

*Renewing*

our vision

*Embracing*

our future

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**Letter from the Minister General and the Definitory  
for the feast of Saint Francis**



## *Dear brothers and sisters*

*May the Lord give you peace!*

The Order has recently celebrated its General Chapter, and this is the first time that we are addressing you as brothers of the General Definitory. We have started working as a Definitorial fraternity, and we are studying in-depth the mandates and guidelines, which the General Chapter has entrusted to us, to draw up guidelines for the animation of the Order over the next six years. We hope to be able to offer you these proposals as soon as possible.

### *Between Fragility and Change*

A Franciscan icon that is helpful in our times is Francis' return from the Holy Land. According to some traditions, he lived a quarantine on a small island in the Venetian lagoon, where he experienced the fragility of his world, the crisis of the fraternity, his inner struggles, torn between darkness and desolation. Yet Francis maintained a response of gratitude alongside a hope-filled vision. (cf. RnB 23).

Today, the Order is also troubled amid hopes and discouragements, growth in some areas and decline in others. We are caught between the path of renewal of our identity as Friars Minor and the clericalism that gives power and security and makes us believe that we do not need anyone, distancing us from our vocation and mission as Friars Minor. For this reason, we can allow ourselves be touched once again by the motto of the General Chapter: "Arise... and Christ will give you light" (Eph 5:14).

We are in a time of change that affects everyone, and we believe that we too must be part of this climate of profound transformation, finding new and positive paths. This is not only a challenge but also a gift of the times in which we live. The present challenges us, placing us in situations of survival and vulner-

ability. It is a profound existential experience that calls us to walk in a better way and deepen the lifestyle we have professed. We recognise that sometimes we forget and do not live according to the charismatic inspiration that calls us to be brothers and minors. Experiencing ourselves as vulnerable helps us recognise our personal and fraternal frailties and go among the people with humility, simplicity, and joy.

To encourage and support us in hope in these times of change, fragility and vulnerability, a number of attitudes can help us:

a. Recognising and accepting our human fragility in our fraternity and the world around us.

b. Recognising the goodness, beauty, justice, values embedded in the hearts of the men and women of our time to grow and rejoice as we accompany others to rejoice in what the Most High is doing in their lives, families and communities, where they are living and working.

c. Listening to the invitation to change to loving without fear, making paths of liberation and going to the places of brokenness, where life suffers and cries out with all its strength. Those cries rise to heaven, and God hears them.



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## *Some Invitations*

In the Final Document, the General Chapter offered us five invitations that make up a journey for all of us: an invitation to gratitude, an invitation to renew our vision, an invitation to conversion and penance, an invitation to mission and evangelisation and an invitation to embrace our future. For us Friars Minor, these invitations are not optional. They are essential criteria for persevering on a path of fidelity to the five priorities of the Order, which are familiar to all of us.

Rereading these five invitations as a journey, we realise that we are called to start from gratitude for the good received, which engenders a constant act of thanksgiving and the continuous restitution of all good to God. Among these goods, we recognise the growth of the Order in certain continents such as Africa and Asia. We see the sincere witness of so many brothers at the side of the needy everywhere. This gratitude comes from the gift of the Spirit that renews our gaze on the world and on history, recognising the signs of the times and the presence of God.

However, to be true, this renewed vision must open our eyes to the need for conversion and penance so that we can truly renew many of our attitudes that require purification. The areas in need of renewal and conversion are those of our fraternal life and our minority, since, as the Final Document of the Chapter says, fraternitas and minoritas are the two lungs of our identity. Fraternity and minority must certainly be lived among ourselves, in our communities, but they must also characterise our approach to the people we meet, to be brothers and minors to all. The poor and those who live in suffering and need are the privileged recipients of our desire to be brothers and minors, and we recognise them as our teachers (cf. GGCC 93 §1). As the Pope told us in his message to the Chapter: “We receive a renewed gaze, which can open us to God’s future, from our closeness to the poor, the vic-

tims of modern slavery, the refugees and the excluded of this world. They are your teachers. Embrace them as St Francis did!”



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## *From the Eyes of the Poor and Defeated*

In the context of the pandemic that we are facing as humanity, we are invited by our chapter brothers to try to make an effort to read reality, history, culture, economy and the Church from where the poor, the defeated, the marginalised live. In this way, with a new deep, believing, incarnational and theological gaze, we can embrace and allow ourselves to be embraced by the poor and the defeated. Therefore, we need to purify and transform our vision in the manner of Jesus, the Poverello of Assisi and the thousands of Brothers and Sisters who stood on the other side of history, with a genuinely Franciscan attitude during these 800 years.

As for St Francis, this opens the way to itinerancy, living as “pilgrims and strangers in this world” (Rb 6:2), free for mission and evangelisation, as contemplative fraternities in mission, with our eyes turned towards the future, directing our steps to the other shore, following the invitation of Jesus to his disciples. We must not be afraid to take new paths, responding to the needs of a rapidly changing world. We cannot be content to repeat what has always been done, with all respect for a history that has been great precisely because it has been able to renew itself constantly over eight centuries.



Our times ask us in particular for specific attention to our common home, in a vision of integral ecology, as Pope Francis teaches us. The newness of this outlook lies in the fact that it reads the whole of reality in an interconnected way, from the relationship with God to care for the environment to the commitment to justice and peace. We believe that it is a challenge of great urgency for all of us. If our lifestyle, in which there is also a certain desire for comfort, is not always consistent with this vision, we must recognise that we need penance and conversion here, too. We must bear in mind the papal encyclicals *Fratelli Tutti* and *Laudato Si'*, which inspire in us a willingness to set out on the journey, to study and to commit ourselves to the good of life. They are also a prophetic sign that shows that it is really possible to live and interact in the light of the Gospel and the practice of St Francis and St Clare, with the spirit that leads us to be good stewards and not owners, to share and not accumulate.

Hope is reborn when we learn not to be afraid to start again as often as possible.

Let us all go forward together: behind us, there is a rich history, which in the coming years we will be celebrating through Franciscan centenaries, and ahead of us, there is a future that we are eager to welcome with hope. We want to offer a message of confidence and hope to our world, which greatly needs it.

We invite all those inspired by St Francis to choose to be ever grateful to the One who shapes the life of each one of us and to all the people we meet in one way or another on the path of life and history. We are invited to participate responsibly in a culture of caring, ensuring that our fraternities and all pastoral environments are healthy and meaningful, where no one feels threatened in their life, integrity and dignity.

We are invited to be builders of bridges, communication and dialogue. We want to take the side of those who feel abandoned by society, culture and the Church, as well as those who are forced by economic and political realities to become migrants. We want to

work together with so many men and women of goodwill, as well as with lay organisations that are dedicated to this end. Thus, our Franciscan life will always be a life of incarnation and fraternal and political commitment with the blessed of the kingdom of God (Matthew 5,1-12: 25,31-46).



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### *In Conclusion*

Dear brothers and sisters, please do not see the General House as a distant place: we are here for you and want to be close to you. We will do our part to make contact with you and with the entities of the Franciscan Family, and we trust in your willingness to engage with us.

Following the example of Pope Francis, who concludes his speeches by always asking us to pray for him, we too ask you all to pray for us.

We wish you a happy Feast of St Francis!

*The Minister General and Definitory*

Roma 2021