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# ASIA/THAILAND - Franciscans in mission among AIDS patients, modern "lepers"

Bangkok (Agenzia Fides) - In the Spirit of Saint Francis of Assisi – who at the beginning of his journey of conversion embraced a leper, as his biographers narrate - the Franciscans in Thailand are at the service of the marginalized, those who are considered "dregs of society": AIDS patients. The mission of the Order of Minor Friars in Thailand, where monks have been present for over 25 years, has grown with two new missionaries: Friar Mauro Zannin (Switzerland) and Friar Jeffrey Haller (USA), who last May 20 received the missionary mandate from Friar Jose Rodriguez Carballo, Minister General OFM. After months of preparation and a special formation course held in Brussels, the two are about to leave for the mission in the East. Three other missionary friars have received the missionary mandate: Fr. Roberto dos Santos (Brazil), Friar Zenon Duda (Poland), Friar Sostenes Velasco Torres (Mexico) sent for a mission experience in Morocco. Friar Mauro Zannin OFM, interviewed by Fides Agency, said. "I hope I can give something of myself, my life experience, but I am sure it will be an experience of giving and receiving. The mission is to get in touch with brothers and sisters in other parts of the world: to get to know each other, see that we can live together peacefully, as the Gospel teaches us." The spirit of the Franciscan charism, he explains, is "to bring a witness of the Gospel, like Saint Francis did, among people living in simplicity and humility, among the poor and marginalized."
The Franciscans already started at the beginning of their mission, service to AIDS patients. "In the 80s – recalls Friar Mauro - the local Church gave the monks land in Lam Sai (in the area of Bangkok), where a hospice for AIDS patients was built. AIDS was then a spectrum, the sick are the modern lepers expelled from society because they were seen by families as a curse, it is still difficult for them to be accepted. The friars spend their time treating them and restoring their dignity as children of God: it is a permanent service to the poorest of the poor. "
"Another essential point - continues the missionary - is formation to permanently implant the Franciscan Order in Thailand, where currently there are 8 foreign missionary friars. Today there are many young people attracted by the Franciscan charism. " Finally, he notes " dialogue with the Buddhists is very important, because Thailand is a predominantly Buddhist nation." (PA) (Agenzia Fides 26/7/2012)

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