

May 12, 2016



NEWS 2016 - The Ministers, custos of Latin America came together to celebrate the 24th plenary Assembly of UCLAF (Union of Latin American Franciscan Conferences) in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, from 25 to 29 April.

20 ministers, 4 custos, 2 provincial vicars and the President of the Foundation in Haiti gathered at the Franciscan Center of the missionary province of San Antonio in Santa Cruz de la Sierra. The general Minister, Br. Michael Perry, the General Definitors Br. Valmir Ramos and Fr. Ignacio Ceja, as well as the general Secretary for the missions and evangelization Br. Luis Gallardo also participated in the meeting.

The work of the Assembly was kicked off when the President of the UCLAF Br. Juan Medina welcomed everyone and called them to be guided by the Holy Spirit and to make decisions not only from the desktop or from the ideas, but from the Gospel and from the Latin American reality.

On the second day of the Assembly, after hearing reports on the situation of the Conference, the general Minister addressed a message to those present, in which he expressed his joy and that of the brothers from the general curia who were participating in this fraternal gathering. He reminded them that gatherings such as this are a beautiful opportunity to join forces enabling us to find concrete ways to deepen our Franciscan identity, strengthen the sense of belonging to the universal brotherhood and expand the horizons of the own borders. He said to them: “the general Definitorium and I are absolutely convinced is urgent to change the traditional concept of Province or Custody becoming more permeable, so that new possibilities for inter-entity collaboration are born as a natural consequence of the experience of the rule and life of the

Friars Minor.”

He also invited them to be attentive to the rapid changes occurring in the world, the Church and the order, and to find or create new horizons of meaning and to offer new alternatives that allow us to recognize, celebrate and share the presence and the work of God with those who surround us. “After all, ‘we are mission for the world’, as the Pope Francisco pointed out in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*.”

He also noted a number of challenges that the order is facing and which must be dealt with seriously and with great discernment. In this context he requested the Ministers and Custodians of the UCLAF respond to the urgent need to find, prepare and send at least four brothers to Cuba to support existing pastoral activities and create new ways of evangelization in the context of the Caribbean island.

He also spoke of the difficult situation facing the vicariates of the region entrusted to the order. He insisted on the need to go beyond current practices that emphasize pastoral and social work to the detriment of the Franciscan identity. He invited them to study, dialogue and serious planning, leading, perhaps, to a central strategy, a Franciscan common plan allowing to better support the vicariates.

He also discussed issues such as lack of faith, hope and love in our communities, inculturation, poverty and simplicity of life, and the new challenges facing the order in Europe. Using the teachings of Pope Francisco, he developed a beautiful reflection on “seeing the world from the outskirts (margins): a new hermeneutic for the Franciscan life in today’s world.”

The work of the UCLAF Assembly, which this year celebrates 48 years of existence, will continue until Friday 29th when participants have to take important decisions on the 2015 General Chapter mandates, the Amazonia project and the Masters in evangelization.

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