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**I° PLENARY COUNCIL OF THE ORDER
OUR LIFE IN FRATERNITY AND POVERTY
Quito, 1971**

**THE BROTHER MINISTER GENERAL AND THE BROTHER
DEFINITORS GENERAL TO ALL THE BROTHERS OF THE ORDER:**

Peace and Good in the Lord.

With this letter we wish to inform you of the conclusions of the first session of the Plenary Council of the order, which was held at Quito, Ecuador, 4th – 24th October, 1971.

It is the duty of the Plenary Council of the Order “to assist the Minister General and the Definitors by constructive cooperation in bringing about the renewal and adaptation of the Order.” (Const. 108c). United in prayer, the Council engaged in common study and fraternal dialogue concerning our life in fraternity and poverty in the light of our evangelical vocation, as outlined in the Constitutions and expressed to the friars in the Letters of the General Chapter and of the General Definitory, and recently proposed to us by Pope Paul VI in his Apostolic Exhortation on the Renewal of the Religious Life.

Faced with the actual social reality of Latin America as illustrated to us by Latin-American specialists in the first week of the session, and as we ourselves were able to verify from first-hand experience, the relevance of our life and vocation became more vividly evident to us, since so many opportunities exist in all parts of the world for our Order to be really and effectively inserted in human society as a leavening influence of justice and social development (cf. Constitutions, 11, 46, 84ff.)

Hearing with our own ears “the cry of the poor, rising up more urgently than ever” and seeing with our own eyes the subhuman condition of so many men and women “in their personal distress and collective misery,” (Apostolic Exhortation of Paul VI, Evangelica testificatio, 17), we felt the urgent call of the Spirit urging us to an ever more authentic faithfulness to our vocation. In a new and more insistent way we understood why our Constitutions call us to seek new forms of presence and activity, so that we may offer genuine assistance in the work of evangelizing and elevating human society.

Likewise, it became more vividly evident to the brothers of the Plenary Council of the Order how valuable and significant our Franciscan way of life is, if we sincerely strive to live our ideal of minority and poverty in brotherhood: in that unity of mind and heart that makes Christ really present among us, so that every fraternity of ours, whether local or provincial, becomes an expression of the presence of the poor and humble Christ, serving God and man in charity.

Seeing the reality of Latin America with this inner clarity, the Plenary Council recognized the signs of the times for the Order as a whole. From these evolved the practical guidelines of the final document, presented by the Plenary Council to the General Definitory in the form of fraternal recommendations.

In conveying these guidelines to the whole Order, the General Definitory, for its part, makes these same desires and proposals its own and is resolved to put them into practice, to keep them always in mind when making decisions and proposing guidelines to the Order or the individual provinces and in planning the governance of the Order.

We invite all the friars to receive these resolutions willingly and to find in them guidelines for practical living. It may appear that we are giving a new set of directives; far from it – they are nothing more than a practical application of the spirit of our new Constitutions, both as regards the particular situation of the friars in Latin America and that of all the friars wherever they may be, so that all may live our life of fraternity and poverty in a more authentic manner; fraternity and poverty are, after all, the very foundation of our evangelical vocation.

It is our hope and firm conviction that the first effect of these resolutions will be to awaken the conscience of the friars in these times of spiritual renewal of the Order. Let us not forget that the source of true renewal is the interior conversion of mind and heart, profound communion with God and the constant search for His Will. From this effort at personal and communal renewal will spring new expressions of fraternal life, new modes of presence among the men and women of our times and an authentic witness of life in poverty and humility.

We wish to thank the friars of the Plenary Council for the valuable help they have given us in the exercise of our office and responsibilities. We also wish to encourage our brothers who are working in Latin America for the welfare of the poor and powerless peoples; and we ask all the provinces of the Order and all the friars to be generous in their assistance and collaboration in the work.

In conclusion, we urgently invite all our brothers, particularly the Conferences of Major Superiors and the provincial and local Superiors, to undertake with us a since re-examination of their way of life and a profound conversion in view of the practical guidelines given by the Plenary Council.

Thus, in unity of spirit and in a variety of ways (Const.4,4) we will make an ever more effective and worthy contribution to the renewal of the world in accordance with the demands of the evangelical values of justice and peace.

Your brothers in the Lord,

Paschal Rywalski, Minister General
William Sghedoni, Vicar General
Benedict Frei, Definitor
Bonaventure Marinelli, Definitor
Aloysius Ward, Definitor
Clovis Frainer, Definitor
Optatus Van Asseldonk, Definitor
John Dovetta, Definitor
Lazarus Iriarte, Definitor

Quito, October 23, 1971

CHAPTER I°

CAPUCHIN-FRANCISCAN LIFE IN LATIN AMERICA

A. OUR LIFE IN LATIN AMERICA

1. Just as in every country and in every culture, so also in Latin America, we must look for other specific forms of Franciscan life, adapted to the real situation of each country and in accordance with the spirit of the new Constitutions, so that our identity may be more clearly apparent and we may respond to the voice of God, calling us in the signs of Latin America; in this way we also hope to be able to awaken new vocations to the Order.

2. Considering the conditions in Latin America, we can express the presence of our fraternal and minoritic life in many ways. We can express our presence by means of the traditional fraternities properly renewed, but especially by new fraternities of prayer, witness, evangelisation and work. All these fraternities must be truly ecclesial in themselves and help to raise up other ecclesial communities around them, especially Franciscan ones and those which are called "basic Christian communities."

3. Our opinion is that these new types of fraternity should have the following characteristics:

- a) they should be vital, in the sense that they are forms of our Franciscan life that have their source in the person of Christ;
- b) they should favour personal development, in such a way that each member can develop his own personal charisms for the good of the whole fraternity and of the Church;
- c) they should have a spirit of ongoing renewal that results in devising ever better forms;
- d) they should honour the principle of pluriformity, as the diversity of situations demands.

4. In order that these forms of fraternity in Latin America may be truly minoritic, two things are necessary:

- a) through their spirit of service and availability, they must always manifest themselves among the people as a prophetic sign of solidarity;
- b) above all, as truly poor men, the friars must be present among the poor by their life and witness.

Nevertheless, whatever the forms of fraternity may be, they must have a unity of spirit and true communion among themselves and with the provincial fraternity; in fact, with the whole Order.

5. In view of the particular character of Latin America, special attention must be given to inter-communication among the different circumscriptions of the Order in this territory for the purpose of fostering fraternal life, the sharing of news and the seeking of solutions to problems together. This can be brought about through meetings of men trained in leadership, by means of special courses conducted by CEFEPAL (Latin American Centre for Franciscan and Pastoral Activities) or by other courses, by meetings of Superiors, or by other means judged adequate by the Superiors.

It is greatly desirable that efforts be made to unify, even juridically, the various circumscriptions of the Order in Latin America, especially within the confines of each one's own country.

6. A special fraternal presence on our part is called for among those who suffer from want and isolation, such as those who live in the poorer suburbs of cities and towns, or those who are neglected in rural areas, *A fortiori* the life of our missionaries among indigenous populations and others, undertaken in order to evangelize them and promote their full human development, must be considered as a true Franciscan presence among the poor.

7. In order that this sort of life may be rendered possible in practice, it will be necessary to devise new forms of initiation, with the active participation of the young men themselves, according to the conditions of each region and the recent declarations of the Church and the Order. In order that such improved formation may come about, collaboration among the different circumscriptions is much to be desired.

8. The Plenary Council of the Order gladly expresses its appreciation and confidence in the friars of Latin America and it hopes that they will bring about a new and stronger impulse towards a genuine 'incarnation' of the Franciscan presence in these countries. If this new vitality is to succeed, the native friars themselves have a great part to play and should be considered as having the prime responsibility for the future of the Order. The Order for its part must be ready to provide a sufficient supply of personnel for the formation and animation of the fraternities and other related activities.

B. OUR WORK IN LATIN AMERICA

9. Our Mission in Latin America is shown especially:

- a) by evangelisation, as an expression of our apostolic vocation and as a means of deepening the Christian life;
- b) by our presence among the poor, as an expression of minority, in order to promote their human development.

All this, in union with the life of these nations, should contribute towards finding valid solutions to the many serious problems they face, so that individuals and communities may enjoy genuine human progress. (Medellin, *Message to the Nations of Latin America*)

Moreover, it will be our task, too, as men of justice and peace to form the social conscience of these people and to cooperate in legitimate activities for social and political reform according to the mind and spirit of the Constitutions (No. 85ff. and 166).

10. Pastoral activity should be constantly renewed in our Franciscan spirit. For this reason, in order to be better aware of our identity as Franciscans and to find new and better ways, it will be necessary to relinquish certain pastoral activities. We invite all the Major Superiors of Latin America to undertake a serious re-examination of their commitments, especially with regard to schools requiring the payment of tuition, and certain parishes in urban areas that are already well developed, and other similar activities.

11. In order that poverty may be a genuine and obvious sign and in order that we may truly become part of the reality that surrounds us in Latin America, the friars are encouraged to place at the disposal of ecclesiastical or social works buildings and property which are of no further use to the fraternity or not in harmony with our spirit, to sell them or even give them away for the good of society as a whole.

12. In order that we may discover genuine vocations, it will be necessary to undertake new forms of vocational pastoral activity. Therefore, we propose:

- a) that various methods be tried, according to the local situation;
- b) that more attention be given to vocational pastoral activity among youth who are able to make their decision with greater maturity;
- c) that friars be selected and trained to specialise in this work;
- d) that communities of presence and witness be set up to arouse and foster an atmosphere in which young people will wish to consecrate themselves in the Franciscan life.

13. On account of the present needs of the Church in Latin America, the pastoral work of our friars in parishes is to be highly regarded, especially in Mission territories, but it is to be promoted in new forms so that true Christian communities may be built up. All the friars should prefer to direct their attention to the poorer people and those on the fringes of society.

14. Pastoral work in Latin America pertains first of all to the friars of this territory, so that it is chiefly their responsibility to evangelize and promote the development of their own people. However, assistance with personnel for the missions and new forms of apostolates is still required. The Major Superiors of Latin America should prepare a precise list of the projects requiring material help and of the personnel they require. Friars sent to work in Latin America should be:

- a) carefully chosen;
- b) suitably trained and ready to complete their training in Latin America;
- c) capable of becoming fully integrated into Latin America.

15. Lay collaborators, or collaborators from other religious congregations, are to be welcomed, especially in the missions, as long as they have the proper qualifications.

16. The Plenary Council of the Order invites all the friars to make themselves aware of the needs of Latin America, and to decide on some concrete action they could take to meet those needs, even at the cost of some personal or communal sacrifice. Superiors should see to it that the efforts of individuals and fraternities in their jurisdictions achieve their objective.

The primary responsibility for providing personnel and economic assistance to the vice-provinces and missions rests with the provinces on which those vice-provinces and missions depend, but the latter should, as far as possible, seek to achieve sufficiency in personnel and in financial means.

17. As men of justice and peace all the friars are urged to exert an effective influence to remove whatever injustices may be inflicted on the peoples of the Third World by their governments or by national or international commercial organisations.

18. In every country, where this is possible, or if it seems preferable in every Latin American Conference, there shall be an office for the preparation of projects, and for communication with ecclesiastical and civil organisations and with those of the Order.

19. In the General Curia, there shall be an office whose task will be to study the situations, projects and requests of the circumscriptions of Latin America, to decide priorities and to negotiate with those provinces of the Order which are in a position to help and wish to do so.

CHAPTER II° FRATERNITY

A. THE FRIARS

20. All the friars are equal (Const. 73 & 101), therefore, each should be given equal opportunity to develop his own gifts and talents, in his own state of life, for the service of others, both within and outside the fraternity.

21. To foster the equality of the friars, the following means are proposed:

- a) there should be a common novitiate, without any distinction between clerics and non-clerics;
- b) throughout the whole period of initiation, the first place should be given to religious and Franciscan formation, and this applies equally to clerics and non-clerics;
- c) the liturgy of the Hours and the Eucharistic liturgy should be celebrated in the vernacular and with the active participation of all; they should be renewed not only according to the letter, but more according to the spirit of the Second Vatican Council;
- d) All should receive an adequate formation according to their aptitudes to carry out the variety of duties within the Order and to engage in apostolic work;
- e) the suppression of titles, privileges and exemptions, taken for granted in the Constitutions, should be put into effect;
- f) the participation of all the friars in domestic chores, unless prevented by more urgent work, should be put into practice;
- g) within the norms of sound administration, we should share our material goods both on the local and provincial level and on the inter-provincial level and that of the Order as a whole.

22. The Plenary Council of the Order asks the General Superiors to petition the Holy See again in a prudent manner and at an appropriate time, to allow non-cleric friars to hold any office in the Order.

23. The Plenary Council believes that the negative response of the Sacred Congregation for Religious to n.101 of the Constitutions does not prevent the Major Superiors from petitioning the Holy See, through the General Definitory, to allow an eminently suitable non-cleric friar, in a particular case, to assume the office of Superior, if the good of the fraternity requires this.

24. Since the Spirit of God may speak through all the friars, Major and local Superiors should give the younger friars a chance to take an active part in the renewal of the Order. Therefore, Superiors should:

- a) encourage their active participation in the local Chapter;
- b) promote contacts with the various friars and fraternities of the province;
- c) convoke provincial and inter-provincial gatherings of the young friars for this purpose.

25. Since the young, along with the other friars, should take a responsible part in the renewal of the Order, Superiors should use suitable means to discover their opinions and aspirations, support their undertakings and lead them to dialogue with the other friars.

26. In order that the Constitutions may be put into practice more faithfully, superiors should take care that the friars do not habitually live away from the fraternity, even for the apostolate, and that they are not deprived of the benefit of fraternal life.

27. Where, however, because of special circumstances (e.g. in the missions) the friars are compelled to live alone for a long period, Major Superiors should see that the opportunity to share in fraternal life be provided for them frequently.

28. Among all the friars an educational process should be going on so that they may learn to understand in a fraternal manner the anguish and distress suffered by friars undergoing a crisis and try not to be their judges but their guardians and truly their brothers.

29. a) Provincial and local Superiors are earnestly advised to exercise the greatest consideration and concern for friars returning to the world; they should remember that the admonition contained in paragraph V of n.VI of the Instruction issued by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 13th January 1971, applies also to us especially: "The Ordinaries concerned, among whom is the Major Religious Superior, should treat with paternal and pastoral charity priests reduced to the lay state and, as far as they can, assist them in those things necessary for living a dignified life."

b) The Conference of Major Superiors shall engage in common reflection on this problem and, if necessary, unite their forces to discover suitable means to fraternally and effectively help those friars who leave the Order to find their place in lay life smoothly and honourably.

B. FRATERNITIES

30. The Plenary Council of the Order earnestly advises all Superiors to foster by suitable means the spirit of fraternity, which is the primary and essential element of our Franciscan life.

31. In every circumscription of the Order the structure of the fraternities shall be adapted in such a way that the renewal of the Order may become effective in regard to our special presence with and among the poor and in regard to the apostolate.

32. Each fraternity, whatever its form of life, must give an evangelical witness of poverty and minority by its spirit and by its way of praying, living and working.

33. With due regard for the primary pastoral responsibility of the Superiors themselves, the Plenary Council of the Order recommends also that they, in whatever way they see fit, enlist the help of friars trained in leadership of fraternities to arouse, foster and perfect the renewal of our life.

34. Our fraternities should be open in such a way that lay persons may not only give us special services, but also share in our fraternal life more closely in regard to prayer, or fraternal fellowship or the apostolate. If such participation is to be only temporary, the consent of the local Chapter is needed; but if it is to be for a longer or indefinite period, the consent of the Major Superiors must be obtained.

35. The services of lay experts should be engaged with regard to both economic administration and our integration into society, so that we may reflect more deeply on our poverty, minority, and apostolate, and be more confident in adopting practical and more efficient guidelines.

36. It is recommended to each circumscription of the Order that, after all things have been considered thoroughly before God, at least one fraternity of witness according to n.11 and n.46 of the Constitutions be established. In the circumstances of today, this kind of fraternity seems to be particularly in harmony with our spirit and the requirements of a world in need of the Gospel message.

37. In order that the creation of new fraternities may become possible, the following should be done besides the preliminary information and awareness to be given to the friars of the province:

a) if necessary, in every circumscription at least some house or some apostolic work should be given up, especially schools and similar institutions conducted for the wealthy;

b) a friar who wishes to become a part of such a fraternity should be free to do so, even if he must give up some office exercised in the province, provided that the common good does not suffer therefrom and that he possesses the necessary qualifications.

38. Only those friars should be admitted to such fraternities who are suitable for fraternity life; they should be men of prayer and spiritually mature, and competent in their work, particularly in preaching the word of God. The friar who bears the responsibility of such a fraternity should possess the qualities of a true leader.

39. Granted that, according to the Constitutions n.12, n.40 and n.155, the friars must always unite prayer and work and that they may go to a house of recollection set up according to the mind of n.42 of the Constitutions, the Plenary Council of the Order earnestly recommends further that there be contemplative fraternities where the friars may exclusively foster intimacy with the Lord for as long a time as seems necessary to them in the Lord.

40. Since our life is manifested in a variety of forms, those fraternities which by right preferably carry on the traditional life and activity should imbue their internal life and the external apostolate with the spirit of the new Constitutions.

41. To this end the Superiors and also the Conferences of Major Superiors should see that suitable means are used to adapt and develop the thinking of the friars according to the mind of the new Constitutions and other documents of the Church and the Order.

42. Since the renewal of a fraternity depends to a great extent on the Superior, the Major Superiors should appoint as Superior one who is capable of inspiring renewal in the traditional type of fraternity; the Major Superiors themselves should give him their assistance in this.

43. It is the function of the local Chapter to strengthen the spirit of fraternity, to promote the co-responsibility of all the friars for the common good, and to undertake fraternal dialogue on everything that concerns the life of the fraternity in order to seek out together the will of God.

44. Because of the special importance of the local Chapter for the life of the fraternity, Major Superiors shall effectively promote this Chapter and at times also give it encouragement by their presence.

45. The local Chapter admirably provides for the expression of "obedience in charity", a characteristic feature of our fraternity, whereby the friars serve one another; it encourages creativity and co-responsibility in all the friars, and occasions the unfolding of the gifts of each one's personality for the service of all. To discover and carry out the will of God, the fraternity needs the creativity and personal gifts of each of its members.

CHAPTER III°

WITNESS TO POVERTY IN THE USE OF THINGS

46. We believe that poverty, as an evangelical and Franciscan virtue, is a participation in the self-emptying of Christ and refers primarily to persons rather than to things. Adherence to all the norms in the use of personal and communal goods would not necessarily make the friars truly poor. Our poverty, as proposed to us by Saint Francis in Chapter VI of the Rule, does indeed make us rich in all the goods of the Kingdom of God, but as far as it frees us, in spirit and in fact, from temporal goods, it leads us to place all our goods at the service of the Church and society.

47. We believe that, since poverty is our special charism, renewal will not be true and genuine renewal unless our individual and communal poverty is immediately visible as a manifestation of an interior reality and is so explicit that it needs no explanation or excuses.

48. The criteria for the necessary revision of the use of goods are the following:

- a) The first criterion is the principle of human morality and social justice, by which all men are obliged to the social use of goods; goods cannot be regarded as only for the benefit of some person or particular groups but for the benefit of all men.
- b) Another is evangelical poverty, “which is our special way of salvation” (Const. n.2), leading us not only to distribute our superfluous goods but to share even those which are necessary to us.
- c) Still another is the re-structuring of our presence and our activities according to the demands of the apostolate and the ministry to be coordinated with the pastoral programme of the local Church.

A. PERSONAL WITNESS TO POVERTY

49. Recent and present-day social and economic developments, and their influence on the outlook of religious, place personal poverty in a new perspective and demand greater and more conscious responsibility in the giving of oneself.

- a) An honest and hard day’s work is a pre-eminent sign of poverty by which we can be identified clearly with the poor.
- b) The use of one’s talents is a true gift of oneself and a sign of genuine poverty; laziness, on the other hand, and negligence in the use of one’s talents is against poverty.
- c) Also, it is an expression of poverty to carry out some work for the common good, even against one’s own inclinations, for talents are not given for one’s own personal use and enjoyment, but for the good of the fraternity and the whole Church.
- d) Service for the benefit of one’s own fraternity, within our own houses, is a true exercise of poverty.

50. A friar who makes no effort to observe personal poverty, especially with regard to stipends and wages for work, which should be handed over to the fraternity, must be questioned by the Superiors concerning the genuineness of his Franciscan vocation.

B. COMMUNAL WITNESS TO POVERTY

51. It is part of the pastoral duty of chapters and superiors to form the conscience of the friars and of fraternities with regard to the requirements of poverty. Also, the religious themselves should responsibly increase their own awareness of poverty through personal study, dialogue, local and provincial meetings, etc.

52. Since the immovable goods of the Order must be considered as goods of the ecclesial community, the re-examination of the use of our goods is not merely an internal affair of the Order, but should be seen as an ecclesial matter. Therefore, in reviewing the use of our goods, we should prudently dialogue with the community of the local Church in order to arrive at a common solution for the good of the Church and of the local civil society.

53. All the Order's possessions, particularly land, gardens and buildings that are no longer necessary, and anything else that is not appropriate for us, should be disposed of or put to social use. Any such possessions, however, that are still necessary should conform to the principles and requirements of Franciscan poverty, with due regard being had for the social conditions of the region and of the people to whom we must give our witness to poverty.

54. Since material insecurity is an element of poverty and is today a special sign of solidarity with the poor, the friars, and especially those who form the new fraternities, should, as far as possible, try not to have the ownership of houses or land.

55. Goods which we do not need and which cannot immediately be used to help the poor or the Third World are not to be accepted even as spontaneous gifts.

56. The fact that we are brothers should be manifested or proved also by financial cooperation among fraternities of the same province or among the provinces themselves (in the form of gifts or loans, with or without moderate interest). The goods of a province and of individual fraternities should be fairly made available for the needs of the province, vice-province or mission.

57. Where possible, the assistance of lay experts should be sought in the administrations of the Order's goods so that these may be put to better use and the friars themselves may be trained in a better and more responsible administration of the Order's goods.

58. Concerning shrines (places of pilgrimage) in our care, the real need for our presence there should be verified; if such a need is lacking, the shrine should be given up. In the future, we should not build any shrines or accept any that are offered to us, since they occupy too many religious who could give their service especially to the missions and the poor. We should avoid ways of raising money unbecoming to our spirit of poverty; and our apostolate should be integrated with the pastoral plan of the local Church.

59. In the Order, we should avoid the unjustifiable spending of money on the erection of monuments, the construction of works on a monumental scale, or the restoration of friaries for the sole reason that they are historical. We should also strive to educate the people to understand the concepts and requirements of social justice and poverty.

60. In virtue of the Constitutions, it belongs to the local fraternity, in compliance with the norms given by the Provincial Chapters for the use of goods, courageously to correct abuses against personal and communal poverty, e.g., in recreation, the accumulation of clothing and personal gifts, travelling, the use of cars, etc. This should be done through the local Chapter.

61. The Major Superiors shall see to it that the local Chapters of their fraternities assume their responsibility with regard to the following questions:

- a) deciding the budget for the ordinary needs of the fraternity;
- b) determining the sum of money to be given over for the needs of the province, the missions, the sick and the education and training of the friars (Const. 52);
- c) setting aside a part of their income (a percentage imposed on the friary's income) for the needs of the poor (Const. 54) or to undertake some work in favour of the poor (Const. 69).

CHAPTER IV°

CIRCUMSCRIPTIONS OF THE ORDER IN GENERAL

62. In view of the difficulties of the present time, the Plenary Council of the Order commits to the General Definitory the work of preparing concrete proposals on the erection, division, or union of provinces, according to criteria to be proposed by the Definitory itself, and also the task of making decisions about these things, with due observance of n.98 of our Constitutions.

63. We should not only seek solutions that are in accord with present structures, but also leave the way open to find other structures, even extraordinary ones in a creative sense, that meet the needs of modern-day society and of our renewed way of life, in ways that foster the unity of the Order and its incorporation into the local context.

64. Hence, a sense of unity should be promoted, so that through frequent contacts and joint efforts in initial formation and pastoral activity, union may be achieved even on the juridical level, where circumstances and the good of the Order make it desirable. When a union or establishment of circumscriptions is to take place, it should not be done through imposition without any previous preparation of minds or without the prior consent of the majority of friars.

65. A thorough scientific study is to be made by the General Superiors together with the Conferences of Major Superiors and all the circumscriptions concerned, so that the implantation of the Order in the various regions may proceed well and in orderly fashion.

66. The following criteria should help the General Definitory to proceed in a more prudent way:

a) our availability should lead us to whatever place our forces, personnel, and the witness of Franciscan life show there are valid reasons for our presence; no foundations should be made on the impulse of external or superficial reasons;

b) with regard to territory, this should not be considered only geographically but also as continuous demographic centres (on account of fraternity) in which the friars work (Const. n.98);

c) the criterion of sufficient quantity and efficiency, i.e. the primary element, is not the number of friars but rather the internal and external vitality of the group and the nature of the needs that exist for a new province;

d) in each nation attempts should be made toward unification, especially where there are circumscriptions originating from the same Mother Province. Therefore, the question could be asked whether in one or another nation or region only ONE province would suffice, except in extraordinary circumstances;

e) the criterion of witness in the local Church is important. For this there needs to be a sufficient number of friars who are truly giving efficient assistance to the local Church;

f) as a manifestation of vitality, the first thing to be considered is missionary activity, domestic or foreign, since ours is a missionary Order;

g) in the event that a province is to be established, a further requirement is that in general it should be economically viable, spiritually vigorous, able to ensure a good distribution of

human resources over the different activities, and capable of offering candidates a true picture of our life.

CHAPTER V°

PREPARING FOR THE EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL CHAPTER

67. To prepare properly for the General Chapter in so far as its object is the correction and amendment of the Constitutions to obtain definitive approval of them from the Holy See, a Pre-Chapter Commission is to be set up by the General Definitory as soon as possible.

68. The Pre-Chapter Commission is to be made up of not less five and not more than seven members.

69. The members of the Pre-Chapter Commission should have competence in the main topics of our life (spiritual life, formation, apostolate, government, etc.), but combined with an overall vision of our life. The Commission is to be functional.

70. In choosing the members, a certain proportional representation of regions is to be observed.

**II° PLENARY COUNCIL OF THE ORDER
OUR LIFE AND PRACTICE OF PRAYER
Taize, 1973**

**THE BROTHER MINISTER GENERAL AND THE BROTHER
DEFINITORS GENERAL TO ALL THE BROTHERS OF THE ORDER**

Dear Brothers,

With this letter we wish to present to all our brothers the suggestions and wishes of the Second Plenary Council of the Order, as they were put to the General Definitory.

The Plenary Council met in Taizé, France, to consider the life and practice of prayer in the Order. As the days went by, the prayer rising from the hearts of all the members became more insistent: 'Lord, teach us to pray!'

Encouraged by that same intimate appeal, we tried to draw daily closer to the Lord, so that, being present among us by His Spirit, He might be our teacher in prayer.

That is why we are confident enough to hope that it was the Lord Himself who taught us the things you now have before you summarized in this Document – drawing upon the contacts we had with the people of Taizé and those who came to join us in prayer. We ask you to receive these words with an open heart, so that you too may have a share in what the Plenary Council experienced so intensely as a gift of the Holy Spirit.

First of all, we, the General Minister and Definitors accept the Document faithfully and gratefully, and we intend to give it an important place, as a source of inspiration and guidance, not only in our personal lives but also in our pastoral service of the friars and the Provinces.

In offering the Document to the Order we earnestly invite each friar and each fraternity to accept it willingly, to meditate upon it individually and in community, and to discuss it, especially in their local and Provincial Chapters, with a view to its practical application in everyday life. We urge Superiors not to be over-anxious when it comes to renewing traditional prayer forms as occasion requires, or to finding new ones that are more suitable.

No-one is unaware of the vital importance of prayer: in fact it concerns the very life and death of our Fraternity. Every effort to renew the life of the Order in accordance with the principles of Vatican II, the spirit of St. Francis and the signs of the times, will be futile if we ourselves are not thoroughly renewed in our life of prayer: 'If the Lord does not build the house, in vain do its builders labour' (Ps. 126:1).

The subject of prayer, like the themes of the Plenary Council in Quito, is of such importance that it seems advisable to discuss it again at the next General Chapter, in addition to completing and improving the text of the Constitutions.

May our Order grow more and more in Christ, who is 'our life, our prayer and our work,' into the fullness of Christ Himself (Eph. 4:13).

Therefore, let there be nothing in us to hinder the Spirit of the Lord nor to separate us from Him, so that in our Fraternity and in each one of us His action may be manifest (Const. 164).

Yours devotedly in Christ,

Your brothers in the Lord,
Paschal Rywalski, Minister General
William Sghedoni, Vicar General
Benedict Frei, Definitor
Bonaventure Marinelli, Definitor
Aloysius Ward, Definitor
Clovis Frainer, Definitor
Optatus Van Asseldonk, Definitor
John Dovetta, Definitor
Lazarus Iriarte, Definitor

Taizé,
8 March 1973

MESSAGE FROM THE SECOND PLENARY COUNCIL OF THE ORDER

1. As your brothers, we would like to speak to the whole fraternity of the Order on the subject of prayer. The experience we have shared together in the Plenary Council of the Order, both personally and through the reports of the delegates, as well as the importance of the subject itself, moves us to speak to you on this matter with confidence and in a fraternal spirit.
2. The Plenary Council held in Quito undertook to examine our identity in terms of our fraternity and poverty. On this occasion, here in Taizé, we thought it important to make a more thorough investigation of the spiritual life and practice of prayer, without which we cannot be truly poor or truly brothers. Moreover we wish to do this not in an abstract way but in the context of the Church and society of modern times, which are subject to so many changes.

CHAPTER I°

THE SITUATION TODAY

3. From what was said by nearly all the delegates, we learned that a good number of friars are experiencing:

- a) a genuine desire to pray;
- b) a certain dynamic tension in the search for harmony between action and prayer;
- c) a measure of determination to tackle in a constructive way the factors that give rise to disquiet and anxiety;
- d) various positive experiments already in progress;
- e) attempts to purify the image of God and to renew certain prayer forms;
- f) a lively awareness, especially among missionaries, that finding a solution to the problem of prayer is often a matter of life and death for us.

4. On the other hand, we also found the following obstacles to prayer:

- a) insecurity in faith, and the difficulty of communicating with a transcendent God;
- b) the fact that many friars have not been sufficiently prepared to meet the changes in the Church and in the world;
- c) the separation of love of God from love of neighbour, and consequently of prayer from action;
- d) excessive activism, and conversely, the remoteness of prayer from the reality of human life;
- e) deficiencies in fraternal living;
- f) failure to take advantage of the assistance afforded by pedagogy and sound psychology;
- g) rejection of old forms of prayer, without renewal of the spirit of prayer;
- h) negligence in the formation of candidates to the Order and in training special leaders (animators) of the life of prayer.

5. Acknowledging our common responsibility, we offer you these reflections on prayer as a help towards daily growing in faithfulness to our vocation.

CHAPTER II° THE SPIRIT AND LIFE OF PRAYER

6. Prayer, under the impulse of the Spirit, should be an expression of a vital need of the human heart, the very breath of love: man cannot fully become himself unless he makes the transition out of self-love and into communion with God and man, in Christ who is both God and man.

In making this transition or exodus some discover God as He is in Himself, while others find Him more in their brethren (Mt. 25:35ff).

Like the development of any other inter-personal love, man's journey to God is exposed to a variety of changing circumstances, both favourable and unfavourable, and is subject to the laws of vital growth.

It is a long, dramatic and fascinating road that leads to complete human maturity in the freedom of God's sons and daughters, "until Christ is formed in us" (Rom. 8:22ff; Gal. 4:19).

7. Christ Himself is our life, our prayer and our work. It is when we love the Father and our brethren that we are truly living with the life of Christ. It is in His Spirit that we pray and cry out as sons to their Father: "Abba, Father!" (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6).

The Spirit of Christ is possessed by the person who remains in His Mystical Body, and in his prayer never separates the Head from the Body, praying as a member of the Church and seeking and loving Christ in the Church.

8. The Father is the first to show His love for us (1Jn. 4:10), and speaks to us in the Spirit of His Son. We should listen to Him in an atmosphere of silence.

By our response of "faith, which makes its power felt through love" (Gal.5:6), we carry on a child-like conversation with the Father, through Christ, in the Spirit (cf. Const. 32).

9. Real prayer is known by its fruits in life. "A man prays well so long as he works well" (St. Francis, *Legenda Antiqua*, 74). If prayer and work are inspired by one and the same Spirit of the Lord, far from being in opposition, they complete each other (II Rule 5 & 10; Const. 145).

10. A spirit of prayer that is really alive inevitably vivifies and animates the whole concrete life of the friars, and therefore necessarily renews sound traditional forms of prayer and creates new ones.

11. One who has the spirit of prayer will find time for actual prayer. Whoever does not find time does not have the spirit of prayer.

12. The letter or outward form, without the spirit, is dead. On the other hand, it is impossible for the spirit, without the letter or form, to revitalize human life. We are human persons, in whom the spirit exists in an 'incarnate' or 'embodied' form.

13. Prayer can be expressed not only in words, formulae and ceremonies, but also by silence, various bodily postures, symbolic actions and signs, according to the example of Saint Francis.

14. We should pray as 'lesser brothers.' We will really be brothers when we are gathered together in Christ's name, in mutual affection, in such a way that the Lord is in reality present among us (Mt. 18:20; *Perf. Car.* 15; *Const.* 11 & 72).

We will really be 'minors' when we are living in poverty and loving obedience with the poor and crucified Christ, together with the poor (*Lk. 4:18; Phil. 2:5-11; Gal. 2:19; Const. 11 & 46*).

Our prayer ought to be the cry of the poor in the sight of God, and we should effectively share their condition (Paul VI: *Ev.Test. 17; Const.45; PCO Quito passim*).

15. We should honour and imitate the Blessed Virgin, who was associated with Christ in His Passion (*Const. 39*). We ought never to separate the Mother from her Son (*Const.1, 160. 174*). Through her we can attain the Spirit of the poor and crucified Christ.

16. So that the paschal mystery of Christ in the Eucharist and the sacrament of Penance may daily more effectively renew our life, we should purify our sinful condition by contrition of heart (*L.M. V:8*).

We should embrace the Father's will before our own, persevering in prayer even when it is distasteful and self-love fights against it (*Mt. 26:39 & 42; Lk. 22:44*).

Anyone who prays only when he feels ready for prayer is using prayer to further his own self-love. We would do well to keep in mind always that prayer ought to be an act of genuine love.

We should live out the crucifixion of Christ, bringing to prayer the daily hardships, dryness, anxieties and trials of life. By accepting them in the power of love, we will become true images of God's Son (*Rom.8:29*). It is in this way that we put into practice in our lives, and proclaim to others, the conversion or penance to which the Gospel calls us (*Const. 87. 88, 90*).

17. Our prayer is more the 'affective' kind, a prayer of the heart, which leads us to experience God in an intimate way.

18. In contemplating God, the Supreme Good from whom all good derives, our hearts should break out in a chorus of adoration, thanksgiving, wonder and praise.

In the joy of Easter, seeing Christ in the whole of creation, we should go through the whole world praising the Father and inviting people to praise Him, witnessing to His love by *our fraternal life, prayer and apostolate* (*I Rule 21-23; Canticle of Creation; Mirror of Perfection 100; Const. 23*).

We ought always to pray in spirit and in truth, with a pure heart and a pure mind, since this prayer alone is pleasing to God (*Jn. 4:24; II Rule 10; Admon. 16; I Letter of St. Francis*).

19. The chief supports of prayer are Sacred Scripture and an attentive listening to the Spirit speaking in the Church, in the signs of the times, in the life of people and in our own hearts.

A particular source of prayer for us is provided by the writings of St. Francis, together with the Constitutions, both of which we trust are available to each friar.

20. The spirit of prayer and its promotion among the People of God, especially interior prayer, has been from the beginning a particular charism of our Capuchin fraternity. History witnesses to the fact that this has always been an off-shoot of genuine renewal.

CHAPTER III° THE PRACTICE OF PRAYER

21. Gathering together the experiences of the friars as they were expressed in the reports of the delegates, we propose the following for common consideration.

22. Each friar, praying in spirit and in truth, should trustingly commit himself to 'divine inspiration' in evangelical freedom.

It is in keeping with our character to encourage pluriformity with regard to traditional forms of prayer, which are to be renewed as occasion requires (e.g. Stations of the Cross, devotion to the Sacred Heart, the Rosary, etc), and to the creation of suitable new forms, without prejudice to the unity of the spirit and life of prayer in each fraternity.

23. A praying fraternity makes good progress when the friars regard themselves as responsible to one another for the vitality of their prayer life. Superiors, however, whose task it is to give spirit and life to the friars by their example and teaching, should be the foremost promoters of the life of prayer (*Const.* 147).

24. Everywhere friars are experiencing the need for specially trained 'animators' of prayer and the spiritual life, to work among the faithful and, in a special way, in our fraternities and in the whole Franciscan family.

25. Every fraternity ought to be, in reality, a praying fraternity. So that ever greater progress may be made towards achieving this, it is useful to encourage the setting up of fraternities of recollection and contemplation, using sound principles. This has already been done in several Provinces in recent years, with a good deal of success (Religious Life in Hermitages; *const.* 42; PCO Quito II B, 20).

26. It is imperative that one's conscience be formed to feel the need for personal prayer. Each friar, wherever he is, should set aside sufficient time for private prayer each day (e.g. a whole hour). Many friars, especially missionaries, are experiencing this as a vital need.

27. Dynamic and ordered growth in prayer requires that we should first have been adequately formed as human and Christian persons. For this too the use of new methods of meditation will be helpful.

28. All the friars have their part to play in creating an atmosphere favourable to prayer, with silence and mutual understanding, and also by moderating the use of instruments of social communication by common consent (*Const.* 43, 77).

29. If any friar is unable to find sufficient time for prayer because of excessive work, he may have recourse to the Minister, in fact he ought to do so (II *Rule* 10; *Const.* 157).

30. In view of the many tensions of modern life, it sometimes becomes difficult to maintain a regular pattern of daily prayer. For this reason, periods of prolonged and more intense recollection undertaken by each individual friar, and indeed by each fraternity, will do much to prevent the weakening of the rhythm of prayer (*Evang. Test.* 35).

31. The whole of human experience is a fusion of a two-fold dimension, the individual and the communal. It follows that private and communal prayer complete each other. The more intense one's private prayer, the more vigorous one's participation in the prayer of the community. The one cannot take the place of the other; rather it is the case that the one feeds

the other. If preference is given to the one for a period of time, the other cannot be neglected altogether.

32. No community can be called Christian, still less Franciscan, if community prayer is not a regular occurrence. If any friar ordinarily opts out of community prayer, the fraternity should be concerned for him in every possible way (*Const.* 94-95; *PCO Quito* IIA 10).

33. Prayer becomes truly communal when it is effectively shared in by everyone and expresses real fraternity through mutual trust, understanding and affection (*Const.* 73). In this connection, as Capuchin tradition testifies, spiritual discussions, the exchange of experiences, shared reflection on the Gospel, communal penitential and bible services, evaluation of life-style and other things of this nature, can be of great value (*Admon.* 21; *Const* [1536] 3 and passim; *Const.* 149).

34. The communal and individual prayer of the friars should be a subject for self-examination and criticism in the local chapters of each fraternity.

35. Since fraternal life is the primary and fundamental condition for the normal development of our Franciscan vocation, friars who are compelled to live alone should come together at least periodically to join in fraternal life and prayer (*PCO Quito* IIA 8; *Const.* 80).

It is altogether fitting that friars, especially missionaries, who are unable to have a community life, are now doing all they can to form a praying community with their helpers and the other faithful.

36. The Liturgy of the Hours, being the Church's own prayer, should, together with the Eucharist, have first place in every fraternity and in the life of each individual friar (*II Rule* 3; *Test.*; *II Letter of St. Francis*).

The celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours should be active and dynamic, and occasionally include singing, especially selected psalms, hymns, readings and spontaneous prayers (*Gen. Instr. Lit. Hours* 244-252).

The danger of carrying it out in a mechanical fashion, with the lips alone, should be carefully avoided (*Const.* 38).

Intervals of silence, somewhat prolonged, greatly contribute to a conscious and fruitful celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours.

In many places the friars benefit greatly from joining with the faithful to pray the Hours.

37. The Eucharistic Sacrifice, in which Christ Himself celebrates the Paschal Mystery with His Body the Church, should be a real banquet of love and a bond of unity. It should more and more become the vital centre of the whole life of the friars.

Let the communal celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy, especially concelebration, be highly recommended as the source and summit of our fraternal life (*Const.* 35). Where a daily celebration in community is impossible, there should be one at least at intervals, and all the friars should really take part in it (*Analecta*, 1972, 262-264).

38. Experience shows that it would be very useful for each fraternity to appoint a friar or commission to prepare the liturgical celebrations, to keep them free and continually renewed.

We should also develop a sense of fidelity to the liturgical laws, as well as creativity and spontaneity in accordance with their spirit (*Gen. Instr. Lit.* passim and 46 & 47).

It will be the responsibility of the local Chapter to determine practical details regarding the time and manner of the celebrations (*Const.* 37).

39. We should make a serious effort to renew our dialogue with Jesus Christ who is truly present in the Eucharist as our High Priest and Elder Brother (*Rom.* 8:29; *Presb. Ordinis* 18; *Const.* 36 & 40), enabling the liturgy to have a continuing influence by bringing us into unity with Himself and with our brothers.

A sign of genuine devotion to the Eucharist can be seen in one's effort to live the life of Christ and to serve Him in one's brothers and sisters, in the poor and the sick.

40. Of great value to us are those friars who apply themselves to continuous prayer 'in spirit and in truth', particularly the sick, who strengthen our lives by joining their sufferings to those of Christ. We thank God for these and all other benefits.

At the same time we ask pardon for our inadequacies, which we sincerely acknowledge, joining all our voices to beg for 'the spirit of holy prayer and devotion ... to which all other temporal things ought to be subservient' (*II Rule* 5).

41. Finally Brothers, we are conscious of the fact that our prayer life cannot be renewed by words, but by deeds. Let all of us together – every single friar and each and every fraternity as it actually exists – courageously set out to perform those deeds, starting now, straight away, realizing that 'the only thing we should desire is to have the Spirit of the Lord at work within us, while we pray to Him unceasingly with a heart free from self-interest ...' (*II Rule* 10).

**III° PLENARY COUNCIL OF THE ORDER
MISSIONARY LIFE AND ACTIVITY
Mattli, 1978**

**LETTER OF THE GENERAL DEFINITORY
TO ALL THE FRIARS OF OUR ORDER**

Dear Brothers,

With this letter we present to you the final document of the Third Plenary Council, held at Mattli, Switzerland, from 29th August to 22nd September of this year.

Considering the detailed preparation made by means of the questionnaire, and the method of work adopted by the delegates representing the jurisdictions of the Order, we can say that this document collects and develops the constructive contributions of the whole fraternity, with the aim of bringing about an adequate updating of our missionary life and activity. (cf. Consts. 110, 5)

In accepting this final synthesis of the reflections of the Third Plenary Council of the Order, we are confident that we are offering you all a valuable means for the renewal of an important dimension of our evangelizing service according to the spirit of the Vatican Council, the needs of the times and our Franciscan vocation.

The theme of this Third Plenary Council was expressly proposed in the last General Chapter. The need to discuss it in depth was repeatedly emphasized by all. Therefore the meeting at Mattli, besides having the value of shared fraternity, ideas and information, was intended as a response to specific expectations of the Order, in the face of a series of questions and new situations which have arisen in our times in a vital area of evangelization.

In the light of present-day ecclesiology, of our identity as Capuchin Friars Minor, and of changed situations in the world, the response of the Plenary Council opens up for the Order a wide horizon of perspectives and solutions.

The response does not claim to be exhaustive or definitive, but only wishes to offer a stimulus and guidance for reflection, so that we might acquire the right attitudes in our missionary service today, with full understanding and courage.

Therefore, with the publication of this document, the practical phase of the Third Plenary Council of the Order now begins; each and every one of us must responsibly commit himself to study and put into practice what is proposed here, so that our missionary dimension might be renewed and updated.

And so, we earnestly request all our friars – in the first place the Superiors – to ensure a profound study of this document at all levels, so that, accepting the challenge of the “providential signs of the times,” we may be able to respond adequately to our commitment as evangelical men and preachers of the Gospel.

Yours devotedly in the Lord,

Br. Paschal Rywalski, Minister General
Br. Benedici Frei, Vicar General
Br. J. Carlos Correa Pedroso, Definitor General
Br. Jacob .Acharuparampil, Definitor General
Br. Francis Xavier Toppi, Definitor General
Br. Fidelis Lenaerts, Definitor General
Br. Francis Iglesias, Definitor General
Br Aloysius Ward, Definitor General
Br Theodosius Manucci, Definitor General

Rome, 4th October, 1978.

INTRODUCTION

1. Assembled at Mattli for the Plenary Council of the Order, before all else we feel the need and duty to send our warm wishes to all of you, our missionary brothers, who are generously dedicated to bearing the burden and joy of our service of evangelization in every continent and in situations that are often difficult. We are well aware of your work, and with great affection we wish to express to you the gratitude of the whole Order. By your sacrifices and availability you are an eloquent symbol, both of our Capuchin presence and as true preachers of hope in the midst of the people you serve.

Your history, before which we stand in thoughtful admiration, makes us humble in our search, courageous in our reflections and confident about our future. We address this summary of our reflections in the form of a fraternal message to the whole Order, which by a special charism is involved in the Church's mission. We address it in a particular way to you, our missionary brothers, who are carrying out in an outstanding and specific manner our missionary vocation.

By emphasising certain points that are more important for the future of missionary spirituality and activity of the Order, we wish to develop in all of us a growth in apostolic awareness, in order to give a new evangelising impetus to our missionaries, and, through them, new hope to the peoples to whom the "Good News" is proclaimed.

2. In studying our missionary life and activity during the Plenary Council, we have constantly kept in mind certain basic elements:

- a) current theological perspectives regarding the missionary situation of the Church, and the missionary demands made by reason of our Franciscan identity (nn. 4-15);
- b) the socio-economic, political, cultural and religious situations in the world of today, particularly those which affect our missionary work (nn.16-31);
- c) a number of specific structural problems (pastoral and juridical) concerning our missionary activity which are in particular need of updating (nn. 32-50).

The first part of the document is more doctrinal and brings together the principles which should shape our spirituality and missionary service.

3. Since the reform of the Capuchin Missions effected by Father Bernard of Andermatt, Minister General, and the missionary thrust of Pope Pius XI, the missionary activity of the Order and of the Church has shown continual progress over several decades. However, during the past few years the situation has been changing. We are living in a transitional period, of some difficulty and complexity, but we see it as a providential challenge, full of hope for the future.

The political scene, pastoral methods, the mentality of believers, and the new self-understanding of the Church have a considerable impact on our missionary commitment and attitudes.

The last two General Chapters the Order, sensitive to these "signs of the times", saw the need for a deeper study of this problem. (*cf. Analecta OFM Cap 92 [1976]181-182 and Acta Capituli Generalis LXXVII, 1974, p. 445, 111,3.*)

Hence the reason for this Plenary Council of the Order: to help clarify our responsibilities as preachers of the Gospel, responsibilities which emerge from an examination of the present situation and of the immediate future of the Church and the world.

"GO INTO THE WHOLE WORLD AND PREACH THE GOSPEL"
(Mk.16:15)

CHAPTER I° BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

1. THE CHURCH AND MISSION

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

4. Christ Jesus, the Good News of God and first evangelizer, has handed on to all his disciples, and in a radical way to the community of faith which is the Church, the grace and vocation to evangelize. The Church's deepest identity is found in her essential mission to spread the Gospel. (cf. *E.N.* 7:13-16)

This mission consists in the proclamation of the Good News to mankind. In cooperation with the Spirit, evangelization is carried out by witnessing to and preaching the mystery of Christ in such a way that the Lord's Kingdom may come, through the transformation of man and the creation of a new world of justice and peace.

The mission of the Church, the people of God, through its evangelizing mission, "simultaneously manifests and exercises the mystery of God's love for man." (cf. *G.S.* 45; *E.N.* 18, 21, 22)

"MISSIONS"

5. This mission of the Church, which is essentially one, becomes multiple and diverse as it unfolds in practice, since it must take account of the actual situations and persons to whom the Gospel is preached.

In this sense the most specific and privileged form of evangelization, which is the primary task of the missionary Church, is the effort that is made to reach those who are "furthest from Christ"; (those who do not know Him, or who find themselves in de-Christianized environments, wherever they may be). (cf. *E.N.* 51-52; *A.G.* 6)

Hence, from a theological and existential point of view, this pre-eminent missionary activity of the Church goes beyond the narrow limits of the traditional concept of "Missions" – a concept which had precise territorial and administrative connotations.

Wherever there are people in need of explicit faith in Christ, in need of the first proclamation of the Good News, there is missionary activity par excellence.

MISSIONARIES

6. Consequently, while recognizing the juridical features still in force in some of the so-called "Missions", we consider as missionaries all those who, so to speak, go beyond the boundaries of the "Christian community" to bring the message of Christ to peoples or groups of people who are in fact "furthest away from the Kingdom", in whatever continent or country they may be. During the age of "Christendom" it was the "Saracens and other unbelievers" who were considered to be furthest from the Kingdom of God, and they aroused Saint Francis' missionary spirit.

CONTENTS OF MISSIONARY ACTIVITY

7. The content of missionary activity is the proclamation, by word and example, of the whole Gospel to men and women in all their dimensions.

The essential idea and aim of the Gospel message is this: to present Jesus, in a challenging and constructive way, as the reality which is the deciding factor in the life of the individual and of society.

Hence, evangelization inevitably has profound implications for the whole of human life, because its aim is to save humanity – the whole person, the human person as he or she really is - to bring the Good News of Christ the liberator, who is able to transform humanity from within at every level, and to make everyone a new and free person in a truly Christian sense, free from sin and its roots, selfishness, and free also from all consequences of sin, such as inhuman and de-personalizing situations and structures of every kind, individual or collective (socio-economic, political, religious, etc.). (*cf. E.N. 18, 29, 32.*)

“Christ’s redemptive work, while of itself directed towards the salvation of people, also involves the renewal of the whole temporal order. Hence the mission of the Church is not only to bring people the message and grace of Christ, but also to penetrate and perfect the temporal sphere with the spirit of the Gospel.” (*A.A. 5*)

EVANGELIZATION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

8. Consequently, for us there is no dichotomy between spiritual salvation and human development. On the contrary, there is an integration of these two values.

Certainly, our missionary activity does not stop short at human development, but by its evangelical leaven promotes and requires it, because the human person is the image of God.

Hence we must maintain a proper balance between evangelization and humanization or human development. Avoiding the one extreme of reducing the Gospel to mere faith and worship and the salvation of the soul, and the other extreme of radical commitment to human and social problems to the extent of using violence and revolution, we must preach complete salvation - the total liberation of men and women through Jesus Christ.

Our work of promoting human development and progress should spring from a clear concept of the human person in the light of faith, from an awareness that evangelization is not foreign to efforts made to overcome all that condemns people to remain at the margins of life : famine, chronic disease, illiteracy, poverty, injustice and oppression at every level. The scope of the evangelizer is pre-eminently whatever concerns human dignity and integrity. (*cf E.N. 30.*)

9. Our service should be preferably directed towards those brothers and sisters who are in most need of development, be it material or spiritual.

Hence our missionary work of total evangelization should have as its urgent and primary objective the service of those who, in addition to being “far from Christ”, suffer from any kind of oppression and marginalization in society.

In doing this, we should not hesitate to speak out with evangelical prudence and courage when the situation demands it, having critically examined the facts and circumstances in the light of faith. We will do this by the example of our lives and by proclaiming the rights of truth and justice.

In any case we must be specifically careful to avoid ambiguities or compromises which might adulterate the purity of our message and the specific contribution of our service as religious.

In this connection there are two serious risks to avoid at all costs:

- the loss of a healthy evangelical freedom through binding ourselves to cultural or socio-political formulae that are relative, contingent and sometimes erroneous;

the confusion of roles, by not respecting the diversity of tasks and services within the Church. Our contribution must always be marked by a clear fidelity to our character and to the duties which are specifically ours as religious, with a well-defined and responsible mission among the people of God. (*cf. EN. 66 and following.*)

2. OUR ORDER IN THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

FRANCISCAN VOCATION = MISSIONARY VOCATION

10. Fundamentally, every Franciscan vocation is missionary. The Franciscan life-plan according to the Gospel implies, at its root, a natural apostolic dimension without limits, just as the Gospel of Jesus is without limits: "Go out to the whole world; proclaim the Good News to all creation." (*Mk.16:15.*)

Saint Francis understood his own vocation and that of his friars in this sense: "God has chosen and sent the friars for the benefit and salvation of the souls of all peoples in this world. They will be welcomed not only in the countries of the faithful, but those of unbelievers as well, and they will win many souls." (*Mirror of Perfection, 65; cf. 1 Celano 35; St Bonaventure, Major Life, n, 2.*)

Hence our Order is rightly "an apostolic fraternity which fulfils its role of service in the Church by preaching the Gospel to all". (*Consts. 140,4.*)

11. Among the various ways of fulfilling the apostolic charism of the Order is the one chosen by friars who, "living the Gospel life honestly, simply and joyfully" (*Consts.141, 1*), proclaim the Gospel in a particular context namely, among those who need it most because they are furthest away from Christ. (*cf. Consts. 140,3*)

This missionary task does not of itself imply either a special vocation different from that shared by all the friars, or a lifelong commitment.

Historically, in the medieval context, the apostolic mission among "the Saracens or other infidels" did have the connotation of a morally heroic act on account of the particular circumstances. Because of this, Saint Francis, who had a great respect for the personality of the friars and for the inspiration of God, sought a special certainty and guarantee.

Tasks which commit a person so deeply require - then as now - clearly supernatural motives and careful discernment on the part of the superiors of the fraternity. (*cf. 2 Celano 152; Earlier Rule 16; Approved Rule 12.*)

On the other hand missionary work does not, of its nature, presuppose a "life-long" commitment for the Franciscan, even though it can be seen as a special "charism" for some friars. In fact neither Saint Francis nor our legislation (until the latest Constitutions) raise any question about whether missionary service is temporary or not. Besides, the changed conditions in which missionary activity is exercised, now generally calling for a subsidiary role, offer us a providential opportunity to live out in practice the pilgrim character of the Franciscan vocation.

12. The specific Capuchin contribution to missionary activity is found in faithfulness, as individuals and in community, to our charism as *Friars and Minors*. This consists in incarnating the Gospel in our lives by joyfully and with simplicity revealing the Father's love for people. To be credible one must be genuine.

It is precisely because the missionary has to serve those who are furthest away from faith that his proclamation must have those particular personal qualities which ensure that the message will be more effective.

We believe that the leaven of the Franciscan missionary's presence should have these characteristics:

- a) *fraternity*: living as real brothers among ourselves and practising different styles of fraternal life with the people among whom we work;
- b) *minority*: living as true servants of all, humble, poor, respectful, peaceful, simple in life-style and in our relationships with others;
- c) *experience of the Spirit* in our own lives: showing that in all things we are truly "men of God", attentive and open to any divine inspiration, whether direct or received through life and the experience of others;
- d) *sensitivity to the problems of integral human development*, so that our missionary presence may be a real incentive towards development, justice, dialogue and solidarity;
- e) *evangelical radicalism*: making us ever more generous, ready to accept the Cross and to show a sound pioneering spirit as a courageous response to the more urgent needs of mankind and the Church.

SOME PRACTICAL GUIDELINES

13. We would like to add a few guidelines, in line with the basic traits of our Franciscan identity, concerning the method to be followed by our missionary friars in their life and activity:

- a) first and foremost, Saint Francis' golden rule: preach always the living sermon of one's own life - being meek, peaceful, fraternal, genuine Christians. (cf. *Earlier Rule*, 16; *EN*. 21, 41-42);
- b) then, bearing in mind our condition as brothers regardless of any clerical status, we should try to actualize the missionary potential which all our fellow-friars have in virtue of the Franciscan charism;
- c) in perfect harmony with our character as an "apostolic fraternity" (cf. *Consts.* 140,3), we should try to plan and to carry out missionary tasks in close fellowship with one another, as a work of the fraternity rather than of particular individuals, avoiding gestures of individualism and lack of solidarity. We should be real brothers, and united among ourselves, "so that the world may believe" (*Jn*. 17: 21-22);
- d) faithful to the demands of minority, we should aim to reach people's hearts through dialogue, respect, listening, understanding and acceptance. While we are the bearers of the Message and of certain values, we should at the same time be disposed to accept the message and values possessed by others - proclaiming the Lord while knowing how to listen humbly as He speaks through everything and through all the brothers and sisters.

On the other hand, our attitude of minority will make it easier for us to communicate and work with them, after the example of Christ who became a man among men in order to serve them and save them.

e) Imitating the pastoral method of Saint Francis, particularly with those furthest away from faith, we should know how to reduce the content of our Christian catechesis to the essential core of the Gospel - the Good News of Jesus as Saviour, and of fraternal love.

f) Notwithstanding our preference always to preach the Gospel to "the poor", we should not forget the example of Saint Francis who also proclaimed the Gospel of conversion, truth, peace and good will to the powerful and to the leaders of nations.

g) Saint Francis, by his personal example and his words, wanted to underline a characteristic element of our minority which should be seen in the life and activity of the missionary friars: a readiness to accept the cross and martyrdom. This is the way and the method of any genuinely Christian evangelization like that of Jesus (*cf. Earlier Rule*, 16; 1 *Celano* 55-57; 2 *Celano* 30, 152; *Analecta Franciscana III*, Quaracchi 1897, p.21).

FIDELITY TO MISSIONARY DUTY

14. The obligation of the Church and of every disciple of Christ to respond to the missionary call is fully binding even today.

Although the Lord has a merciful judgement in store for those who have no explicit knowledge of Him and who try to live in accordance with an upright conscience, Saint Paul feels the grave duty to evangelize the gentiles: "I should be punished if I did not preach the Gospel" (*1 Cor. 9: 16; Rom. 2:14* and following; *L.G.16.*), and the Lord's command to "proclaim the Good News to all creation" (*Mk. 16: 15*) will always be relevant.

Besides, missionary work is essential to the Church, since the very reason for her existence is to witness to the mystery of Christ, to "reveal and to communicate the love of God to all people and nations" (*A.G.10*).

On the personal level, every disciple of Jesus has a specific missionary responsibility ~ following logically from faith and from the intrinsic dynamism within religious experience itself.

Explicit faith in Christ the Lord is born only through direct proclamation to those who do not know Him: "How will they believe in him unless they have heard about him? And how can they hear of him unless they get a preacher? ..." (*Rom. 10: 14*).

A genuine experience of Christianity inevitably impels a person to communicate to others the values and riches of religion. Faith, lived out in practice, is necessarily missionary. "What we have seen and heard, we are telling you, so that you too may be in union with us, as we are in union with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (*1 Jn.1: 3*).

15. Consequently, the more each person consecrates himself to Christ and the Church, the more he feels obliged to dedicate himself to Christ's cause.

This is why religious "find in their consecrated life a privileged means of evangelization" (*E.N. 26*). "The more ardently they unite themselves to Christ through a self-surrender involving their entire lives, the more vigorous the life of the Church becomes and the more abundantly her apostolate bears fruit" (*P.C. 1*).

Our charism as Franciscans gives greater and special force to the missionary zeal conferred by the religious vocation we share. Our missionary activity is imbued with the strong example of Saint Francis, and is the fruit of an intense experience of "the Spirit of the Lord and His holy operation", and of the evangelical and apostolic essence of Franciscanism. But it is also the spontaneous and natural expression of our spirit of fraternity and minority. Since the central content of evangelization is witness to the Father's love and to the brotherhood of all people revealed by Christ (*cf EN. 26*), our identity logically leads us to missionary service, as a fraternal gesture precisely towards those who most need to experience the fact that they are sons of the Father and brothers to all.

Rightly, therefore, "our Order accepts as its own the task of evangelization ... and regards and undertakes this missionary work as one of its principal apostolic obligations" (*Consts.174, 3*). And likewise rightly, each one of us can say with the Apostle: It IS my duty to preach the Gospel" (*1 Cor. 9: 16*).

"WHEN THE FRIARS GO ABOUT IN THE WORLD"
(*Earlier Rule, 14*)

CHAPTER II° NEW CONTEXTS

SAME MISSION IN A NEW WORLD

16. Saint Francis after his "conversion" made the decision "to go out in the world."

In the same way he wished to send his friars throughout the world after the manner of the Apostles, in poverty, with full trust in God as Father, bringing peace everywhere, not just as a form of greeting, but as a living experience. (*cf. Earlier Rule, 14; Lk. 9: 10*)

The friars who go into today's world, in a more radical form, that is, outside of Christianity- "among the Saracens and other infidels" - cannot but take account of the fact that missionary activity is much changed. In the past, classic means were churches, chapels, schools, hospitals, etc. Today there are also new situations demanding new responses and new forms.

If we attempt to describe some of these situations, it is to specify what should be the response of a Friar Minor.

Such situations are found in typical fashion in the Southern Continents, but not exclusively. The suggested responses are the fruit of the experience of many friars.

If in the near future the great majority of Catholics and humanity will be living in the so-called Third World, how much this fact ought to stimulate the Friar Minor to carry the dynamic of hope to that world.

1. NEW ECCLESIAL CONTEXTS

PARTICULAR CHURCHES

17. In the diversity of situations, which vary from country to country and which cannot be reduced to a common denominator, there emerges the new dimension of *particular* or *local Churches*.

This idea has been developed theologically in many texts of the Second Vatican Council and since. While Vatican I had placed the accent on the Universal Church and on centralization, Vatican II, completing the theology of the previous Council, highlighted the doctrine of the Episcopate and of particular Churches: the dioceses, but also parishes and small communities. These do not belong to the Church; they *are* the Church of Christ. (*cf. L.G. 26.*) While each has its own partial autonomy and its particular characteristics in theology, liturgy and discipline, all of them together, in communion with the other Churches under the Bishop of Rome, form the *Katholiké*, which is not so much the result of a juridical structure but of being united in the word of God, in the one sacrifice and in charity, a union that translates itself into mutual interest and help.

A practical and juridical consequence of this is clear in the Instruction of the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (formerly known as Propaganda Fide) of 24th February, 1969. Formerly, the “jus commissionis” was in force, according to which defined territories had been entrusted to specific missionary Institutes, which had complete responsibility for them. Now, not missionary Institutes but particular Churches, dioceses, are responsible for themselves, even if they can, as is clear, take the Institutes into their service on the basis of some form of contract, envisaged in the same Instruction.

18. In this situation the missionaries are now changed from being dynamic founders of Churches into collaborators, from men of initiative and of autonomous decision-making into listeners, men of dialogue and, to a certain degree, of obedience and availability. In taking this second place, in this detachment, the Friar Minor finds himself in his own natural setting, with the opportunity to live his identity in availability and minority more authentically. He presents himself neither as a superior nor as an inferior, but as a brother. He does not impose himself but offers himself. He is no longer “sent” after a unilateral decision by the mother Church, but is rather “invited” by a particular Church that has need of his service and only for as long as he is needed.

These particular Churches must still grow and mature both as regards clergy and as a community. They have their human and fragile aspects, yet they are sources of faith and hope. The Friars Minor try to find their place in the particular Churches, thinking and speaking of them in a positive way, considering it a principal aim of their work to create possibilities for a Church that will be able to govern itself, become financially self-sufficient - even able to spread itself, since each local Church, after the model of the Universal Church, must be missionary. (cf. *A. G. 20*)

Our missionaries have understood that the purpose of their presence is to form local leaders, clergy, religious, catechists, and lay people capable of taking a part in social and political advancement. We wish to encourage them to dedicate themselves to the formation of Christian communities, to promote among them different ministries, giving them greater responsibility and so making themselves, gradually, less necessary. It is by being present in a more spiritual way that their presence ensures communion with the sister Churches and with the Universal Church under the Bishop of Rome.

With this attitude of lesser brothers, the missionaries will be there to serve the local Churches, avoiding the risk of becoming an internal pressure group or an opposition group.

CAPUCHINS IN THE THIRD WORLD

19. Our friars have made their contribution towards founding the particular Churches in the three southern continents. An interesting aspect of our presence is this: from 1922 - 1972, Capuchins in “our Missions”, for the most part foreigners, grew from 594 to 1,590 (an average annual increase of 20). From 1972 to 1977, however, foreign missionaries decreased at the rate of about 30 a year. Their place has been taken by local friars, in such a way that the total number remains practically the same. The phenomenon clearly shows that our type of presence is being transformed.

2. NEW SOCIO - ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

NEW SITUATIONS AS CHALLENGES

20. The Second Vatican Council no longer spoke of the Church and the world, as one alongside the other, but of the Church in the world and of the world. "The joys and hopes, the grief and anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the grief and anxieties of the followers of Christ." (*G.S.* 1)

In recent years the situation of the Church in not a few countries has changed. Many reports sent from our missionaries refer to the difficulties in which they find themselves with governments and the uncertainty of not knowing for how long they can remain and whether they will be expelled. It is true that apart from what happened in China not so long ago and what has happened in individual cases, up to now we have not had further expulsions. But their uncertain future alone is enough to worry them psychologically.

Certainly, the Church cannot indulge in an introversion that centres on itself. In one way or another it must commit itself to live in today's world without nostalgia for the past and without recourse to an unreal flight from the world. Every new situation presents a new challenge.

The Friar Minor accepts these new historical realities in poverty of spirit, with faith in Divine Providence and with serenity, but also with critical eyes, and he rises to the occasion with prophetic courage, if necessary, because he preserves the freedom of the children of God and is a stranger to fear. He knows it is not enough to be concerned simply with saving individuals in these situations, but rather to judge these same situations in the light of the Gospel, to push for those changes which favour the advent of God's new world and to live them personally in a creative and exemplary way.

AUTONOMOUS STATES

21. In the last decades the so-called "missionary countries", once predominantly colonies, have become autonomous states. The foreign missionary no longer enjoys the authority and privileges of the past, but here too has to take second place.

The lesser brother accepts this situation, neither stressing nor criticizing the insufficiencies of the young states (corruption, tribalism, inept administration etc.), but rejoices that these people are moving towards their own dignity and their own identity. He recognizes that de-colonization has also impelled the Church to promote the native clergy and to encourage a greater sense of responsibility among the Christian communities. He is a witness - after the struggle for political independence - of the struggle for economic independence, the drive to break the vicious circle of underdevelopment by fighting ignorance, disease and poverty.

The Friar Minor feels solidarity with the "lesser ones" and, as a tireless animator, shares in the efforts of the people and of governments, be it by encouragement or by putting his hand to the common effort. He does this because he knows that a person's effort to be free from misery and to ensure a life worthy of men and women as children of God "is not extraneous evangelization". (*E. N. 30*)

SYSTEMS OF NATIONAL SECURITY

22. In not a few countries of Latin America and of the Far East there is a preponderance of systems known as "national security" regimes. According to this ideology, the basic rights of the individual are completely subordinated to the needs of the nation, or rather of a privileged group, in collaboration with international capitalism. Such States do not wish to share riches with the poor in any way. They apply in time of peace the strategy of war-time to "maintain order", so that, in practice, any attempt to rise against injustices is suppressed. Often the dominant class claims to be Christian and controls religion in order to impede any inflow of "dangerous ideas". Such

governments are a scandal to the Christian name. Many Bishops and many Episcopal Conferences have condemned these regimes characterized by collective injustice and institutionalized violence.

The Friar Minor, in such a situation, preaches the entire Gospel, which has much to do with human dignity and justice. He cannot avoid risks. Mission has always been a risk. It belongs primarily to the local hierarchy and to the people, not to foreign missionaries, to make public protest in such cases. But if the foreign missionaries believe that they ought to speak, such a decision should always be taken as a fraternity.

There is a Franciscan way of being present in socio-political struggles, made up of intransigence and fraternity, of confrontation and a spirit of peace. And all have need of this witness. The friars in such situations must be sure to have objective information. They should be understanding of those who in desperation have recourse to violence, not always motivated by hate, but often by a love of justice. However, they, as Franciscans, choose another method, that of being one with Christ in the "kenosis" of non-violence and of trust in the power of the non-violent. Without equivocation, let them take an active part in peace movements and in organizations against the injustices of dictatorships, be they left or right- wing.

Our reservations regarding countries with 'national security' regimes do not mean to ignore the contribution these make towards economic development.

INTERNATIONAL CAPITALISM

23. The same attitude is valid for the system of international capitalism, which with the advantage of free trade, solicits unlimited competition and the insatiable desire for profit. Often it does not respect fundamental human rights, such as the right of people to receive from their work that which is necessary for their livelihood, to which the right to private property and free trade ought to be subordinated. (*cf. Populorum Progressio* 22) Often it destroys even the balance of natural ecology and exploits the economy of poor countries, thereby condemning them to becoming ever more so.

The Capuchin missionary tries to make the poor more self-aware and to prepare them to defend their rights. Also, through frank discussion, the friars of the Third and of the First Worlds will seek to influence the decisions of governments and of multinational companies.

These brief indications show us that the theology of redemption becomes, in many actual situations, a theology of liberation which has had a strong impact on the socio-economic and political realities.

We must have these human and Christian perspectives of liberation clearly in view when faced with any kind of discrimination, for example, when "apartheid" is in effect, when minority groups face various kinds of oppression, when anti-conversion laws are the law of the land, and so forth.

MARXIST REGIMES

24. The political upheavals of recent times have also placed the Church in confrontation with Marxist regimes. More than half of Asia and a great part of Africa and Europe, for example, have Marxist governments. Marxism has imposed itself almost always as a reaction to harsh feudal conditions, colonialist or capitalist, and as a liberation movement. However, we have yet to see verified anywhere the perfect revolution. New injustices have replaced the old and the people are victims of a new oppression and of inhuman restriction of freedom.

The Friar Minor knows that Marxism, in as much as it is scientific materialism, denies God and seeks to destroy the Church, religion and the sense of the mystery of the human person. But he also believes with great confidence that this ideology cannot prevail. We already have the evidence of

history that the Church can survive by becoming more evangelical and by ridding itself of so much traditional conditioning. The Franciscan position in the face of Marxism is therefore:

- a) to re-awaken faith in the power of the Gospel and in the grace of the risen Christ;
- b) to remain with the people, to share with them the harsh conditions of life and to make sure that they do not lose their filial trust in the Father;
- c) to recognise common initiatives and to work for the good of the people in all that is not against the Gospel, in the struggle against underdevelopment so that all may have living conditions worthy of a human being;
- d) not to go against Marxism as any kind of representative of other systems, e.g., of Capitalism, but to go among the Communists and dialogue with them, just as Saint Francis, despite the adverse systems of his time, went to the Sultan, spoke with him, man to man, and then sent his friars "among" the Saracens, not against them;
- e) to believe firmly in the fundamental goodness of people and to hope that even Communists can gradually learn from history, that is from their mistakes, and thus to develop a more adequate interpretation of humanity and the world.

3. NEW CONTEXT OF A PLURALISTIC SOCIETY

a) New Cultural Contexts

THE PROBLEM OF CULTURES

25. While western technology is becoming universal, the cultures of different peoples are in a period of rebirth after centuries of European dominance. It is true that the problem of cultures has taken second place to the problem of revolution and of liberation from poverty. However, the first remains of greatest importance because man, beyond economic progress, aspires to have a cultural environment which he finds himself "at home".

It is one of the sacrifices of the missionary to renounce, to a certain extent, his own culture and customs, and to immerse himself as far as is possible in the language and culture of the people. He will appreciate their cultural values and sing the Canticle of Creatures on seeing the love, the sense of community, the dignity and the joy of the people: because it is all created by Him and through Him! With this theological interpretation the Gospel will more easily be "incarnated" within cultures and be made to take on local forms. (cf. *EN. 63*)

b) New Religious Context

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

26. We claim for the Church the right to religious liberty and the possibility to preach the Gospel in the whole world, and for each Christian the right to practice his or her own faith without discrimination. (cf. *EN. 39*) The other aspect of the same religious liberty and of conscience, affirmed by the Conciliar document "Dignitatis humanae", is that each person has the right to follow his or her own conscience. Christianity is not imposed, but offered to a free person.

Young Churches too need to grow and mature in evangelical freedom and, as a consequence, come to a generous tolerance of legitimate pluriformity.

NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS

27. The subject of non-Christian religions has become one of primary importance. During the period of European predominance, Christianity was almost automatically regarded as the one religion worthy of the name. Today, religions have reached greater self-awareness and we must review many of our past claims. The more we deepen our knowledge of these religions by means of real contact and dialogue, the more we appreciate and admire them, even though they may contain sinful and erroneous aspects.

While fully recognising the one Saviour Jesus Christ and the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation, many theologians of today accept that other religions also can be ways of salvation and that Christ is already at work among them through His Spirit. The mercy of God in fact is without limit and makes no discrimination between the elect and the non-elect, "but anybody of any nationality who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to Him." (*Acts 10: 35*)

The Friar Minor rejoices in this evaluation of the religious world. He praises the Lord for the wonders He accomplishes among all his peoples. He will seek dialogue and common prayer in order to give and receive the gifts of the experience of God. Mutual visits, especially on the occasion of religious feasts, will be a sign of a growing universal brotherhood. Also, such contacts will open the way towards shared undertakings among all people of good will for greater justice and peace in the world.

DIALOGUE AND MISSION

28. And so dialogue and mission are two stages in the journey towards God. They are no longer alternatives. Missionary activity cannot be exercised without dialogue. Dialogue as such has its own worth: two people of different faiths meet together, open up to each other, appreciate each other, admire each other, enrich each other. It is left to the Spirit of the One God to determine whether such meetings will result in the desire and possibility, not only of sharing one's experience of God, but also of changing one's faith.

ECUMENISM

29. If there should be new relationships with non-Christians, how much more ought we to move towards a new fellowship with non-Catholic Christians.

Ecumenism, entering strongly into the Church's consciousness with Pope John XXIII and the Council, has provided the impetus to overcome the scandal that divided Churches have exported to peoples in need of the Gospel.

Capuchins should be protagonists of the ecumenical Church! All common initiatives at local level, on social, political and religious matters are to be encouraged, without denying loyalty to one's own belief. May Saint Francis, much appreciated by non-Catholic Christians, give us his language and evangelical heart!

SECULARIZATION

30. One particular current no continent can escape is secularization. Many Christians, and even many adherents of non-Christian religions, “emigrate” from their own systems and from their own religious structures. They do not become purely and simply a-religious, but they do abandon many concepts, ties and myths. They go their own way, becoming “religious nomads”.

Secularization is of itself a positive process that can give to the cultural and scientific world legitimate autonomy (cf. *G.S.* 59), while not denying faith in God, the Creator and ultimate mystery of man.

The Friar Minor, with great attention to the sensibilities of modern people, will ask himself:

- a) what myths, bound up with past world views, and what time-bound forms, can be dropped without betraying the content of the faith?
- b) what is the permanent core of the gospel message that we can proclaim in modern language?
- c) how can we free people from a magic mentality, from superstition, from a false seeking after “graces and miracles”?
- d) instead, how can we promote human values - objectivity, honesty, courage, joy, love, fidelity - and unveil, in all the realities of the so-called “profane” world, the transcendental dimension? (cf. *EN.* 70)
- e) how can we transpose biblical experience into today’s terms, convinced that Christian life finds its place in history and not beyond it? How can we experience the closeness of God in the midst of political and social struggle and not in an imaginary flight from them?
- f) how can we, finally, walk alongside the “religious nomads” in order to interpret their existence and proclaim the word of salvation in their lives?
- g) is this not also a Franciscan way of “going into the world” of today?

SECULARISM

31. A more radical phenomenon is secularism, which denies the very existence of God with an atheism that is either pragmatic or systematic and militant. The new facts of present salvation history are these: there are in Christian countries, individuals and whole groups of people who are non-practising or who do not believe at all. (cf. *EN.* 55-56) Faced with these, the Church must “constantly seek the proper means and language for presenting or re-presenting to them God’s revelation and faith in Jesus Christ.” (*EN.* 56) Therefore there are today in all countries of the Six Continents “missionary situations” which constitute a tremendous challenge for believers.

The Friar Minor is not intimidated by this situation. Not theoretically, but through his presence and witness, he seeks to live among these brothers and sisters who are truly “far away”, to eliminate many prejudices, to encourage a certain longing for the transcendent. In this connection, special acknowledgement is due to those friars who, for example, look after the working world of those who apply themselves to systematic house-to-house visitation in large cities. But all the friars, through their preaching and work with groups, can help Christians to realise that they are not such only for their own benefit but also for the good of others; by their lives they are to give credible witness to the secularized and indifferent masses.

“THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH WILL GUIDE YOU”
(Jn.16: 15)

CHAPTER III° GUIDING PRINCIPLES

PRACTICAL GUIDELINES

32. What we have said so far needs to be effectively applied in the renewal of our attitudes and missionary work. A new theology of mission, new principles of missionary propaganda and new situations in the world and in the Church call for a new way of expressing our missionary action and cooperation, different from the old.

In this third section, some practical guidelines are given which will help us to respond better to the demands made today by the missionary dimension of our life.

The "Spirit of Truth" will guide each of us in this renewal, and will help us to make these suggestions become part of the varied social and religious situations in which we are called to live.

POINT OF DEPARTURE

33. We see this Plenary Council of the Order as a starting-point for an updated arrangement of our missionary work. We therefore wish to invite all our confreres to reflect carefully on the conclusions that have emerged from this privileged meeting of the Order.

Let this document be the object of profound study by all, especially by the missionaries, in such a way that they are in fact helped to reconsider their life and activity.

1. REASSESSMENT OF OUR APOSTOLIC SERVICES

34. One primary practical consequence will be the duty to reassess at every level our pastoral vision and our service to the Church and the world of today. This reassessment is demanded in view of the special character of our missionary vocation.

a) In its proposals and decisions, the entire Order should show that it has understood the true value and dimension of the missionary ideal. The Order should feel that in each of its members it is witnessing to and preaching the Good News. Making its specific contribution to the development of the local Church by carefully propagating its spiritual heritage and its charism of minority, the Order will feel itself to be universal and Catholic.

b) The Provinces, in their turn, should honestly rethink their apostolic commitments in the light of the missionary situation today. Missionary work should be close to the heart of the Province, wherever and however it is exercised.

c) The decline of our missionary personnel obliges us, perhaps providentially, to reassess our missionary presence and commitments. Let the missionary friar devote himself to his specific work,

leaving other offices and duties to lay people, to the Christian community, and to the various co-workers.

2. PROGRAMME OF MISSIONARY AWARENESS AND FORMATION

MISSIONARY AWARENESS

35. If the Order is to fulfil adequately and ever more effectively this important apostolic duty, we need to plan an ongoing programme to improve missionary awareness and formation among all the friars.

The life, activity and prayer of the Provinces should be imbued with the missionary ideal. A Province without the missionary spirit is bound to stagnate and eventually disappear.

This missionary spirit should be seen most clearly in the fact that the Province considers missionary activity as one of its principal apostolic duties.

The idea of “our missions” and “our territories” is finished. It is therefore important that all should try to assimilate and deepen their grasp of the new dimension in missionary activity: namely, that it is a service of a particular church in a spirit of fellowship.

By means of an adequate analysis of the missionary dimension in present-day ecclesiology, all should be brought to see that missionary activity today is psychologically more complex than in the past.

The new situations regarding personnel and the apostolate compel us to realise that qualification and training are basic requirements for any missionary service. Rather than count how many missionaries a Province has, we should consider who they are and what preparation they have received.

For the work of fostering missionary awareness to be effective, the Provinces should exchange qualified personnel who have experience in this field. Through this kind of exchange of values and services on an inter-ecclesial and fraternal basis, the missionary spirit of the Order will be more easily renewed.

FORMATION

36. To safeguard this missionary dimension it is absolutely indispensable that the Order as a whole, and each Province in particular, should promote proper formation and re-training on missionary questions. This should be available to all the friars, not only to those actually engaged in this important aspect of our apostolic vocation.

For this purpose:

- a) the Provinces should provide a deeper theology and spirituality of the missionary dimension of our Franciscan charism, so as to bring about real renewal of the apostolate;
- b) formation personnel should be conscious of the apostolic value of our identity as religious. In forming our young candidates, let them strive to bring out the doctrinal and practical consequences of missionary problems, and their repercussions on our Franciscan life. Above all, as the Church intends, they should stress the missionary dimension in the teaching of theology (*cf. A. G. 39*);

c) courses of study and in-service training should be available to all, covering missionary theology, catechetics and evangelization, and including documented information about the Order's missionary commitments;

d) in the light of the Church's evangelizing mission and the efforts made by our missionary friars, the aim should be to provide the brothers with appropriate information to make them aware of international problems, and sensitive to the socio-economic, political, cultural, and in general, human independence of the various peoples;

e) the friars should be properly informed about the documents of the Holy See, the Order and the Episcopal Conferences dealing with missionary topics, and they should carefully study and reflect on them.

37. The formation of our missionary friars requires altogether special care. First of all, brothers destined for missionary activity should have adequate specific preparation regarding the religious, anthropological, cultural, socio-economic, political and historical aspects of the people among whom they will work.

This preparation can take various forms: for example:

a) specialized studies before leaving for the mission, living together with qualified priests and religious of the place for a period of time, academic studies (preferably done in the place of work), a serious orientation programme conducted by the missionaries themselves or in collaboration with other missionary institutes and with the local church, etc. In any case, the new missionaries should not be involved in direct apostolate before acquiring adequate preparation in the field, in the place where they will work;

b) secondly, the Provinces should be particularly careful to provide for the on-going formation of missionaries already involved in the apostolate. Since missionaries are called not only to be pastors but to form others as well, this ongoing formation should take account of the various aspects of their personality: human, religious, intellectual, professional, and so forth;

c) there are many opportunities for this kind of "ongoing Formation", such as days of spiritual renewal, of living together and study, organised from time to time;

d) specialised courses on particular themes conducted on the spot;

e) attending selected courses during holidays on theological matters, on Franciscan spirituality, on pastoral or other topics useful for the missionary's personal formation, or directly related to his missionary work;

f) the so-called "sabbatical year" after a period of missionary activity - a prolonged and systematic programme of in-service training and spiritual renewal.

3. SOME FUNDAMENTAL CHOICES

38. The new perspectives in missionary service compel us to plan our apostolic life and activity in conformity with certain fundamental choices. We wish to emphasise only three of them which are of particular importance: Franciscan authenticity, implantation of the Order and pastoral choices.

FRANCISCAN AUTHENTICITY

The genuineness and fruitfulness of our missionary work will depend fundamentally upon evangelical fidelity to our Franciscan vocation.

Above all, our missionaries should aim to be seen as true men of faith and prayer. If, through perseverance and constant prayer, their life remains rooted in an uninterrupted communion with God, that in itself will be a living proclamation of the Gospel, revealing the Holy Spirit, the principal agent and goal of evangelization. (*cf. A.G. 25; EN. 41,75; Consts. 33*)

This will make it easier to reveal to all a true image of men of poverty, minority and genuine fraternity. The community dimension, typical of our profession as “brothers”, must be lived by our missionaries with profound dedication, in spite of the material difficulties inherent in our duties and places of work. The value of fraternal life and the possibility of living it effectively must always be safeguarded.

IMPLANTATION OF THE ORDER

39. The new dimension of particular churches and the statistics regarding missionary personnel (decline of foreign missionaries and the increase of local vocations) compel us to pay particular attention to indigenous vocations.

Let information centres be set up to spread Franciscan life and spirituality, so that the work of preaching the Gospel and building up the local Church may be achieved more effectively.

All the friars should be concerned for the work of implanting the Order; formation of candidates should be entrusted to those best qualified, and Superiors should not hesitate to withdraw them, for this purpose, from other apostolates of direct evangelization.

In keeping with our spirit of availability and pluriformity, large structures should not be created for the purpose of establishing the Order; but, attentive to the style of life in the various nations and particular churches, we must set up our centres of Franciscan life. Where possible and appropriate, different provinces and regions should unite in doing this as an example of cooperation. Thus this new Capuchin experience will witness to the unity of the whole Order, rather than to the exclusiveness of historical and geographical divisions.

The Order should have a specific programme, apostolic and spiritual, whereby it establishes itself in the nerve-centres of the countries where the Church and Order are younger.

PASTORAL CHOICES

40. Without claiming to give an exhaustive list of today's more important options (and leaving aside pluriformity in contexts and situations) we would like, however, to emphasise some of them.

a) Sacred Scripture: Saint Francis has left us a wonderful example of zeal for the Word of God. Sacred Scripture has an altogether special role in our missionary activity, and it ought to be the “magna charta” and foundation of our evangelization. Therefore, in our missionary activity, let us give first place to propagating the Scriptures, translating them where necessary, and teaching the people to read and live them, in ecumenical collaboration. (*cf. Dei Verbum 22*).

b) Evangelization and Sacramentalization: We should always seek to effect a correct balance between evangelization and sacramentalization. The sacraments must always be seen as the completion of a careful and arduous process of evangelization. Moreover, evangelization should not end with the reception of the sacraments, but continue to give life to the sacraments already received, by means of constant catechesis. (*cf. EN.47*)

c) Popular piety: While realising the need to stress the essential values of the faith, we should also recognise the value of popular piety (*cf. EN. 48*). This popular piety, when purified of unhealthy and mistaken elements, can be a way to the experience of God. Let us not forget that Saint Francis

celebrated Christmas with a group of simple folk, and promoted the medieval devotion to the Passion of Christ. We should leave the people free to express themselves spontaneously, taking care however that these manifestations of popular piety nourish faith, hope and charity.

d) Service of the poor: Let us choose to live for the poor and with the poor. Our first concern should be to do everything to free them from their poverty through genuine human development. On the other hand, we have much to learn from these people. Those friars are worthy of praise who choose to live closer to the poor and to share with them the daily hardships of their poverty. Thus we shall keep alive the healthy tension between structure and the demands of poverty – a tension present throughout our history.

e) Basic Christian communities: This experience was recommended to the whole Church in the 1974 Synod of Bishops. There are many varieties of such movements, arising from the initiative of committed laity, and their aim is to form authentic Christians who will live the Word of God with a deep sense of community, and will seek to change the world from within its structures. As lesser brothers, close to the people and sensitive to expressions of spontaneous faith and biblical spirituality, we will back up such groups with the animating spirit of Saint Francis.

f) The Secular Franciscan Fraternity: Let us not forget that the Secular Franciscan Fraternity has been recognised by the Church “as a leaven of evangelical perfection”. (*Const. 151, 1*) We should esteem and value the spiritual gifts of so many brothers and sisters who share our spirit and service. In this way we will bring to maturity a community of faith and love, gifted with particular effectiveness in the preaching of the Gospel, such as Saint Francis desired and people of our time expect.

4. POSSIBILITIES FOR CO-OPERATION

41. As a result of the new concept and plan for evangelization, our attitude to co-operation also calls for renewal. Co-operation among Provinces in a given region, and among the local Churches in the various forms of missionary activity and service, should be sought and encouraged by every means. In the spirit of our Constitutions, we would recommend a fraternal sharing even of personnel, so that those areas of our missionary activity which are in greatest need may be effectively helped. We also encourage a fraternal and generous cooperation, in ways that are most appropriate, with all the Franciscan families, both of men and women.

We should also remember that the particular church cannot be said to be fully established without a variety of spiritual dimensions and experiences - a variety that is contributed by the different religious institutes. Therefore it is desirable that in a particular missionary context there should be this variety of presence. This implies reducing the monopoly of presence enjoyed by one institute; such a monopoly sometimes hinders the growth of diversity of expression in the particular church.

We wish to underline the need for lay people to be involved in our work of evangelization at every level: those from abroad who are spiritually and technically trained and accepted for a particular task; and local people, who are formed and prepared for the service of their particular church.

It is not enough that our missionaries work hard and at great cost *for* others, but they must work *with* others. Therefore, let them neither do nor plan anything without reference to the local church or do anything that is outside the interests of that church.

Genuine missionary activity and cooperation are not a one-way process. The young churches also have a message to give to the old churches and to our Provinces, enriching them with their religious, cultural, social and political values. The principal agent of this “reverse mission” is the

missionary himself. He will find his periodical visits to the Province fitting occasions for performing this excellent duty of inter-ecclesial cooperation.

5. CHANNELS OF ANIMATION

42. The Mission Secretariats should primarily be centres of missionary and inter-ecclesial animation.

The friars who are put in charge of these secretariats should be well trained and mission-minded, dedicating themselves to study, documentation, research and inspiration.

This animation should take place both within the Order itself and in the particular churches where we are: parishes, groups, mass media and in other civil and religious organisations.

Our work of animation should be integrated into the local church. It should be entrusted, as far as possible, not to an individual but to a team or to a fraternity, which will be ready to perform this service.

In planning missionary propaganda, let us avoid all forms of it which do not command respect. We should avoid creating a missionary awareness containing elements which are not at all suitable or helpful for the growth of a people and of the particular church. Exhibitions, days of missionary promotion, publications, etc., should emphasise the positive message of the local values of the people among whom the missionaries live and work.

Besides its normal duties, our General Secretariat for the Missions should also be a centre for research, inspiration and documentation at the service of the General Superiors and of the whole Order, to further our missionary presence in the world and to develop a more profound and authentic missionary awareness among ourselves.

Financial help which we are able to send to the “missions” should be properly balanced in the light of the various needs and distributed with the consent of the Superiors.

6. ECONOMIC PROBLEMS

43. It is generally agreed that finances are not one of our urgent and disturbing problems. On the contrary, in certain places and circumstances, abundance of means has proved harmful: houses not in tune with the environment in which they are built, disproportionate and useless projects which had to be eventually closed down, excessive means of communication, technical aids certainly not in keeping with the circumstances, a lifestyle too much at variance with that of the people among whom we are called upon to live, etc.

Our missionaries should place themselves on an equal footing with other missionaries in the local church with regard to administration, having the same helps, subsidies, contracts and temporary commitments.

Administration and planning of initiatives should be done in common, and should not be reserved only to the Superior, much less to the individual religious. Our vow of poverty and our profession of minority have an altogether special value for each one of us; hence private means and all kinds of expenses and projects, individually planned and financed, are forbidden to us.

Those “missions” are praiseworthy where each year or several times a year, the missionaries meet together to take common decisions regarding the expenditure for the apostolate, for buildings, for means of communication and everyday needs, etc.

The missionary should not be anxious to build huge projects, but rather those that are modest and self-sufficient, in such a way that, even when he leaves, they can continue functioning without great difficulty and without further financial help.

On the other hand, from the viewpoint of authentic development, the missionary should not ignore the real possibilities he has of arousing the desire of the people for community development which might possibly be supported by big organisations or international co-operation.

7. JURIDICAL ADJUSTMENTS

44. The reflections contained in the preceding pages bring us to certain juridical conclusions which cannot be ignored, because they embody in practical form everything that has been said in nn. 32-43 of this document.

Here then are some conclusions, which the Plenary Council of the Order presents to the General Definitory or General Chapter, according to the respective competence of each, for the specific restructuring of our missionary presence and activity.

MISSION AND PROVINCE

45. Our present missions should be changed into vice-provinces, if necessary by merging them with neighbouring vice-provinces and missions, when this is possible in the opinion of the General Definitory, keeping in mind nn. 98, 3 and 99, 1 of our Constitutions.

If there is only one mission dependent on one Province in a single region, the transition to a vice-province or province can be very easy, since the constituent elements are the same.

But it must be pointed out that in fact, the mentality and psychology of the missionaries need to be change. A new entity actually comes into being, which must look, with greater clarity, for its own identity as a local church, in all its dimensions, including that of implanting the Order. All foreign missionaries would have to be enrolled in the new juridical entity, as real members of it. However, they will always retain the freedom to return to the province of their origin if they wish to do so in the future.

As far as the relationship between vice-provinces and provinces is concerned, this is already foreseen in the Constitutions, since in this case the new vice-province always depends on the province.

If two or more provinces have missions in the same region, a single vice-province or province should be formed there. If a vice-province is formed, it will depend upon the Minister General.

In this case, since more than one Province is involved, the group of foreign missionaries, as well as the indigenous friars, should be represented on the vice-provincial council. In this way, the necessary coordination and contact with the individual provinces will be ensured. Here some kind of regional form of government could be tried. The relationship with the provinces should be determined by contract.

If more than one province works in the same mission, a single province or a vice-province dependent on the Minister General should be established, as in the previous case.

The vice-provincial council should be composed of as many councillors as there are missionary groups.

In this case also, all the members would belong to the new vice-province, with freedom to return to the province of origin when they so desire.

As in the previous case, there should be a contract to regulate the relationship between the vice-province and the provinces in question, with regard to personnel, finances and other matters.

CUSTODIES

46. The Plenary Council of the Order proposes that those missions which cannot be erected into vice-provinces or provinces should be called custodies. However, this terminology cannot be used before the General Chapter pronounces upon its merits.

Their juridical status will be that of the present missions according to the Constitutions.

DELEGATIONS

47. Delegations which exist in regions where there are already provinces or vice-provinces (Custodies) should be integrated into these jurisdictions.

However, delegations which are in regions where no other structure of the Order exists shall be called custodies.

The Custos shall have those faculties granted to him by the General or the Provincial as the case may be. The General Superiors are urged not to permit this kind of presence in the future when there is no assurance of true fraternal life, and when there are no prospects for growth in apostolic life and activity, or for establishment of the Order.

48. Moreover, in several regions there are *groups of friars* which, while not being delegations in the proper sense, do, in fact, live outside their own province and within the territory of other provinces or vice-provinces, without depending upon the Superiors of these latter. Their distance from their own Superiors and confreres and their non-dependence on the Superiors of the region deprives these brothers of many benefits of fraternal life. It seems appropriate that these situations should also be considered by the General Superiors, and a solution found.

PRIORITIES AND MISSIONARY COMMITMENTS

49. After a critical examination of the real situations, priority should be given to existing missionary commitments. However, this should not be done in such a way as to hinder the possibility of taking up new commitments in other places, especially for the sake of "implanting" the Order.

CONCLUSION

50. At the conclusion of this work we offer our gratitude and prayer to Christ Jesus, Eternal Priest and Missionary of the Father.

It may be that all we have said in this message does not correspond to the reality we live each day. But it does provide us with a vision to keep in mind, a path to tread, and a goal to reach.

We also intend it as an examination of conscience about the work we have achieved, and an act of humility concerning our limitations.

At the same time, it should be seen as an act of confidence in our capacity for renewal and, in accord with the “signs of the times”, as a sign of our readiness to dedicate ourselves totally to the service of Christ and the brethren, of peoples and of the churches in need.

We entrust these projects to the Blessed Virgin Mary, who has given to us the “Son of Man”, and with Him a new hope, of which we are the bearers and evangelizers to the whole human race.

APPENDIX

SOME SPECIAL QUESTIONS

MISSIONARY STATISTICS

Taking into account the new portrayal of the missionary, as presented in the document of this Plenary Council of the Order, it is impossible to have correct statistics of the missionaries.

TERMINOLOGY

With regard to the terminology hitherto in use, one is free to choose that which is more suited to each country. However, the terms which remain in the Constitutions will have to be understood according to the new context so often explained in this document.

CATHOLIC MISSION

In postal addresses, we should use terms most appropriate for the purpose, taking account of local sensibilities.

NOMENCLATURE OF THE MISSIONS

If missions are changed into vice-provinces, they should take the name of the place where they are. Where the transition is expected (from mission to vice-province), or in places where it is not possible, the existing name should be kept without modification.

VICARIATES, APOSTOLIC PREFECTURES, PRELACIES

In keeping with the reflections made at Mattli concerning our missionary service in the Church, and in conformity with present-day ecclesiology and the practice already followed in other similar situations, the Plenary Council of the Order desires that the General Definitory petition the Holy See to erect into dioceses the vicariates, apostolic prefectures and prelacies still entrusted to the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin in Latin America, taking into account the circumstances of each case.

This request should be made in such a way that it shows our readiness to pass from the role of directors to that of collaborators. It should stress our intention to foster a plurality of presence and the primary responsibility to develop a native clergy.

REPORTS OF SUPERIORS

The Plenary Council recommends that the General Definitory study ways of making the reports, which the mission superiors are bound to make periodically, less frequent and less detailed.

SERAPHIC MASS ASSOCIATION

Above all, a theological and pastoral revision of the Seraphic Mass Association is recommended, with the aim of making the Association more acceptable and credible to Christians of today.

OBEDIENCES

If a mission is changed into a vice-province, the obediences to and from it will be issued by the Minister Provincial or the Minister General, according as the vice-province depends on one or the other, following the norms of the Constitutions n. 79,4.

IV° COUNCIL OF THE ORDER FORMATION GUIDELINES Rome, 1981

LETTER OF PRESENTATION

Dear Brothers,

The Plenary Councils of the Order held at Quito, Taizé and Mattli summarised the fruits of their work in their respective Documents, which put forward guidelines for a number of important aspects of our life. Their impact has been, and continues to be, considerable. The General Definitory now assumes the responsibility of publishing the Document of the Fourth Plenary Council of the Order, held at our International College in Rome from 2nd-31st March, 1981, and fervently hopes that it will meet with the same welcome and determination on the part of the friars to observe it in practice.

While they were in no way obliged to do so, it is a fact that all the plenary Councils so far have drawn up their reflections in the form of a document destined for publication, to serve as a tool for the adequate updating and renewal of our way of life. A future PCO might well choose not to adopt this method, giving the General Definitory, for example, only the bare bones of its reflections and practical guidelines, without formulating them in a Document destined for the whole Order.

It seemed necessary to make these points clear, so as to prevent misunderstandings. The fact remains that, as a consultative body at the service of the General Definitory (cf. Consts. 110, 6), the Plenary Council has proved its worth. This is clear from the inherent value of the documents drafted in the course of its four meetings.

We must also point out that the last two meetings of the PCO, in Mattli and Rome, are special in that their respective subjects for discussion were decided by a General Chapter (Analecta OFM Cap. 92 [1976] pp. 181-182). This fact constitutes an added reason for the General Definitory to publish this document on formation and to ask all the friars, in particular the Conferences of Major Superiors and formation personnel, to put it into practice. The Definitory have also decided to have the document translated into the principal modern languages, as well as Latin. The Italian text remains the official one.

The General Definitory believes that this document faithfully reflects the spirit and norms of the Constitutions. Of course, it is not complete. It says nothing, for example, about the priestly or professional training of the friars, deliberately limiting itself to initial and on-going formation for our Capuchin Franciscan life. But even within that restricted field, there are considerable gaps. Obedience, for instance, was not explicitly treated. Finally, the Plenary Council did not aim to say everything even about the subjects it did deal with.

The PCO realised, then, that many questions still remain open, and has asked that a solution be found as soon as possible, at least to the more urgent ones.

Among the more urgent questions are:

- the Secretariats (at Order, Conference, national or provincial level);
- regional formation centres, with particular attention to the training of formation personnel, the lack of which is keenly felt everywhere;
- means of formation: the various publications dealing with initial and on-going formation, etc., and first of all, the publication of a handbook or manual of Capuchin Franciscan spirituality.

The General Definitory therefore asks the Conferences and the Provinces to be actively concerned for these bodies (the secretariats and formation centres), so as to make them really effective. They should also consult among themselves about sharing experiences and the means of formation.

The publication of this document is therefore an opportunity to draw the attention of all the friars to a crucial question which the Church is facing today: what is the place and role of the religious charism in the Church, particularly in its pastoral and apostolic activity – an activity the Church performs through all its members and institutions to reveal salvation to people in Jesus Christ. We are not alone in rediscovering the evangelizing force that belongs to our charism. All religious institutes are engaged in a similar search, and as communications between religious institutes are intensified it becomes obvious that there exists in the Church a “religious charism” which, through the great diversity of its expressions, is fundamentally the same. We must be mindful of this search now taking place throughout the Church, and contribute our own modest share.

Thus, to speak of the “Franciscan charism” does not express our vocation in its entirety. Proof of this is the fact that we share it with the “Secular” Franciscan Order. What we are asked is to be more and more specific about our religious, Franciscan and Capuchin charism. It is in this way that we will make an effective contribution to the search that is under way in the Universal Church and in the great Franciscan family.

The publication of the document on formation is not, then, a point of arrival, not the end of the line. Rather, it marks a new point of departure towards the implementation, in formation, of the fundamental dimensions of our religious, Franciscan and Capuchin life. So, let us go forward with generosity and courage.

Br. Paschal Rywalski, O.F.M. Cap. Minister General
Br. Charles Sérignat, O.F.M. Cap. Secretary, PCO IV
Rome, 13th April 1981

FORMATION FOR OUR WAY OF LIFE

1. Formation in and for our way of life is understood as the realistic fostering of the growth of individual friars and fraternities so that the way we live in today's world may conform more and more to the example of the Holy Gospel.

The basic model for this formation is given us by Jesus the Master, who invites his disciples to stay with him and continue his mission (cf. *Mk. 3: 14ff*). Saint Francis lived it in his own time; it was studied with fresh insights in the history of the Order and in the Capuchin reform, and is now proposed to us.

Formation involves every dimension of the intellect, will and action. Growth and maturity in these spheres comes about through experience, especially that of faith and prayer, instruction and work.

Although there are stages of formation to be traversed, it is a single process of growth, assimilation and integration of values and experiences; it is likewise an on-going conversion, so that, enlivened by the Spirit, we may conform to the image of the Son of God.

AIM OF THESE GUIDELINES

2. The present guidelines, the result of co-operation by all the friars, are intended to be an informed response to the expectations of the Order in the area of formation.

It has not been our intention to deal exhaustively with all the topics. We have merely tried to propose concrete guidelines concerning the directions formation in the Order should take.

The results of the Plenary Council are not presented systematically, but in a way corresponding to the manner in which it actually worked. We hope that this kind of presentation will better communicate something of the stimulus and encouragement that emerged during our meeting, serving as a basis and point of reference for regional formation programmes.

CHAPTER I° SITUATION AND NEEDS

1. NEW FORMATION CONTEXTS

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

3. Formation is a process which develops in a specific historical and cultural context. Valid formation programmes cannot be prepared without reference to the world in which the forming community and the person being formed live.

In the course of the Plenary Council there was a lengthy, fruitful exchange of views on the state of formation in the Order, and efforts were made to place each topic in proper context. The themes emerging in the present document are intended to be a response to today's challenges. However, the complexity of the data, the diversity of contexts and the different standards by which these can be read and interpreted have made us forego any attempt at a complete examination of present-day reality.

Yet we wish to emphasise the importance of the analysis that follows, even though it is a partial one, in the hope that the friars will be encouraged to take to heart the problem of formation as the core of the Order's spiritual renewal .

FORMING MEN FOR THE EVANGELICAL LIFE

4. "Saint Francis understood, by divine inspiration, that he was sent to convert people to a new life. He therefore called into being a new way of Gospel living. He remained in the world but not of it, and wanted his fraternity to live and work among people, so that the joyful news of gospel conversion would be proclaimed by word and deed" (*Const. 85*).

Consequently, the aim of formation will be to form men capable of living the gospel life in our world.

THE CHURCH

5. Christ sent the Church into the world, just as he himself had been sent into the world by the Father (cf. *Jn. 17*). The Second Vatican Council reflected at length on this "mission". Numerous documents mirror these reflections, especially *Gaudium et Spes*. For a more detailed exposé of the situation in the Church and the Order, we refer back to those documents as well as the documents of the Order, particularly those of Quito and Mattli .

All we wish to do here is emphasise some aspects of formation which seem to us to be particularly important.

THE HUMAN PERSON

6. Today the human person is threatened from every side. There is danger that man will become depersonalised and lose himself in the crowd or that, faced with this, he will yield to

despairing isolation. The ideologies (Marxism, liberalism, capitalism, totalitarianism, national security) assail human freedom by proposing and working to reduce mankind to a unity that serves their own world view.

The Church, particularly in recent years, is inviting Christians everywhere and by every means to promote the dignity of and respect for the person, and commits itself to offer its own contribution for peace and justice in the world.

For us as Capuchin Franciscans, these efforts towards peace and liberty take actual shape when we affirm the primacy of brotherhood, which leads us to acknowledge every person as a brother and serve him as such, sometimes renouncing our own rights, in conformity with our vocation, which is one of penance, minority and peace.

It is in this context that “minors” must be formed. In simplicity and the joy of living, in mutual service and loving obedience, in penance and conversion by means of chaste and generous love, we must form builders of a human society capable of being free and possessed of a critical sense in the face of dominant ideologies.

THE PERSON IN RELATIONSHIP

7. We are witnessing a truly prodigious growth of communications and news media. It is easy to understand the negative side of this growth: superficiality, psychological conditioning, the danger of cultural levelling, etc., but we also perceive how it opens up the possibility of greater knowledge among people, increased opportunity and ability to meet one other, and a greater impulse towards universal brotherhood.

We are witnessing the search for new models of living together, both in families and in nations: a new balance is being sought between the Universal Church and the local church, between the Order and its Provinces. Greater critical awareness is developing in relation to the various grouping systems, though this sometimes leads to a resentful desire for personal self-fulfilment and a loss of social identity.

Saint Francis' evangelical radicalism offers a model of commitment generating and strengthening freedom and a critical sense. His ideal of ongoing conversion is a clear expression of the critical force of the Gospel, and the person-community relationship provides the proper balance between the person and the group to which he belongs.

All these are stimuli for the formation of the Franciscan today.

SECULARISATION

8. Today many people no longer consider the world as a stepping-stone to heaven: it has value in itself. Hence, secularisation frequently becomes secularism, the desire to build a world closed in on itself, with no outlet to transcendence, one in which God, when he is even tolerated, is considered a private matter. Faced with this situation, which moreover takes on different characteristics according to the different cultural areas, the Church has become aware that salvation is achieved within the reality of everyday life, and has been able to purify its faith and hope by acquiring a truer sense of the transcendence of God and the Christian life. Hence, she seeks to put into practice a new form of presence and activity in the world, faithful to the Gospel command to become a “leaven”.

Here too we find a challenge to our formation projects. Not for nothing does the expression “leaven” or “ferment” recur frequently in the Constitutions when they speak of our presence in

the world , since we are called to be the builders of love, justice, peace and evangelical joy . It is precisely the aim of formation to produce these builders, humble and persevering.

THE ORDER

9. The Order, now spread all over the world, has made its own the value of pluriformity. It is faced with a situation of cultural and geographical change and enrichment, with all the problems these bring.

Long-established Provinces see the numbers of their friars diminish, particularly the number of their candidates. On the other hand, young Provinces, in regions where the implantation of the Order is recent, are growing rapidly. The Order's composition is such as to show a clear need for new and diversified styles of life and formation, capable of responding to the cultural and social needs of the different regions. The presence of the Order in every continent enhances the special urgency of greater identification with the world of the poor and the oppressed, and gives rise to a new awareness of what it means to be "lesser brothers" .

DIVERSITY

10. The principle of pluriformity in the new Constitutions and the changes it has brought mean that we are faced today with models of life and formation differing considerably among themselves . It is difficult to classify these; we are reluctant to reduce a living, changing reality to a mere outline.

As regards formation, in some Provinces there is a great problem as to the type of fraternity in which the formation of candidates should take place, the way they are to share in the actual life lived in a particular Province, and the role of the formation houses for an effective renewal of the Order.

11. In spite all the differences there is profound agreement on many points. The present document is proof of this. It is the unity that comes from sharing the essential inspirational motives of our way of life. One of the most genuine expressions of this unity is the common search for a response to the call to live a life in accordance with the Gospel through a re-reading of our Capuchin Franciscan sources.

12. The present analysis of the new contexts of formation is proposed to every Province or area. Precisely in order to promote a way of life faithful to the original Capuchin Franciscan values and inspiration , the Provinces or regions have need of a formation plan (a "ratio formationis") which takes into account the historical, social, cultural, religious and ecclesial situation of the person in formation. Only in this way will these plans effectively provide genuine formation in the Order, according to places and times.

2. PRIMACY OF THE LIFE OF GOSPEL BROTHERHOOD

LIVING THE GOSPEL IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF SAINT FRANCIS

13. In the new situations just described, there is more incentive for us to live the Gospel in imitation of Saint Francis and the first friars of the Order . Constantly returning to our origins,

which the Church today is inviting us to do, is one of the characteristics of Franciscan history and in particular Capuchin history . We shall never manage to overcome the gulf separating our life from that of Francis - a difference due partly to our own weakness and partly to the exceptional holiness of our Seraphic Father .

... IN BROTHERHOOD...

14. Our Order is an order of brothers. The Gospel form of life it proposes to us is that of brotherhood . Saint Francis applied this term first of all to the Order as a whole: he would say: "I want this Order to be called the Order of lesser brothers" . Hence, the term expresses the real character of the Order, of the province and the local community.

... ACKNOWLEDGING OURSELVES TO BE SONS OF THE SAME FATHER ...

15. "Let us welcome one another as brothers," first of all because we all recognise ourselves as sons of the same Father in Jesus Christ, and then because we wish to advance together in communion with him, through daily submissiveness to the Holy Spirit . Hence, at the heart of our brotherhood we find common prayer and continual contemplation of Christ, particularly in the mysteries of his Incarnation and Passion , that is to say that "spirit of prayer and devotion" which turns our whole life and activity into an expression of filial love .

... LOVING ONE ANOTHER

16. Being brothers means loving one another. This love makes some very specific demands, such as:

- creating in the fraternities a family-like, simple and joyful atmosphere in which each brother can freely grow ;
- developing mutual trust, understanding and esteem for one another ;
- manifesting our needs to each other with simplicity ;
- willingly placing our talents at the service of the fraternity ;
- practising loving obedience and fraternal correction in a continuous striving for conversion ;
- supporting one another in times of difficulty or discouragement .

It can never be stressed enough how much is contributed to the evangelical and Franciscan appearance of our fraternities by those friars who devote themselves to household duties and apply themselves to maintaining an atmosphere of recollection, simplicity and joy .

It is precisely by means of these attitudes and activities that fraternity in minority is built up day by day. This becomes the crucible in which our Gospel life is forged.

UNITED WITH THE ENTIRE FRANCISCAN FAMILY

17. y fostering both the spirit of prayer and reciprocal relationships, the fraternity, far from closing in upon itself, opens us to welcome others, particularly members of the Franciscan family . Especially encouraging and enriching for both sides are the frequent and familiar contacts with the brothers and sisters of the Secular Franciscan Order; and this is so precisely because they live with us our own charism of brotherhood and minority, but in its secular

dimension . Hence it is good for the fraternities both at the provincial and local level to organise shared activities with the lay Franciscans: prayer meetings, retreats, conventions, apostolic activities . . . In this way we will be able concretely to develop the vital interchange between our two fraternities.

BROTHERHOOD AS WITNESS ..

18. The pre-eminence of fraternal life must also be underscored in the field of the apostolate. Our Constitutions clearly state that “the first apostolate of the friar minor is to live the gospel life in this world honestly, simply and joyfully” and that we accept “any work of ministry or apostolic activity as long as it is in keeping with our form of life.”

Before all else, therefore, we must bear witness to a brotherly life, lived with the people and for the people, with the poor and for the poor.

...AT TIMES WEAKENED BY INDIVIDUALISM...

19. This witness is weakened when friars individually devote themselves so much to activities, whether ministerial or otherwise, that they no longer find time to pray with their brothers, perceive their needs, share in the life of the fraternity or take part in household chores. The Plenary Councils of Quito and Taizé have already drawn attention to these aberrations

20. The pre-eminence of fraternal life in the field of the apostolate is even further weakened in some provinces and regions because of the life-style that has developed there. This way of life is organised around the needs of the ministry more than around its witness of fraternal life. One is then faced with a community of priests who draw inspiration from Franciscan spirituality, rather than with a fraternity of lesser brothers endeavouring to live the Gospel .

It is clear that we must see in this situation one of the causes of the constant decrease in brothers' vocations. What is left to attract them when they see that our life is structured almost exclusively as a community of priests?

THE ORDER MUST PRESERVE ITS CHARACTER AS A BROTHERHOOD IN MINORITY

21. These observations are obviously in no way intended to condemn the priestly ministry, but they do show that in many places we exercise such ministry without sufficient discernment, so that we run the risk of propelling the Order towards increasing clericalization. We seem to have fallen into the “trap” of our own generosity, which has constrained us to respond to the urgent needs of the dioceses, without taking sufficient account of the specific character of our own calling as lesser brothers . If we wish to preserve for the Order its specific character, it is absolutely necessary that we have a substantial presence of brothers. As we strive to renew our life of brotherhood let us recognise that this is one problem we face.

CONCLUSIONS FOR FORMATION

22. In order to preserve and strengthen the primacy of the life of gospel brotherhood, we suggest the following:

- in the vocations apostolate the accent should be on brotherly life as a characteristic of our form of life and not only on any particular activity, even priestly activity;

- at every stage of formation emphasis should be placed on the essential aspects of fraternal life among us (community prayer, contemplation, service) and also on our particular way of embodying the Gospel in the world through brotherhood lived in minority among the poor;
- there must be a clear distinction between formation for our way of life and formation for the priesthood or a profession. Formation for our life must take absolute priority, especially in the first years of initial formation ;
- since we are an Order of brothers and "by reason of one and the same vocation, all the friars are equal" , formation for our life must be the same for all. It is also desirable that, following on this point the style of the Rule, the Testament and the Constitutions, we all form the habit of calling ourselves "Brothers" without distinction ;
- yet again because Saint Francis wanted us to be an Order of brothers, offices in the service of the brotherhood - on Order-wide, Provincial or local fraternity level - must be available to all the friars ;
- everyone must be offered the opportunity for cultural, human and spiritual development according to each person's capacity and in conformity with our Franciscan vocation ;
- we should also strive to find new forms for our traditional services in the Church and in the world: preaching the Word of God, acts of mercy, formation of the faithful in contemplative prayer, etc.

3. INCULTURATION

CONTEXT

23. In recent years several documents the Church and the Order have drawn attention to the principle of pluriformity. These documents are still valid and require careful reflection and appropriate application on our part.

Yet there exists a problem connected with pluriformity which should be given serious consideration today, since it constitutes one of the most urgent priorities both for the implantation of the Order and for formation. That problem is inculturation. Only by tackling this problem with true wisdom can we hope for the unique evangelical and Franciscan spirit to be embodied in the life of individuals just as it is in that of the various cultures. The diversity of expressions will then be able to radiate everywhere a genuine brotherhood of love - the brotherhood so ardently desired by Saint Francis .

24. In many parts of the world the gospel message comes face to face with ancient and highly developed cultures. In such areas it has not been able to exert great impact. At the same time it may also find an aggressive nationalism, which rejects it as the bearer of unwanted attitudes, values and life-styles of a foreign culture. And everywhere in the world it is faced with changing cultural patterns.

Among the newly independent nations a new awareness of their own cultural identity and the desire to grow in the forms and values of their own culture is evinced.

A new consciousness of the legitimacy and need of inculturation has been evident in the Church, particularly during and after the Second Vatican Council.

The local churches in many regions are still far from being truly inculturated in their own surroundings. Due to many historical factors, an atmosphere of fear and resistance coupled with a minority complex prevails among them. Consequently, the process of inculturation often encounters psychological and sociological obstacles, which originate within the churches themselves.

CULTURE

25. The word "culture" does not always mean the same thing. When we speak of inculturation, we use the word basically in a sociological sense to refer to a network of attitudes, values, institutions, artistic creations, language, human and social relationships, etc. This is the result of a people's collective memory of history and heritage that modify and are modified by their ideals, needs and expectations, as these emerge in the process of realising their own destiny.

FAITH AND CULTURE

26. The Gospel is linked to no particular culture and is capable of penetrating any culture, while being subservient to none and losing none of its uniqueness as salvation message . The same must be said of the essential Franciscan values, since they are fundamentally nothing other than gospel values .

Inculturation is not merely a question of transplanting the Gospel and the Order into another cultural area or of adapting it to another culture or to changing cultural forms. It is much more than that. Inculturation is the attempt to bring Christ to birth anew in a given culture. It seeks to transform it by the power of the Risen Christ's Spirit, which is the beginning of a new creation. It is the profound insertion of the faith and the Order into the socio-cultural realities of today. Considered in terms of the local Church, inculturation is the integration of the lived experience of a particular church into the culture of a particular people. As far as the Order is concerned, it implies the integration of the lived experience of the Franciscan charism into the culture of the people among whom the friars live and work .

UNIVERSAL REALITY

27. Inculturation, however, should not be understood merely as the process by which the "young" churches and the newly independent nations seek to realise and live their own identity. It is a process that involves all countries and all churches, since culture is not merely static but a living and dynamic reality, subject to change and growth.

Economic and social realities exert a great influence upon the culture of a society. Faith must enter into the values, norms and perspectives of economic and social projects, juxtaposing them in critical confrontation with the Gospel and thereby purifying them. This requirement applies to every type of inculturation.

The supreme motive and model of inculturation is the incarnation of the Word. This unique act of integration of the universal with the particular must be seen as the foundation of all inculturation.

Inculturation fully corresponds to the spirit and intentions of Saint Francis who lived in intimate communion with the paschal mystery of Christ, united with all creation . He wanted his brethren to observe the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ wherever they were but

always in accordance with the circumstances of time and place . Thus, Capuchin Franciscan identity can and must be lived in its entirety in all cultures.

MUTUAL ENRICHMENT

28. Inculturation leads to mutual enrichment. Just as the Church and the Order can be enriching factors for cultures, so the latter can be enriching for the Church and the Order. Some cultures have values and life-styles which are particularly congenial to the Capuchin Franciscan charism .

Inculturation involves not only accepting the values, norms, lifestyles, etc. of a given culture, but also the critical re-evaluation of these on the basis of the Gospel once the faith and the Order are a part of the culture.

Inculturation demands that, while being rooted firmly in one's own culture, there is openness to the riches and values of other cultures. In this way there will be a continuous dialogue between them, rendering them fertile and causing them to grow in a continuous creative process.

SUB-CULTURES

29. This fact must also be taken into account: that every culture is an aggregate of sub-cultures that exist side by side even in the same area. Intellectuals, students, workers, youth, the middle class, the poor, all have their own sub-cultures, with specific characteristics, sensibilities and tensions. Consequently, knowledge of a culture must above all be acquired through lived contact with it, its modes of being, values, etc. The gospel message and Franciscan values will truly be capable of reaching the various groups ("subcultures") only if they can really confront the challenges the latter present and respond to their needs .

INCULTURATION AND FORMATION

In trying to live the Capuchin Franciscan charism account must be taken of the social, economic and ethical situation of the people among, whom we live and work. Inculturation demands solidarity, especially with the poor and with ordinary people.

Inculturation starts with the people. It cannot be dictated from above; it must grow organically from below. Formation must therefore encourage initiative and creative freedom. Only in an atmosphere of freedom and trust, supported by faith, can inculturation succeed.

Where there is still fear and resistance in the face of inculturation care must be given to making the people and the local Church aware, through gradual introduction to it. In this area we must be capable of acting with discernment and wisdom, but at the same time we must, like Saint Francis, exercise a prophetic role at the service of an authentic renewal of the Spirit .

30. The primary agent of inculturation is the living community of the local church. Therefore, those who are in the stage of initial formation, as well as those in on-going formation, must identify themselves with the traditions, spirituality, liturgy etc., of the local church. They must have a profound knowledge of the values of their culture and also be imbued with the experience of God and prayer possessed by their "wise men", an experience that constitutes the true soul of a culture.

During the period of formation, the friars should not be taken out of their cultural environment. From the very beginning they should try to gain a deep acquaintance with the attitudes, values, norms, life-styles, ways of thinking and acting, language, symbols, art, literature, etc., of their own culture, and this, above all, through genuine experience and living contact with the people. They must be trained to discern the values of their own culture in the light of the Gospel .

As far as possible, formation personnel should come from and be formed in their own cultural environment. Yet, even when this is not the case, they should be possessed of genuine Christian love for the people and their culture and feel themselves in solidarity with it.

The formation programme of the friars should also include a coherent inculturation programme both for those under initial formation and those in on-going formation.

Continental, regional and inter-provincial Franciscan centres can serve the cause of inculturation by helping to analyse and make specific one's own cultural identity in terms of ethnic, religious, social and economic circumstances.

On the general level, the Order can play an important role in promotion and co-ordination of an intercultural dialogue so that the variety of cultural expressions converges toward the unity and universal brotherhood of the entire Order. The unity aimed at must be one of faith, of mutual service and sharing, unity of real brotherhood in the spirit of the Gospel as it was lived by Saint Francis .

4. GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF ACTION

Starting with the priority of the need for inculturation, some general criteria and guidelines for our formation can be established.

PRINCIPLE OF THE PRIORITY OF GOSPEL LIFE

31. The principle of the priority of our gospel brotherhood means making radical choices according to the Gospel lived by Saint Francis, in its various dimensions of prayer, poverty, minority and option for peace. Based on this principle, decisions will be made in such a way as to promote above all our common fraternal life .

PRINCIPLE OF INCULTURATION

32. The principle of inculturation demands that our life be deeply integrated into the socio-economic reality of the various regions. This inculturation concerns the different cultures with their characteristics, their values and expectations, as well as the rapid changes that occur therein. Diverse situations require pluriformity in our life, in the sense that it is lived in ways corresponding to places and times .

PRINCIPLE OF PARTICIPATION

33. The principle of participation means that formation is a growing and maturing process if the individual friar and communities overcome the tendency to create their own closed world, and participate in the experience of others. Nobody can mature by himself; everyone needs

other people. In an age that places so much importance on self-fulfilment and at the same time seeks new ways of living together, this openness to others and this capacity to participate is a source of spiritual and cultural enrichment, as well as serving to overcome the conflict one sometimes finds between “person” and “institution.” In line with this principle of participation, an open fraternity should be favoured, especially open to the Franciscan Order in all its parts. This openness will incite us to deepen the Franciscan values we share, and improve our practice of them .

PRINCIPLE OF INTEGRATION

34. On the principle of integration, formation should help the individual and the fraternity to assimilate values and experiences. Some values cannot be easily integrated, such as those of prayer and community, intellectual formation and activity, self-fulfilment and community, intellectual formation and lived experience, etc. Only by forging a living synthesis of values and experiences in the different phases of life can a person achieve interior unity and avoid assuming attitudes out of frustration. Even renunciations, chosen freely because of the Gospel or imposed by life, should become part of this vital synthesis .

PRINCIPLE OF CONVERSION

35. The principle of conversion enables us to make a continual review of our forms of life in the light of the Gospel. As various changes take place and new values emerge, only a critical awareness such as this can make choices in conformity with one’s own vocation .

CHAPTER II° SOME SPECIFIC ELEMENTS

SOME CHARACTERISTIC ELEMENTS OF OUR VOCATION AND FORMATION

36. The Second Vatican Council sees the renewal of the religious life as composed of a two-fold element: return to the primitive spirit of the founders and a sensible adaptation to the particular circumstances of place and time .

For this reason it seems appropriate to point out some of the paths, traced by history and open to the future, along which to carry forward the work of renewal and formation in our Fraternity :

PRAYER

a) In accordance with the example of Saint Francis and the teaching of the Rule, it is necessary before all else to understand that every activity of ours ought to serve “the spirit of holy prayer and devotion” , with the consequent commitment to regain the contemplative dimension that has characterised the Capuchin reform and has been the source of its apostolic and social action .

PENANCE AND POVERTY

b) In line with the fundamental choice made by Saint Francis, and guided by the law of love for Christ , we wish to pattern our lives on him in personal self-discipline, and with him choose to be close to our most poverty-stricken and outcast brethren . Hence the urgency to return to a consistent evangelical poverty, and the invitation to all the friars to search together for new ways of expressing it with greater credibility for the people of today .

MINORITY

c) In face of the pride and ambition that disturbs human coexistence, we wish to be lesser brothers and take the lowest place in society, remaining, like Francis, always faithful and obedient to the Church .

GOSPEL WITNESS AMONG THE PEOPLE

d) As an expression of love for the Father and our brothers, let us reaffirm our commitment to evangelize the poor by being effectively present in their midst, giving witness by the way we live, by preaching to the people, by missionary activity and practical service to those in greatest need .

In this perspective we now underline here some aspects arising out of brotherhood, which have a bearing on formation.

1. A PRAYING BROTHERHOOD

THE TAIZÉ DOCUMENT

37. Since the Plenary Council of Taizé, encouraging progress in deepening our life of prayer has been made in the Order and in the fraternities, even if some difficulties still remain, due to excessive emphasis on efficiency in work and to the flight from brotherhood on the part of individual friars. The establishment of contemplation fraternities has met with many obstacles.

We maintain that the Order has in the Taizé Document a valuable aid for the spirit and life of prayer. For this reason only a few indications concerning formation in the spirit and life of prayer are given here, so that prayer can have the primacy it should rightly have according to the words and example of Saint Francis and to Capuchin tradition.

As a practical principle in formation to a life of prayer, it will often be necessary to reflect upon what is stated in the Taizé Document: "The spirit of prayer that is truly a living one cannot help but inspire and vivify the actual life of the friars, and therefore it necessarily renews the wholesome traditional forms and creates suitable new ones."

AIDS TO GROWTH IN PRAYER.

38. Prayer is a gift of God which, however, must be developed by searching, study and faithfulness.

The following guidelines may prove useful in the process learning to pray more and more:

- profound participation in the liturgy of the Church according to the course of the liturgical year makes us live the great mysteries of redemption ;
- a progressive introduction to and practice of biblical prayer, especially the Psalms, imbues us with a great sense of God and salvation history ;
- an introduction to the great experiences of God among various peoples and to the new and traditional forms of prayer can enrich our way of praying. Prayers which are highly valued in the various cultures merit special attention;
- shared prayer with our brothers and the people makes us aware of their anxieties and joys in the presence of God;
- regularity of prayer helps growth in the spirit of prayer itself, which needs continuity and fidelity if it is to develop .

ANIMATORS OF PRAYER

39. There are various requirements of a general order for promoting the growth of fraternities and individuals in prayer.

The fraternity itself can play its part as a formative community in prayer if all the friars contribute by participating in prayer, by appropriate preparation for community functions, by creating a favourable climate for prayer. Traditional forms, e.g., night vigils, can then take on new meaning. In this context the problem of the time schedule must also be resolved, both as regards set times and more prolonged, special periods of prayer .

Qualified local formation personnel with experience of prayer are needed to instil spirit and life and promote creativity so that ritualism can be avoided.

FORMATION IN FRANCISCAN PRAYER

40. Formation should aid Franciscan prayer in such a way that prayer becomes more and more the expression of our whole way of being, our values, our essential individual and community existence, and the demands of our times .

Inner or mental prayer, personal and of an affective character, has always held first place in our traditional prayer, it has been the true centre of fraternal and apostolic life (*Taizé 20*). It appears vitally important to renew this type of prayer, teach it to our friars and make it the core of our apostolate. This is particularly true in that today there exists a widespread desire for this kind of contemplative prayer, especially among the young .

The characteristics of Franciscan prayer as being biblical, emotional, contemplative and penitential indicate the directions in which formation should proceed: formation in listening to the word of God ; formation of the heart ; development of the capacity for awe before God's great works in the whole of creation and redemption ; interest in the mysteries of Christ's death and resurrection ; formation to discover God's presence and His will ; formation to acquire a universal spirit that prays and lives as it shares in the joys and sorrows of its brothers .

This kind of formation will aid in finding the right solution of the prayer-activity dilemma and will contribute to ensuring that the spirit of prayer and devotion pervades the entire life of the friars.

TEACHING PRAYER THROUGH CONCRETE PROGRAMMES

A true and proper step-by-step teaching method in the spirit and life of prayer must respect differences in the cultural areas. The Conferences, in cooperation with the regional Franciscan centres, should prepare a suitable programme.

2. PENITENTIAL FRATERNITY

REALITY AND IMPORTANCE OF PENANCE IN THE ORDER

41. Many traditional forms of penance have lost meaning and are no longer practised. On the other hand, the concrete suggestions of the Constitutions concerning penance have not in practice had the desired effect. Yet the need to find new and adequate forms of penance seems to be strongly felt. In particular, the meaning of penance is nowadays emerging more and more clearly in the fraternities, understood not just in a negative fashion as renunciation but especially as conversion .

INTERIORIZING PENANCE

The meaning of the Gospel challenge to "be converted and believe in the Gospel!" is perceived in a more forceful and profound way. The call to penance and faith is a call to break with the

world (Exodus, conversion) and a new orientation towards Christ and the Gospel, through which radically new relationships with God, men and the world are established. For us this means spiritual renewal (change of mentality) so as to build a fraternity according to the Gospel. Hence, penance is a means towards the evangelical growth of brotherhood, which is the essential goal of our formation .

It should then not be forgotten that in the new ecclesial situation, penance is seen not only as an ascetic value but above all as a means to improve the practice of charity. What is taken from the “table of the Lord” should be given to the poor in a spirit of brotherhood .

PENANCE, INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR

Penance as Exodus and conversion essentially concerns one’s interior attitude but should also find expression in exterior life, in the manner denoted by the term “austerity” – which is certainly a characteristic of our identity . Penance or exterior austerity, permeated with gentle, sensitive charity, will be joyous: the saints were always austere with themselves but full of goodness and kindness with their brothers .

In actual practice, a detached attitude must find expression in daily choices and actions by individuals and the community alike. It is these which create, by the grace of God, the “new man” and the “new world” .

SPECIFIC FORMS OF PENANCE

42. Among the specific forms that can aid us in making the transition to this new life, we can mention:

- the renunciation of self in order to be converted to the life of the fraternity through the practice of charitable obedience;
- accepting the promptings to conversion that come to us from the Church, especially in the special seasons of renewal;
- accepting the specific forms suggested by the Constitutions, in particular, fraternal correction and fasting;
- joyful acceptance of the difficulties and persecutions that might come our way because of our consecration to God, our preaching of the Gospel, our efforts to accomplish justice and peace, etc.
- accepting all the consequences of our vows, especially that of obedience, even when they are painful and difficult;
- accepting life’s difficulties, in work, sickness, poor food, bad climate, etc.
- sharing the lives of the poor and meeting the “lepers” of today, that is to say, the outcasts and the disinherited;
- seeking new external forms suitable to local circumstances which at the same time signify a witness and a break with the world.

ANIMATORS OF PENANCE

In order to encourage the fraternity's growth in the evangelical life there is need for men who can inspire renewal. Foremost among these are the forming fraternity itself, the local Superior and the Minister Provincial, the formation personnel, among whom we find especially the one responsible for spiritual direction, who, by adapting his ministry to the needs of the individual, helps each friar to grow.

PENITENTIAL ITINERARIES

As a way of putting this into practice, we recommend a penitential itinerary: that is, the fraternity could propose for itself a path of more intense penance- conversion, based on the Word of God and the Franciscan experience, with a deeper penetration of Sacred Scripture, special occasions, objectives to be attained, etc.

DETAILED PROGRAMMES SHOULD BE PREPARED BY EXPERTS AT THE PROVINCIAL LEVEL.

Still, among all the itineraries, preference should certainly be given to those provided by the liturgical life of the Church and in particular, Lent, which is the penitential journey par excellence, leading to the "new life" of faith in the Risen Christ.

3. FRATERNITY IN POVERTY AND MINORITY

SITUATION IN THE WORLD AND THE ORDER

43. In today's world we find on one hand an opulent consumer mentality and on the other, poverty, injustice and hunger which cry out for a witness of evangelical poverty.

The Church desires to appear in the eyes of the world as the "Church of the Poor" at the service of mankind, especially the outcast.

Among the Order's positive aspects there are many expressions of poverty in loving kindness and the responsible use of money on the part of many friars. Nevertheless it must be remarked that poverty does not entail the renunciation of material possessions alone but the renunciation of power as well. At times, too, we work for the poor but do not live as and with the poor.

POVERTY AS AN IMITATION OF CHRIST "THE SERVANT"

44. Poverty, understood as loving solidarity with others, is the foundation of what makes us Franciscans. This implies the contemplation of the poor and crucified Christ, the practice of self-denial and our presence among the lowly.

Poverty goes beyond availability in love; it consists in shaping one's life according to Christ, Who came to serve.

This calls for a whole life-style, a simple way of life (in dress, food, housing), and the giving up of any form whatever of social, political or ecclesiastical power.

POVERTY AS OPENNESS TO THE PEOPLE

In order to put all this into practice, the friars should be formed to live and work among the people and for the people, preferring and fostering those forms of the apostolate - both within and outside the fraternity - best suited to our minority and poverty.

While being men of peace, we should be formed in and seek to form people's consciences to the significance of the quest for social justice. Let us also participate in the work of social and political reform, but always in the Spirit of the Gospel and in accordance with our Constitutions, especially by turning away from any form of violence whatever.

Let our houses be open to a type of hospitality which also encourages sharing in our life of prayer, while preserving their atmosphere of silence and a definite area of privacy.

MINORITY AS INSECURITY

Material insecurity is also a sign of the reality of poverty and minority. Even the insecurity involved in undertaking new, prophetic initiatives (studied and undertaken, certainly, in the sight of God) is a part of our life, inspired by Saint Francis, which as minors we accept at the risk of failure.

FORMATION IN POVERTY AND MINORITY

45. During initial formation it can be useful for the young friar to have real contact with the poor and needy in order to learn in a more concrete way how to be poor and live a life of poverty. This is in the spirit of Saint Francis, who placed himself at the service of lepers.

At any rate, for such an experience to be truly effective and fruitful, it should be "guided".

It is very important that all friars should be trained to have a practical sense of responsibility in the use of money and other material things in accordance with the precise criterion of "the minimum necessary, not the maximum permitted".

To this end, all the friars should avoid expenses not permitted to the poor.

There should also be very strict standards for the use of the mass media for reasons of the apostolate or brotherhood, any other purpose being excluded. This will also safeguard recollection and purity of heart.

Within the fraternity, formation for poverty and minority includes formation for generous, voluntary service especially in household tasks, mentioned by our Constitutions as being part of the loving obedience we owe to one another.

4. FRATERNITY IN THE MIDST OF THE PEOPLE IN THE MIDST OF THE PEOPLE

A ROAD TO BE TRAVELLED

46. Closeness to the people characterizes our Order. The process of renewal has made us more aware of our identity and tradition in this area also, and increased our desire to regain it. This has brought about a rediscovery of the riches contained in the traditional forms of our presence among the people; missions for the people, ministry for confession ... and the quest

for new meaningful forms of being part of the people: the world of workers, the disinherited, small fraternities ... a process in which we find both light and shadow. Surely there still remains much to be done in this area.

A LIFE-STYLE THAT IS "OF THE PEOPLE"

47. The economy of the Incarnation and the historical example of Jesus will always be the archetype of the Franciscan option in relationships with people. It is as Christ's follower that Francis could incarnate, as no one else has done, the life, deeds and language of the people of his time, so that he has passed into history as the "universal brother".

The primacy of fraternal life leads us to live as brothers with the people and work among them for the Kingdom of God.

By its very nature Franciscan fraternity is open and predisposed to sharing. By taking our place among people, not so much as individuals but rather as a fraternity, we should live in their midst moved only by true love and sincere conversion. In this way our presence will not be alienating, and will remain discerning in the face of social, political and economic conditioning. Living as we do among the people we should place at their service not only our material goods but also our talents – not just those of individuals, but also those which are part of our identity as Capuchin Franciscan fraternity.

FORMATION

48. The process of insertion among the people should always respect legitimate pluriformity of choice, both at the provincial and fraternity and personal level. Small fraternities are one of the means that can be used, as long as the guidelines given at Quito are observed, which the Provinces will continue to encourage.

Initial formation should help the candidate to begin the process of incarnation among people, taking as a point of departure our Capuchin Franciscan identity. For this to happen, it is important that as far as possible the candidate should not be removed from the people among whom he was born. This dimension should also be kept in mind in relation to ministerial or professional formation, with for this reason paying less attention to the friars' solid Franciscan, theological and professional formation.

The need for a process of incarnation also holds true for on-going formation. Here too, experience of living among the people is useful in providing a real possibility of conversion and renewal of one's life and vocation. Also, it reveals the need for sound and continued preparation, to serve the people better in building the Kingdom of God.

WITNESS AND SERVICE

A NEW SITUATION

49. Our Franciscan vocation makes an ample wealth of forms of life and activity available to us. Historically, apostolic and ministerial work have been pre-eminent, and this has given rise to an abundance of thought and writing in this area. We refer back to this literature. The

rediscovery of other forms of life and work has provoked a series of problems to which satisfactory answers have yet to be found - for example, as to how it is possible to reconcile apparently contradictory aspects of life, such as manual labour and the work of the ministry, activity and prayer, personal charism and fraternal life. The present considerations are intended to be of assistance in finding answers to these questions.

While the word "work" is understood to mean any honest activity of the friars, and even though all that is said here may also be applied to ministerial work, our reflections have centred particularly on the subject which today more and more demands an answer - that is, the new situation in the Order in the face of new forms of presence and work.

CHOICE OF LIFE AND ACTIVITY

50. The "religious" character of work (the "grace" of working) needs to be underscored. The friars' activities - apostolic, charitable, intellectual and manual - should be seen as a "locus theologicus" of encounter with God. Christ, who did the work of the Father both at Nazareth and as a preacher and worker of miracles as well as in his Sermon on the Mount, is transmitted to us in the form of life we inherit from Francis. This indefatigable preacher of the Gospel and man of prayer, or, rather, a living prayer, worked with his hands and wanted all his friars to do the same. He was always at the service of the Church, together with his friars. And yet he remained firmly in opposition to any suggestion of a life and activity that entailed giving up the form of life revealed to him by the Lord. The principal service of the Friars Minor is to live the Gospel life in this world - honestly, simply, and joyfully. But it is also an evangelical and Franciscan value to develop our talents in order to share in the creative work of the Father, in the Redemption of the Son and in the sanctifying mission of the Spirit. Consequently, initial formation should propose a concrete process of apprenticeship which will effectively lead to joy in living one's proper vocation in a personal and community balance between fraternal life, prayer and work, between study and manual work, between apostolic life and intellectual preparation.

This balance must begin with the person himself, and one should seek to develop in appropriate ways the personal gifts of each brother, in accordance with our own Capuchin Franciscan identity.

WORK AND FORMATION

51. Candidates should have a genuine experience of work, particularly understood in the sense of service, firstly, within the fraternity and then in being available to others. Formation in work effectively aids in maturing a person in the true dimension of brotherhood, intensifying solidarity, vivifying communion and sharing in and contributing notably to heightening the credibility of our way of life.

People must be taught not to confuse work with activism and not to quench the spirit of prayer and devotion, which all things should serve. Franciscan life involves real work, whether physical or spiritual, not merely for ascetical reasons but because of the natural law of work: "Whoever does not want to work is not to eat".

It is right to present study and meditation to the young as being necessary and authentic work, since our formation, while emphasising the primacy of the lived life, should give the friar a specific and qualified preparation through specialised studies as well, in order better to

serve the Church, the people and the fraternities themselves. This aspect is most important and should not be neglected in on-going formation.

The way of overcoming the present difficulties and dichotomies can be found by putting into practice everything our legislation tells us regarding the discernment of the work of the whole community and of each friar, namely; the local chapter, truly lived; the provincial chapters, particularly the “spiritual” ones; reflection on this problem at the level of the Conferences of Superiors. These are the places where the newness of our Order, with its wealth of life-forms and modes of presence and activity in the world, can really become a fact.

5. AFFECTIVE MATURITY

IMPORTANCE OF EMOTIONAL (AFFECTIVE) AND SEXUAL MATURITY

52. Affectivity, meaning the capacity to experience feelings, to establish interpersonal relationships and to love, contributes particularly to the integration of a person's various dimensions (social and working relationships, sexual role) and is basic to one's healthy development. In a mature person, the value of sexuality is accepted and integrated. For one who has opted for a consecrated evangelical life, maturity means coherence, creativity and constructivity for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

Concretely, affective and sexual formation travels the gradual road of conversion from self-centred and possessive (infantile) love to an altruistic and self-sacrificing love capable of giving itself to others. It is clear then that affective maturation accompanies a person for the whole of his human and Christian life, like an on-going conversion.

MOTIVATIONS

A life consecrated to God in chastity is a charism not everyone can understand. It is a choice made for the Kingdom of God and is a value in that perspective alone. The new family of those who have given up their own in order to follow Christ with an undivided heart and to serve one another as brothers and friends is a prophetic sign that the Kingdom of Heaven is already in our midst, as well as being a testimony of faith in the life to come.

THE AFFECTIVITY OF SAINT FRANCIS

53. One of Saint Francis' characteristics is the richness of his feelings and emotions and his ability to express them. Francis, in love not only with God, like every other saint, but with all mankind and all creatures, is the brother and friend of everyone and everything. With a more than maternal heart he puts himself “at the feet” of each and all, subject to every human creature for love of God. With extreme courtesy and nobility, sensitive to all that is good and beautiful he wished his friars to be joyful heralds of penance and conversion, in peace and universal brotherhood of cosmic dimensions.

THE TASK OF FORMATION

54. In order to help the friars attain the affective maturity indispensable for the personal integration of values, for life in fraternity and for fulfilling our service in the world and the Church, formation must provide effective aids in this area, likewise taking advantage of the contribution of the human sciences.

In initial formation, affective formation is as important as intellectual formation. The formation person must be conscious that his knowledge of the problems relating to affective formation, his way of interpreting them, dealing with them and helping to resolve them, depends in great part on the psychological, moral and religious lives of the persons entrusted to him. He will therefore be very tactful when dealing with problems of emotional development.

Friars in the on-going formation phase also need help in overcoming the loneliness, anxiety and spiritual aridity which are often encountered in life so that they can emerge enriched and renewed from the transitional stages which life itself involves.

Formation programmes should also include guidelines as regards affective and sexual maturity.

Friars qualified in the subject should be in a position to help their fellow-friars to make use of modern science in their psycho-sexual development and emotional maturation.

AIDS FOR AFFECTIVE FORMATION

55. The fraternity could and should be the place where the friars grow in affective maturity.

The atmosphere of the community, if serene, optimistic, frank, free and open to dialogue and acceptance of others, makes it possible for each person to develop his affectivity normally and communicate his emotional difficulties spontaneously. Commitment to brotherhood demands constant renunciation and dedication from each brother, and these give rise to the genuine, deep friendships that are so important for fulfilment of the affective life. On the other hand, fraternity fosters a way of working in togetherness and reciprocal responsibility, teaching one to be flexible and adaptable to different personalities and circumstances.

It must be part of every formation programme to learn how to really care about others. Young friars should be led to have an attitude of regard for the old, who in turn will love the younger friars as gifts granted to them by God.

Very early on in the course of formation, the friars should get to know the members of their own province by attending the more important gatherings and visiting other fraternities when the occasion arises.

Social contacts with every class of people, men and women, children, young and old, of varying social condition, facilitate not only a normal life but also an open and balanced personality development capable of being open to others.

Friendship, including friendships with persons outside the Order, is a great gift and offers the possibility of human and spiritual growth. By virtue of our consecration and out of respect for the vocation of those we meet, we should avoid binding others to ourselves too much, but rather giving of ourselves. This is the way to begin a friendship that is liberating and not destructive for the fraternity and families.

The friars' contact with their own families is good for emotional growth; but we must also consider that the fraternity is itself our family.

SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

56. Saint Francis offers a pedagogical itinerary for the formation of the heart.

He always tried to form the friars' hearts - which is the same as saying the vital centre of the person. It is in the heart that the Spirit of the Lord wishes the Father and the Son to dwell, instead of the carnal spirit of self-love.

Formation consists precisely in overcoming self-love under the holy inspiration of the Spirit. The most effective means of formation for Francis is to lead the friars to feel, experience and know the sweetness, joy and goodness and the love which is God. And to the friars, who have nothing of "their own", he offers in exchange the love of God and the more maternal love of brethren.

CHAPTER III°

PRACTICAL GUIDELINES

57. The formation process, while being divided into various stages, must correspond to an underlying unity.

As a continuous procedure opening out to values, formation should be distinguished by certain characteristics.

Formation must be regarded as a personalised process in the sense that it must take account of the characteristics, the charism and needs as well as the growth rhythm of the individual. At the same time, the individual must also grow as an open person.

Formation must be continuous. Only a continual adaptation in ways of living, thinking and acting can guarantee the ability to face new situations, challenges and expectations. From this comes the need for the friars to learn how to learn.

The process of formation must be organic and coherent and set the targets to be aimed for. These targets will enable corresponding choices to be made.

All growth must be gradual. Formation is therefore a journey whose stages must be respected. The young should not be made to repeat the same stage twice, just as older persons must be helped to continue to advance. The objectives to be reached in the various stages are points of arrival and departure at one and the same time.

In order to attain these objectives in a manner corresponding to the different cultural circumstances, the provinces should provide themselves with a “ratio formationis”.

Formation in and for our life is made up of three major phases: vocational guidance, initial formation and on-going formation.

1. VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE

VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE AS A SERVICE

58. Vocational guidance is a pastoral activity aimed at helping young men discover God’s plan for their lives and deepening within them their baptismal commitment, promoting their apostolic spirit and inviting them to follow Jesus.

Since the vocational apostolate is a service carried out with the individual's charism and the good of the Church in view, the guidance of the young to all callings that exist in the Church is to be respected and encouraged. The Secular Franciscan Order, which shares with us the spirit of Francis, and the spiritual youth movements, should receive assistance, and there should likewise be cooperation with the vocational guidance agencies in the particular local church.

ORIGIN

59. Vocational guidance begins with the friars' realisation that they are living and can offer the example of a life rich in human and evangelical content, in which aspirants can fulfil themselves completely and render service to the Church and humanity. It goes without saying that it is our desire for continual renewal that makes us able to proffer a convincing model of this kind. Vocational guidance should not be motivated by the will for survival or the necessity for keeping certain structures alive, but only by the desire to activate God's plan by means of our charism.

MEASURES

60. Among the more effective measures that can be taken to assist those seeking a convincing model of Christian and religious life, it must be remembered that first place is held by consistent witness of our brotherly Gospel life, along with prayer, which, according to the teaching of Jesus, is absolutely necessary for achieving vocations to the Lord's vineyard.

Offering young men the real possibility of sharing in our life in some way is among the practical means that have been found to be particularly useful, especially in community activities such as prayer, celebration of the Eucharist, meals and work. All these could perhaps be done in houses especially geared to the purpose, with the chance for individuals to be given assistance in personal reflection.

Amid the clamour of so much propaganda for movements and ideologies, the use of the mass media can also serve to give a voice to the testimony of evangelical life.

Other forms, apart from minor seminaries, where they still exist, could be work and school camps, camping trips and pilgrimages to Franciscan shrines.

It can prove useful to develop the vocations apostolate in environments that are spiritually close to us, such as Franciscan Youth and in the parishes in which we minister.

Even greater effectiveness may result from assigning certain religious to vocational guidance, to promote and coordinate an activity in which all the friars should be involved as a sign of the fruitfulness that is part of Franciscan life.

2. STAGES OF INITIAL FORMATION

DESCRIPTION AND PHASES

61. The term "initiation" implies progressive detachment from one form of life and the assimilation of new values and insertion into a particular society. In this process of initial formation for our life, the candidates, under the guidance of a master, acquire the necessary knowledge and experience, thus interiorising the Franciscan evangelical life.

As a period of insertion into our fraternity, initial formation comprises the following stages:

- the postulancy, as a period of seeking and choosing;
- the novitiate, as a period of interiorisation and integration into the fraternity;
- the post-novitiate, as a time of maturing and consolidating.

Provision must be made for total initial formation to follow a consistent line that permits progressive development, just as it is likewise important not to promote a candidate to a further stage if he has not attained the objective set for a particular period.

THE POSTULANCY

DESCRIPTION AND PURPOSE

62. Postulancy, as the first period of initiation, is a time of discernment and choice of the Franciscan life. During this period, the candidate is in close contact with the fraternity and comes to know our way of life, while the fraternity on its part comes to know the candidate better, so that it can discern his request and give a responsible reply. Postulancy is the time for the candidate to discover the deepest reasons for his own vocation, to know and experience our Capuchin Franciscan life, complete the break with his environment and gain a first experience of brotherhood.

For postulants, formative activity above all revolves around completing their catechesis of faith; methods of prayer, especially with an introduction to the liturgy; Franciscan instruction; an initial introduction to apostolic work. It also seeks to examine and promote human maturity, especially their emotional maturity.

What is done in formation must be centred on the person of the candidate so as to meet his needs on the intellectual, affective and spiritual plane. It is important that those not suited to our way of life be guided along other ways.

PLACE AND DURATION

63. There is a great variety of methods among the Provinces with regard to where the time of postulancy is to be spent. In any case, the place should be one that allows a sufficiently realistic knowledge of Franciscan life in a given region. In every instance the candidate ought not to be taken outside of his cultural milieu.

When postulancy begins, the candidate is admitted into the fraternity as one of its members and takes part in fraternal life. The duration of the postulancy, which varies according to the Province, is conditioned by the candidate's human and Christian maturity and likewise by the needs of the initiation. It presupposes a certain degree of detachment from the former life and a certain level of insertion into the fraternity. Practical norms should be laid down in the formation programmes of the Provinces.

THE NOVITIATE

DESCRIPTION AND PURPOSE

64. The novitiate is the period of intense initiation into Franciscan evangelical life and of experience of this life, the choice of which has already been made.

The aim of the novitiate is to put the novice in a position, through direct experience, to deepen and interiorise the values and spirit of our life and be integrated into the fraternity.

Novitiate takes for granted the free and mature choice of the religious life.

In order for the novitiate to be truly an introduction and rehearsal for our life in its fundamental aspects and requirements, we note some of the objectives of this period:

- introduction to our life in accordance with the Gospel and evangelical counsels, given that the Gospel constitutes the content and rule of our life;
- deepening of our Capuchin Franciscan life;
- a life of intense prayer (liturgical, community, private with periods of contemplative prayer);
- a life of charity, brotherhood and work;
- participation in the different ways of life the Province has to offer;
- participation in the real life of the example the handicapped or needy persons for a certain period of time.

The rhythm of life in the novitiate should correspond to the essential aspects of our life.

From these objectives it is also possible to deduce the criteria for evaluating the novice and creating a programme more adequately serving his needs.

AIDS

65. The principal aids for the novice are Sacred Scripture, the Office, the writings of Saint Francis and his early biographies as well as the writings of Saint Clare and those of the early Christians.

These aids are intended to help the novice traverse the road he is following.

The novitiate fraternity

66. The formative fraternity of the novitiate has the outstanding task of assisting the novice to become a part of the fraternity, especially through practical living. It should consider the novice as a gift of God, a reason for hope, a stimulus for renewal, accepting him as a brother and trying to promote his personal charism in a context of fraternity and service.

THE POST-NOVITIATE

DESCRIPTION

67. The post-novitiate is a time for acquiring depth and maturity vis-a-vis the commitment undertaken at first profession; it prepares the friar for solemn profession as the definitive opinion for the evangelical life.

PROGRAMMES AND PRIORITIES

68. Given the primary place held by the life of evangelical brotherhood in our vocation, it must be given priority also during the post-novitiate formation period. As well as taking priority, such formation must be one and the same and available to all the friars without distinction.

The programmes include deeper probing of Sacred Scripture, spiritual theology, Franciscanism and the various forms of work, especially in the house. In order to round out

this formation completely, even correspondence courses in theology and similar subjects should be considered. Certain forms of intense study and professional preparation are difficult to reconcile with the priority that must be given to formation for the evangelical life.

SPECIALISATIONS

69. As regards the work to be done during this period or the specialisations to be undertaken, there are two directions being followed in the Provinces.

In some Provinces, the principal aim of the post-novitiate is the continuation of religious-Franciscan formation, reducing to a minimum the types of cultural, apostolic and professional formation. Future specialisations (including study for the priestly ministry) are foreseen after solemn profession.

Other Provinces consider the post-novitiate as a time when the fraternal Franciscan life is lived in a new environment, that is, in another house and another life-style, such as work, study, apprenticeship to a profession. The religious-Franciscan formation programmes are given priority and are the same for everyone, even if the candidates do not live in the same house. Along with the programmes of formation for a deeper evangelical life, there are courses for cultural formation and the like. If this approach is followed, formation will take pains to lead the candidates to the point where they experience a solution of problems arising from the tension between prayer and activity, or activity and fraternal life.

Before solemn profession, a period of intense preparation, also called a "second novitiate", is desirable. Its length and methods vary according to the Province.

In order to make solemn profession, the friar must have adequate knowledge and experience of our life, as well as a disposition for continuous conversion and renewal.

Solemn profession makes the friar a member of the fraternity with all the attendant rights and duties in accordance with the Constitutions.

3. ON-GOING FORMATION

DESCRIPTION

70. For us, on-going formation is a process of renewal by which we are rendered capable of living our vocation in accordance with the Gospel in the actual situations and contingencies of daily living. The whole document is conceived with a view to development of our human, Christian and religious life, that is to say, in view of on-going formation as well. If we devote a special section to it here it is for the purpose of better emphasising its importance and the means for achieving it.

NECESSITY AND DIFFICULTIES

The urgent need for on-going formation, so vital in the whole modern world, is increasingly noticeable within the Order. We perceive how necessary it is for the full realisation of our charism. In fact, by means of continuous personal and community renewal and a consistent adaptation of structures, it favours growth in the spirit of the Gospel and the effectiveness of

our witness. Furthermore, it consolidates fraternal life, making dialogue among the different generations easier and aiding in overcoming some of the unavoidable problems and crises arising with advancing age.

Yet you cannot help but notice almost everywhere a certain resistance. At times the reason for this is excessive work but more often it is based on an erroneous concept of on-going formation itself, as if it meant evasion and lack of something to do; again, other times it lies in a subconscious fear of self-examination.

DIMENSIONS

71. While it embraces the whole person as a unit, on-going formation has a twofold dimension: that of spiritual conversion through continual return to the sources of Christian life and the spirit of the Order, in view of greater fidelity to them; and cultural and professional updating by means of “technical” adaptation, so to speak, to the conditions of our day.

This twofold dimension must always be seen in relation to different phases of human life.

ON-GOING FORMATION IS A FRAME OF MIND

On-going formation, more than methods and external aids that are concrete and structured – though these too are necessary – consists in acquiring a frame of mind, a spiritual attitude, which makes us conscious that formation, in other words our human and Christian commitment on the spiritual, scientific and professional level, is never-ending because it can and must continually be worked at, improved and perfected.

One who has ended his period of initial formation cannot claim to be right for the rest of his life. Instead, a genuine “formative attitude” is acquired during initial formation with the realisation that basic formation is only an introduction – certainly necessary – to our continual conversion that lasts as long as we live. Indeed, this is one of the most decisive accomplishments of the initiation period. Ongoing-formation is not identified with or fulfilled by participating in a few “updating” projects, but it is a continuous, living process.

ON-GOING FORMATION: A RIGHT AND A DUTY

72. Without a doubt, making oneself responsible for one’s own ongoing formation is firstly a personal obligation of the individual religious. It is a duty, but also a right, to which everything else must be subordinate, because on-going formation is nothing but the continuous unfolding of our vocation.

But at the same time this formation must be regarded by the Province and its superiors as a serious obligation towards the friars. Every Province should have regulations in this regard and do everything to encourage renewal of the religious, thus creating a climate in which on-going formation cannot only find a place but is considered a normal thing.

RECIPIENTS OF ON-GOING FORMATION

On-going formation is for all friars. There are, however, some groups which must be the object of special attention: older friars who might feel life has passed them by; those friars who for various reasons have not yet been able to benefit from an improved formation whether on the

religious or professional plane; missionaries, often left out of these projects because of too much apostolic work or lack of opportunity; and brothers, who did not always receive sufficient formation in the past.

FORMATION OF THOSE WHO FORM.

73. A very special subject of fundamental importance is the formation of those who form. They, more than all others, have the serious duty of renewing and updating themselves, in other words, of constantly deepening and improving the living of their own vocation, and continuing in the specialisation they began.

Provincial superiors must be fully aware of and responsible for all this.

ON-GOING FORMATION - WAYS AND MEANS

74. The possible means for on-going formation are many and various. Much depends upon a spirit of initiative, good will and dedication on the part of the individual religious and the superiors of the various areas and circumscriptions to find new and stimulating ways.

Not only do extraordinary initiatives contribute to growth and a better realisation of our project of evangelical life. So do moments in our ordinary life. Especially valued among these are: an intensely lived liturgical life in the Mass and in the celebration of the Hours, following the rhythm of the liturgical year; reflection together on the word of God; mediation and periods of silence; the local chapter; the review of life; dialogue and fraternal correction; meetings of the fraternity concerning various problems, even at the level of culture; personal study taken up methodically and with commitment, etc.

All these are means that are available at the level of the local community which is the true family where we live every day. Among the functions of this field there is also that of making opportunities for formation, especially for excessively busy friars. Within the fraternity the local superior has a decisive role in on-going formation. He is the real animator and a large part of the success or failure in this area depends upon him.

There are also “extraordinary means”, that is, new or renewed initiatives in on-going formation. While not an exhaustive list, we recall the following:

- on the part of the Order: apart from the work of animation by the General Minister and his Definitory, the general Secretary of formation should take up the task to point out ideas and experiences; to inform, to foster the exchange of personnel, to promote awareness; in short he should become one of the main driving forces for the animation of the Order. Other centres can also be created in the various areas and make better use of those that already exist (Historical Institute, Franciscan Institute of Spirituality ...)
- on the part of the Conferences: the creation of centres for animation, refresher courses, meetings, the exchange of personnel ...
- on the part of each Province: The Province is immediately responsible for formation in general and for on-going formation; apart from the work the Provincial Minister and his Definitory, the formation Secretary should have a particular role. Where possible it would also be good to create a special group for on-going formation, in which there might be representatives of the various fields of activity of the Province. Special “open” Chapters (“chapter of mats”), in which all the friars can take part, are very important to share in the life and journey of the Province;

- various other initiatives can be suggested, such as: the institution of prayer fraternities and of study fraternities; the practice of the sabbatical year and the priestly month; intensive refresher courses; seminars on our spirituality; certain periods of intensive renewal such as animation weeks, retreats ... organised for all the friars.

75. As with initial formation, on-going formation will also need to work out a plan to guide work and check outcomes. Starting with the situation of the fraternity (both local and provincial), the plan should determine the outcomes to be achieved, those who are responsible, the timing and concrete steps to be taken.

The plan should be organic, dynamic and complete as far as possible. It should be organic in that it forms a consistent whole in itself and should also be consistent with the previous stages of formation. It should be dynamic, taking account of the development of the human person. It should be complete, because it must embrace the different dimensions of formation (intellectual, affective, practical ...) while giving priority to evangelical fraternal life.

Since the responsibility for drafting such a plan belongs to the local or provincial fraternities, we suggest here only a general outline:

- daily: meditation, celebration of the Hours, Eucharist, Word of God, living together in fraternity;
- monthly: local chapter, monthly retreat, other meetings;
- yearly: the liturgical year, spiritual exercises, updating sessions, other initiatives;
- at least every ten years, taking into account the different phases of life and transitional periods, (e.g., the "mid-life crisis"): sabbatical year, longer cycles of prayer and updating.

SPECIAL TIMES FOR ON-GOING FORMATION.

76. Furthermore, it can be said that while our whole lives should be spent in on-going formation, yet certain times are particularly appropriate for a more intense and fruitful effort.

The following are some that come to mind: the first years after solemn profession and priestly ordination, so as to help our young confreres become part of the community life of the fraternity in the Provincial and socio-ecclesial context; in the event of a vocational crisis, so as to consolidate and deepen one's religious life; and in cases where adaptation to new situations in life and work is difficult, etc.

4. THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR FORMATION

SITUATION

77. In order to guarantee its commitment to formation, the Order must have at its disposal certain elements which really correspond to the specific requirements of its charism. This is all the more important now that there is a danger of a certain "levelling off" process in religious life. (MR 11-12)

A glance at the situation in the Order shows that the principle that all the friars are to consider themselves responsible for formation at all levels, local, provincial and general, has not really

caught on everywhere. Quite often, one comes across fraternities whose life-style is incompatible with a serious commitment to formation. In a few cases it is actually the life of the Province itself that is at variance with the direction taken in formation.

YET THERE ARE FACTORS THAT GIVE GROUNDS FOR HOPE.

Superiors are more involved in ministry to their own communities, and this favours the field of formation; new fraternities of hospitality are being founded, made up of friars who are particularly aware of their responsibilities as regards formation; there is a growth in dialogue with the use of positive methods in the formative relationship, and candidates in general tend to be more open and involved.

DIVINE INITIATIVE

78. The chief agent in the formation process is the Holy Spirit, present and life-giving within the formation personnel and those being formed. The initiative is His. It is He who calls, who inspires, who conforms us to the image of the Son and consecrates us to the Father. It is for the candidate to respond, complying with His “holy operation” (Reg. Bull. 10) by accepting Christ as Master and model of our life, both individually and as a brotherhood. In this the friar in formation is sustained by his filial love for the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, by her “whose life is a rule of conduct for everyone” (PC 25). In this connection, the importance of prayer and spiritual direction, which helps one to hear, discern and fulfil God’s will in fraternal life, must be emphasised.

THOSE IN FORMATION

79. On the level of human response, formation demands the active cooperation of those being formed, who, as principal architects of their own growth, bear the primary responsibility. They must be understood, respected and loved for their spiritual and cultural worth, and still more for those unique and irreplaceable characteristics that bespeak the primacy of the human person. In this way they will be helped in the development of their psychological balance and emotional growth to advance toward a more conscious and sincere commitment to our life in brotherhood. Obviously, candidates must possess those qualities and dispositions which are considered indispensable for belonging to our Order.

THE FRATERNITY

80. Every fraternity achieves its identity to the extent that it consciously assumes its formative role. Each of its members must consider himself as both being formed and imparting formation, open to cultural, ecclesial and social realities and at the same time anxious to foster religious recollection and a family-like atmosphere. In the sphere of fraternal life, prayer should hold first place, beginning with affective contemplation understood as a source of life. The human qualities of the friars are also to be prized and appreciated, qualities such as authenticity and a spirit of initiative, as well as particular personally significant moments in life.

In fraternities which are specifically houses of formation – first among them that of the novitiate - every other commitment should be subordinated to and coordinated with the work of formation under the guidance of a director. The family should meet frequently to agree

upon the direction the fraternity is to take, the necessary planning and consequent evaluation, and above all to conduct a review of how they are living, with frankness and judgement and constructive charity. It is of great importance to know how to accept the friars as they are, without dwelling excessively on how they ought to be. A lively sense of forgiveness creates an atmosphere of evangelical joy at the heart of the fraternity.

Those fraternities charged with the work of initial formation should be set up on normal principles, so that the fraternity is typical and the candidates do not later feel estranged from real life. This does not mean that the formation fraternities ought not to provide an effective stimulus to the other fraternities.

THE PROVINCIAL FRATERNITY

In order that the individual fraternities can effectively acknowledge this role, they should draw inspiration, stimulus and encouragement from the primary fraternity: the Province. The degree of fidelity, conviction and realism of the provincial fraternity has immediate repercussions upon the security and vitality of every friar, as well as on the effectiveness of the work of teaching in the formation centres.

If a Province lacks the ability to establish authentic formation fraternities, the serious question arises of whether it may assume the responsibility of accepting new candidates.

SUPERIORS

If it is true that everyone must have a formative role to a certain degree, it still remains indispensable that some qualified friars be chosen to take charge of formation, beginning with the Minister Provincial and the local superiors. They are the everyday animators and coordinators of the formative process for all the friars.

QUALIFIED FORMATION PERSONNEL

81. This brings us to the urgent problem of qualified formation personnel. They should stand out for certain qualities which they possess with an open and dynamic attitude, namely: they should lead a genuine life of faith; have a firm hope in God and in the future of the world, the Church and the Order; they should love the Franciscan vocation and be convinced of the value of the religious life, able to work in a team and to animate the life of the fraternity, especially as regards prayer, work and discussion. They should feel the need for continual updating, and be encouraged to specialise in psycho-pedagogical disciplines, or at any rate those that have a bearing on formation. They should have a deeply-rooted belief in the value of their formation work, drawing generously upon the many models by which the authentic image of our Order is being constantly consigned to history.

From this it is obvious that the need for qualified personnel opens out into a further question which is more delicate still: the training of the formation personnel themselves. This has been one of the most keenly felt problems of the present Plenary Council of the Order.

CONTRIBUTORY FACTORS INFORMATION

82. Finally, as contributory factors in our Capuchin Franciscan formation, particularly important are the dynamism of the local Church, the family and the genuine values of the

culture and religious faith of the people. Special emphasis must be given to the contribution made by the entire Franciscan movement, beginning with our cloistered Sisters and the Secular Order, who share and promote its genuine spirit in a dynamic interchange with the First Order.

SECRETARIATS AND FORMATIVE EXCHANGES

83. The structure of the Secretariats should be constantly improved so as to promote and arrange meetings for broad areas of study, information, reflection and exchange of experiences on various levels: provincial, inter-provincial, international. In the final analysis, the ultimate formation method is the brotherhood of the Order.

That brotherhood, however, while on the one hand working to overcome racial and nationalistic divisions, must also strive to safeguard, and indeed to promote, its wealth of ethnic and spiritual values, following the principles of prudent inculturation.

It is necessary to spell out and systematise the pedagogical aims and practical stages of the learning process in every phase of formation, keeping the entire educative process in view. In drawing up programmes and in the process of encouraging and enabling formation, there should be a prudent place for dialogue and a team spirit, in support of the practical guidelines laid down by the formation personnel.

CONCLUSION

84. These, then, are the reflections and guidelines that emerged during this Fourth Plenary Council of the Order on the formation of the Capuchin Friar Minor. Essentially their only aim is to make us observe the Rule, that is, the Gospel, more faithfully and more “spiritually”, by living in obedience without property and chastity.

The text offered here is the result of work by the members of the Plenary Council, but it is also in some sense a product of the Order as a whole, which cooperated during the entire preparatory phase.

As presented, the text has its limitations, first of all because it does not tackle all aspects of formation - and this was pointed out from the beginning. Then, too, because of its deficiencies: we did not always manage to reach the depths of the problems. In any case its purpose is not so much to be perfect as to induce the friars to continue their own reflections. The text will therefore have to be enriched and completed. The Plenary Council can only be a beginning rather than an end.

We must “go forward”, especially by putting into practice the guidelines sketched out here. They will be for us an effective help for “following in the footsteps of Christ”, as Saint Francis wished. Everything we have done and will do must have the effect of leading us into ever-closer companionship with Christ. We must “go forward” each day, even though we may slow down or fail, always keeping our hearts full of courage, hope and joy.

In order to observe what we have promised with ever greater fidelity, let us be guided by the Virgin Mary, the handmaid of the Lord, for it was precisely to ensure that perseverance of his friars in their vocation that Saint Francis entrusted the Order to her who is called “the faithful Virgin”.

V° PLENARY COUNCIL OF THE ORDER OUR PROPHETIC PRESENCE IN THE WORLD Garibaldi, 1987

PRESENTATION

Dear Brothers,

Only now can we present to you the Document of PCO V "Our prophetic presence in the world: our apostolic life and activity". You have been waiting for it for several months. The Document was first of all revised by a Redaction Committee, and we wanted to wait for a full meeting of the Definitory before approving it. This was only possible recently because of our many commitments in the service of the Order.

Firstly, we wish to underline one aspect of the value of the Document. It is only a small part of a larger work in which our fraternities have been involved for nearly three years, and will be involved for many years to come, which we hope will bear lasting fruit throughout the Order. The Document brings together only what the delegates of all the Conferences, and the General Definitory, perceived and expressed in the unforgettable meeting held in September 1986 in Brazil.

From this point of view we are aware that we are presenting our confreres with a limited and imperfect piece of work. Nonetheless, we now make it our own and we entrust it to each and every one of our brothers, so that they may profit by its inspirations and be urged on even by its limitations to continue their quest and their journey.

We wish to share with you our conviction that the Plenary Councils have had an important role in our recent history. They are a new instrument by means of which we have been able to listen to the ideas and sentiments of the brothers all over the world, in a way which is new, fraternal and effective. Our Order, in its life and in its writings, beginning with the Constitutions, would not be what it is today without the growing change and ferment which we have been able to harvest from Quito, Taizé, Mattli, Rome and now Garibaldi.

From the beginning of the preparation for PCO V one of the principal lines of approach was to listen to and indeed to "challenge" the brothers, without determining schemes and methods in advance, and without closing any doors. We have been surprised at what has been expressed, and we are certain that much remains to be brought to light. The Holy Spirit, it seems to us, is doing lovely things through the brothers of our Order all over the world. Such a discovery is most comforting.

Hence our fraternal message is now an insistent request that our brothers everywhere, helped by this Document, will continue in their commitment to making our life an evangelical witness. Therefore it is necessary, amongst other things, to study in depth the Document itself by means of meetings, congresses, writings etc.

We end with the words of blessing and exhortation addressed by our Seraphic Father "To a General Chapter and to all the friars" (vv. 7-10, 12,61) (*Omnibus* pp.104 ff.): "Obey the voice of

the Son of God. Keep his commandments wholeheartedly and practise his counsels perfectly. Give praise to him because he sent you all over the world so that by word and deed you might bear witness to his message. 'God deals with you as with sons' (Heb.12: 7). May you who do this be blessed by God and may God be ever with you. Amen".

Rome, 2nd February 1987.
Feast of the Presentation of the Lord.

Br. Flavio Roberto Carraro, General Minister
Br. Francisco Iglesias, General Vicar
Br. Claude Ollukaren, Second Definitor
Br. José Carlos Pedroso, Third Definitor
Br. Viktrizius Veith, Fourth Definitor
Br. Jacques Belanger, Fifth Definitor
Br. Pacificus Dydyecz, Sixth Definitor
Br. John Corriveau, Seventh Definitor
Br. Teodosio Mannucci, Eighth Definitor

INTRODUCTION

This PCO V owes its primary inspiration to the General Chapter of 1982, which realised the necessity of examining thoroughly the topic of our apostolate.

The General Definitory, in ordering the wishes of the General Chapter to be carried out, wished to define the meaning of the project, and so, by choosing the title of “Our prophetic presence in the world: our apostolic life and activity”, it has reminded us of the unbreakable “unity” between life and activity, and of the fact that they must be understood in a “prophetic” sense, with sincere commitment of life and great openness to the future.

The whole Order was consulted for more than two years, and a Commission prepared for this PCO, processing the replies received and providing resources and suggestions for reflection.

With fraternal affection we wish to thank all the brothers of the Order for the wealth of their contributions to the work of the Plenary Council and to the drafting of this Document.

At the PCO itself, drawing on the information received from the Conferences and read at the start of their labours, the delegates immediately took note of the profound changes which are under way, in different degrees, in all the fraternities of the Order. These changes raise profound questions and challenges to which we must respond.

Who actually are we? What is the relationship between our life and activity and this world which is changing so rapidly? How can we meet the growing demands of the poor, the exploited, and the oppressed? These and other questions soon made us realise that our life can no longer remain on the tracks on which it runs at present; very often there is too great a difference between our way of life and this world of suffering.

At the same time it became very evident to us that pluriformity in the Order is a fact of life, not only in externals, but in our vision of life and of our place in the world.

For these reasons the PCO, which had set out with the idea of tackling the subject of the apostolate in the world today, saw the need to discuss the overall significance of our life as a whole. Thus the discussion of the apostolate embraced all the fundamental values of our charism.

This could look like a simple continuation of the traditional approach, insufficient in face of the changes now under way, but the internal dynamics and content of our reflections constantly sent us back to the demands a prophetic presence would make, both now and in the future. Following the “see, judge, act” method, we were led to rethink and reorder the fundamental values of our life, as well as offering new practical guidelines for their implementation.

We also realised that the term “prophetic”, which we had applied to our life, was in no way a flag to be flown, but an ideal to be lived, if we still wished to be “living stones” to build up the Kingdom of God.

From this, too, came the desire that the Document to be presented to the brothers should be eminently pastoral, without too many technical or juridical concerns.

At this point we realise that our future depends on our capacity for conversion and our ability to make our presence in the world truly “prophetic”.

The environment in which the PCO took place helped us greatly, both to realise the great contrasts of life (e.g. people almost dying of poverty, alongside enormous wealth), and to understand how precious certain values are when they are presented with simplicity and love. In fact, not only did we experience great hospitality, given with a smile and perfectly organised, but we also saw various brothers who are already sharing their lives with people who are very poor, keeping hope alive in them by praying with them and sharing in their struggles.

This document is also intended as a tool for the subsequent work of up-dating our life and apostolic activity so that they become a prophetic force in the world.

CHAPTER I°

CONTEMPLATION IN OUR LIFE AND APOSTOLATE

THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTEMPLATION

1. Our presence in the world and in the Church demands contemplation as its very foundation. This is a sort of journey to the interior by stages, a return to “the place of the heart”, which is “the place of God”, a glimpse of the Absolute, which illuminates the whole of reality.

Contemplation is an essentially personal experience flowing from the innermost depths of the human being as he or she faces the mystery of God. Hence all language is inadequate for the expression of its ineffable richness.

Facing our prophetic and apostolic vocation, we experience the imperative summons to this contemplative dimension, so characteristic of our Franciscan charism: to live on intimate terms with God, and, contemplating in humanity the image of the Son, we become apostles of Christ.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF PCO V

2. In 1973 at Taizé our Order held a PCO about prayer, and drafted a valuable chapter on the same subject in the Constitutions. PCO V intends, above all, to underline some aspects of contemplation which are essential for our life and activity.

A. NEW CONTEXTS OF CONTEMPLATION

THE CONTRIBUTION AND DANGERS OF THE NEW CONTEXTS

3. We see that in the world of today development in every sphere has brought many benefits to mankind: the raising of the level of culture, more profound interpersonal relationships, the increased effectiveness of our resources, easier communications, better living standards etc. These changes have helped to improve emotional growth, the development of the intuitive faculty, a more mature critical ability, and a more conscious openness to the truth. The communications media have enlarged the horizons of our knowledge by providing a more global vision of life.

However, we also see dangers in this development, such as more superficial interpersonal relationships, the lack of times of silence; failures in communication; self-sufficiency; the complete immersion of the person in material things and in consumerism; and - on a more structural level - the manipulation of the media by political and economic forces offering false values.

Yet at the same time we discover that human beings have a growing need for mystery and transcendence. The widespread sense of anguish and bewilderment begets a search for total abandonment to the mystery of God. From this follows an experience which is above all the fruit of intuition, and which drives one towards affective union with God, a union lived in interpersonal and community relationships.

Many seek other forms of encounter with God: the spiritual ideas and the prayer-forms of the East have come to the West.

POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE PHENOMENA

4. In the Church and the Order also we meet both negative and positive phenomena regarding contemplation.

Interior dissipation, which seeks compensation in activism, seriously compromises the experience of God in prayer and in hearing the Word on the one hand, and spiritual dialogue with one's confreres on the other.

As a consequence comes an inability "to be men of prayer", and still less experts who can initiate and accompany others in the way of prayer. Sometimes traditional methods are no longer regarded as suitable for the needs of people today.

It is a joy to witness the rise of many new forms which seek to respond to man's need for the Transcendent: oases and centres of spirituality, new forms of the eremitical life, the opening of the contemplative life to the laity.

Many brothers are rediscovering the experience of contemplation as a vital need, as a spiritual dimension which nourishes activity and fraternity. Centres of Franciscan spirituality seek to harmonise the contemplative aspect with the active. This could be the prelude to a new contemplative springtime in the Order.

B. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF OUR CONTEMPLATION

AN INBORN NEED

5. Contemplation is an inborn need of human beings, which manifests itself in the varied and rich traditions of the great religions. Its characteristics are:

- a way of life involving intuition and experience of the mystery of God and a perception of the unity of Creator and creature;
- a global view and evaluation of reality which flows from experience of the presence of God in whom we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28);
- a personal and community way governed by the laws of human and religious development;
- a spiritual journey with its sublime moments, but also with critical stages such as aridity, the pursuit of compensations, running away from reality, the search for extraordinary experiences etc.;
- a process which requires discipline, method and sound guidance;
- contemplation is an essential element of all religious experience.

CHRISTIAN CONTEMPLATION

6. In Christian contemplation, the following essential aspects have been highlighted:

- it is a gift of the Spirit, who prays in us with sighs too deep for words (Rom. 8: 26), waiting for the revealing of the Sons of God (Rom. 8: 19); who makes us cry “Abba, Father” (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). The same Spirit enlightens us so that we may recognise a ‘brother’ or a ‘sister’ in every person we meet;
- it has been described as a dialogue with the Holy Trinity who dwells within us; as worship of the Father in Spirit and Truth (Jn. 4:23);
- it is a way of entering into the personal and communal covenant offered by God to humanity for the fulfilment of his loving plan which is realised in the Incarnation of the Son, who came so that we might have life in all its fullness (cf. Jn. 10:10). Thus contemplation equips us to struggle for justice and to accept persecution;
- contemplation, as a covenant-union with God, expresses itself and nourishes itself by hearing the Word, celebrating the Eucharist, and loving the brethren;
- it is a gift of prophetic discernment whereby the contemplative is able to see the hand of God in history and to perceive its evolution from within in the light of the revealed Word, thereby becoming an agent of that history in accordance with God’s plan;
- it is a gradual experience of the truth which sets us free from illusions, above all from false ‘truths’ such as those uttered by political and economic forces, which seek to change us for their own ends.

CONTEMPLATION IN SAINT FRANCIS

7. Saint Francis’ contemplation, which inspires our own, is characterised by the following qualities:

- Saint Francis discovers the love of God in the poor and crucified Christ of San Damiano, in the embrace of the leper, in Sacred Scripture and in the Eucharist. Thus the love of the poor and crucified Christ leads him on to the love of people, above all of the poor and suffering. Thus God is seen and contemplated within human realities; in them his transcendence is revealed.
- in contemplation Francis discovered the divine plan, and wished to share fully in Christ’s love for people, proclaiming the Good News of hope and peace through conversion. All his activity was nourished by sublime contemplation.
- Saint Francis lives the mystical life of divine praise in the context of his immersion in creation. For him the whole of creation sings the glory of God. This is the driving-force behind his message of a universal brotherhood amongst men and with all creation. Saint Francis meets God in contemplation by way of intuition and affection, a way taken up again by the Capuchin tradition, for which “to pray is to speak to God with the heart” (Const. 53:6). We are speaking of a way accessible to all. The first literary output of the Capuchins was concerned almost exclusively with treatises on contemplative prayer, as a continuation of their popular evangelical preaching.

CONDITIONS FOR PROPHETIC CONTEMPLATION

8. Our Capuchin-Franciscan contemplation will be prophetic and will correspond to the needs of the men of today on condition that:

- it follows sound Capuchin tradition, creatively enriched by new forms which are arising in various places;
- it is cultivated personally and in community, and is open to dialogue with the brothers and to the contribution of others, because these interpersonal relationships enrich one's own experience;
- it is based on an awareness of our radical poverty as human creatures. This awareness is the first step in our ascent to God: recognising our own wretchedness and need, we have recourse to the divine Teacher (cf. Bonaventure, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, 'Breviloquium' p.4, c. 4);
- it is humble and simple, capable of being practised by all, and capable of transforming the joys and sorrows of daily life into intimate union with God;
- it is affective and spontaneous, the expression of a heart opening out towards God, towards the brothers and towards every creature;
- it is capable of leading us to real poverty and to incorporation into the world of the poor;
- it is open to the poor and the crucified of our day, seeking to learn from them and to be in solidarity with them;
- it brings to the celebration of the Eucharist the problems of the day, as a sharing in the death and resurrection of Jesus, keeping in mind the cultural roots of diverse peoples.

C. PRACTICAL OPTIONS

PRACTICAL MEANS

9. The brothers must be offered the practical means by which to foster the encounter with God in their inner life and in the realities which surround them. Therefore we must:

- implement on-going formation programmes in contemplation, at the same time utilising the findings of new and sound psychological research;
- train spiritual directors and guides;
- organise our personal and community life in such a way that its contemplative dimension is assisted not only at definite times, but as the fundamental commitment in our life;
- provide and safeguard an environment with time and space for silence.

A CONTEMPLATIVE WAY

10. We need to rediscover valid traditional forms of the contemplative way, renewed by an awareness of the dimension of social solidarity (fasts, vigils, pilgrimages etc.).

HOUSES OF PRAYER

11. We must foster houses of prayer and hermitages to nourish our contemplative life (Const. 56:1) and to help those who are seeking forms of contemplation adapted to various different conditions.

OPEN FRATERNITIES

12. We must cultivate a welcoming attitude in our communities, which should be open to all who want to come, individually or in groups, to share in the life of the brothers and to get to know Franciscan spirituality.

CENTRES OF CONTEMPLATION

13. Especially in the big cities, it is well to promote contemplative centres and places where people can meet on a human and religious level, perhaps in collaboration with other men and women religious.

14. To develop the contemplative life in the Order, it is useful to organise meetings at which brothers from different cultures can share their experiences and help each other to make progress on this difficult journey.

CHAPTER II°

THE GIFT AND TASK OF FRATERNITY

UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD

15. Within the world-wide search for greater community and the particular effort to witness to fraternity ourselves, three inter-related elements are always involved: the fundamental dignity of every person, manifested in freedom; their fundamental equality and the necessary solidarity among them.

In all these dimensions we recognise a gift of God which commits us to the task of creating one single family. Our fraternity is called to give witness to this universal trend and to facilitate its expression. This gift and task of ours was highlighted when the General Chapter of 1968 gave special importance to the theme of 'Fraternity' as a fundamental value in Chapter VI of our Constitutions.

A. DIGNITY, EQUALITY AND SOLIDARITY IN TODAY'S WORLD

HUMAN DIGNITY IS INVIOABLE

16. Human and social relationships are based upon the inviolable dignity of every person, actualised in freedom. All institutions, and the social order itself, must be based on this principle. As a consequence, persons must be valued above structures.

This notwithstanding, we find ourselves faced with divisions, manipulation and exploitation, all taking place under the banner of freedom. In this process civil, political and religious rights are often violated.

Elements of these tendencies can be found even in the Church and in the Order. Nevertheless, there exists a clear effort to create structures founded upon and productive of the primacy of the person. Since each person is an individual and each fraternity has its own singular character, the Order affirms and defends pluriformity as a value in itself.

EQUALITY

17. On the basis of the inviolable dignity of men and woman created in the image of God (Gen. 1: 26-28), all persons are equal and must be treated as such. A sign of the endeavour to actualise this universal right is evidenced by the movements working for political and religious equality between races and between men and women.

In the Church, too, we notice an effort to include the marginalised and the laity in its life and activity. This universal phenomenon has also influenced our Order, which has clearly recognised the equality of all the brothers, based on our common vocation (Const. 84:4,5; 11 5:6).

Despite these movements towards equality, forms of discrimination can be found almost everywhere: sexism, racism, class-distinction and exclusion of the old ('ageism') undermine community, tribalism and the caste system still divide societies. Within nations, as in the sphere of international relations, the rich and the powerful flourish at the expense of the poor

and the oppressed. Economic, social and cultural rights are often violated in the process. Since the Church and the Order are part of this world, they must continually beware of tendencies towards these forms of discrimination.

WORLD-WIDE SOLIDARITY

18. The existence of institutions and movements of a regional and international character attests to a historical development towards global solidarity. The rapid development of technology and communications, progress in the field of electronics and computers, transportation and space research, all further the possibility of making the world one big village. Business people and politicians, cultural exchanges and sporting events, provide still further possibilities to promote bonds of solidarity. This phenomenon of solidarity is present also among the developing nations.

In spite of this, personal and communal selfishness continually threatens to nullify efforts aimed at establishing community. Ethnocentrism, nationalism and religious fanaticism are frequently found. Violence, terrorism and the arms race grow apace. The wealth of the northern hemisphere increases while the debts of the south pile up.

Much of the breakdown in solidarity must be attributed to a false notion of self-fulfilment and to individualism. Just as individualism is breaking up the unity of the family, so in our Order and in our fraternities it threatens to undermine our fundamental value of brotherhood. Despite the fact that we say fraternity is our chief apostolate, in reality it is the individual apostolic activities which condition our fraternity. Because of such forms of individualism, our bonds of fraternity are perhaps weaker than they were in the past.

Even though there will always be tension between the goals of a community and the development of the personality and gifts of each person, the present situation in the world, the Church and the Order demands an immediate response to individualism.

B. FROM INDIVIDUALISM TO THE PROPHETIC WITNESS OF FRATERNITY

CAUSES OF INDIVIDUALISM

19. The causes of individualism cannot be isolated to the point where it is possible to indicate this or that cause, this or that person. Our individualism reflects that of society, East or West, North or South.

Notwithstanding the slogans about liberty and equality and commitment to solidarity, there are forces which develop subtle forms of collectivisation through political control of the media and through economic manipulation (dominance of the economically powerful through commercial advertising). These result in an increasing stress on individualism. Furthermore, bureaucratization takes place in a way that also increases individualism. All this has had its effects on our fraternities too. Although in some provinces there are examples which give rise to hope, all too often we find in the Order a kind of minimalism in what regards community prayer and the time spent around the common table. Then when the brothers do come together for recreation it is dominated by television. The result is the erosion of the bonds of brotherhood among us, a tendency to give priority to communities outside the fraternity and, again, a growing individualism.

OVERCOMING INDIVIDUALISM

20. As can be seen from Chapter VI of the Constitutions and from PCO I (Quito) and PCO IV (Rome), the Order has made great strides to ensure the dignity of each person. Rediscovering the charism of Saint Francis, it has reaffirmed his vision of a fraternity of equals based on a common vocation (Const. 83: 3). We will not be able to give to the world a genuine witness of fraternity and of solidarity unless we deal with our individualism.

THE BASIC CRITERION: A LIFE OF BROTHERHOOD

21. The fundamental principle of fraternity is not only at the heart of our documents: it is the heart of our faith, as Jesus teaches us in his prayer to the Father: 'I pray...for those also who through their words will believe in me. May they all be one. Father may they be one in us, as you are in me and so that the world may believe it was you who sent me' (Jn. 17: 19-21).

Moreover the teaching of the Church constantly invites us to build 'a civilisation of love'. The Council document on 'The Church in the Modern World' affirms that 'God ...has willed that all men should constitute one family and treat one another in a spirit of brotherhood' (n. 24, Abbott). 'As the first-born of many brethren and through the gift of the Spirit', the Council continues, 'Jesus founded ...a new brotherly community composed of all those who receive Him in faith and in love. "This solidarity must be constantly increased until that day on which it will be brought to perfection" (n. 32, Abbott).

Our Constitutions remind us that 'inspired by God, Saint Francis initiated a way of gospel life which he called a fraternity' (n. 83:5), founded on brothers who live together in charity. Faithful to our vocation, we must build up a genuine fraternal community, and so co-operate in the fostering of a family which is authentically human, in the Church and in the world.

Therefore we believe that the prophetic witness of lived fraternity is at the heart of our work of evangelisation. Above all it is a service of 'Peace and Goodness' as a sign of trust and of hope.

The realities of the world, the Church and the Order remind us of God's plan; they urge us to be prophetically consistent with the gift and task of fraternity which characterises us as Franciscans.

THE EXAMPLE OF SAINT FRANCIS

22. To this end the prophetic influence of our presence and activity in the midst of the world and of the People of God must derive its inspiration from the example of Francis who 'in love with God and with all people, and indeed with all creatures, is a brother and a friend of all' (Const. 169:2).

C. GUIDELINES FOR ACTION

FOSTERING FRATERNAL LIFE

23. Realising our need to move from theory to practice, we reiterate that all our *formation* must involve a process of growing awareness and constant conversion, both personal and communal, in order to promote a greater degree of brotherhood amongst ourselves and with others.

Specifically, we underline the following key moments of daily life in fraternity:

- a) *the prayer of the fraternity* (the Eucharist, the Liturgy of the Hours, and other forms of prayer), lived in a creative and spontaneous way, genuinely participative, and realistic;
- b) *fraternal living*, expressed as true communion, which should find expression in trust and forgiveness, in understanding and esteem, in mutual love and availability, and in the sharing of all that we are and have, with special care for the brothers who are sick or in difficulty;
- c) *work* in all its forms, must always be an expression of the whole fraternity (Const. 76:2; 145:6); above all, it must find expression in mutual assistance, according to the gifts given to each, including the performance of daily household duties (cf. Const. n. 84:6).

To inspire our fraternal living we consider dialogue in all its forms as a fundamental tool, especially during meetings of the fraternity (local chapters). These should be frequent and well planned, including the use of group dynamics. As various ecclesiastical groups and movements do, let us also endeavour to examine our daily life in the light of Sacred Scripture.

THE GOSPEL MODEL

24. In order that, enlightened by the gospel, we may be able to overcome divisions, alienation and individualism in our fraternities, we suggest that we adopt the method which Saint Matthew proposed to the Church in similar situations (Mt. 18: 1-20). This implies that we try to overcome existing divisions (18: 1-9), that we hold one another in mutual esteem on the basis of each one's dignity (18: 10-14), and that we practise fraternal correction aimed at conversion (18: 15-18). With these bonds of solidarity, fostered by esteem and correction, we will be more united and our prayer will be more efficacious (18:19-20).

REVISION OF LIFE

25. We are confident that through the impact of this PCO we will manage to revitalise the prayer of our fraternities and the forms of our apostolate, and thus overcome our individualism. To facilitate this we propose the following points for a revision of our life:

- a) let us examine the ways in which individualism manifests itself in our fraternities, recognising its harmful effects and also admitting that, with the grace of God, it can be overcome.
- b) let us involve ourselves in joint enterprises which do most to develop solidarity among ourselves, especially in our way of responding to the cry of the poor (ET 18).

We particularly recommend:

- 1) that there be fraternities amongst the poor as foreseen by the PCO of Quito;
- 2) that those who are already involved with the poor should think about ways of deepening their solidarity with them, while those who are engaged in other apostolates should have frequent experience of living among the poor;

3) that those who are not so involved because of sickness or for other reasons should use their talents, their prayers and their sufferings for the benefit of the poor and for the promotion of justice, and that our prayer should express awareness of these needs;

4) that we reject any form of 'compromise with any kind of social injustice' in our life-style, whether communal or personal, in the goods that we use, and in our relations with the laity who work with us, 'awakening consciences to the drama of misery and to the demands for social justice made by the gospel and by the Church' (ET 18).

SUITABLE STRUCTURES

26. We call attention especially to the matter of *structures*, which should be adapted to promote fraternity. In the first place let us take account of the circumstances of each brother when forming fraternities and assigning work (Const. 88: 2; 146: 4). We should develop our life through forms of government and organisation which foster mutual charitable obedience that is also active and responsible through subsidiarity and co-responsibility, and the growth in maturity of each brother and of the fraternities (Consts. nn. 23: 3ff.; 30:3; 37: 3ff.; 50:4; 142: 2ff; 157: 3ff.; 162; 164: 2ff.). Finally, let us take care that our houses are conducive to fraternal living (Consts. 68: 3).

A LIVED SOLIDARITY

27. We should strengthen co-responsibility and fraternal solidarity so that attitudes of isolation and provincialism may be overcome. For this purpose we should promote the different means of animation and collaboration in the fields of formation, the apostolate, culture, publications etc., at Order level and at continental, national and regional levels. Special attention should be given to animating the Conferences and cultivating a sense of fraternity by the sharing of goods and the promotion of fraternal goodwill between Provinces, and between fraternities of the same Province. Equally, bearing in mind our spirit of poverty and itinerancy, we must take care that long residence in the same place does not affect fraternity.

BROTHERS OF ALL

28. To realise fully our vocation as brothers of all people and of all creatures, we suggest:

a) that we open our fraternities to those who wish to share our life of prayer, community, reflection and work, when opportune (Consts. 68:2; 50:3; 57: if.);

b) that we cultivate a welcoming attitude and a spirit of solidarity towards all, especially towards the needy, offering them hospitality and placing our buildings and our goods at their service;

c) that we always give primacy to our message of fraternity and community spirit in all our meetings with and service of people, above all fostering esteem, understanding and fraternal dialogue with everyone (Consts. 97ff.);

d) that, as a matter of preference, we lead our fraternal life close to the needy, the outcast and the oppressed, uniting our energies with those of voluntary associations and with all initiatives of partnership, unity and solidarity amongst nations (Consts. 12: 3; 99: 3);

e) that we be sensitive to the needs of the local Churches in which we work, developing a climate of generous solidarity and availability of our personnel and of our houses;

f) that we favour efforts at fraternal integration with the entire Franciscan family, and especially with the SF0, so that we may live and offer a message of fraternity amongst ourselves and with the world (Const. 11:3; 95; 152:2);

g) that we cultivate a sense of universal brotherhood with the whole of creation, encouraging respect for nature and the religious awareness of what it means to be a creature (Consts. 11: 1ff.; 46: 7; 97:1).

CHAPTER III°

OUR LIFE OF POVERTY AND MINORITY AMONG THE POOR

POVERTY AS A PROPHETIC SIGN

29. Our vocation as Capuchins, living according to the life and rule of Saint Francis, implies that our existential condition should be that of poor men, and as such it is in itself a witness and a prophetic sign. Therefore let us concern ourselves by preference with the poor, the needy and the suffering in every state of life, in a spirit of sharing and participation, in the condition of minority proper to the Order. Here we can only underline some aspects of poverty, referring to the Constitutions and the preceding PCOs for other matters. The aspects which seem to us more relevant in the world of today relate essentially to our life-style and to our pastoral commitment.

A. AN EXAMINATION OF THE PRESENT SITUATION

THE CAUSES OF WANT

30. Many today are unable to satisfy their primary needs, material, cultural, social and spiritual. This phenomenon is the result of causes which are often outside the control of the human will, but also others which are certainly the fruit of the selfishness of individuals, of nations, and of political, military and economic blocks which create structures exercising oppression and permanent injustice. In this context the 'little ones', because they have neither wealth, knowledge, nor power, are very often condemned to silence and to be the victims of a history decided by others.

Many people lack other vital necessities, are dissatisfied because they lack education, social integration, or a sense of meaning in their lives, and they suffer by not feeling understood in their loneliness, their pain and their interior struggles.

DIVISIONS IN THE CHURCH

31. Like society, so also the Church is marked by the divisions between people, and between rich and poor churches. There are problems which have not yet been studied sufficiently, and have not had sufficient pastoral attention. We find in the Church also groups which have not yet an evident possibility of participating adequately and of making decisions, for example, the laity, and especially women.

CONSUMER MENTALITY

32. A consumer mentality has a negative influence on our life and our activity. We have considerable means at our disposal (buildings, resources, tools). Sometimes the people we go out to are not by preference the poorest, the most needy, the most suffering, and we are at the service of institutions which often operate chiefly in favour of the wealthy classes.

SOLIDARITY WITH THE POOR

33. However, we also come across positive aspects in society, in the Church, and in the Order. In society, through scientific research and the mass media, there is growing an increasing awareness of the problems, and new ways of solving them by joint efforts are sought on an international level.

In the Church there is a more lively sense of community, of participation and of service. For this reason awareness of the scandal of increasing distress is more vivid, and the struggle to overcome it is more positive. There is also at times a voluntary effort by the laity to improve structures and situations generally.

In the Order, greater awareness has had the effect of some brothers choosing to live among the poor, the needy and the suffering; it has also induced the Order to accept new ministries in poor districts and among minorities.

So it is that we are in the process of renewing our Order's tradition of sensitivity to the poor and the needy. The sense of solidarity has also grown through the exchange of personnel and of goods between provinces.

B. CHARACTERISTICS OF OUR POVERTY AND MINORITY

TOWARDS A MORE JUST SOCIETY

34. The fact that many human beings live in extreme poverty and in conditions of unjust dependence is contrary to the dignity and fundamental rights of the human person and of nations, and it obliges us to work for the construction of a just and united society.

CHRIST, THE HOPE OF A NEW SOCIETY

35. The conviction has grown among people that the world is a complex system, in which each part is related to every other part, but that for this very reason it is an open system. Sacred Scripture teaches us that God created the world for all and that he has entrusted to human beings the task of building a just and fraternal society as a prophetic anticipation of the future world, in which all recognise themselves to be children of the same Father and servants of each other (Gal. 5: 13). By becoming incarnate and choosing the way of love, Jesus Christ placed himself within the human situation of poverty, as a man among men, making a choice that liberates them, not partially but totally. We see in him, dead upon the Cross, a poor man; one who loved more than all others, forgiving others; one who reconciled humanity (to God). Inspired by his resurrection, let us strengthen our hope in the building of a new society.

CHRIST OUR MODEL

36. The contemplation of Jesus Christ, poor and crucified, a testimony of the Father's love for all people, enabled Francis to recognise, love and serve the poor and crucified Christ also in human beings, his members, especially in the poorest and most afflicted.

Love of Jesus crucified obliges us to become one with his suffering members, living with them in the give-and-take of attentive and active love. This we do by the austerity of our life and the sharing of our material and personal resources. Here we find the privileged way, following Saint Francis and our Capuchin tradition, which leads us to the poor and crucified Christ, the 'Suffering Servant'.

By vocation we are called, by truly choosing the last place, to find Jesus Christ in the atoning annihilation of his Incarnation (Kenosis) and of his Passion. This Franciscan choice will enable us to be close to all in a spirit of fraternity and joy.

C. SOME PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

THE BEATITUDE OF POVERTY

37. Convinced that evangelical poverty is a gift of God, a value and a beatitude, whilst we work so that people may have a life befitting children of God, let us, by our joyful life and by our preaching, offer the gospel value of poverty to rich and poor alike.

This poverty demands of us full availability to others as regards our talents, our time and our goods.

COURAGEOUS REVISION OF LIFE

38. In the light of the Constitutions (n. 60:6) and of PCO I (nn. 46ff.) we must first of all undertake a courageous review of our life, on the individual and fraternity levels, concerning the use of goods, the austerity and minority of our life, and the preferential direction of our activity.

CONCRETE SIGNS OF POVERTY

39. Our voluntary choice of radical poverty (Consts. n. 46) requires that we give up our unnecessary goods to help those in want.

As a practical measure, every provincial and local fraternity should decide upon a percentage of their income to be given to the poor, in a spirit of sharing and of solidarity.

Our poverty also demands that all share in the service and work of the fraternity, with the aim of avoiding, so far as possible, the employment of outside personnel.

PRESENCE AMONG THE POOR

40. In putting into practice the Constitutions (60: 6) we should effectively foster fraternities which give us a presence among the poor and the marginalised.

During initial formation, in keeping with our life-style, which should be close to the poor and the needy, we should facilitate a period of experience of their way of life. We should also make possible a time of specific preparation of some religious for work amongst them.

In our activity we should prefer the service of the poor, needy and ordinary people. We should stimulate sharing by the brothers and fraternities in voluntary organisations, and we should look favourably on full-time unpaid work amongst the most marginalised groups.

We should support those brothers who work without pay among those farthest from Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER IV° OUR APOSTOLIC ACTIVITY

THE FOUNDATIONS OF EVANGELISATION

41. Preaching the gospel is a fundamental element in the life and activity of the Order. It originates in the love of God for people, a love which culminates in Jesus Christ, made man for our salvation. His whole life, from the first moment of his existence to his death and resurrection, is an integral part of his evangelising activity (cf. EN 6). Then Jesus sent his Holy Spirit to continue this work. Jesus Christ is an incomparable model of evangelisation for us.

We are part of the Church which, formed by the Spirit and enlightened by Christ, walks with all men and women. In all cultural transformations we seek to understand the significance and direction of history as it evolves towards a new humanity.

The preacher of the gospel lives the message before proclaiming it to others. Since we all live in different situations, we should present ourselves to others with a humble attitude, ready to listen and to accept, to evaluate and assimilate the positive elements of every culture.

Francis, a faithful follower of Christ, lived the gospel fully, was receptive to people's conditions, showed the world the love and mercy of God, and thus became the inspiration for our kind of evangelisation.

A. EVANGELISATION IN A CHANGING WORLD

CULTURAL CHANGES

42. During the last twenty years the world, the Church and the Order have undergone rapid and profound transformations. These enormous changes have had a profound influence on the Order.

Cultural changes have also altered the forms in which people express their experience of God and their religious values. People feel the need for the Transcendent. Until recently this need was expressed in institutional and traditional forms. What people express today through materialism, atheism, indifferentism, secularism, relativism and scepticism is a continual challenge to the Church and the Order to find new ways of expressing this need for the Transcendent.

Some traditional ministries of the Order have become much reduced in scope e.g. confessions, devotions, sermons, popular missions, the quest etc. In many provinces numerous friars are dispersed in a multitude of individual ministries, thus threatening to weaken the prophetic presence of the province as such.

CHANGES IN THE ORDER

43. The apostolate in the Church is in a process of rapid development, with profound consequences for the Order:

- a) the notable decrease in the number of diocesan priests has forced the Order to accept pastoral ministries without proper reference to its fundamental charism;
- b) the increase in the number of lay ministers, often professionally trained, has enriched our apostolate. However, in some places the brothers were not prepared for this and have been afraid to co-operate with the laity;
- c) in the Order, the increase in the number of brothers who do not wish to embrace the clerical state, nor to engage in the traditional ministries of the non-clerical brothers, has enriched and changed our apostolate. However, these brothers have not always found with us a way of conducting the apostolate which is stimulating and satisfying;
- d) some clerical brothers do not want to exercise the traditional forms of the apostolate of the Order;
- e) the role and responsibility of women in society have undergone a revolutionary change. Their increased involvement in the ministries of the Church has often been viewed with fear by the brothers.

A NEW RELIGIOUS AWARENESS

44. As a result of cultural transformations, such as secularisation, a change has taken place in the religious awareness of people, together with an increased appreciation of human values. As a result:

- a) in many places popular religious devotions, so important in the past for the apostolate of the brothers, now make little appeal to the religious sentiment of people;
- b) evangelical religious sects of a fundamentalist nature address themselves to people's need for a personal experience of God. The strong sense of identity of these sects appeals to the need for interpersonal relationships. Generally speaking, they make more appeal to the religious sentiments of the people than do our traditional methods of apostolate;
- c) the ecumenical spirit of Vatican Council II has resulted in a new and positive dialogue with other Christian Churches, and a new appreciation of the other great religions of mankind. This has had a profound influence on the missionary approach of the Order.

A NEW DEMAND FOR JUSTICE

45. Poverty and oppression have aroused a new demand for justice at all levels. The Church has declared that action on behalf of justice is an essential element of evangelical life and activity. The fact that we must preach the Good News to the poor for a more just social order calls into question past methods of formation and present mentalities. We note that:

- a) the Order has innumerable works of charity to assist those in need; schemes for the provision of food, shelter, clothing etc. Most of such works aim at helping in emergencies. However, often they do not meet the needs of those who are trapped in structures of poverty;
- b) the call to proclaim that justice is a constitutive element of the gospel is difficult to preach, especially to those who have power and wealth;
- c) in many parts of the world the brothers are forced to live and carry on their apostolate in situations of permanent crisis: war, oppressive regimes, guerrilla warfare, terrorism, famine, epidemics etc.

B. JUDGEMENT AND EVALUATION

A "NEW LOOK" FOR THE ORDER

46. The traditional image of the Capuchin Order has changed considerably. In the Order such a change is not always taken into account in our life and work. Thus, not all attempts to adapt ourselves to the new realities have been successful. Nevertheless, in practically every area a new image of the Order is emerging. Some profound Christian and Franciscan values are fostering the emergence of this new look.

REVITALISING THE APOSTOLATE

47. The ministry of Jesus was an urgent proclamation of the Kingdom of God, a potent force which changed the lives of many, and brought them hope. "The time has come. The Kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News" (Mark 1:15). Many movements of renewal and reform in the Church have found their driving force in renewed faith in the word of God.

The revitalising of our apostolic presence in the world derives from the same profound need which made Francis exclaim: 'This is what I want, this is what I am looking for, this is what I long for with my whole heart' (I Celano n. 22). For us, the Gospel is not only a set of values to be lived and preached, it is the authentic form and content of our life and our apostolate.

TOWARDS COMPLETE LIBERATION

48. Let us accept the reality and the dynamism of the times as a sign of the presence of God, certain that the Holy Spirit will guide us and bring us to understand and interpret the ultimate significance of history. This is the point of departure for our proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Let us take to ourselves the sufferings and aspirations of humanity which is seeking to grow towards complete liberation. Let us present to the Father the cry of the poor, and effectively share their lot (Consts. 46:3). Francis, in the *Regula non Bullata*, invites us to begin our proclamation of the Kingdom of God by living in peace amidst every culture and every nation. 'Let them avoid disputes and be subject to every creature for the love of God' (RnB XVI).

For this reason let us enter into dialogue respectfully, to discover the values common to every culture (goodness, truth, freedom, beauty) because they reveal the presence of God and are the basis of unity.

BUILDING A UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD

49. As a brother among his brothers and sisters, every friar is called to share the gifts which God has given him to help others to live their Christian vocation and to build up a universal brotherhood, to '...strive, in the manner taught by the Gospel, to bring into peaceful and lasting harmony those who are divided by hatred, envy, conflict of ideas, or strife between classes, races and peoples' (Consts. 99:2). The promotion of the dignity and rights of the poor is an

integral part of our gospel mission. We express our vocation to minority more by sharing in the human journey in service to others than by ruling them from positions of prestige.

FAITHFUL TO THE CHURCH

50. Let us be faithful to the Church of Christ, which is engaged in building a new humanity in company with all people of good will. The pursuit of our Franciscan and Capuchin charism is an essential part of our fidelity to the Church. In accordance with the spirit of the Testament of Francis we should always be attentive to the needs of the local Church. Let us share its sufferings and its hopes in the development of new forms and structures.

GUIDING VALUES

51. Francis in the Testament describes his life of faith as a process of continual conversion. In the same way, the coming of the Kingdom of God demands the radical conversion of every brother and of every fraternity. This conversion requires a profound revaluation of the significance of our religious vocation and of the role of religious fraternities in the contemporary world. This calls for an examination of the criteria by which we judge, of our ideas, and of our values, in the light of the Gospel we are urged to open our eyes to the work of the Spirit in the world. It demands that we learn to listen. We must confess that sometimes we are more ready to preach to the world and to our brothers and sisters than to listen reverently to the Spirit who speaks in them. All this requires us to re-examine our projects and our personal priorities in the light of that 'true and loving obedience' which Francis describes in his Admonitions (cf. Admonition III).

C. A CALL TO ACTION AND TO PRACTICAL CHOICES

PASTORAL PLAN

52. As a consequence of what has been said, we strongly recommend in a very special way that every province and circumscription of the Order formulate a pastoral plan, in which our new apostolic presence in the world is clearly expressed. We recommend that the formulation of this plan involve all the brothers and that it embrace all our ministries, whether of individuals or of communities. This new vision of our role in the world should give to each province and circumscription the courage to initiate new forms of activity and to abandon those apostolates and structures which no longer testify to a significant evangelical presence.

CRITERIA

53. The ministries of our Order (preaching, helping in parishes, chaplaincies, the sacrament of reconciliation etc.) should be revitalised in accordance with the following criteria:

- a) sensitivity to human values;
- b) the appropriate renewal demanded by the Church;
- c) in the light of the fundamental values of our life and activity, especially minority.

ECCLESIAL GROUPS

54. Basic communities and movements in the Church present a powerful gospel challenge for our Order:

- a) they are part of the pastoral plan of many Churches;
- b) they are a new form of being Church;
- c) they are a powerful force for evangelisation;
- d) they foster the rise of new expressions of religious life based on the Scriptures, strong interpersonal relationships, and a commitment to the transformation of society.

COMMITMENT TO THE POOR

55. The cry of the poor must find an ever clearer response in the ministries and activities of the Order.

- a) all the brothers should be made aware of the rights and dignity of the poor;
- b) this work of raising awareness of justice is an integral part of all our ministries;
- c) since we are minors, the process of raising the Order's awareness of the poor includes a willingness on the part of the brothers to walk with them, sharing their life, their aspirations and their struggles;
- d) we reaffirm the validity of our manifold works for the poor and among the poor. We recommend that special attention be paid to the most recent forms of human suffering: the unemployed, migrant workers, refugees, victims of drugs and of AIDS, those living alone, the old etc.

ADEQUATE SPIRITUAL ANIMATION

56. We underline the importance of responding to the religious needs of people by seeking to provide adequate spiritual animation. The transformation of religious attitudes demands of us:

- a) that our fraternities live a credible gospel life;
- b) that we allow people to share in our spiritual life;
- c) that we open our houses to different groups, such as youth groups, for their spiritual guidance and to foster vocations to the religious life;
- d) that we train spiritual guides capable of responding to people's thirst for God;
- e) that confessors, suitably up-dated in moral and pastoral theology and in psychology, be available to serve the people;
- f) that we set up houses of prayer, as the Constitutions (56:1) desire, and collaborate in establishing other centres of spirituality.

NEW MISSIONARY INITIATIVES

57. The Order continues to promote its mission to the young Churches:

- a) we seek to discover the signs of God's presence in every culture;
- b) we are ready to collaborate in the creation of autonomous local Churches by training suitable ministers;
- c) we recommend that the Order agrees to initiate the Capuchin-Franciscan presence in places where it does not yet exist, especially in Africa and in eastern Asia;
- d) we recommend an increase in the present missionary efforts of the Order. Also, suitable structures should be developed to widen inter-provincial collaboration in favour of new missionary initiatives;
- e) our presence in countries which do not permit explicit proclamation of the Gospel retains its validity, for 'the chief apostolate of the lesser brothers is this: to live the gospel life in the world in sincerity, simplicity and joy' (Consts. 145: 2).

THE MASS MEDIA

58. The mass media and the means of communication are an important part of contemporary culture. We recommend that these means be used in a responsible way in order to create a new religious mentality. This requires:

- a) that the mass media and the instruments of communication be used as a means of preaching the Gospel;
- b) that the brothers learn to use such means critically, and teach people to do likewise;
- c) that lay people also be trained to carry the Christian message in this very important area of communications.

TOGETHER WITH THE SFO

59. We should continue to regard spiritual assistance to the SFO as an obligatory and privileged family duty. Through the real complementarity of life that exists between us we strengthen our presence and apostolic activity and at the same time enrich ourselves with the gifts of so many brothers and sisters who live the same Franciscan charism in the specific vocation of the laity.

BIBLICAL APOSTOLATE

60. In keeping with our Franciscan vocation and, as the Church wishes, in order to respond better to the challenge of evangelisation today, we should give due priority to the Biblical Apostolate.

PASTORAL CARE OF THE SICK

61. Pastoral care of the sick and the aged demands a renewed option and new training, including in-service training. Let us give pride of place to the work of visiting and helping the sick and the aged in their homes, to bring them spiritual and material help. We should also promote voluntary visiting of hospitals and of people in their homes by lay associations.

OPEN TO ALL NEEDS

62. In the different cultural areas of the Order there are many other activities which meet the needs of the people and of the Church: the promotion of culture, especially by books and publications, the apostolate of the family, youth apostolate etc. Our urgent desire to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ requires constant openness and sensitivity to every new possibility in society and in the Church.

CHAPTER V°

OUR PROCLAMATION OF JUSTICE AND PEACE, AND OF RESPECT FOR NATURE

GOD'S PLAN

63. Following Jesus in the footsteps of Francis, we have come to realise anew that, as brothers, our lives and actions must express in a prophetic way the values of justice, peace and respect for nature.

Harmony among these three realities was God's plan on the day of creation. It was destroyed by sin. Now as brothers we must collaborate to restore this original harmony and to prepare for the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth, with all our brothers and sisters throughout the world. This is the plan of the Covenant inaugurated by Jesus.

THE GIFT OF PEACE AND JUSTICE

64. Peace was a gift entrusted to Francis and his followers by the Lord himself. We must proclaim it by our life and by our actions. It must be solidly founded on love and on truth, but it cannot be genuinely evangelical if it does not also include justice. As the Synod of Bishops said (1971): 'Action for justice and participation in the transformation of the world appear to us clearly as the constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel i.e. of the mission of the Church for the redemption of the human race and liberation from all forms of oppression'.

THE UNIVERSE UNDER THREAT

65. Moreover, today the whole universe - water, air and 'Mother Earth' herself - are threatened by pollution, and by destruction on a huge scale.

The fact that John Paul II has declared Francis of Assisi the patron saint of friends of the environment (29th November 1979) invites us to extend to all creation Francis' way of loving in justice and in peace.

A. ANALYSIS OF THE PRESENT SITUATION

I - SIGNS OF DEATH AND OF LIFE IN THE WORLD

NEW AND COMPLEX PROBLEMS

66. The world in which we have to proclaim justice, peace and respect for nature is gravely wounded, but it is at the same time traversed by a new breath of life.

Many problems, above all in the realm of the economy and of ecology, are so new and complex that so far the experts have not been able to find adequate and satisfactory solutions. For

example, there are as yet no 'models' for resolving the conflict between technology and unemployment.

The Christian Churches, too, have proposed significant research e.g. a plan for a new world economic system. Without knowledge of such research it is impossible to make a realistic judgement about the great problems of the day and about those responsible for these situations.

a. Signs of death

THE THREAT OF DESTRUCTION

67. As in the time of Moses, so also today, one can hear the desperate cry of millions of women and of men unjustly deprived of their most fundamental rights. Human life and its environment are threatened with destruction. It is the first time since creation that man has held in his hands such great power over all the earth, either to destroy it or to make it much more habitable. The very future of our planet and of humanity is at stake.

MILITARISATION AND OPPRESSION

68. Ever since the Second World War, humanity has found itself in a chronic state of war. Weapons of war are ever more numerous, sophisticated and dangerous. The staggering expenditure devoted to them unbalances the world economy and further plunges the nations into debt to such an extent as to impede help for poorer countries and hinder their normal development. While armaments increase one does not see an equivalent commitment to solving the problems of millions who are dying of famine, of countless peasants driven off their land, of the growing number of abandoned children, and of systematic genocide in various parts of the world.

FORMS OF VIOLENCE, OBVIOUS AND CONCEALED

69. There are specific ways in which we experience violence. All around us there is physical violence against persons and property, sexual crimes, including rape and the ill-treatment of women and children. There are more hidden forms of institutionalised violence, as when multi-national companies put themselves beyond the effective control of governments in their world-wide search for profits and commercial domination; when racism continues in subtle forms; when religion is politicised or distorted by fanaticism (e.g. in some forms of Islam there is the 'Jihad', or 'holy war'; when work and livelihood are denied because of the colour of one's skin; or when politics and ideology justify their existence by apartheid. All this can become a way of life.

INSENSITIVITY

70. Perhaps, given the mass media which continually bombard us with news of violence, we also have become hardened? It is said that, in order to survive, the victims of the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki developed, in a few hours, an insensitivity to the cry of sorrow around them. With such cries of the poor in our midst, millions of abortions every year, the exploitation of women in so many nations, inhuman working conditions, worldwide

denial of freedom of various kinds, systematic unemployment justified in the name of economic growth, the growing disparity between rich and poor within nations and between nations, terrorism and torture, one could ask whether we also have become hardened, whether we also have not developed ways of ignoring the death which surrounds us.

MANIPULATION OF THE MASS MEDIA

71. The new technologies and the mass media, capable of opening this world of ours to unthought-of prospects - are they not all too often manipulated by those who hold power and who are not always interested in the promotion of gospel justice?

AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

72. Today there is often grave concern about the harm done to the balance of nature, which happens in the waters of rivers and seas because of the discharge of contaminated waste and of nuclear waste; in the atmosphere of industrial areas because of gases from factories and from heavy traffic; in the vegetable and animal world because of harmful exploitation. Thousands of animal and vegetable species are disappearing or are threatened with extinction. Vast areas of the earth are eroded and the deserts advance. Humanity sees its future threatened.

b. Signs of life

DEFENCE OF LIFE

73. Today we find many people who have become aware of these fatal conditions and are reacting to them.

Groups which give human and economic support to women who, at great cost, choose not to have an abortion; groups which, at great risk, speak out forcefully in their society, preaching a prophetic call to conversion; members of resistance groups which act in a non-violent way to promote social change; groups of people who supervise international agreements so that human freedoms are not violated by oppressive regimes; various peace movements which launch appeals and act with great integrity.

In addition to groups there are the well-known contemporary martyrs put to death because of their defence of human values, especially those of peace: Mahatma Gandhi, Anne Frank, Martin Luther King, Maximilian Kolbe, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Oscar Romero, Titus Brandsma etc. As well as these there are the millions of silent martyrs who, by their lives, their witness and their energies, took action to resist the forces which operate in favour of death rather than life.

DEFENCE OF ECOLOGICAL BALANCE

74. New associations are coming into existence for the defence of the balance of nature, of natural parks, of animal species, of the seas and the rivers, for the protection of clean air in industrialised zones and places which have high traffic density. These are the new 'crusaders for peace' in defence of threatened nature.

II. THE CHURCH: LIGHTS AND SHADOWS

THE CHURCH'S DIFFICULTIES

75. Today, on account of the complexity of modern life, it is not easy for the Church to give a well-articulated and realistic set of answers to those who seek a more just world, and who want to know the reason for so many things. The Church has difficulty in evaluating what is at stake, and the challenges to which we have to respond today. For her, as for everybody, there is a great temptation to give in to fatalism and to go with the crowd.

a. Shadows

DANGER OF CLOSING IN ON SELF

76. Like every institution with a long history, the Church does not escape the risk of shutting herself up in her past, in her customs, in her achievements. Perhaps she does not ask herself with sufficient urgency the question which Paul VI put to the Synod in 1974: 'What has today become of the energy born of the Good News, capable of profoundly moving the conscience of humanity?' (EN n. 4).

THE SPLIT BETWEEN DOCTRINE AND ACTION

77. Perhaps also we Christians feel more at ease with an 'individualistic' spirituality unconnected with the real life of individuals and groups of people, removed as we are from precisely those places where injustice is perpetrated, or quite blind to the injustices which we ourselves commit? We feel more secure in the role of a director or teacher. Perhaps it is true that, as a Church, we are too little accustomed to face the tension of being exposed, of listening, and letting ourselves be taught, of showing our brothers their rights, and of accompanying them in their personal and collective development. Our preaching about justice has certainly become more incisive, but have we had the courage to go into action as a Church?

b. Light

DEFENCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

78. In the Church there has been an effort, especially since the 19th century, to form a body of social teaching to encourage the faithful in their social duties. Vatican II and the thinking which followed it have given (the Church) a decisive orientation towards humanity. The Pope and the Bishops never tire of reminding us of these ideas. In many countries the Church openly defends human rights against oppressive regimes and resists abuses of the environment. Many times she is alone in doing so.

This clearer rediscovery of the love of Jesus for humanity has found an enthusiastic echo everywhere and we can say, has opened us up to the future again. The beatitudes of justice and peace seem to be a special gift of the Holy Spirit for our times, especially for the young.

III. OUR CAPUCHIN FRATERNITY: LIGHTS AND SHADOWS

a. Shadows

PSYCHOLOGICAL INSENSITIVITY'

79. We Capuchins also have not escaped these limitations of the Church. Bro. Paschal Rywalski, then General Minister, said in his Report to the General Chapter of 1982 that we Capuchins were less advanced than the Roman Church in many matters concerning our presence in the world. We suffer from 'psychological insensitivity' in relation to the problems of the world, a fact proved also by various surveys made in the Order in recent years.

We have still to rectify clerical attitudes. Often we are inclined to support the upper classes which support us. At times our attitude towards the world reflects that of the mass media.

b. Light

NEW PATHS FOR THE FUTURE

80. The recent renewal of our Order, so clearly evident in the revision of the Constitutions in 1968, and which has been continued by the PCOs and many local meetings, has opened up unthought-of paths for our future. Our level of awareness of what happens to humanity and of what are the concrete demands of Jesus' fraternal plan for us has been decisively intensified in recent years. One sign of this, amongst others, is the new way of regarding ourselves as 'persons' in our mutual relationships and in the practice of obedience.

We expect the Order to take the reality of the situation seriously into account. We hope that it will, as in its early days, get back to listening to its primitive vocation in order to make some decisive choices.

B. CRITERIA AND MOTIVES FOR OUR CHOICES

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

81. A prime criterion is respect for fundamental human rights. This implies putting man and his rights back at the centre of our concerns; reacting every time that a human being, or a people, is the object of injustice, or is impeded in its normal development, or is excluded from any kind of rightful participation (cf. Const. 99:1-2); and intervening every time nature is abused or attacked.

FIGHTING FOR THE CAUSE OF HUMANITY

82. Jesus spent himself for man's sake. He is 'the Just One' (Is. 45:8), 'our Peace' (Eph. 2: 14), passionate in his desire that all should have life to the full (Jn. 10: 10ff.), that no one should be excluded from this, and that those who have less chance of life should be given first consideration (Lk. 4: 1 6ff). This fraternal plan of Jesus- lived by us courageously, dangerously

and if necessary even to the point of a violent death - is our Christian vocation. If this life-giving circle which leads to peace is impeded by injustice or any other evil, then we must fight so that life may continue to circulate abundantly for all.

THE EXPERIENCE OF SAINT FRANCIS

83. This is the experience lived by Francis in his following of Jesus. The vocation he received was to proclaim peace, i.e. life in abundance (Testament 23; I Cel 29). He did this with the joy of one who transmits life, but also in a spirit of penance and conversion, like Jesus, who shed his blood to fulfil his mission of peace (Eph. 2: 14). He first became a man of peace, and then he proclaimed peace.

PREFERENCE FOR THE 'OUTCASTS'

84. Like Jesus, Francis preached the gospel of peace to all, with a preference for the 'outcasts' from the beginning (Testament 1-3). He did this as a 'minor', taking the lowliest as his starting point; he did it without violence, without powerful resources, but resolutely, taking on the risks involved (his visit to the Sultan).

UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD

85. Francis lived and preached peace to people, to animals, and to things, as to brothers and sisters, members of the same family, respectfully and gratuitously. He believed that every being could become a 'brother' - the Sultan, the wolf, fire. Thus he did justice to persons and to nature, seeing them as God sees them, and treating them as God treats them.

OUR CHARISM

86. Francis has passed on to us a special charism for peace, justice and nature. The point of view of the poor is the privileged place from which a son of Francis sees and proclaims values. Reconciliation and respect for creation are the means that Francis proposes to us for attaining true peace and harmony. This forms an integral part of our Franciscan vocation.

OUR APOSTOLATE

87. What has been said can be lived in the greatest freedom and pluriformity. However, the substance of it cannot be rejected without calling into question our Franciscan charism. Paul VI reminded us of this at our General Chapter in 1976: 'I would like to recall one of the most traditional characteristics of the spirit of your Order, which it seems to us important to emphasise even today, especially in your apostolate, namely, to make yourselves in all circumstances bringers of peace amongst men.'

BOLDLY AND WITH COURAGE

88. Our Constitutions of 1982, in line with the CPOs of Quito (9,17), of Mattli (4,22,27) and of Rome (6,8,12,31,42,44), invite us to be bold and courageous. 'We should not be afraid to proclaim to persons in positions of power and to rulers of peoples the message of conversion to justice and the duty of preserving peace' (Consts. 145:4). Many of our brothers have already

run the risk of doing this in the past. Those who try to do it today do not always receive a warm welcome.

THE EXAMPLE OF SAINT FRANCIS

89. It is a matter of rediscovering the hidden force of our charism. On the occasion of the eighth centenary of the birth of Francis the Italian Bishops wrote, 'without trying to change the social structures of his time, Francis in fact revolutionised his time by renewing the conscience of people and the face of society'. (*Osservatore Romano*, 14th March 1982, p.4)

CAPUCHIN PROMOTERS OF JUSTICE AND PEACE

90. Our active presence in the promotion of justice and peace draws inspiration also from the tradition of our Order. Indeed, the Capuchins, such as Giacomo da Casale, Marco d'Aviano, Saint Lawrence of Brindisi etc., right from the start, have promoted a great work of social pacification and justice, as much in humble ways and on the local level e.g. through their preaching, as in diplomatic missions on the grand scale, with people of eminence.

C. SPECIFIC LINES OF ACTION

ON THE WAY OF CHRIST CRUCIFIED

91. The contemplation of Jesus and of his members can transform us. The oppressed and the outcast will be our brothers and sisters. They will also be our teachers. With Jesus and these, his suffering members, we will experience conversion to peace, not theoretically, but in a way that will spur us to definite and courageous actions. That will certainly set us on the way of the Cross, but it will also make us capable of loving all, even our enemies, as our Franciscan work for peace demands.

This contemplation of Jesus and of his members will doubtless make us realise that we must change many things in our personal and community life which are thought to be important. It will urge us to radically renew our choice of priorities, to 're-found' our life, starting from a rediscovered 'inspiration'.

LIVING CONTACT WITH THE MARGINALISED

92. The outcasts of this world have privileged admission to the Kingdom of God and are the first to receive the Good News (Lk. 4: 14-18), for which reason it has become a duty for the Order to have fraternities amongst the poor, in order to hear their authentic voice. We are fortunate in having so many of our brothers in daily contact with the oppressed and the marginalised. These will help us to hear the cry of the poor and to admit it into our prayers and into our resistance to everything which oppresses them. Therefore, let us follow the example of Francis, who willed to return frequently to the lepers in order to learn from them (Rnb IX, 3),

THE DRAMA OF WRETCHED POVERTY

93. Let us remember the words addressed to religious by Paul VI some twenty years ago: 'How, then, will the cry of the poor find an echo in our life? In the first place it should debar you from anything which would be a compromise with any form of social injustice. It obliges you also to awaken consciences to the drama of wretched poverty and the demands of social justice, of the gospel and of the Church. It leads some of your members to join the poor in their state of life, and to share their bitter cares.' (ET 18)

A NEW WAY OF LEARNING

94. We have much to do regarding the conversion of which we have spoken. It is a new education, which must affect the heart as well as the intellect. Francis spent a long time among the outcasts before clearly understanding his vocation. It is in public places and in contact with the outcasts that we also will understand the profound meaning of our vocation, experiencing for ourselves the injustices and the violence of which they are the daily victims. It is thus that Jesus advanced in wisdom, in contact with the outcasts and the despised of his time.

LIVED ALTERNATIVES

95. Our programme of initial formation should ensure that the new brothers have this experience. The same is true for ongoing formation. Do not let us neglect any opportunity of making other people also aware of this reality; from members of the fraternities of the SFO to the people we meet every day.

Let us remember at once that it is not sufficient for the sons of Francis to propose solutions and alternatives: we must personally 'be' and 'live' those alternatives and pray to the Lord to help us on this road.

A special word of thanks to our brothers and to the fraternities who daily share the life of the 'least brethren' at all levels; to those who are one with them in their sufferings and in their resistance, to those who day after day live out the fraternal plan of Jesus, each in his own way and in the most varied circumstances.

RENUNCIATION OF VIOLENCE

96. An essential part of the conversion of Francis was his renunciation of violence. In this spirit, mindful of the value of the human person, we refuse to support the use of violence as a means of righting wrongs. In the same way we support the right of conscientious objection to military service, and we are likewise opposed to torture and the death penalty.

INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION

97. If we wish justice, peace and ecology to become specific services in our provinces and fraternities we must form an international secretariat with a full-time staff. Its responsibility will be to develop and co-ordinate this new ministry throughout the world, in a Franciscan manner. It will be at the service of the General Definitory, which should constantly become the voice of the poor for the whole Order. It could also collaborate with other groups, religious and non-religious, which pursue the same end on an international scale.

The provinces are earnestly requested to create a secretariat for JPE (justice, peace and ecology) where there is not one already, and to give responsibility for it to capable people.

A DEFINITE PROGRAMME

98. A definite programme to encourage and enable the brothers in the areas of justice, peace and ecology will have to be devised. Our option for these values should be based on scientific data in the fields in question. Therefore what is needed is sufficient information and trained experts in these fields, based on solid biblical foundations and on a critical reading of the life and writings of Francis. We invite our University professors e.g. at the Antonianum, Saint Bonaventure's, and other Franciscan centres, to prepare seminars and formation programmes about these subjects, and also to offer them as subjects for university studies.

REVIEW OF LIFE

99. Every form of injustice and inequality should disappear from our fraternities, especially any forms of clericalism which may yet exist. We should also re-examine the salary paid to our employees. We should watch over how banks use the money we have deposited with them.

VIGILANCE REGARDING ECOLOGY

100. The brethren should also be vigilant in matters ecological, avoiding having gardens or woods which are used neither by us nor by others, or selling them at the risk of their being exploited. They shall be at one with those who fight against the destruction of nature in any form.

SOLIDARITY WITH ALL

101. We are certainly not the leaders in the struggle to build a just world, nor are we alone in doing so, nor necessarily the best. Often the best thing we can do is to support groups already in existence, doing so in a Franciscan way.

We should first of all support initiatives originating within the Franciscan family.

THE GREATNESS OF OUR VOCATION

102. We have not yet finished discovering the hidden power and greatness of our vocation. Like Francis, we have received the mission to live and preach peace and reconciliation. Through our vocation we bear witness that it is possible to live fraternal relationships in this world, based on justice and love. At the same time we are custodians of Nature which the Creator has entrusted to all.

CONCLUSION

We reached the end of our reflections on Saturday, 27th September 1986 which, like every Saturday, was dedicated to Mary, Queen of our Order. At the end of our meeting we can say, in the words of the Magnificat: 'My soul glorifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.' We look forward with confidence to the day when the whole of Capuchin life and activity becomes prophetic in the sense of the Magnificat and shares in the process by which the proud are confounded in their inmost thoughts; (when) the power of the great is re-ordered so that the humble and oppressed are exalted, (when) we invite the hearts of the wealthy to be converted, so that the hungry are assured of better things; (when) reconciliation and peace become moral attitudes.

A time of grace began in the Order three years ago, when we were invited to reflect on the theme of 'our prophetic presence: our apostolic life and activity'. For us delegates the fact that PCO V was held in Brazil has been a potent experience of that grace. Now, it is calling on all the brothers of the Order to continue the journey they have begun, to welcome the reflections and suggestions of this document, and courageously put its recommendations into practice.

Trusting in the Lord who has assisted the Order in the past, we look to the future with hope. May God, who began this work, bring it to perfection until the day of Christ Jesus our Lord.

VI° PLENARY COUNCIL OF THE ORDER LIVING POVERTY IN BROTHERHOOD Assisi, 1998

PRESENTATION

To all the Brothers of the Order

Dear Brothers,

We are pleased to present you with the conclusions agreed upon and drafted by the VI Plenary Council of the Order, held in Assisi from 7 September to 1 October, 1988, on the topic of *Living Poverty in Brotherhood*.

Two and a half years ago we announced to the Order our intention of holding a Plenary Council dealing with gospel poverty in its communal and institutional aspects. Throughout this time the Order, as a Fraternity, was involved in preparing for this important event, the venue for which was, significantly, Assisi. There, 31 Delegates of the Conferences, representing all five continents, met with the General Minister and his Definitory.

In publishing the results of the work at this time, we are sure you will find them a valuable resource. Together with the brotherhood experienced during the Plenary Council, they are an expression of the lively unity that exists between the fraternity of the Order as a whole and its central government. As the Constitutions suggest (cf. 123,1), they will serve to promote awareness of the mutual responsibility and cooperation of all the Brothers, and will foster the unity and communion of the Order in pluriformity. At the same time, we confirm these reflections of the Plenary Council, so that they lose none of their value as a guideline for the whole Order (cf. *Const.* 123,6).

On our part we have decided to study the text during the General Definitory meeting of January next. This will enable us to see which points can be put into effect immediately and which might need to be dealt with at the General Chapter. In any event, we intend to accept all that this Plenary Council has submitted to us in its reflections, and everything that can foster the process of renewal in the Order.

We would like to say a word about the choice of method that guided the Assembly in its work. As you can see from the text, the Plenary Council decided to adopt the method of *propositiones* or proposals, instead of drafting a document as previous Plenary Councils had done. The purpose of *propositiones* is not an in-depth development of a topic from a doctrinal point of view. Doctrinal elements are present, but their purpose is functional in view of a proposal, and this is above all intended for action. By using the method of *propositiones*, the participants were able to engage in an intense sharing and exchange of views. Further, it enabled them to recognize, value and welcome our rich cultural diversity. Not least, it guided our way towards a surprisingly broad consensus regarding the Brothers' varied and at times differing points of view.

Following the wishes of the Plenary Council, a small redactional committee revised the style and literary form of the text of the *propositiones*, keeping always to what the brethren had suggested. Following the majority opinion at the Plenary Council, we also considered it appropriate to insert titles. While these are not part of the substance of the text, they are an aid to understanding it.

Finally, since Major Superiors and Guardians have primary responsibility for the formation of the Brothers (cf. *Const.* 23, 6), we earnestly recommend that they make known and study these principles proposed by the Plenary Council for living our gospel poverty in brotherhood. At the same time, as far as they can and have the authority to do so, we ask them to ensure that they are applied in practice.

Brothers, may the Lord's Spirit inspire us all with a renewed love for our Lady holy Poverty, and by His holy operation help us to preserve it.

The General Minister and Definitory

Br. John Corriveau
Br. Ermanno Ponzalli
Br. Aurelio Laita
Br. Andrew Anil Sequeira
Br. Tadeusz Bargiel
Br. Paul Hinder
Br. William Wiethorn
Br. Andrés Stanovnik
Br. Thaddaeus Ruwa'ichi
Rome, 4 October 1998
Solemnity of St. Francis

PROPOSALS

GOSPEL POVERTY AND MINORITY IN OUR TIMES

1. **The foundation and model of our gospel poverty** is Jesus, the Word of God, who “emptied Himself (*kenosis*), taking the form of a slave...even to accepting death, death on a cross” (*Phil* 2,7). Following in His footsteps, we have freely chosen poverty: poverty for the sake of the Kingdom; poverty that is free and joyful. It is not an end in itself but, like Christ’s poverty, who “although He was rich, became poor to make us rich” (*2 Cor* 8,9; cf. *Const.* 59,1), its purpose is to make us available for God and for our brothers and sisters.

2. **St. Francis’ fundamental intention** was to “observe the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (*Rb* 1,1). It was in the Incarnation and the Cross that he saw the pattern of his radical attitude, which was: “to keep nothing of himself for himself” (cf. *LOrd* 29). This means first of all recognizing that all the good that is in us and is accomplished through us is a gift of God, and that therefore we must return it to Him in praise and thanksgiving. The second component of this radical self-giving is more painful: we have to be “firmly convinced that we have nothing of our own except our vices and sins” (*Rnb* 17,7). To these Francis adds a third, equally demanding element: “We should be glad when we fall into various trials and suffer anguish of soul or body” (*Rnb* 17,8), and “boast of our humiliations and in taking up daily the holy Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (*Ad* 5,8).

3. For Francis, the gospel ideal of poverty involved choosing minority. To be “lowly” is a genuine manifestation of interior poverty, which in the Franciscan life-project also expresses itself externally, as humility of heart and lack of power (cf. *Admonitions* 2,3; 3; 4; 6,4, etc.), and as solidarity with the needy and the deprived.

Without minority, our poverty would have no meaning and would become a source of pride, just as without material poverty, interior poverty would be unreal.

Conversely, for Francis poverty and minority are not ends in themselves, but help us to put into practice “the highest gift” (cf. *1Cor* 12, 31) which is **love**, expressed for people and for all creation in Franciscan brotherhood.

It was this life of gospel brotherhood, lived in poverty and minority, that drew people of every social condition to gather around Francis and made them responsive to the most needy in practical ways.

4. From Francis was born “an Order of Brothers” (cf. *1Cel* 38). Our whole spirituality and tradition has highlighted poverty, viewing it especially under the ascetical, individual aspect, without forgetting, obviously, the communal and fraternal dimensions (cf. especially *PCO* I, 46-61; *PCO* IV 43-45; *PCO* V 29-40 & 55; *Const.* 59-74). Nevertheless, the renewed sense of brotherhood, the world-wide spread of the Order and new problems in our society invite us to reconsider and deepen the meaning of our “**gospel poverty in brotherhood**”, specifically from the communal, institutional and structural point of view.

5. Within the Franciscan movement the Capuchins have placed particular emphasis on ***austere simplicity*** in their manner of living poverty and ***closeness to the people*** in practicing minority (preaching to the people, serving the sick and plague victims, questing...). These

values, when they are lived in brotherhood, renewed and encultured, are a powerful witness to the gospel and a stimulus for the advancement of the weakest people.

6. Francis judged that greed and avarice disrupt relationships with God, just as ambition and competition damage the sense of brotherhood among people. In order to live the gospel ideal of love and brotherhood in its fullness, Francis and his first companions adopted a form of life that involved courageous choices of poverty for those times. Among these were the non-use of money, non-appropriation of goods and manual work as the ordinary means of support and help to others, and alms in case of manifest necessity.

In recent times, responding to changed circumstances, Paul VI (Declaration of March 4, 1970) abrogated all the pontifical declarations that had interpreted the practice of poverty in the Order for seven centuries, except those contained in canon law and the Constitutions. He thereby declared that Franciscans were no longer bound by the economic choices of Francis and his first companions.

However, we are still bound to be faithful to the profound intentions of St Francis. Therefore, we need to look for new ways of living out a number of options that are fundamental in Franciscanism, such as austerity of life and commitment in work; solidarity and mutual dependence; a life rooted in the experience of the people, particularly the poor; a correct use and administration of goods and property, and commitment to sustainable growth.

7. In the face of the globalized world economy, we Capuchin Friars Minor, who also feel its influence, humbly and faithfully reaffirm **the value of gospel poverty as a valid alternative for our times** according to Francis' original inspiration and the constituent elements of the Capuchin Franciscan tradition. Therefore we accept **gospel poverty** as the option we have made as a family, and commit ourselves to rethink it afresh. How, for example, are we to react to the influences of a globalized world? First of all, we need to be familiar with the mechanics of this new economic order, to understand it and appraise it critically, being particularly aware of the moral problems underlying the economy. Then, we must live and give witness to our gospel form of life, which, for all its weakness, wishes to counter the prevailing economic system by putting forward a more genuinely human way; with its values of simplicity, gratuitousness, the will to serve, respect for persons and for creation. We should remember that we are not alone in this endeavor, rather, we walk alongside countless men and women of good will who in different ways work for goodness, justice and peace.

8. So that we do not find ourselves unprepared in the face of the challenges of today's world, suitable courses should be arranged during the time of initial formation, to provide knowledge of economic and social realities and work experience (voluntary work, service to the poor, etc.), as called for also by PCO IV. (cf. 51). Ongoing formation should also make the study of this subject one of its main concerns.

BROTHERS AMONG THE POOR & PLURIFORMITY

9. With the whole Church we reaffirm our preferential option for the poor. This choice is not at the discretion of the individual Brother but challenges us as a fraternity, and must be visibly shown: by living with the poor in order to take on what is valid in their way of believing, loving and hoping; by serving them, preferably with our own hands; by sharing bread with them and

defending their rights. Being poor with the poor and becoming their brothers is part and parcel of our Franciscan charism and of our tradition as “brothers of the people”.

St. Francis says in his Testament that his conversion journey took a decisive turn when the Lord led him among lepers. It was then that he “left the world” and also changed his social condition and his residence, leaving the centre for the periphery of Rivo Torto and Our Lady of the Angels. Our Constitutions and the Plenary Councils of Quito and Garibaldi encourage us to establish some of our fraternities among the poor: “Those Brothers who, in the particular circumstances of a region, live with the poor, sharing their lot and their aspirations, are worthy of praise” (*Const.* 60,6; cf. 12, 2-4; 100, 3; 104,1; *PCO V*, 25,1). We believe that solidarity with those on the edge of society is one of the prime responses against the injustice of our times.

10. We recognize that closeness to the culture of the poor enriches us from a human point of view and is a necessary hermeneutical tool with which to reach the heart of our Franciscan heritage. We therefore propose that every Province of the Order draft and implement plans to establish and monitor our humble presence among the poor. In this way, sharing their culture from within and being accepted as members of their society, we will be able to promote its integral development. Such plans should include careful selection of the insertion fraternities and the formation of the Brothers who are members. In addition, they must ensure the constant support of the circumscriptions, as well as ways of fraternally sharing the experiences.

11. **Francis** embodied gospel radicalness and, in his unmistakable style, stressed the fact that to live and proclaim the Gospel means *nudus nudum Christum sequi*.

For him the fundamental thing is surrender to God in total trust. Thus, he insists that his Brothers should go about the world without taking anything, like sheep among wolves, leaving it to their daily witness of life as lesser brothers, before anything else, to proclaim the gospel. For Francis, this way of being and living, powerless and totally defenseless, was not a method or condition of evangelization, but was already in itself a proclamation of the Gospel. Our **Capuchin** history encourages us to take up once more and bring up to date this direct form of gospel presence among people of all classes, with special preference for those who are simple and poor. Consequently, we must seek to implement models of evangelization that are less bound up with the power and security that derives from having many expensive resources. We should be more ready to learn from the poor and to place our trust in God alone.

12. This Plenary Council of the Order reaffirms that poverty, too, as an essential element of our life, must be lived in the light of what the Constitutions say about the unity and pluriformity of our Franciscan vocation. On the one hand, unity refers to brotherhood and to the principle that “*because of the same vocation, the friars are all equal*” (*Const.* 84, 3). But situations differ, so that without sound **inculturation**, no true pluriformity or evangelization will ever be possible. Inculturation of poverty must go as far as our dwellings, buildings, lifestyle, the poor means we use in the apostolate, and our external appearance.

The principles that should guide inculturation in pluriformity are:

- the fraternity’s creative fidelity to the one Spirit living in the Order and speaking in the different circumscriptions and in the signs of the times;
- fraternal communion and obedience to the superiors, which guarantees the unity of our charism (*Const.* 5,5);
- joyful acceptance that we are different, yet in communion;

- readiness to share everything that belongs to us.

13. The Constitutional norm, “*the minimum necessary, not the maximum allowed*” (67,3) can only be meaningfully applied in the context of the societies in which our friars live. We therefore propose that the Brothers in each circumscription apply this norm to their own specific circumstances. With the introduction of budgetary controls and spending limits, the local communities and the provincial fraternity can limit their use of resources and give an appropriate example of moderation and even austerity.

SOURCES OF SUPPORT: WORK & QUESTING

14. **Work** contributes to the completion of creation, is beneficial to society, unifies the community and fulfils the person. Evangelical poverty, as a way of following Christ, restores the dignity of work in a world where it has been reduced to a mere commodity. For us Franciscans, work is a form of solidarity among ourselves and with the people, and is a primary source of support.

We wish to highlight some aspects here: work should promote the value of the individual and meet the needs of the community; our Brothers should have equality of opportunity in training for their work; we should be critically aware of the forces operating within the world of work.

15. The Franciscan tradition has always seen work as a grace. Therefore, any work is permissible for a Brother, as long as it is honest and in keeping with our lowly state. (cf. *Test.* 20; *Rnb* 7, 9; *IV PCO*, 49). We know that the reality of work is relative to the economic conditions in force in various periods of history and in different geographical contexts. Given such variety, we should value all kinds of work: apostolic, charitable, intellectual and manual. The Order has always valued the apostolate, understood both as a sacramental action and as evangelization in many forms. This is one type of work that must be given appropriate space and dignity. As well as this, we wish to underline the dignity and usefulness of manual work, the widespread need today for specialization in particular jobs, with equal opportunities and access for non-cleric and cleric Brothers alike. In order to keep alive in us the sense of gratuitous giving, each community should keep a proper balance between paid work, necessary for the support of the fraternity, and work done without payment. We must always be convinced that a Brother is not to be valued for the work he does or the money he earns. There should always be a communal sharing and discernment of the activities chosen by individuals (cf. *Const.* 76,2; 77,4). This will also help to avoid the danger that a Brother's work becomes his private property and makes him impossible to transfer, and insensitive to the needs of the local and provincial fraternity.

16. **Domestic work** is so important that whoever does not share in domestic work weakens the fraternity (cf. *IV PCO*, 19). The active collaboration of all the Brothers in the ordinary daily life of the fraternity - monitored in the local chapter - is useful for the growth of a sense of fraternity, equality and reciprocal dependence or assistance. Domestic work also makes us share in the lifestyle of ordinary people. It not only takes the form of manual work; in fact, in any community today, jobs can range from gardening to computing, and each Brother can make available his practical skills or intellectual abilities.

In some areas of the Order, **lay people** are employed to work in our houses because of the age, small numbers or the many commitments of the Brothers, especially when the houses are very big. This may be done as long as we act within the law, but we should be careful not to adopt such a solution automatically as a matter of course, or in a way that causes a “boss mentality” in ourselves.

17. We live in a fast-moving society, under pressure from commitments, deadlines, and modern communications media. Our fraternities do not escape these pressures, so that as well as avoiding idleness we need to avoid excessive **activism**, even in the apostolate. Confronted with this tendency, we must take care that our work does not eventually damage fraternal life by eliminating times for reflection, study, and interaction with our Brothers. Above all we must ensure that it does not compromise our “prayer and devotion”, thereby unbalancing our life. The prevalence of activity may lead us to place too much trust in what we do and to put ourselves first, as if the Kingdom of God were not the work of the Holy Spirit, and as if listening, hospitality and silence before God meant nothing.

18. Work **outside the friary** or among outsiders, even of a non-religious nature, practiced in our past and recent history, has in recent times taken a prominent form in the experience of “small fraternities” or “work fraternities”. These ventures were motivated by a concern to be present or “incarnated” in the world of labour, especially as wage-earning working people. Today working conditions have changed: there is less work, and being a worker is no longer an advantage, as it sometimes was for “small fraternities”. However, even today, the motives behind such fraternities can still justify the choice of being a paid worker, not necessarily in a factory, but in humble occupations that are burdensome and involve dependence. This is our way of sharing in the conditions of life affecting so much of humankind, it is a gospel witness to others and is formative for us. The fraternity always retains its crucial role (*Const.* 77,3; 79,1-2) as the place where one lives and receives challenge and support.

19. The type of commitments we engage in and the professional status required in some jobs today give our Order greater stability in jobs and presences, but there is always the risk that this will lead to immobility. To avoid losing the sense of itinerancy, which makes us “pilgrims and strangers” in this world (cf. *Rnb* 6,2; *Test* 24), we should often calmly discuss this question, both in community and with the Superiors. We should evaluate from time to time our readiness to change assignments or to remain, basing decision on the good of the community and that of the People of God, toward whom we have responsibilities.

20. In the life of Francis and of his Brothers, right up to our own day, **the quest** has played an important role. It showed their dependence on the people among whom they lived and established closer relationships with them. Also, it has always provided a way of becoming part of the fabric of popular society, and an effective tool of evangelization. Today new forms of the quest have emerged (mission secretariats, foundations, pious unions, newsletters and calendars, etc). However, we still need to find new ways of direct personal contact with people, and to conduct a humble, almost door-to-door type of apostolate among all levels of society, poor and rich.

The values underlying questing need to be reinstated, namely trust in Divine Providence and a sense of dependence and reciprocity between us and the people. People give to us because we give to the poor, and in order to give alms, we must welcome alms.

As far as fund-raising is concerned, we propose that it be subject to authorization by the Provincial Minister and Definitory and carefully monitored by them. The purposes for which funds are raised must be clearly and publicly stated. A proper statement of accounts must be

presented annually to the Provincial Minister and Definitory. No individual Brother may be given control over the destination of funds collected.

SOLIDARITY AND SHARING

21. **The sharing of gifts** among the various local churches is one of the essential dimensions of catholicity (LG 13). For St. Francis the sharing of goods goes beyond legal obligation and enters the realm of mutual love: *"If a mother nourishes and loves her natural son (cf. 1 Thes 2, 7), how much more should one love and cherish his brother according to the spirit?"* (Rb 6, 8). *Sollicitudo rei socialis* defines the moral virtue of solidarity as *"a firm and constant determination to be committed to the common good, that is, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all"* (SRS 38). St. Francis adds weight to this definition of solidarity by proclaiming a brotherhood in which there is no shame in being dependent on one another (Rnb 9, 6-7). Indeed, Francis states clearly that dependence on others is a consequence of being created and redeemed, and is therefore a right (Rnb 9, 8). Furthermore, interdependence requires the theological gift of love, which enriches giver and receiver alike (Rnb 9, 9). Fraternal communion and interdependence should inspire and determine our structures of solidarity within the local, provincial and international fraternities, as well as our interaction with the world, particularly the world of the poor.

22. Solidarity is not primarily about giving things to others. It is mutual interdependence and brotherhood. The culture of solidarity creates new ways of understanding and living relationships with others. By going among the lepers, Francis changed his way of relating to them. To be in solidarity means taking care of each brother or sister, especially of those who are excluded from sharing in the benefits of society. Listening to the cry of the poor, we must work to ensure that global solidarity becomes a new social order.

23. In line with St. Francis' invitation to respect a friar's mother as one's own, concern for the Brothers' **family of origin** should be included among the different forms of solidarity directed outwards. One useful suggestion might be that the fraternity, not the individual, should decide such forms of solidarity. When discussing the matter, the community should also keep in mind the gospel invitation to transform ties of flesh and blood, enabling us fully to live as men who belong to the Capuchin fraternity and are welcoming to vulnerable, needy people.

24. In the past, **international solidarity within the Order** was efficiently based on Province-Mission relationships. The changes now under way in the Order call for a fundamental review, so that we may continue to live solidarity according to the spirit of St. Francis. With this in mind, we make the following proposals:

- a) since our Order is a Brotherhood, solidarity flows from fraternity to fraternity, rather than from one individual to another;
- b) since gospel poverty roots us in a particular culture and binds us to a given people, international solidarity should neither uproot nor compromise our cultural bonds;
- c) as a fraternity rooted in many cultures, we should seek equity rather than equality. Equity requires that each Province should have the capacity to respond to the needs of its Brothers and ministries in ways that are tailor-made to its own culture and people. We do not seek to

establish one Capuchin lifestyle throughout the world. At the same time, Brothers in any part of the world must be freed from misery and enjoy acceptable living conditions;

d) the principle of subsidiarity requires that no Province has the right to ask of another that which the labors of its own Brothers and the alms of its own people can provide;

e) Franciscan solidarity goes beyond law and justice. It flows from the generosity of fraternal love;

f) effective solidarity requires transparency, both on the part of the giver and the receiver;

g) the present structures for solidarity among the circumscriptions of the Order do not appear to reflect adequately the fact that we are brothers of the same family. Therefore, the next General Chapter should set up a new permanent structure for solidarity between the circumscriptions and the Conferences. It should be simple and practical, and should regulate relationships among themselves and with the whole Order, keeping in mind what the Constitutions say: "Goods not needed by a fraternity should be handed over either to the Major Superior for the needs of the jurisdiction, or to the poor, or for the development of peoples" (*Const.* 67,4). Even if a greater degree of centralization becomes necessary, it should continue to take account of historical fraternal relationships between circumscriptions;

h) since we are members of one family, Solidarity Commissions in our Order should include not only representatives of contributing Provinces but also of those that receive.

25. Our solidarity towards the least ones and the suffering is also well expressed in social and charitable works or structures. These must be administered according to law and, as far as possible, be run with the cooperation, at different levels, of competent lay staff trained in the values of solidarity. Our specific, privileged task remains that of enabling these enterprises at the human and spiritual level. (*cf. Const.* 71, 9).

26. With filial gratitude Francis sang of the reconciliation of creation and of compassion for all creatures (*cf. Circular Letter*, 12). In this spirit the Brothers should be committed to **peace, justice and integrity of creation**, using the resources of "mother earth" sparingly, taking care of the least ones with a sense of fraternal responsibility (*V PCO*, 65), speaking out for those who have no voice and caring for future generations. They will express such choices not only by animating and participating critically in movements of solidarity and ecology but, even more, by living soberly, content with little, and not blindly enslaved by the consumer society.

27. Living in solidarity should promote a culture of sharing, caring and **walking together**. Inspired by such motives, the Brothers should continue to work for fraternal solidarity with all people of good will, particularly with the sisters of the Second Order and with the members of the Secular Franciscan Order. In addition, they should contribute to the growth of movements such as Franciscan and ecclesial ecumenism, inter-religious and inter-racial dialogue, meetings between North and South, etc.

28. Franciscan solidarity is a broad reality. It includes responsibility for every person and respect for the integrity of all creation. We are brothers to all peoples and all creatures (*PCO V*, 28). **Worldwide solidarity** is even more urgent today since the market forces of the global economy give a different and tragic meaning to the words of Jesus; "the one who has will be given more, but the one who has not will be deprived even of what he has" (*Mt* 25,29). Bearing in mind the example of Francis, who could not bear to see someone poorer than himself, we should commit ourselves to listening to people, particularly those who are excluded from sharing the benefits of the global economy.

PRINCIPLES OF FRATERNAL, TRANSPARENT ADMINISTRATION

29. Francis allowed recourse to extraordinary means for the obvious needs of the sick (*Rnb* 8,3) and of lepers (cf. *Rnb* 8, 10). Today we have other “manifest necessities” - which must always be carefully verified - requiring recourse to extraordinary means, such as financial reserves/investments. Therefore:

- financial reserves/investments should only cover those ‘obvious needs’ that cannot be met by our work, alms or inter-provincial solidarity;
- the needs for which monies are invested should be strictly defined, and the yield from these investments should be used exclusively for those same needs;
- rather than defining the minimum investment required to establish a certain security, a Franciscan fraternity should determine a maximum for investments, consistent with our dependence on human and divine providence;
- investments, whether in real estate, money or other financial instruments, must be governed and critiqued by strict ethical norms. To this end, collaboration with other Christian and religious organizations working in particular regions can be a valuable and necessary resource;
- as an international Order, our fraternities exist in a wide range of economic and social conditions. These require pluriform responses. However, it might be appropriate to establish national or continental criteria to govern the question of financial reserves/ investments.

30. Fraternal life also requires **transparency** in local, provincial and general administration. Such transparency begins with the individual friar, continues in the local fraternity and finds its completion in the circumscription to which the fraternity belongs.

Transparency expresses and facilitates brotherhood and solidarity among all the constituent parts of the Order.

31. **Local chapters** are the ideal occasion for preparing the fraternity budget and monitoring how money is spent. Our administration of money is one of the ways in which brotherhood is expressed, and the local chapter is the proper place to examine whether it conforms to gospel values, minority, etc.

32. To achieve transparency in the various levels of administration, each **annual financial report** from the fraternity, the circumscription and the Order must include:

- a) a balance sheet;
- b) a statement of income and expenditure;
- c) an annual budget.

To enable budgets to be correctly drawn up, a well structured accounting system is essential.

33. The **local fraternity** can have only short-term capital investments (cash in bank). The capital at its disposal represents only what is necessary for the ordinary running of the community. The Major Superior and his council should establish the upper limit that each fraternity may manage (cf. *Const.*67,4). For this purpose the circumscription should produce appropriate forms or models, and assess whether a centralized economic administration at provincial level is advisable.

34. Transparency is also necessary for **provincial bodies** with separate administrations: missions, pastoral activities, social works and various funds. The decision-making and supervisory body remains the Major Superior and his council. Superiors may entrust the financial administration to competent persons or other financially qualified bodies, whether religious or lay.

35. The administrative report of each Circumscription should show all financial investments, stating whether these are for the benefit of the province or for other works. With respect to the **balance sheet**, it should also include the commercial value of goods which do not contribute to the ordinary running of the circumscription (e.g. property, unused buildings, rented houses etc.).

36. Each circumscription, bearing in mind the principles of solidarity established by this Plenary Council and the provisions of our Constitutions (cf. 67,7; 73,1), and after consulting its own Conference, should determine, at the level of the Definitory or of the Chapter if necessary, what is required for its ordinary administration. It should decide the amount to be held in reserve/investments for internal extraordinary expenditure (maintenance of properties, the sick, staff insurance, formation) and for external solidarity (missions, charitable giving).

37. With regard to **investments**, in addition to transparency we must observe ethical principles. With reference to *Const.* 66, 3, we deem acceptable the forms of investment in use in civil society today. However, for us there are conditions to be observed. We should:

- a) assess the positive and negative effects of each investment ("ethical responsibility"), doing everything possible to promote investments that are just;
- b) avoid purely speculative investments;
- c) as far as possible, invest in one's own socio-economic area or in poorer countries.

In this context, it is important that each circumscription check its own practice against the guidelines of other circumscriptions and the financial laws and regulations of each country. Investments may not be under the control of an individual but must be approved by the Major Superiors. They may seek the advice of competent lay financial specialists who are knowledgeable about the gospel character of our Order.

38. With respect to **houses**, the guidelines given in the Constitutions and previous Plenary Councils are more than sufficient to provide solutions in particular cases (cf. I *PCO*, 53). The Brothers are to live in this world as pilgrims and strangers. We therefore encourage them to re-examine whether their present dwellings make it sufficiently obvious that we are called to rely on divine providence. They should assess whether their residences are in proportion to the number of Brothers and to the work carried out there.

39. Our houses should be simple and welcoming, combining **taste and harmony** with unpretentious simplicity. Our way of life should leave its mark even on the buildings and places where we live, since matter should be moulded by the spirit.

40. **Rents** for the properties we own are acceptable in the context in which we live and according to norms to be determined by the General Minister and his Definitory. We highly recommend the sale of goods and land which we no longer use. If this is not possible they should be used for social purposes at non-speculative rents.

41. **Courses** should be organized for the proper training of Brothers, enabling them to combine competence in modern economic administration with fidelity to our lifestyle.

42. Following the Constitutions (71,5; cf.163,3), the mid-term reports sent by the circumscriptions to the General Minister should include economic matters and should be transparent and complete. For this purpose a form should be drawn up for use by all circumscriptions. In the present context of globalization, a good **information network** is vital to ensure a more just distribution of the necessary assistance to needy Circumscriptions.

43. The transparency recommended for fraternities and circumscriptions also applies at Order level. In addition to the amount stipulated (e.g. the annual contribution from the circumscriptions and 10% of income for the missions), the account of the **General Curia** should receive the surplus of each province plus any unused donations. (cf. *Const.* 67, 7). Long-term investments of capital earmarked for immediate solidarity (e.g. Mass stipends, donations for the poor) should be avoided.

44. The General Curia is the competent body to guarantee **solidarity** and fraternity on a world-wide basis. Using **appropriate** structures, it intervenes in those circumscriptions that are unable to provide for the vital needs of the Brothers (food, education, health, and the needs of the elderly). In coordinating the exercise of solidarity it is essential to keep in mind the cultural and social context in which the Brothers live.

45. It is good that the General Minister and his Definitory should decide the ways, and create the **necessary structures**, to ensure effective and efficient solidarity. The management of the funds available to the General Minister, with the consent of his Definitory, to respond to needs, should be evaluated at each General Chapter.

**VII° PLENARY COUNCIL OF THE ORDER
FRATERNAL LIFE IN MINORITY
Assisi, 2004**

PRESENTATION

TO ALL THE BROTHERS OF THE ORDER

Dear Brothers,

We are writing to present you with the results of the work of the Seventh Plenary Council of the Order, which met in Assisi from 1-27 March 2004 to reflect on our *Fraternal Life in Minority*.

Many of you were able to follow the Plenary Council via the Internet, and so you were aware of events in Assisi almost as soon as they happened. Not only that: through the Internet, many brothers were able to send us their own opinions and encouragement - and sometimes their criticisms - all of which we greatly appreciated.

In addition to enriching the participants and contributing to the growth of unity and cooperation in the Order, PCO VII produced 55 *Proposals* of its own on the allotted subject.

For the second time in this type of meeting the method of drafting *Proposals* was adopted. Conscious of the limitations of this approach, the Plenary Council, at the conclusion of its work, decided that the text of the *Proposals* should be subsequently revised and improved. Now this work too has been completed and the General Definitory, meeting from 21-26 June 2004, approved the definitive text of the *Proposals*. We are now sending this text to all the Fraternities, in accordance with the prescription of our Constitutions: "*It is appropriate that the General Minister, in his good judgement and with the consent of the Definitory, confirms the acts of the Plenary Council with his authority, and makes them known to the Order*"(123,6).

The brothers who worked on the text after the Plenary Council divided it into 7 sections, providing a title for each one. The titles are: *Foundations; Living Brotherhood in Minority; The Service of Authority; Itinerancy; Minority and Structures; Formation in Minority and Itinerancy. Our Minority in the Church. For a World of Justice and Peace*. Additionally, every one of the 55 *Proposals* has a title in the margin to make it easier to understand and interpret their contents, both individually and as a whole.

The importance of this Plenary Council for our life as Capuchin Lesser Brothers will be obvious from these titles alone. The PCO should lead us to reaffirm minority and itinerancy as an essential characteristic which we choose as our own, not just as individuals but as an institution (cf. *Proposals* 3,5,6,24,25,26...).

Aware that our vocation as lesser brothers is a 'gift', we wanted to start the entire discussion by indicating the sources from which it draws its inspiration and foundation, namely, the Most

Holy Trinity; the foundational experience for Francis of meeting the crucified Christ of San Damiano and the leper; the attraction of God's beauty and glory, manifested in Jesus; and finally, faith in Christ, the Lord of history (cf. *Proposals*, 1-6).

Since the way of minority and itinerancy "is not a natural one that is easily chosen", we reaffirm – with *Proposal* 31 – the value of contemplation: "both fraternities and brothers need ongoing formation in order to acquire a spirit of service and minority. It is essential to develop a contemplative attitude. One concrete means of developing this contemplative ability is the community exercise of silent prayer".

Finally, dear brothers, we would like to remind you that PCO VII should be seen as completing the Sixth, because without minority and itinerancy, poverty lived in brotherhood would have little social impact. Its spirit would be missing.

Now it is up to all of us to reflect on these perhaps rather general teachings and experiences, to study them and apply them to the different cultural and social situations in which our fraternities belong and where each of us lives and exercises his ministry.

We offer this gift of God to the whole Church and to the world. It is the inheritance we have received from our Father Saint Francis, to whom we never cease to pray that he may help us to walk with *the Lord's most holy blessing* along the paths of brotherhood, lived in poverty, minority and itinerancy.

The General Minister and his Definitory,

Br. John Corriveau
Br. Aurelio Laita
Br. Joseph Nacua
Br. John Bednarik
Br. Vicente Carlos Kiaziku
Br. Jure Šarčević
Br. Manoel Delson Pereira da Cruz
Br. Felice Cangelosi
Br. Ephrem Bucher

Rome, 24 June 2004

PROPOSALS

FOUNDATIONS

"YOU ARE HUMILITY!"

1. The Trinity is unique in that no person of the Trinity is ever superior to the others. Though this radical equality is not true of creaturely relationships, it is a model that teaches what it means to be made in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26) and offers a vision after which humans aspire for themselves.

a. Humility opens human hearts to this experience of Divine relationship. In his *Praises of God*, St. Francis proclaims: "You are humility!" (PrsG 4), because our Trinitarian God is relational by nature, i.e., a free communion of persons without domination or subordination. Because they are made in the likeness of God, humans slowly become a free communion of persons without domination or subordination, thus achieving true humility. Through the act of creation and baptism we become part of God's familial relationship, i.e., we become God's children (Jn 1:10-13). St. Bonaventure tells us that in the Incarnation, "God humbly bends down to lift the dust of our nature into unity with his own person" (St. Bonaventure: Sermon II on the Nativity of the Lord).

b. The Trinity is the foundational relationship which creates Church: "The universal church is seen to be a people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" (LG 4). "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home in them" (Jn 14:23). Zeal to keep the word of Jesus inspired Francis to make the Gospel the very foundation of fraternal life (*RnB* I 1; *RB* I 1). Established on fidelity to the Gospel, fraternal evangelical life draws us into the intimate relationship of the Trinity.

c. Francis embraced the plan of God for his creatures as a family of sisters and brothers: brother sun, sister moon, etc. (see *CtC*). He never referred to himself simply as "Francis" but always as "Brother Francis." "Brother" revealed the relationship with every creature to which God called him. "Brother" also revealed his mission to heal relationships through submissive humility (see *CtC* 10-11, in relation to the other stanzas; *L3C* XIV, 58).

FRANCIS, THE DISCIPLE OF JESUS, WAS SIMPLE AND SUBJECT TO ALL

2. Minority came to birth in Francis of Assisi as amazement in the face of the love of God who, in order to free us from evil and to introduce us into the divine life, did not hesitate to become human, making himself obedient to death on a cross (Phil 2,6-11; *2LF*, 1). Thus he became *simple* and *subject to all*. Serving the Father's will so that all creation could return to him, the Word did not consider his equality with God a thing to be grasped, but he united himself with humanity, in order to heal, reconcile and free the entire creation. (Mt 9, 13; 12,7; 2Cor 8,9; Gal 1,4; Ep 2, 6-9; Hb 10,10). This glorious kenosis of the Son of God, which lives on in the sacrament of the Church and in the Eucharist (cf. *Adm*1, 16-22) aroused in Francis an overwhelming desire to leave everything in order to follow Christ. Inwardly moved by God's compassion for us, and convinced that only in him is our salvation, he made himself lowly

among the lowly ones, wandering the world as a pilgrim and stranger (*Rb VI,1;Test 24*) to bear witness to all that Christ the Crucified One was risen (*LOrd 8f*). Inspired by the example of Francis, let us then commit ourselves to contemplate the mystery of our redemption, growing in faith, hope and charity, so that each day we may rediscover the genuine roots of our life and of our work in Church and society.

a. For Francis, being “lowly and subject to all” was not the result of fear or psychological submission, nor a sign that he had given up his own free responsibility. Rather, he was attracted by the beauty and glory of God, manifested in Jesus. By setting out to follow Jesus on the path of minority and itinerancy, Francis showed the liberating force of the love of God, which redeems, heals wounds, consoles hearts and calls to freedom. We too, therefore, reaffirm minority and itinerancy as a liberating choice that opens us to welcome Christ’s invitation: “ If you wish to be first, be the least and servant of all”. Identifying with the experience of Francis, let us go out to the “lepers” of our age and “show mercy to them”.

As the poor Christ continues his journey of unity among creatures under the humble Eucharistic forms of bread and wine (*Adm 1,17*), so we, through the waters of baptism, become Christ (1Cor12: 12-13, 27), travelling on earth with the divine mission of healing, reconciling, liberating and redeeming (1Jn 2:17).

b. “Oh marvellous humility! Oh amazing poverty!” (*LAg 4*). Such was Saint Clare’s exclamation at the mystery of the Incarnation. Let us promote a spiritual dialogue with all Franciscan sisters, especially those of the Second Order, so that our mutual contacts may help us to grow to a more complete and balanced vision of minority and itinerancy.

c. Like Mary, Francis knew that God looks upon the humility of his servants, exalts the humble and casts the mighty from their thrones (cf. *LMj VI,6*). Let us therefore often look toward the “Virgin made Church” (*SalBVM,1*) to learn from her the spirit of humility, so that we may faithfully persevere in our vocation and mission in the Church and for the world.

LOWLY, LIKE FRANCIS

3. We Capuchin Lesser Brothers live in a diversified world where active forces have produced a history of injustice and enormous human suffering. Among these forces are economic, military and technological power.

No society where Capuchin brothers are present is absolutely free of sin and of the sinful structures generated and sustained by these powers. On the contrary, they are widespread on a global scale; they find their way into our lifestyle and condition our fraternal relationships.

On his journey of conversion, Francis discovered the foundation of minority in the crucified God-Man, the Christ of San Damiano, but by way of the leper. His encounter with this human being, abandoned and excluded by the society and system of his day, made Francis “leave the world” and change his social status and residence, moving out from the centre to the periphery of Rivo Torto and Our Lady of the Angels (cf. PCO VI, 9). In other words, he became “minor”. (cfr *Test*; VI PCO, 9)

Following the example of Francis, we wish to live our gospel life as lesser brothers, as pilgrims and strangers in this world. In doing this we do not ignore or downplay the greatness of the challenge posed by the complexity of the historical situation today. On the contrary, we trust in the grace and providence of God, who has always shown his mercy to his people. The service we propose to offer to all creatures is to proclaim the good news of this God, who is not

solitude, but Love, and as such, goes out of himself and calls men and women to enter into communion with himself. This leads us to:

- reaffirm our choice of minority as an essential characteristic of Capuchin Lesser Brothers, not just as individuals but also as an institution;
- joyfully accept the consequences of weakness, precariousness and vulnerability as we humbly serve in all our institutions and structures;
- gradually (i.e. by taking small steps) make a “significant” shift towards the periphery of today’s society, where we wish to pitch our tents among the lowly ones of today, as Jesus, Francis and the first Capuchins did in their day.

FRANCISCAN FREEDOM

4. Poverty, minority and itinerancy, as well as being constituent elements of the following of Christ, bring Franciscan freedom. They are means to our end, i.e., to building the kingdom of God or, in Franciscan language, building brotherhood wherever and whenever we can. Fraternally-structured poverty, minority and itinerancy, according to the situation in each place, help Capuchins to free themselves from the effects of structural sin, inconsistent inner drives, manipulation by other power interests, lack of skills for crossing boundaries, and anachronistic traditions that enslave us, in order to build a viable fraternity in the 21st century.

ITINERANCY INSERTS US INTO THE HISTORY OF SALVATION

5. The strength to be itinerants, pilgrims and strangers in this world is found in faith in Christ the Lord of history, who will reveal himself fully at the end of time to judge everyone according to the law of love (cf. Mt 25, 31-46). This tension toward ultimate fulfilment does not make us outsiders in history but gives concrete direction to our life, frees us from the idolatry of immediate possession, from the narcissistic temptation to put on a show and to succeed, and to be attached to positions we have acquired. On the contrary, it impels us to recognize Christ and humbly serve him in our brothers and sisters, especially in the needy. Like Francis, who wished to call nothing in this world “his own”, let our hearts be ever more open to the unforeseeable providence of God, who is greater than all our plans. Let us give to all people witness of the joy that comes from placing all our hope in him, and show ourselves attentive to the needs of all.

OUR CHOICES

6. Society in the time of Francis was marked by the struggle for social dominance, which unleashed strong violence. Francis too was influenced by this, but after his conversion he turned to the fringes of Assisi’s society, choosing to live among the lowly and marginalized. This led Francis to the deep intuition that human relationships had to mirror the Trinitarian love of free persons without privilege or priority and then to make courageous choices of minority, which redeemed and radically reconstituted his relationships: authority without power which dominates; service characterized by humility; extension of fraternal relationships to all creation; a life lived on the social periphery.

Our world is characterized by domination and violence of many kinds: an unfair concentration of wealth, which causes a large number of migrants; arrogance; narcissistic preoccupation with self-fulfilment; self-serving powers that marginalize the poor and destroy the

environment; relationships marked by domination and social stratification; ethnocentrism and religious intolerance; a culture which seeks change through violence.

Franciscan minority today demands courageous choices for a more fraternal world.

- The choice of a fraternal economy everywhere we live and serve (cf. PCO VI).
- Other-centred relationships.
- A culture of peace based on the confident choice of vulnerability.
- Leadership and pastoral action based on service and participation.
- An ethic of justice based on the fact that we are all brothers and sisters.
- A new commitment to dialogue in the spirit of Francis. (cf. *RnB* XVI, 5-6).

LIVING BROTHERHOOD IN MINORITY

CONSEQUENCES OF OUR IDENTITY AS LOWLY ITINERANTS

7. a. “Inspired by God, Saint Francis began a form of gospel life which he called brotherhood, modelled on the life of Christ and his disciples” (*Const.* 83,5). He wanted his brotherhood to be called the Order of Lesser Brothers (cf. *1Cel* 38; FF 386), and changed its first description of “poor lowly ones” to “lesser brothers” (cf. FA: ED I, 594), so that the image of Christ, poor, humble and devoted to the service of all people, especially the poor, would shine more brightly in the Church and in the world (cf. *Const.* 8,2).

Living our choice of fraternal life in minority as a gift of God, we put forward for the whole Church and for the world a way of life that proclaims the essence of the gospel. We recognize in our life according to our fraternal and lesser identity the foundation of our entire apostolate and the primary form of gospel mission. It enables us to give an effective witness of complete communion in the diversity of charisms and ministries lived in our fraternities.

b. Our Founder wanted none of his brothers to be called prior, but that all should be called lesser brothers, simply and without distinction. (cf. *RnB*, 6,3).

Minority describes and distinguishes our brotherhood. Therefore no brother in the Order is greater than another, but, as sharers in the same call to brotherhood, all are equal in dignity. Therefore “let us walk in truth and sincerity of heart, willingly serving one another in a spirit of charity and in mutual obedience” (*Const.* 167, 1).

c. Therefore the Plenary Council states and reaffirms that:

- the one profession of gospel brotherhood makes us all “lesser brothers” without any distinction;
- all circumscriptions, local fraternities and all the brothers should be encouraged to live the primacy of brotherhood in minority as the primary form of our apostolate;
- that in exercising any type of ministry at whatever level, the participation of all should be effectively promoted;
- it is necessary that in the different areas of the Order appointments and elections to the various offices be open to all the brothers, without any distinction or reservation (cf. *Const.* 84,5);
- every type of service in our houses must be appropriately shared by all the brothers, as a requirement arising out of their vocation;

- our initial formation, in all its stages, must be equal and identical for all the brothers in formation. The same opportunities for special formation must be guaranteed to all the brothers;
- all the brothers should be encouraged to keep in view the unity in diversity that characterizes our brotherhood;
- deeper reflection is needed at every level on our identity as an Institute in the Church, regardless of any clerical and/or lay connotation. (cf. *Letter of John Paul II to the General Minister*, 18.09.96. See AOFMCap. 112(1996) 565-566);
- the theory, or statement of principle, regarding the equality of all the brothers, needs to be lived in practice.

AUTHORITY AND ANIMATION

8. Minority involves the recognition of a brother's gifts, the exercise of shared responsibility and the participation of all the brothers in enlivening the fraternity. Authority should be the dynamic that encourages the fraternity to draw up a common plan as a real instrument of growth in life and faith. The guardian should be the facilitator and custodian of this plan. Also, it should lead to each circumscription periodically drawing up its provincial life-plan.

ALL PLAY THEIR PART IN THE FRATERNITY

9. We should divest ourselves of any privilege that might arise from office, education received, presbyteral ministry or from any other service we render for the common good or for the benefit of the people of God. In the fraternity, where all have freely chosen to be lowly and to serve rather than be served, all should not only be called brothers without distinction but should really be so, by sharing in decisions concerning fraternal life, in access to means of transport, communications, etc. In addition, each brother should make his contribution to the ordinary maintenance of our houses without exempting himself from housework and other everyday fraternal services. However limited and symbolic this contribution might be in practice, it is nonetheless necessary and becomes a proof of real brotherhood and mutual service.

ACCEPTANCE OF OTHERS

10. As a fraternity of lesser brothers we should emphasize what unites, rather than what divides. Let us make a conscious effort to be inclusive of others, in order to help prevent ethnocentrism from taking root in our fraternities. Our ministries should also be characterized by a sincere acceptance of others, regardless of their individual characteristics or personal history.

THE LOCAL CHAPTER

11. The local chapter, frequently held, is an appropriate place to express our fraternal life in minority. In it, each brother listens humbly and intently to his brother, and all the brothers, in co-responsibility, dialogue, loving obedience and the lowly exercise of authority, search for ways to grow in the communion of the gospel. In order to improve the use of this instrument of fraternal life we invite the brothers to analyze regularly the power structures implicit in any community, for example: the influence of office, facility in speaking, imposition of one's

opinion through obstructionism, etc. The chapter also fosters a spirit of itinerancy, in that it enables the brothers to assess how meaningful the presence of the local fraternity is and to open themselves to new horizons.

TEAMWORK

12. Team work is one facet of minority. It is a simple, daily exercise of horizontal authority. As a team, all feel that they are lesser brothers working in equality. This attitude should have an effect at all levels of the fraternity.

AN INTERNATIONAL HORIZON

13. The Order is a worldwide brotherhood to which we belong through the Province and other circumscriptions. In order to overcome all forms of provincialism and ensure that we are able to move effectively in our globalized world, it is important for us to be open to the international horizon of our brotherhood. In particular, we are willingly open to all forms of inter-provincial collaboration, not only in the area of initial formation but also in ongoing formation and ministry. Indeed, collaboration between circumscriptions is not only required by shortage of personnel but is a value in itself, being a wider form of brotherhood and a concrete expression of minority and itinerancy.

Effective tools of collaboration are the establishment of inter-provincial fraternities and the exchange of personnel among the circumscriptions.

Similarly, appropriate, updated forms of minority and itinerancy can be found through inter-Franciscan collaborative ventures, first with the other brothers of the First Order and of the TOR, and with the Poor Clares and other Franciscan sisters and brothers. We should also gladly work together with the laity, especially with the brothers and sisters of the Secular Franciscan Order and Young Franciscans.

SOLIDARITY OF PERSONNEL

14. The Order has grown a great deal in showing a sense of solidarity in personnel. The Plenary Council recommends that this spirit be maintained, and that provincial and inter-provincial fraternities be established on the peripheries and boundaries, where the system generates large numbers of impoverished people, e.g. migrants, exiles, etc.

CIRCUMSCRIPTIONS IN DIFFICULTY

15. In several circumscriptions of the Order the brothers are living a certain form of poverty caused by the increasing age of the brothers, the decline in vocations and a secularized environment that is indifferent or anti-clerical.

We encourage the brothers to accept this situation and to live it in faith as a concrete expression of our choice to live in minority. Nevertheless, we invite them to draw up new projects adapted to their possibilities and to the pastoral situation in which they find themselves. To implement these projects they may have recourse to international solidarity for personnel.

BROTHERS IN DIFFICULT SITUATIONS

16. 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.

CELEBRATING PERPETUAL PROFESSION

17. To underscore our vocation as brothers and the ecclesial value of the religious life, perpetual professions should be celebrated with an appropriate dignity shown in simple gestures and a sober style, as is proper to the liturgy and to Franciscan poverty (cf. *Roman-Seraphic Rite of Religious Profession*, 75). The same applies to ordinations and other fraternity anniversaries.

AUTHORITY AS SERVICE**THE AUTHORITY WILLED BY JESUS**

18. The word of God enlightens and inspires the decision of a Capuchin brother who wishes to live in minority. From it he learns the need to abandon every form of dominant power (Mk 9, 33-37; RnB V,9) and the fact that service is the correct attitude for anyone who understands Jesus as servant (Lk 22, 24-27). In the same way, the gospel teaches him to identify with the excluded (Mt 25,31-46) and to share all good things with them (Rm 15,27). A good use of power is the “genuine sacrifice” characteristic of one who has had a profound experience of Jesus (cf. Rm 12,1).

The modern social sciences make it clear that, because all social relationships are asymmetrical, it is impossible to live without exercising power. Jesus taught his followers not to “lord it over” one another as nonbelievers do (cf. Mt 20:25; Mk 10:42-45; Lk 22:24-27; 1 Pt 5:3). Francis wrote that the brothers should not exercise power or dominion (*RnB V 12-15*).

THE CAPUCHIN USE OF POWER

19. Francis, accepting his own vulnerability, was able to relate to every individual and creature. The Capuchin use of power emphasizes more the building up of relationships than the quick resolution of tasks and thus includes the following characteristics. It is:

- non-exclusive/inclusive, i.e., everyone affected by decisions is included;
- participatory, i.e., all participants have a real say;
- equal, i.e., final decisions equally respect the needs of all those affected;
- marked by a willingness to dialogue with a view to reaching a possible consensus;
- non-violent.

These characteristics can also be a model for others in the world to imitate.

AUTHORITY ACCORDING TO THE CONSTITUTIONS

20. Our Constitutions (156-157) identify four positive sources of authority within the world and our Order: (1) service to others; (2) the coherence between what one says and what one does; (3) attentive listening to others; and (4) the office of authority looking toward the common good. The *Constitutions* suggest a hierarchy in which authority from one's office is exercised last and only after the other sources have been exhausted.

ROLE OF THE FRATERNAL MINISTRY OF AUTHORITY

21. Mindful of the *Admonitions* of St Francis, of the *Letter to a Minister* and the *Letter to Brother Leo*, we know that the exercise of fraternal ministries is a constant call to individuals and fraternities to grow in their free commitment to follow Christ. It is the task of fraternal ministry to foster the growth of personal responsibility in fraternal life, to promote and sustain unity and communion among the brothers, to recognize the gifts that exist among us, stimulating mutual, inclusive love for all those we encounter, and to sustain the brothers on their journey of conforming themselves to the poor and humble Christ.

For this purpose, Ministers should use every means to promote the shared discernment of the will of God, coresponsibility, fraternal dialogue, joint planning, subsidiarity and solidarity. A basic, indispensable tool in this process must be, above all, the local chapter. In addition they should cultivate an attitude of listening to the brothers and gladly acknowledging the personal journey of each one, remembering the words that Francis used to describe fraternal ministries: to *visit, admonish and correct* (cf. *RbX*, 2)

Those who occupy positions of authority should be in all things ministers and servants of the brothers, without dominating in fraternal relationships and avoiding all partiality. Mindful of the words of St Francis (cf. *Adm* IV) they should, in a spirit of mutual service, not appropriate any office; they should, moreover, show in practice a healthy detachment from their own role, which will enable them to give disinterested service.

Therefore it is part of the spirit of minority for ministers to accept vulnerability in relationships. We further propose a review of all terms used to designate ministries, replacing those that are incompatible with the gospel way of life, with our ideal of minority and with the fraternal character of our Order.

WHEN POWER BECOMES OVERBEARING

22. No matter who we are or what position we hold, we all possess a particular type of power. It can assume a positive or life-giving, creative role and be at the service of people, or it can become corrupted, and in turn destructive in its application.

The domination and exploitation of others reveals itself and has consequences not only in a physical and tangible aspect, but also in the psychological or emotional dimensions of human life. It is here that the deeper wounds are felt and scars remain.

- Wilful acts of violence, debasing language, threats either spoken or implied, must never be part of the life of a lesser brother.
- Sexual exploitation or abuse of another person is a greater offence against Franciscan minority than against chastity.

- We passively participate in acts of violence and in degradation of others when we accept violence and explicit sex as forms of entertainment.

THE HIDDEN ALLUREMENTS OF FALSE POWER

23. To safeguard our gospel form of life as “lesser brothers”, fraternities should exercise courageous self-criticism and humble discernment of any forms of power – e.g. political, religious and economic – that have found their way into our fraternities and manipulate the desires and interests of the brothers, distort their “face-to-face” relationships and lead them astray through privileges and honours, such as economic, fiscal and other benefits.

ITINERANCY, MINORITY AND STRUCTURES

FORMS OF IMMOVABILITY

24. Our true vocation is rooted in the following of Christ and his apostles, who renounced all claim to any place in order to proclaim the Kingdom of God freely and generously (cf. Mt 8:20; Lk 9:58). The immovability of some of our brothers radically compromises our vocation and mission in the Church and in the world.

The concept of immovability is not simply physical. Immovability can be more ingrained in habitual ways of thinking and judging, which often become obstacles to genuine conversion. These obstacles can include rigid theological thinking, an unchanging mindset, and theological fundamentalism, and can prevent people from encountering God ‘outside the camp’ (Ex 19:17; 33:7-11).

ITINERANCY: GIVING UP POWER AND POSITION

25. Francis was inspired by the itinerant life of Christ and his apostles and he followed their example. In fidelity to Francis let us express our itinerancy by choosing to give up positions of publicly acknowledged, assured power, and choose instead those that are more accessible to the ordinary and poorest people. We should discern and decide in fraternity about giving up those ministries that have become occasions of appropriation, advancement and self-promotion. Such a choice favours our life in fraternity and offers individual brothers the possibility of personal growth by enabling them to make new relationships and to assume new responsibilities.

In this way we will share in the characteristic that Christ has given to His Church as a pilgrim people.

We wish to follow the sound tradition of the first Capuchins, who were nourished by faith, open to hope and always close to those who were needy and abandoned by others. We therefore propose, as a commitment to a new evangelization, to live alongside them, even if this means giving up structures that do not conform to our ideal.

REVIEWING OUR LIFESTYLE

26. Mindful of the fact that minority promotes more just and consistent relationships with the humble people of our times, all fraternities should commit themselves to a serious review of our lifestyle, aiming for a real solidarity, avoiding unnecessary waste and the exaggerated use of vehicles and other tools of modern technology. We should ask ourselves whether our possessions are essential for the mission that is ours in virtue of our charism.

REVIEWING OUR STRUCTURES

27. A clear awareness of the real situations and social contexts in which we live will move us to undertake a serious discernment regarding the minority of our structures. These will need to be simple, flexible and moderate in scale, far removed from power, money and influence. A lesser brother knows how to improvise.

a. We should question the structures we own: churches, friaries, gardens and cultural goods. We should ask ourselves whether our use of them is in conformity with our vocation as lowly itinerants. If such goods are surplus to the needs of the fraternity or require excessive maintenance, we should study how to put them to good use for the benefit of the Church, the poor or society. Among possible solutions we should also consider temporary loans, sale, or donation, according to places and needs.

b. To opt for small houses, with a suitable number of brothers settled in marginal areas and living on their own work, can be a practical way of implementing our lesser, itinerant brotherhood.

c. Care should be taken, however, to protect goods which, because of their historical significance, are an important reminder of the identity of our Order.

FORMATION FOR MINORITY AND ITINERANCY

CANDIDATES AND MINORITY

28. Candidates to our life, from pre-postulancy onwards, should be informed, guided and encouraged to understand and to live our lesser, itinerant brotherhood, with its distinguishing mark of fraternal equality.

USEFUL EXPERIENCES IN INITIAL FORMATION

29. Just as St Francis grew in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus through his encounter with the leper, so should initial formation provide experiences of real contact with the “lepers” of our age: the sick, the poor and every type of marginalized person, according to the places in which we are present.

As far as possible, some temporary experience of working for a living is useful, so that we are able to understand the ordinary people among whom we live.

In order to complete initial formation, periods of missionary experience are also useful. Periods of study and service in a circumscription other than one’s own, especially in poor ones, help a brother in initial formation to develop an attitude of itinerancy and an awareness of belonging to a worldwide Order.

Right from the beginning of initial formation the two possibilities of “brother” and “priest-brother” must be presented as both being necessary expressions of equal dignity in the one Franciscan-Capuchin charism. Conferences may prepare common programs for initial formation.

ONGOING FORMATION IN MINORITY AND ITINERANCY

30. Minority and itinerancy are elements of the Franciscan vocation that always accompany our fraternal life. Therefore through ongoing formation we should be constantly deepening our grasp of these values, and, in addition to providing opportunities for educational updating, should promote concrete experiences of closeness to people and to the poor. It is therefore appropriate that each brother periodically renews his consecrated identity and his ministry, through experiences of service to the suffering, of life shared with the marginalized and of some pastoral ministry in a new field. These experiences can be had in other circumscriptions or in a mission.

Ongoing formation also concerns itself with the Franciscan quality of our prayer. We pray as true lesser brothers when we are ready to share our prayer with the people, when we know how to adapt it to the circumstances, whether through cultural forms or presenting to God the joys and hopes, the sufferings and concerns of our contemporaries (cf. *GS* 1).

FORMATION FOR CONTEMPLATION IN MINORITY

31. Since minority is not a natural way that is easily chosen, both fraternities and brothers need ongoing formation in order to acquire a spirit of service and minority. It is essential to develop an ability to view things contemplatively, especially through the community exercise of silent prayer.

The journey of the first Capuchins to the periphery was also a journey to contemplation and silence open to the world. The lesser brother is one who contemplates above all a God who humbles himself in the manger, on the cross and in the Eucharist, and who never loses sight of his brothers and sisters – especially the poorest ones – or of all creation.

The hermitage, which for the first Capuchins was always on the edges of the town, is not a place in which to avert one’s gaze, but to acquire a broader vision of reality, contemplated from the vantage point of God and the poor.

- Therefore we wish to promote a type of Franciscan-Capuchin contemplation:
- following the tradition of Francis, focusing on the minority of God as the model and method of evangelization;
- arising out of real life and leading us to action (compassionate love and international compassion);
- a place where, instead of speaking, we listen to God in his Gospel and in the poor.
- For this we should:
- promote ongoing formation to help us humbly recognize the need to relearn our own way of contemplation;
- encourage each Conference of the Order to create a space where the brothers can know, practice and love Franciscan prayer;
- discuss in local chapters our use of time and consider which activities could be dropped so that we have the necessary time for contemplative prayer;

- prefer to meditate on the mysteries of the Incarnation and the cross, in accordance with our tradition;
- ensure that eremitical experiences do not encourage a monastic lifestyle, but are a springboard for developing a contemplative perspective in the midst of the world.

DOCTRINE AND LIFE MUST BE CONSISTENT

32. Our fraternal life is the fundamental requirement in the process of all formation (cf. Const.23, 4-5). This delicate formation process is undermined when a double standard is perceived in relation to what has been taught or proposed, compared with what is found in the jurisdiction at large. Oftentimes this leads to viewing religious profession and ordination as steps or stages of personal advancement or privilege, rather than as deeper levels of commitment and greater generosity. We therefore stress the importance of consistency between what we profess to those in formation, and our lifestyle.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE CHURCH'S SOCIAL TEACHING

33. For our options in the field of the social apostolate and for our presence among the poor, knowledge of the social teaching of the Church should be promoted in all our fraternities, including times of special formation (initial and ongoing).

PCO VII AS A FORMATION RESOURCE

34. All circumscriptions should wholeheartedly commit themselves to implementing the *Proposals* presented by the VII PCO. Meetings should be planned for this purpose to raise the awareness of the brothers, as well as specific action in the fields of initial and ongoing formation.

OUR MINORITY IN THE CHURCH

THE PRIEST: MINISTER AND SERVANT IN THE CHURCH

35. "Since the People of God have been given many gifts to build up the Church (cf. 1Cor 14:26; Eph 4:7, 11-12), presbyters are called to exercise within the Church a ministry of unity without dominating people's faith and as servants of their joy (2Cor 1:24; 1Pt 5:3). The Eucharist, source and summit of our lives (LG 11; Const. 47,1) helps us as lesser ones to understand better this service of ordained ministry.

The Eucharist does not belong to any single individual but to Christ himself, in whose priesthood all the faithful participate actively. The priest acts in the name of Christ, the Head, during the assembly's Eucharist (LG 10, 28; PO 2; SC 33). The Gospel according to John presents this Christ as a head who bows low, washing the feet of others: "If I, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you must wash each other's feet"(13:14; cf. *RnB* VI 3; *Adm* IV 2). Further, the example of Christ humbling himself as he comes into our hands during the Eucharist (*Adm* 1, 16-19; LOrd 26-29) should lead the ministers to humble themselves in service to the people. This Christ-like attitude should lead the brother priests in our Order of Lesser Brothers to be humble and lowly in their service at the altar of fraternal life.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE “LESSER” PRIEST

36. “The Lord gave me brothers”, said Francis, referring to the origins of the fraternity. (cf. *Test* 16). Into this fraternity he welcomed all those who wanted to follow his ideal of minority – among them priests. Thus, Francis addresses “all the ministers, custodians and *humble priests* of the fraternity” (*LtOrd*,2). To these he offers concrete instructions on how to exercise the ordained ministry as lesser brothers. This applies also to all who are priests in the Order today.

The priest-Franciscan lives his ministry by respecting above all the primacy of belonging to the fraternity (cf. *LtOrd*, 30-34). As a special minister of God’s mercy, he draws inspiration from the model Francis puts forward in his *Letter to a Minister* (*LtMin*, 1-21). He makes himself available for the needs of the Church, preferably for the more difficult and least honourable services, and he knows how to be close especially to the suffering, the marginalized, and those far away.

Again, the lesser brother who is a priest takes care to see that the liturgy reflects both the simplicity of the Franciscan way and the grandeur of the mysteries that are celebrated, by his own conduct and through the signs and objects that make up the rite. (cf *1LtCl*).

Finally, he demonstrates freedom with regard to money, knowing how to offer his ministry freely to everyone, as freely as he has received it (cf Mt 10,8-10).

ECCLESIASTICAL OFFICES

41. Since Capuchins strive to be lesser, our Order does not seek the episcopacy or other high ecclesiastical offices for its members.

FOR A WORLD OF JUSTICE AND PEACE

CREATING RELATIONSHIPS

42. The power of the Holy Spirit stimulates genuine love in our hearts, which creates unity among all creatures, regardless of who or what each one is (cf. *LG* 7). As brothers of Francis, we ought to be bridge-builders and pathfinders, going beyond the barriers of caste, creed, religion and geographical boundaries, holding on to the thread of love while walking through the labyrinth of relationships. Our fraternities should be focal points of peace and reconciliation in our neighbourhoods.

SEEING BEYOND PEOPLE’S SIN

43. One specific feature of Francis’s minority was his ability to look beyond peoples’ woundedness, limitations and sins and see the presence of God in everyone. To show mercy to “lepers” is to recognize the mystery of God present in the suffering person; constantly to offer forgiveness to those who sin is to make a statement that the brother is greater than his sin. We too, with consistent evangelical witness, should not allow ourselves to be conditioned by evil

and suffering, but in everything we should bring hope, promoting reconciliation and healing for those who suffer in body and spirit.

FOSTERING RECONCILIATION

44. The current situation of international conflict and the human condition marked by individual and social sin reveal a radical need for conversion, reconciliation and peace, which can only come from above. “He is our peace, making a single people out of the two” (Ep2, 14). It is part of our task as lesser brothers to actively foster reconciliation through suitable practical initiatives and to promote a culture of reconciliation. In this context it is certainly an expression of minority to make ourselves available to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation.

THE JOY OF MINORITY

45. Capuchin brothers believe in the beauty of minority. Like Francis, we believe that, despite the hardships involved in a life of minority and itinerancy, we always have reasons to reflect joy in the way we live. The experience of the gospel and fraternity life itself are reasons to be joyful in living our minority. With this motivation we try to bring joy to the often very harsh life of the poor (cf. *Const.* 100,1). Furthermore, many people notice our joy, which encourages them in their lives and can attract them to embrace our vocation. To be minor and to live joyfully is not only possible, it is an ever-present reality in our lives.

REDEEMED RELATIONSHIPS

46. In Jesus, Francis was embraced as brother in a relationship which transformed what was bitter into “sweetness of soul and body” (*Test* 3). Francis committed himself to a new world of redeemed relationships. Capuchin brotherhood overcomes ethnic, linguistic and national divisions. Therefore, it is our specific vocation

- to seek reconciliation above all (cf. CPO V, 86);
- to seek to achieve understanding and build empathy among parties in conflict;
- to allow each side to express its own experience within a conflict;
- to address the legitimate needs of all parties in a conflict;
- to live a model of solidarity among ourselves that ensures security for each brother and can also provide an example of solidarity for the world;
- to overcome ethnic, linguistic and national divisions through brotherhood.
- to be a voice among the voiceless;
- to consider the effects of proposed solutions on our sister, Mother Earth;
- to denounce unjust policies and practices.

WITNESS AND DIALOGUE

47. When we go among those who do not share our faith we are called in the first place to be witnesses of Christ by our life, and secondly, following the recommendation of St Francis, to dialogue with others (cf. *RnB* XVI, 6-10) and not to proselytize or despise or wrongly interpret the beliefs of others. Consequently we wish to live among the poor without distinction of religion, to dialogue with cultures, religions and denominations and enculturate the gospel.

SOLIDARITY WITH THE LITTLE ONES OF OUR TIMES

48. In a world of competition and strife, where self-sustaining financial, military and technological systems are increasingly marginalizing the poor, we commit ourselves as minors and itinerants to carry out a prophetic mission, expressing our solidarity with the poor and marginalized, walking alongside them to transform the world according to the gospel spirit of fraternity.

Our preaching of the Kingdom consists not only of verbal proclamation of the Word, but also of involvement in society for its transformation. Jesus said: "What you did to the least of my brothers and sisters, you did to me" (Mt 25, 40). As lesser brothers, being poor and having opted for the poor, we need to be more actively involved in the social and spiritual development of the poor and marginalized. Depending on the existential situation in various parts of the world, we should work to bring about a positive change and tangible improvement in their lives, using all the Franciscan means at our disposal.

This gives meaning to our solidarity with society's "little ones", whose deprivation degrades their humanity to a point where their moral sense is often compromised.

The effect of this activity should be critically evaluated and objectively measured from time to time.

A CHANGE OF PLACE

49. We believe that from a privileged position like ours it is difficult to understand the world of today, immersed in poverty of every kind. And so, to go out towards those forms of poverty can generate new life in the Order. This requires two things: a physical change of place which would lead us, as happened with the first Capuchins, to place our houses on the fringes of society, living in a simple, poor style. Also, it calls for a sociological change, which requires us to live there with the desire not only to welcome the poor but also to be welcomed by them. This "baptism of the poor", which Francis received when he embraced the leper, leads us to live in the midst of poverty, walking alongside poor people and taking an active part in their liberation.

For this purpose it is desirable that circumscriptions have at least one presence in areas of poverty, and that some of the brothers be able to participate directly in solidarity ventures with impoverished peoples.

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY FUND AND FRANCISCANS INTERNATIONAL

50. The International Solidarity Fund is a way in which all jurisdictions should share their resources with circumscriptions that need help to build their own infrastructure and to assist in the social development of their local people. Our minority moves us to contribute to this effort in collaboration with others. Individual jurisdictions should work with other viable organizations and institutions that share our Gospel values in their locality to transform society and to provide direct assistance to poor people. *Franciscans International* at the United Nations is our premier organization with which all jurisdictions in the Order should cooperate. The Order should inform all its members about the work of Franciscans International at the United Nations.

MANAGING DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

51. Many jurisdictions have significant programs for social development/transformation and direct aid to poor people. These activities are laudable and consistent with our Capuchin charism. Because large amounts of money are often involved, they are also occasions of wielding great power which, like all uses of power, need to be critiqued within the Order. The following norms aim to ensure that the use of power in these situations is appropriate to Capuchins.

- Works of social development/transformation should aim to build the structures of a fraternal economy within society. Works of direct aid to poor people should aim to connect people in need with people of means in a fraternal economy.
- The use of all money in the projects should be transparent.
- Because these works often involve the exercise of great power, no brother should stay in a position of leadership or control for too long. To do otherwise risks abusing power and developing habits inconsistent with our life of minority. The norm of tenure for a brother in such a position might be similar to that of a provincial minister, i.e., no more than six consecutive years in leadership.
- Assistance should not go from individual to individual, but always through the fraternity.
- Preference should be given to those ministries where the brothers themselves directly serve the poor.
- The brothers should clearly promote Gospel and Franciscan values within these ministries.
- When social development and direct aid programs sponsored by the Order can be done better by other groups, they should be handed over to them.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

52. We Capuchin brothers acknowledge our share of responsibility for the destruction of our planet (for example, the different forms of pollution and excessive exploitation of resources), since we actively contribute to the negative effects of this destructive system.

We invite the brothers, individually and collectively, to assess their conduct in the area of ecology. We also encourage them to take part in action by groups committed to the protection of the environment.

COMBATING CONSUMERISM

53. In order to combat consumerism, which feeds the dominant system and compromises our witness of minority and itinerancy, we agree:

- to use judiciously, and preferably avoid altogether, consumer goods that are signs of power, ostentation and self-enhancement;
- to enter into partnership with advisory organizations and associations for ethical consumer awareness;
- to collaborate with organizations that defend life, nature and biodiversity and that promote the rational and ecologically sustainable use of natural resources.

A CIVILIZATION OF LOVE

54. In societies that are particularly marked by selfishness and violence, women and children are often forced to suffer the worst consequences. Therefore we should stand by them in

practical ways, sustaining the “civilization of love” by upholding a culture of life against a culture of death.

We should as much as possible promote initiatives in support of defenceless children, rescuing them from violence and working with reliable international associations for their health and education.

We should promote equal rights for women and foster a culture of reciprocity that recognizes their equal dignity. In this way as lesser brothers we relate to women with equality and respect, listening to their claims and criticism, and building with them the new city of equality.

JPE COMMISSIONS

55. The Plenary Council insists on the need for each circumscription to have a functioning Justice and Peace Commission. In each Conference the work of *Franciscans International* should be made known and supported.

**VIII° PLENARY COUNCIL OF THE ORDER
THE GRACE OF WORKING
Rome, 2015**

**LETTER OF THE GENERAL MINISTER
AND THE BROTHER GENERAL COUNCILORS
AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE VIII PLENARY COUNCIL OF THE ORDER**

About two months have passed since the conclusion of the work of the eighth Plenary Council of the Order, dedicated to the theme *the grace of working*, and I am sure that many of you would like to know the result of the meeting, how we have worked, and the reflection that this gathering has produced. After the conclusion of the work, the Propositions were revised from the grammatical and literary points of view. This revision brought a further moment to examine the Propositions, which justifies the brief delay with which we are handing on to you the fruit of our work.

The PCO saw the participation of 44 friars: 10 members of the General Council and 34 delegates from the Conferences. To these were added the friars who carried out the tasks of translation, moderating, working as secretaries, liturgical animation and other services that made our work efficient and productive. We worked together from October 26 to November 19, 2015. Our stay at the 'San Lorenzo' International College in Rome was supported by the cordial fraternity of the friars of the permanent community there and by our students, with whom we shared prayers in the evening and meals.

As you can imagine the composition of the assembled brothers was heterogeneous and multicultural; the different areas of the Capuchin world were represented with their baggage of history and culture. The participants were subdivided into four working groups: two for the English language, one for Italian, and one that joined the brothers of the Spanish and Portuguese languages. All the friars showed a fine spirit of flexibility both in praying together using different languages, and in the little rules made such that the event could be celebrated in an orderly way. The climate that was created among the participants was serene and fraternal, especially in the moments of evening recreation.

The first ten days of work were dedicated to a studious listening on the theme of work and to particularly meaningful witnesses. During the sessions of the morning we heard Professor Mauro Magatti, who presented a sociological approach on certain dynamics that govern the world of work. Professor Mary Hess introduced us to the world of digital technology and the changes that it has produced in the activities of work; a reality from which we Capuchin friars are not excused! Our confreres Br. Fernando Ventura and Br. Carlos Susin presented on theme of work, respectively, in the Sacred Scriptures and the Magisterium of the Church; they were followed by Br. Pio Murat, General Councilor, who gave us a presentation on how the documents of our Order have dealt with the theme of work. Rev. Felice Accrocca, analyzing the Franciscan Sources, presented the concept of work in St. Francis of Assisi; Br. Giuseppe Buffon, OFM, finally, discussed with us what emerges in the tradition of the Capuchin Friars Minor with respect to work. During the afternoon sessions, we listened to a serious of witness

presentations of our fellow religious, both of our Order and from other congregations, who told us in captivating ways about their experience with the poor, the imprisoned, in factories as worker-priests, and in multi-ethnic pastoral situations. This first part of the PCO concluded with a day of retreat and prayer led by Br. Eric Bidot, Provincial Minister of France.

The following days were characterized by reflection, by dialogue, and by proposals. We treated many possibilities of work. We chose not to give rigid criteria to the work of the language groups: it was asked that each brother, beginning from his experience, from the *Instrumentum laboris* compiled in preparation for the PCO, and by the contributions heard in the preceding days, be free to formulate propositions within his own group. By the end of the first days there emerged a line of work that brought together the hopes of the friars belonging the groups, which can be summarized in three questions:

1. How can we help the friars to reflect on work in the various aspects inherent in it, keeping in mind the rapid changes that different societies are undergoing?
2. What proposals can we present to the friars so that, founded on the Gospel and on the charism of St. Francis, work can be lived truly as a grace?
3. Our identity as brothers and minors: How do we “counter the challenges of individualism and the tendency to reduce work to a tool of mere economic profit”? (Constitutions 78,7)

After a first moment of ‘apparent calm’ in which the friars understood better what was their task, we set off with zeal. It was edifying to see how the various language groups emphasized the themes inherent in work, highlighting cultural and social aspects from the various geographic areas. Each group approved propositions on its own to then be brought to the plenary assembly, which in turn approved or rejected the proposals. The effort was significant such that the final proposals should gather up the motions from the different groups. The work of the two editing commissions was important and worthy of gratitude. They worked hard to give value, synthesize, and propose anew, in a linguistically correct way, all that the groups produced.

Our work produced 74 Propositions that we now present to your attention. Allow us to present to you certain criteria with which you can read and dialogue on what the friar delegates to the PCO give to all of you.

1. We have tried to enhance and make current the themes already proposed in our renewed Constitutions, in PCO VI, *Living poverty in brotherhood*, and in PCO VII, *Our fraternal life in minority*.
2. In the final editing of the text that you have in your hands we have grouped the various Propositions into thematic areas that follow the development of the chapters of our Constitutions, in particular the first six and IX and XII.
3. We did not try to be systematic or elegant with language. During the work there were many calls to be concrete. Some Propositions are similar, but we have kept them because in the context in which they are placed, they recall concepts and values that are essential for our life.

Now, dear brothers, do your part! We ask all the Provincial Ministers and the Conferences to identify the most opportune means such that what the Delegates to PCO VIII pass on to you is worked upon. Let each circumscription plan special meetings on the Propositions developed during the recent PCO. We entrust to the care of the Ministers the printing and distribution of the Propositions of the PCO to every friar of his own circumscription. Take on this work in a concrete way: following the awareness of the content of the Propositions, let every province, custody, local fraternity and individual Capuchin friar minor make a self-examination with

regard to what is written and may this reflection produce a renewal and, if necessary, a change in our style of life. Let us support one another; let us pray the Spirit of the Lord that our work also might manifest in an ever clearer way our identity as brothers and as minors, in our fraternities and where are called to give our lives. We hope that all the friars are able to praise even more the Lord who grants us the 'Grace of Working.'

All the best for your work, brothers. We greet you fraternally.

Br. Mauro Jöhri
General Minister OFM Cap.
The brothers of the General Council
Rome, January 15, 2016
Memorial of St. Mauro, Abbot

PROPOSALS

1. CALLED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE WORK OF CREATION

1. We who have freely received the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, by reason of the great love that God has toward us, feel ourselves called to pass it on to our brothers and sisters, in all of its dimensions, among which is that of work. The grace of work thus becomes praise of God and a witness to Him who has loved us first. We encourage and exhort all the brothers to live the “gospel of work,”¹ even with its inevitable struggles, happy for this vocation and announcing to the world the greatness of the Creator.

2. In the image of Jesus Christ, who worked with his own hands, and of Francis, who followed in his footprints, we make the Kingdom of God present with our work, serving people with our personal and shared gifts. In fact, “Jesus worked with his hands, in daily contact with the matter created by God, to which he gave form by his craftsmanship. It is striking that most of his life was dedicated to this task [...]. In this way he sanctified human labor and endowed it with a special significance for our development.” (*Laudato si'*, 98)

The Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph, her husband, are for the lesser brother examples of daily, silent, humble, and fraternal work in service to the Kingdom of God. Following the words of St. Francis, who exhorts us to be mothers of one another, let us enter into the mystery of salvation in a way known only to God, and the Father, who sees what is secret, will reward us.

The Capuchin tradition has also made work an ordinary part of daily life. Our history is continually enriched by the lives and example of friars who serve the community with all their physical, mental, and spiritual abilities.

3. God bestows the gift of work on humankind. Coming from His hands, work is grace and is to be considered something good, by which we participate actively in the creative action of God. Understood as an opportunity full of grace in which we become sharers in the sanctification and redemption of humankind, the gift of work done with love makes interior joy and enthusiasm shine forth from within us.

4. The human person, in order to grow and realize himself, has a vital need of entering into relationship. Authentic work helps human relationships mature in their various dimensions:

- Work puts us in contact with ourselves, with our skills and abilities. This is why it is important that every brother, as much as is possible, be recognized in his gifts and charisms.
- Works puts us in relationship with the brothers. Therefore, let personal work, assigned by the fraternity or taken on in communion with it, be an expression of the fraternal life and let it become a privileged instrument for the reinforcement of fraternal relationships, generating a true communion within the common life.
- Work puts us in relationship with people. By consecration we are called not only to serve, but also to offer our lives to others, sharing a particular solidarity with the poor and those who work. Therefore the consecrated person appropriates to himself neither a work nor its fruits, but shares everything.

¹ John Paul II, Encyclical letter *Laborem exercens*. Given at Castel Gandolfo, on September 14, feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, in 1981, the third year of his pontificate.

- Work puts us in relationship with the whole creation. Therefore the consecrated person, by means of his work, shall collaborate in the protection of creation with respect, recognizing in it the footprints of the Creator God.
 - Work puts us in relationship with the Lord. The consecrated person is called to work in the 'Vineyard of the Lord'; therefore it is of vital importance that he grow day by day in an intimate relationship with Him who is 'Master of the Vineyard.'
5. Every workbench, desk, ironing board, or kitchen counter can become an 'altar' where the work of our hands and the intentions of our hearts are presented to the Lord of the harvest. Our work becomes liturgical and therefore prayer. One doesn't work so much by himself, or for himself, but in communion with others.

With his own personal way of being and acting, one takes part in the history of salvation and collaborates in the construction of the Kingdom of God.

6. We Capuchin friars are called to provide whatever is necessary for our support through our work and to share this with the poor. The grace of working is constitutive of our being Capuchin friars: it realizes our relationship with God and neighbor, becomes a prophetic announcement of the presence of God in the world and is a source of human and spiritual fulfillment. It is to be understood and lived according to our Capuchin-Franciscan identity: in fraternity, minority, and in the spirit of service. The authenticity of work supposes an ongoing conversion to the Gospel that we have promised to live and to witness to prophetically among people.

2. LEARNING TO WORK

7. An appreciation for work as a response to the love of God in the service of the brothers is to be instilled in the course of initial formation through a pedagogical process. This contributes to the maturation of the person.

8. During the time of initial formation, there should be an insistence on manual and domestic work as a means for interiorizing our charism. When possible, some periods even of external work should be provided for the candidates so they may contribute actively to the support of the fraternity.

9. All the friars are responsible for giving witness to the brothers in initial formation regarding the way of working. It is important, therefore, that the formators especially participate in domestic and manual work, each according to his own ability, and so communicate the value of such work as a dimension that characterizes our style of life.

10. Manual and domestic work makes us experience an altruistic love for the brothers, in the humility and minority of service. If practiced with devotion, beginning from initial formation, it allows us to develop a sense of belonging to the local fraternity and to the circumscription; it becomes a concrete expression of our care for what belongs to everyone and of solidarity with the poorest. In various cultures the practice of manual and domestic work can mean a change of mentality and is an announcement of the equal dignity of the sons and daughters of God.

11. During initial formation, the variety of work available in the circumscription is to be made known to the friars in formation, so that they can discern with their formators what type of work seems most appropriate for them. In this discernment, the abilities of the individual are to be taken into consideration, as well as the needs of the circumscription, of the Church, and

of society. The formators shall carefully foster in the friars in formation a concrete willingness to commit themselves to activity and work, according to the demands of the circumstances.

12. After assessing the abilities and the aptitudes of the friars in formation, let them be sent for specialization also in fields not linked to ordained ministry (agriculture, medicine, economics, information technology, social sciences, etc.), adopting this criterion also in the assignment of study burses.

13. Each circumscription shall send a friar for the scholarly study of Capuchin history and spirituality, giving due importance to the necessity of such work in order to preserve the memory of our form of life and see to the formation of new generations.

14. The formation of the friars should prepare them to engage in a professional way the issues affecting society, even offering them the opportunity to live among the poor for a good period of time before perpetual profession.

15. Academic specialization and degrees are to be seen as gifts to share in a spirit of fraternal service, not as acquired rights or privileges within the Order. Each circumscription shall discern its needs and, in view of these, identify the brothers to be sent to academic centers. Considering the costs involved, they should be judged to have the intellectual capacity and be of an appropriate age to fulfill such a course of studies. We should also take care to accompany the friars during the period of study. They are to understand clearly that full-time study is their work, and as such avoid taking on parallel activities. Having completed the academic degree, they are to be assigned to those activities where the acquired skills are of value and can be used in the service of the brothers, in research and in study.

3. THE FIRST WORK

16. We are called to integrate our life of prayer and work. We place all of our work, with its joys and hopes, as also with its struggles and anxieties, before the Lord so that with the whole fraternity we place our trust in Him: "Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain." (Ps. 127:1) Prayer and fraternity are the essential foundations for our work: without these the intrinsic value of work will be reduced to a mere execution of required tasks, empty of interior life and vitality.

17. The first work of the friars is seeking union with God. The times of fraternal prayer are not a way to avoid our work and pastoral care or an escape from the human toil of work, but are a service that comes from our state of life as consecrated persons. Therefore no friar shall dispense himself from the primary task of liturgical and mental prayer, aware that when one prays he is interceding "on behalf of all humanity." (Const. 49,1)

4. MINORS AT THE SERVICE OF ALL

18. The identity of the Capuchin friar is characterized by minority lived in fraternity; this becomes the criterion for the choice of our works. We are not called only to work for the poor, but above all with the poor. Let us avoid considering work as a means to personal self-promotion, in order to live always in a spirit of service.

19. Our charism as Capuchin lesser brothers is expressed in particular in those activities that situate us in the last place, sharing prophetically in the condition of those who are judged insignificant by consumerism and hedonism. This commits us to leading a simple life like the poor of the place.

20. Let us remember that the purpose of our work is not only to ensure our support, but to share our life with people, putting ourselves at their service as lesser brothers. Every circumscription of the Order shall have at least one structure to provide assistance and advancement for the poor. To this end let the ministers strive: a) to make competent and willing friars available to carry out this service; b) to assign some of our friaries to such initiatives; c) to assign a percent of our own income for the benefit of the poor. Closeness to and association with the poor will help us to review our style of life in many ways.

21. Our fraternity is made up of religious presbyters and lay religious. In our internal relationships and in ministerial work we avoid every form of clericalism that seeks social climbing, privilege, and power, which are deeply contrary to our identity as minors. Let us foster fraternal structures and attitudes where witness is given to collaboration, dialogue, and service.

22. Many of our works, as also other activities/initiatives, are sources of economic benefit. Many countries have taxes, such that a part of the income from all economic activity is put to the common good, financing charities and services for all. As lesser brothers we are to be responsible and honest citizens, always complying with fiscal obligations, without using strategies to avoid them.

23. Work for people outside the Order belongs to the charism of our origins. This is a way of working that entails: being employees of others and submitting to their conditions, renouncing personal and institutional attention-seeking, and accepting working conditions that are normally more demanding. When decided upon and shared in fraternity, this way of working is a window open to the world, a source of fraternal enrichment, a school of work, and a privileged means for our sharing with people.

5. WE LIVE FROM OUR WORK

24. The first Capuchins chose to live by having recourse to begging. Today the socio-cultural and ecclesial situations in which the Order lives demand that we support ourselves from our work. Therefore we can take on, even as remunerated work, every type of activity, also outside the fraternity, that is honest and that allows us to live as minors.

25. Those who enter the Order with a profession, if it is not against our charism, shall continue to exercise it if such is necessary to contribute to the support of the fraternity.

26. The diminishment of the solidarity funds of the General Curia and of other external sources is to be taken and lived as a blessing, an opportunity to discern how to create new forms of self-support, trusting in divine Providence. Among these forms, let us prudently evaluate the possibility of establishing institutions or projects that respond to local needs and in which the friars can work.

27. In the context of contemporary society, the traditional questing – as was done for centuries – has gradually disappeared almost entirely. We believe, however, that the tradition of begging is something to preserve, renewing and adapting it to the socio-cultural context, finding

alternative forms consonant with our being minors. For example, we may have recourse to the donations of persons and institutions in order to assure the minimum necessary for us and for the poor.

28. Structures built with contributions from the economic solidarity of the Order must become self-supporting by the labor of the friars that work there. Structures shall not be built if the friars are not willing to work there and support it themselves.

29. Keeping our interdependence in mind, the surplus of the fruit of our work, or other income, shall be made available to the Order for the needs of the circumscriptions and for the good of the poorest.

30. Economic autonomy is one of the objectives to be reached, if possible, in the management of ministerial services and in our structures.

Since young circumscriptions are not always able to provide for themselves adequately by their work, it is suggested that the office of solidarity furnish materials and technical support to guide the reflections of such circumscriptions on economic sustainability, responsible investment, and self-help projects. It is important to provide health insurance and a retirement fund for the friars, keeping in mind the local situation.

31. Recourse to the service of paid employees in the fraternity is, in some situations, in conflict with our choice to be lesser brothers. All the circumscriptions are asked to make a serious and rigorous examination of the hiring of employed personnel, which must be submitted to the discernment of all the friars in the local chapter and have the consent of the minister or custos with his council.

32. As lesser brothers, let us work with our employees with respect, cooperation, humility, and simplicity. Let us make them aware of our form of life, and relate to them fraternally and courteously rather than with a bossy mentality. At the same time, we should never disregard our responsibility as employers.

33. In regard to the employees that work in our fraternities and in our institutions:

- The local laws that protect the rights of duties of workers shall be observed;
- They shall be paid a just wage;
- Care shall be taken to give them an adequate, ongoing formation.

6. BROTHERS WHO WORK TOGETHER

34. We esteem and give thanks to God for the work of the friars all over the world, which is expressed in varied ways, in both traditional as well as other more innovative forms. Let us remember that the primacy in all of our activities belongs to fraternal life and prayer, in the light of which discernment is made on our work. In fact, we wish to present ourselves to the world of today beginning with our identity as lesser brothers, in order to respond to the tasks that the Church asks of us and to the challenges that the culture and society of today put before us.

35. In the light of our fraternal charism, the grace of working commits us, as the Constitutions exhort, to take on works within the project of the fraternity, willingly submitting, in a spirit of obedience, one's own work to the discernment of the local fraternity and of the minister, accepting with a spirit of willingness even that which does not suit or satisfy us, as an occasion of personal maturation and of blessing.

36. Each of us has received various gifts from God. Each time a brother shares the gift received, he witnesses to the beauty and the attractive force of fraternal communion. Creative individuality in work, in harmony with the plan of a respectful and welcoming fraternity, brings joy and is to be encouraged.

37. Let the work of the individual friars be an expression of the whole fraternity. May the local chapter be the place where, sharing the efforts and the joys of different works, the friars support and mutually enrich one other.

38. Let us give priority to working as a team rather than as individuals, because this better expresses the values of fraternity and minority. It is necessary that all the friars commit themselves to working for common objectives, promoting the sense of belonging and participation, developing relationships of equality, appreciating and respecting one another's differences, and renouncing particular interests and personal self-seeking. The coordinator of the work should not behave like an authoritarian boss, but as a brother, whose serves to animate and coordinate the group such that all participate. He should foster communication and creativity, and courageously face conflicts.

39. Let all the friars feel responsible for the animation of fraternal life, and when they are called to carry out the service of minister and of guardian, let them be prepared and aware that such service is their first work so that they may foster the journey of the brothers and the quality of fraternal relationships. Guided by our Constitutions, let them promote the participation of everyone and the sense that each individual is valued.

40. The consumerist mentality measures the value of the person based on the role that he occupies in society, and above all based on what he produces, marginalizing the weakest. Let it not be so among us. In whatever state of health or age and in every situation of work, the friar is to be welcomed and enabled to give the best of himself. The work of every friar is to be valued independently of the salary received. May our communities be places of freedom, in which each can develop the gifts received with creativity, working faithfully and devotedly in a healthy balance with the other aspects of our life.

41. Two risks threaten our fraternal life. On the one hand there is overwork, which can become a pretext to distance oneself from the fraternity; in reality, the harder one works the more necessary it is that he remain linked to fraternal life. On the other hand, there is the risk of a disengagement from the tasks entrusted to us and a falling into laziness and a bad management of time.

42. As Capuchin Friars Minor we are a fraternity in which the lay brothers and the presbyter brothers enjoy the same dignity. It is the responsibility of the minister and his council to seek various forms of apostolate such that the choice for the lay form of our life has a real space for expression and in which human and professional realization is made possible. The circumscriptions that dedicate themselves almost exclusively to parochial and sacramental ministry, with a mainly clerical formation in post-novitiate, will have difficulty passing on the importance and the beauty of the lay form of our vocation and in attracting young people to this style of life. Therefore, let the different expressions of our vocation be proposed, encouraging and appealing to all the brothers to make their natural gifts fruitful by means of a specialized formation, which will prepare them to carry out better the services entrusted to them.

43. One of the most marginalized groups in our society is the sick. We recognize the value of the presence of sick brothers in our fraternities. With their silent witness, in patience and in prayer, they collaborate in the building up of the fraternity. Let us recognize also the work of

the brothers who take care of them in the fraternity, accompanying them generously and with love and deep respect.

44. Love and responsibility for our senior and sick brothers requires that the fraternity give them special care and attention. Let the fraternity ensure medical care and assistance, adapt work to their capacities, and encourage their gradual withdrawal from responsibility, service, and ministry, helping them in this transition since it is often a source of interior distress.

45. Considering that money is the fruit of the work of all the friars, the guardians and the ministers shall respect the “maximum sum” of expenditure established by the economic statutes of the circumscription (cf. OGC 4/4), making every choice with responsibility and transparency, in agreement with the local council and the circumscription. Therefore, all the circumscriptions are called to develop clear economic statutes in order to avoid arbitrary decisions and abuses of money by superiors.

46. In a spirit of belonging, all the friars shall hand over to the fraternity in their entirety the offerings, salaries, pensions, or other resources that they receive. In the same way, they shall not appropriate to themselves a ministry, function, or office, nor draw personal profit from it.

47. If a brother obstinately refuses to hand over to the fraternity all that he has received for work or for any other reason, his minister is obligated to admonish him with firmness, gentleness, and love, even having recourse to canonical warnings, if necessary, so that the brother might live what he promised.

48. The time of vacation is to be considered a moment of grace that the Lord grants to us, though not a right to arrange our time independent of others. Every fraternity should discern the best way to live such times, both in common and individually.

49. In planning our vacations, let us look to those who do not have such opportunities, due to unemployment or lack of means. Let us avoid imitating the affluent, and let us make our vacation consistent with our state of minority, possibly sharing them with the brothers and in solidarity with the most humble of our society.

50. Let us express concrete signs of gratitude toward the friars for their generous work.

7. IN A SPIRIT READY TO EXERCISE EVERY TYPE OF APOSTOLATE

51. We Capuchin friars contemplate reality as the place where God reveals his beauty and mercy. In creation, in the human person, and in the poor we contemplate the face of Christ that continues to reveal itself in his *kenosis* and resurrection. Therefore, let our choices of work be the fruit of a discernment made in the prayer of the fraternity and in a spirit of minority, attentive to the socio-cultural context in which we live.

52. In order to commit ourselves to real, concrete decisions and actions, we need to keep our eyes open to what is happening in society, in the local Church, and in the circumscription of the Order in which we live. It is crucial for us to face the particular situations of the place to which the Lord has sent us, to be intelligent in discerning the ways of his will, and to act resolutely to fulfill them in a spirit of freedom and humility.

53. Carefully observing the world around us and listening to the concerns of the people allows our discernment to be better informed in order to:

a) identify and value the activities of individual friars;

b) make our fraternities meaningful to the people and able to relate to them;

c) avoid proposing activities that are not required by the context;

d) facilitate our presence and evangelical witness among the poor.

54. To better serve the men and women of our time, let our work be carried out with competence and love. Therefore, starting from 'the principle of continual improvement':

a) we recognize the necessity of specialization, updating it continuously;

b) we assess the needs that call for our response;

c) we plan aims and objectives properly;

d) we give priority to team work and networking with other organizations;

e) we evaluate the results and promote innovation.

55. Let the friars take on their commitments not just for the sake of financial gain, however necessary, but as a free response to the needs of the social context in which they find themselves, in collaboration with other free charitable initiatives.

56. One of the traditional forms of Capuchin ministry is the presence in shrines, where our brothers can genuinely encounter one another and God. The active presence of friars in these places is encouraged. Let them be pilgrims among pilgrims, open and available to welcome people pastorally, especially for confessions and blessings.

57. Let us value the practice of popular missions and the spiritual formation of the baptized, accompanying them in the process of conversion and of growth. Let us encourage greater creativity in the preaching of the Gospel and promote the integration of the baptized into the common life of the parish as well as reconciliation with the Lord and with their brothers and sisters.

58. Let us value and promote the participation of the lay faithful in the life of the Church, giving particular attention to the Secular Franciscan Order. Let us commit ourselves to their formation by means of workshops, courses, the publication of books, and the use of the web.

59. Let us share our charism with the laity, involving them in our works. Let us foster solidarity by means of volunteer service, giving people the opportunity to live the spirit of fraternity and minority by means of work that is joyful and freely given in service to the most needy.

60. The pastoral care of a parish is to be understood as entrusted to the whole fraternity. Whenever a parish is entrusted to us, the pastor shall not appropriate it to himself, but shall work in collaboration with the fraternity.

61. The ecclesiology of communion calls us to live our charism and our pastoral service as a gift to the universal and particular Church, in a spirit of itinerancy. Wherever we are present, as true brothers of the people, let us willingly serve the growth of the local Church, collaborating willingly with the diocesan clergy and with other ecclesial structures.

62. We encourage the friars to 'leave the sacristies' and to work in the existential peripheries, where no one wants to go, bringing our charism as lesser brothers. By means of our work, let us live out the prophetic element of consecrated life in the Church.

63. Various circumscriptions have founded schools of every kind and level, which are very useful for parents in search of a quality education. Often we friars limit ourselves to occupying leadership or administrative roles, while it would be preferable for us to commit ourselves

also to taking an active, professional part in teaching the various disciplines. This would help to reduce costs and to broaden access to young people of modest means and to the poor.

64. In social, educational, health care, or other works, let our presence be first of all as brothers and spiritual animators, transmitting our charism, creating communion and giving witness to fraternity, rather than only as directors and administrators. For these latter tasks, let us accept the help of competent persons who share the spirit of Capuchin-Franciscan mission.

65. Let the principles of JPIC serve as a point of reference in the choice or evaluation of our work. Let us concern ourselves with the care of creation: not wasting energy, reducing consumption, re-using recyclable materials, avoiding waste, promoting a critical reflection on our habits, and denouncing the businesses that attack nature. In our work let us motivate people to live in communion with creation.

66. Aware of the injustices and problems of the world of work, we contemplate the face of the suffering Christ in those for whom work is not perceived as a grace:

- In those without access to work;
- In those who bear unjust conditions;
- In children, women, the elderly, and in all those who are exploited;
- In the many poor who are subjected to humiliating and undignified activity (e.g. prostitution, trafficking in organs, the drug trade);
- In those who suffer because of unhealthy working conditions;
- In those less qualified workers who are often marginalized by the world of competition.

To these persons we express our solidarity and we wish to support firmly those organizations that promote dignity and justice in the world of work in a concrete way.

67. Let us collaborate with institutions that work on behalf of the poor, the marginalized, and all the persecuted, Christian or not, and with organizations that promote peace, justice, and the integrity of creation. Catholic institutions and, in a particular way, Franciscan ones, are to be privileged, such as the Damietta Peace Initiative and Franciscans International, without excluding other local institutions, such as REPAM (Pan-Amazon Ecclesial Network), REBAC (Congo Basin Ecclesial Network), and FAN (Franciscan Action Network).

68. The friars who work among the marginalized, the poor, or migrants, often do not receive any compensation for their activity. The ministers and the local fraternity shall willingly support the economic needs of these services, even by means of renunciations and sacrifices in ordinary expenses.

69. The technological development of recent years with the spread of the means of social communication, has significantly transformed society, and its effects are manifest in a new way of living, of communicating, and of establishing interpersonal relationships. This has created a new culture, with new ways of learning, which has given rise to the development of heretofore unknown opportunities for work.

The new digital media also facilitate our work of evangelization, improve communication among ourselves, and assist the administration of our fraternities and institutions. Let us place our knowledge and skills of digital media at the service of the poor, who often are not able to benefit from them.

70. In this new culture, of which we are part and by which we are also influenced, let us be aware of the danger of an inappropriate and excessive use of digital media which creates a virtual world, with the risks of individualism, distraction, and wasted time. All of this weakens

fraternal relationships and brings further problems that come from the wrong use of these media.

Education in the appropriate use of such means should be a necessary component in the initial and ongoing formation programs of the friars. Formators, in particular, must be aware of the conditioning that comes from digital media, and suitably adapt their methods of formation.

8. LET US BRING THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF SALVATION

71. The work of evangelization suggests a 'missionary conversion' of one's own apostolic life that can no longer be confined to our own structures and traditional activities, but is rather about a Church 'going forth.' Therefore, let the friars commit themselves to working with passion and enthusiasm, in particular in the service of the first proclamation of the gospel, in the Christian formation of communities and in all those places that today are 'peripheries.' May our 'going forth in mission' give priority to witness and service among non-Christians, by means of inter-religious dialogue and, when possible, the explicit proclamation of the Risen Lord.

72. The work of evangelization aims first of all to bring about an encounter with the person of Jesus Christ and to have people remain enthralled by him. This presupposes that the friars allow themselves in turn to be evangelized and renewed by a living encounter with Jesus Christ.

73. In our apostolic work, we should be attentive and vigilant in reading the 'signs of the times', in order to:

- a) faithfully carry out our form of evangelical life and our apostolic witness in the different regions and cultures;
- b) harmonize evangelization with the needs of people and their condition of life;
- c) open ourselves to dialogue with all Christians, with the believers of other religions, and with non-believers.

74. Let us encourage new ventures featuring international fraternities, either permanent or temporary, with the purpose of responding to people's search for and desire for God and to serious social emergencies (e.g. refugees, migrants, natural disasters).

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