyrenees. In 1870 she was among the foundresses of the Indian Carmel of Mangalore and in 1875 among the foundresses of the Carmel of Bethlehem. Mariam is considered a mystic and to her is attributed the miracle of having saved a Sicilian baby, just born and doomed to a certain death.

Maryam Sultanah Danil Ghaṭṭas, on the other hand, born in Jerusalem on October 4, 1843, was a Palestinian religious and foundress of the Sisters of the Holy Rosary of Jerusalem of the Latins. She died at Ein Kerem on March 25, 1927, and is known by the religious name of Mary Alphonsina.

Latin America looks toward PCO VIII

**AÑA, Peru –** With a first meeting in Peru, which was held in our fraternity in Añana from February 9 to 13, the CCA began a series of meetings in each circumference in order to animate the friars on the themes of PCO VIII. A commission, composed of three friars, Br. Carlos Azcona of Ecuador, Fr. Alfredo Miranda of Peru, and Br. José Luis Cerdeño of Rio de la Plata, held the meeting that was on the realities of work in our contemporary world; pastoral work in a church that ‘goes out’; the biblical dimensions of work; work in our Franciscan Sources; and concluding with the challenge of the grace of working in our fraternities. After Peru, the next meetings in April will be in the Custody of Paraguay and in the Province of Rio de la Plata; in the month of May in the Provinces of Ecuador and Chile; and finally, in June, in the Custody of Venezuela and in the Province of Colombia. There will then be a synthesis of the contributions of all the friars, which will serve the delegates in order to offer the next PCO the ideas and way of thinking of the whole Conference. In Latin America all this work will conclude with the meeting of ALAC (Latin American Assembly of the Capuchins), during with the Provincial Ministers and the Delegates of the Conferences will also have time to reflect on ‘The Grace of Working.’ Thus we are inspiring each other, making our way to celebrate, in communion with all the brothers, this great event of the Spirit in our life as brothers and minors.

**CÓC, Ecuador –** Among the celebrations of the Year of Consecrated Life, which is still in course, the Church of Aguarico is rejoicing in the celebration of 15 years of the presence of the Monastery of Santa María de Guadalupe of the Capuchin Poor Clares. Founded in mission land, the community of the monastery brings the announcement of joy that comes from the common life in constant prayer, like ‘sentinels of the morning and guardians of the night.’ In a world marked by diverse and opposing changes and developments, the presence of a contemplative monastery in this local Church is a cutting edge bid that offers to old conflicts and inequalities an alternative of joyous serenity, fraternity, and sisterly solidarity, all nourished by a life lived continuously before the Blessed Sacrament. The brief and fruitful story of the monastery motivates the sisters, on this anniversary, as Pope Francis says, “to look to the past with gratitude, to live the present with passion and to look to the future with joyful hope, having the certainty that it is the Lord guiding his work.” It is thus time to sing a paraphrase of the psalmist: “How sweet and pleasant it is for sisters to live together in harmony.”