



# PLENARY COUNCIL OF THE ORDER

## VERIFICATION OF THE MANDATES AND CHAPTER GUIDELINES

by Br. Ignacio Ceja Jimenez, Vicar general

I present to you a verification of the fulfillment or process of fulfillment of the propositions approved by the 2021 General Chapter (we will call them *Mandates*, in a generic sense), some of which have been approved as mandates (eleven) and others as guidelines (twenty-two). The difference between mandates and guidelines is given by the introduction to their list in the *Final Document of the Chapter*: "By mandate we mean a more binding decision for the Minister and his Definitory, and usually it is a matter of more specific choices; by orientation we mean rather the indication of some values that must guide the choices of the Minister and his Definitory."

The Mandates were published, together with the final message and the message of Pope Francis, in the "*Final Document of the 2021 General Chapter. In response to the invitation of the Spirit from brothers and minors, in the Church and in the world.*"

### To which areas of our lives do they refer?

- Our identity in general: two mandates and one orientation.
- Fraternal Life:
  - In general: two orientations
  - Economy: two mandates and one orientation
  - Safeguarding of minors and vulnerable adults: a mandate
- Mission and Evangelization: two mandates and eight orientations.
- Training and Studies: a mandate and six orientations.
- JPIC: a mandate and a guideline
- Government structures: two mandates and three orientations.

### Who is responsible for implementation? (direct or indirect – in collaboration):

1. The Minister General and his Definitory: eighteen
2. SGME: eight
3. SGFS: nine
4. JPIC Office: two
5. Conferences and continental areas: two
6. The Entities (Province, Custody, Minister, Custos, Friars): five

### The Guidelines

As part of and as a beginning of the fulfillment of what was decided in the General Chapter of 2021, on December 8, 2021, the General Definitory published guidelines entitled: "*Let us begin, Brothers!*" (1Cel 103) *Guidelines of the Order of Friars Minor for the Six-year period 2021-2027.*"





The Minister General announces a synodal journey until the celebration of the *Mat Chapter* in 2025, a journey that will help us to broaden our vision and prepare ourselves in a renewed way for the General Chapter of 2017.

*Two levels of the synodal horizon:*

1. The Centenary: A Commission of the Entire Franciscan Family
2. Proposals for animation and formation indicated by the General Chapter

## I. OUR IDENTITY

There are three Mandates that correspond to our identity: two that concern the fundamental equality of all friars, lay and clerical in the Order and one on the celebration of the Centennial or the Centenary.

- **All friars and minors**

*1. The Minister General with his Definitory, in collaboration with GSME and GSFS, should identify ways to listen, to discern and to act to promote the essential equality of all the Friars, both lay and clerics (CCGG3), and should take action to plan, form and implement paths aimed at an everincreasing integration of the resources and potential of all Friars Minor (Orientation).*

*2. The Minister General with his Definitory must organize an international meeting of lay friars, prepared for by gatherings at different levels (Conferences and Continents), in coordination with GSME and GSFS, to forge paths with regard to contemplation, formation and pastoral and evangelization initiatives, indicating new ways of expressing our charism (Mandate).*

In Mandates 1 and 2, the General Chapter asked us to deepen our identity, that of everyone, not only of our lay brothers and sisters, and to do so by listening to those brothers among us who respond to the call to be Friars Minor, simply. As the Minister General points out in his Letter to the whole Order of 8 December 2024, *"In too many regions of the Order, even and often especially in those places where we are growing in number, the clerical element dominates and, when not well understood, seriously risks obscuring our deepest identity."*<sup>1</sup>

As requested by the Chapter, meetings between lay brothers were held in almost all the conferences to respond to the request of the General Chapter. The SGFS encouraged and supported the conferences in this task. They were important moments to deepen the sense of our identity common to all the friars: we are brothers and minors.

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<sup>1</sup> Fr. Massimo Fusarelli, OFM, *Brothers & Minors Today. The State of the Order in These Times*, Roma 2024, 10.





From the 28th- April-2nd May, 2025, the International Congress of Lay Friars was held in Assisi. Representatives of each Conference gathered in Assisi to discuss the themes of Fraternity and Minority, Missions and Evangelization, Formation and Studies. With the presence of the General Definitory, the General Secretariat for Formation and Studies and the General Secretariat for Missions and Evangelization, the meeting was an opportunity for prayer together, listening and dialogue.

In a Final Document, which will then be communicated to the whole Order, the brothers invite us to a renewed vision of our identity and propose a series of tools to verify and strengthen it: a common and fraternal involvement in mission and evangelization and common formation. Amongst the tools is a new verification form for the Visitors General, which was approved by the General Definitory in the *Tempo Forte* of May 2025.

- **The Centenary**

*3. Over the next few years, we will have occasion to commemorate centenarians linked to the life of St. Francis and those linked to the welcoming of the faith through friars in different parts of the world. Therefore, the General Minister with his Definitory must establish a Commission to organize those centenary celebrations in ways that offer significant opportunities for a charismatic renewal and revitalization of the Order, and that offer to all people of good will a hope-fille Franciscan message that responds to the problems and concerns of our times (Mandate).*

The third Mandate, which concerns our identity, refers to the commemoration of the eighth Centenary of the events related to the last years of St. Francis' life: the approval of the Rule (1223-2023), the Christmas of Greccio (1223-2023), the gift of the Stigmata (1224-2024), the Canticle of the Creatures (1225-2025) and, finally, the Easter of St. Francis (1226-2026).

As requested by the General Chapter, a Commission was established, this one at the level of the Franciscan Family. Our representative to the Commission, Brother Cesare Vaiani, has also been appointed Coordinator.

Guidelines for the celebration of each year have been published: themes, recipients, methodology.<sup>2</sup> At the beginning of each year there was a joint celebration of the six Ministers General. The invitation is to celebrate the annual centenary at the level of the Franciscan family in every country or region where it is present. The idea is that centenarians do not only initiate a positive impact on the Franciscan Family as a whole, but that through imagination and creativity they can also have an impact on non-ecclesial social and cultural environments.

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<sup>2</sup> Conference of the Franciscan Family, 2023-2026. *A Multifaceted Centenary in Wich Several Centenaries*, January 1, 2022.





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Probably there has been a lack of a wider dissemination of the news and chronicles of the events of the Centenary celebrated in the different regions.

## II. Fraternal Life

### a. *In Generally*

**4.** *The General Minister with his Definitory should develop, over the next six years, and with the involvement of Ministers and Custodes, Definitors, Councilors and Guardians, ways for promoting authentic fraternal life, including such dimensions as interculturality, intergenerationality, internationality, and the essential equality of all friars as brothers (Orientation).*

**5** *Since many young people who wish to join our fraternity come from diverse socio-economic, political, cultural and familial backgrounds, and with diverse personal experiences, the Conferences and Continents, with the assistance of GSFS, should develop contextualized initial and ongoing formation programs and materials for their respective Conferences or Continents that facilitate and enhance the fraternal relational literacy of the friars (Orientation).*

Mandates 4 and 5 were presented under the theme of *Fraternal Life in general*, both with the character of orientation, addressed the first to the Minister General and his Definitory and the second to the Conferences and Continental Areas. These Mandates allude to formation in fraternal life by touching on various aspects that make it a challenge for our time: the diversity of origins of young people who want to live our lives, interculturality, intergenerationality, internationality, and the fundamental equality of all friars.

As announced in *the Guidelines for the six-year period*, during the years 2023 and 2024 we met as General Definitory, with the Ministers and Custodians of each of the Conferences in their own regions, as well as with some other brothers present at the various meetings, and we addressed these issues related to authentic fraternal life. These topics were also addressed in the courses for the new Ministers and Custodes and in the formation of the Visitators.

The Minister General in his letter friars *and Minors Today* warns against the excessive autonomy of the Provinces and indicates the need to encourage international and interprovincial fraternities, starting with the houses of formation as the entities are already doing with a decrease in the number of those in formation. He also recalls that these fraternities do not only concern formation, but also mission and that there are concrete experiences in the Order, such as the international fraternity of presence, mission and charity conformed a few months ago in London and the oldest international fraternities existing in the Order.

### b. **Economy**





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**6.** *The Minister General with his Definitory shall study how to improve the ways in which provinces contribute voluntarily to the General Curia (including contributions to the Mission Fund and the Formation Fund). This proposal should be submitted to the Presidents of the Conferences; if approved, it could enter into force ad experimentum until the next General Chapter. While we await this eventual change, let us continue with the current procedure of voluntary contributions (Mandate).*

**7.** *The Minister General and his Definitory shall call a meeting with the Provincial Ministers and Provincial Treasurers to encourage and form them in the spirit of Fraternal Economy and stewardship in the Order, with an emphasis on solidarity and co-responsibility that move us beyond provincialism; transparency and accountability; and the ethical and ecological use and social screening of our assets and funds (Mandate).*

**8.** *Within three years, the Minister General and his Definitory should study and define the best practices that provide an accurate assessment of the financial sustainability of each entity, taking into account of the situation at local and continental levels (Orientation).*

Mandates 6 to 8 are still under the theme of Fraternal Life but focus on the management of a fraternal economy. All three are addressed to the Minister General and his Definitory.

Mandate 6 calls for the revision of the method of contributions from the Provinces to the General Curia in order to improve it. During the three-year period, work continued to sort out the Order's finances and make them capable of supporting its life and mission. After careful study and reflection on different contribution models, an updated modality was discussed and approved by the Conference Presidents in November 2023.

Mandate 7 concerns the formation of Ministers, Custodes and Bursars in the spirit of the Fraternal Economy. To this end, for each Conference or for groups of Conferences, Conferences were organized for ministers/custodians and provincial/custodial treasurers in which tools were offered to increase practices for good economic management.

The General Treasurer has been charged with drawing up a program on the Fraternal Economy for the Conferences and implementing it in collaboration with the General Definitors responsible for each Conference. The program was carried out from the end of 2022 to the beginning of 2024. Since this was the first of these meetings organized by the General Treasurer, the general purpose was simply to bring the bursars together in a fraternal meeting around common experiences, to provide a contribution (spiritual, theoretical and skills) and to initiate a discussion on certain topics. Only the South Slavic Conference, the English-speaking Conference (with the exception of the Province of St. Casimir in Lithuania) and the Custody of the Holy Land have not yet held these formation meetings.

Finally, *Guideline 8* asks the Minister General and his Definitory to study and define good practices for an assessment of the financial sustainability of Entities.





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To follow up on this orientation, in December 2024 the General Definitory established the *Order's Commission for the Fraternal Economy* (initially, the "Commission for Economic Sustainability"). The Commission's objective is inspired by the exhortation contained in the encyclical *Laudato Si'* to "*value common action in favour of the Common Home*" (LS 13), orienting ourselves towards a vision of sharing and mutual help, to achieve an authentic economy of communion that can guarantee:

1. a transparent and sustainable management of budgets, which considers both the self-sustaining capacity of each reality and the mutual support between strong entities and those in greatest need;
2. the promotion of a culture of active and concrete solidarity, encouraging the sharing of resources according to the specific needs of the various regions and enhancing an economy of fraternity;
3. a balance between Western and developing entities, especially in mission areas, to avoid the risk of oversizing projects in regions that do not have the necessary resources or vocations to support them in the long term.

The Commission is composed of: one of the three heads of the OFM Partner agencies, two members of the General Treasurer, two General Definitors and two friars who are experts in economics and management. The duration of the mandate will be two years with a moment of sharing and discussion on the occasion of the November 2025 meeting with the presidents of the Conferences.

So far, the Commission has met twice online and once in person. A questionnaire is being sent to the Ministers and Autonomous Custodians of the Order, to understand the current practices and needs of the Entities, in particular in the areas of sustainability, solidarity, projects, asset management, investments, fundraising and evaluation tools related to their Fraternal Economy.

It is not just a question of technique, as the *Franciscan Administration of the Economy* reminds us in the handbook, "through the economy pass fundamental choices of our lives that should be marked by the vow of poverty that we have professed and by a sober, fraternal and supportive lifestyle" (p.5).

## c. **Safeguarding of Minors and Vulnerable Adults**

**9.** *Because as Minors Brothers we strive to live as brothers to all, and to respect the dignity of each human person, we remain committed to the safeguarding of minors and vulnerable adults from abuse in its various forms (sexual, of power, of trust, of authority, etc.), and to a just and compassionate response to anyone who has suffered directly or otherwise from such abuse.*

*Therefore, the 2021 General Chapter mandates that:*





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- a. the General Minister and his Definitory create as soon as possible a Commission for the safeguarding minors and vulnerable adults;*
- b. each entity develop a written code of conduct for its friars, and written policies and procedures for responding to allegations of abuse that comply with the civil and ecclesial requirements of their country or region;*
- c. each entity must train the friars, and laity collaborating with us in our missions (employees and volunteers), in the prevention and reporting of abuse, in conformity with its written policies and procedures (Mandate).*

Mandate 9 is the last listed under the theme of Fraternal Life and refers to the protection of minors and vulnerable adults by the Order. It is addressed to the Minister General and his Definitory, but it also involves each of the Entities of the Order.

The mandate begins with an introduction that serves to justify what is to be requested immediately. The content of this introduction and the rest of the mandate have become part of our General Statutes (art. 45), as requested by the General Chapter. What have we done so far in this six-year period?

1. A permanent Commission for the protection of minors and vulnerable adults in the Order has been created, consisting of a president and 10 members (including two female members) from nine different countries, which meets at least four times a year in person or through digital means. "The International Commission for the Safeguarding of Minors and Vulnerable Adults collaborates with the General Office for Safeguarding to advise the heads of the Order's Entities on the training, prevention and accompaniment of all persons involved, as required by the relevant General Statutes" (Art. 20 of the Specific Statutes).
2. An Office for the Safeguarding in the Curia has been created with a director and a secretary, with the aim of "promoting and coordinating, with adequate means and initiatives, the activities of protection of minors and vulnerable adults in the realities and pastoral spaces entrusted to the Order, to make known the directives promulgated by the Holy See and by the authorities of the Order of Friars Minor regarding the procedures to be followed after a complaint of abuse in the Entities of the Order" (Art. 3 of the Peculiar Statutes), and accompany the process of elaboration of policies and procedures in the individual entities.
3. 14 friars from Latin America and Asia have so far attended the Diploma course at the Institute of Interdisciplinary Anthropology, Dignity and Care of the Gregorian University with a view to animating their conferences. Friars are preparing for other conferences, first at the local level, then possibly with the course for the Gregorian Diploma.
4. The Guardianship Office has organized various conferences to offer training on Guardianship in some Entities, is organizing virtual meetings for Guardianship





delegates in the Conferences and, in collaboration with the Commission, has published the following documents:

- Resource for the theme of the protection of minors and vulnerable adults in OFM Ongoing and Initial Formation
  - Recommendations for Drafting a Safeguarding Policy and Procedures for the OFM
  - Letter on the abuse of authority in the Order
  - Letter: Practice to be followed when the Minister or the Custodian receives a complaint.
5. The General Definitory has added to the forms for the canonical visitation of the Entities a specific module on the status of the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Adults (module 6).

### III. FORMATION

The seven subsequent Mandates refer to the area of formation and studies, of which only No. 11, which refers to the initial and ongoing formation programmes of the conferences and provinces, has the character of a mandate, the others are guidelines. Let's start with this mandate and then go on to the guidelines.

**11.** *The GSFS shall work with the Secretaries of Formation of the Conferences and Provinces to ensure that all programs of initial formation respect and effectively inculcate our primary identity as a brotherhood, both lay and ordained. Initial and ongoing formation programs should provide the training needed for all friars according to their gifts and the needs of the Order, from manual skills to specializations (Mandate).*

This work is carried out above all through the process of ratification of the *Ratio formationis* of the Entities, because particular attention is paid to ensuring that the Entities offer an adequate and balanced experiential and intellectual formation, taking into account the common vocation of all the brothers. In addition, as already mentioned, the GSFS accompanied the organization of the Meetings of the Lay Friars at the level of the Conferences, which prepared the International Meeting of the Lay Friars, which took place from April 28 to May 2, 2025 in Assisi.

Let's now check each of the orientations:

**10.** *The GSFS should expand its network with the Secretaries of Formation of the Conferences and Provinces to strengthen the animation of initial and ongoing formation, taking into account the cultures and specific challenges in each region of the Order (Orientation).*

To respond to this request, a process was initiated in the meetings of the three Offices of the Animation of the Order in various Conferences, where an attempt was made to promote greater





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collaboration in the field of initial and ongoing formation, starting precisely from the local context and seeking to offer a more experiential formation.

During the meetings at the level of the Conferences we were able to get to know each other better, make contacts. However, collaboration with the Secretariats for Formation and Studies of the Conferences is also institutional through the International Council for Formation and Studies, which meets every two years and, in some way, through the Executive Committee for Formation and Studies, which collaborates even more closely. The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled for November this year. The SGFS in all meetings has made itself available for any necessary help requested by the Secretariats for Training and Studies of the Conferences and Entities. A very positive example is that of the Course for the Training of Formators in Asia, in which the SGFS actively participates. Another example was the meeting of all the temporary professed friars of Europe and their formators, held in Assisi in July 2024, from which concrete proposals came out, which the Minister General then shared with all the Ministers and Custodes in Europe, asking them to discuss these proposals at different levels of the Entity, which mainly concerned initial training.

**12. The GSFS, in collaboration with the Entities, should create effective means for the formation of formators, vocation directors, guardians, and bursars at the appropriate levels of the Order (Orientation).**

This orientation was discussed in the meetings of the three Offices of Animation of the Order with the respective Offices of the Conferences. The fruits of this process are the Course for the Formation of Formators organized in the Conference of Brazil – Southern Cone, the already mentioned Course of the two Conferences of Asia, the preparation of a similar course in the Guadalupe Conference and from 8 to 19 September there will be the Course of Formators for the Anglophone Conference of Africa. Of course, to this must be added the Diploma in Formation for Consecrated Life at the Franciscan Institute of Spirituality of our Pontifical University Antonianum, which is accessible to all friars of the Order.

As far as the training of guardians is concerned, it must be started from the fact that already in the previous mandate the SGFS prepared the *Manual for Guardians*. In the Conferences of Asia, a Course for the Formation of Persons in Charge of Ongoing Formation is being prepared, and guardians can certainly be included there. Then, the experience of this course can be shared with other Conferences. In the last meeting with the moderators of the Diploma of Formation for Consecrated Life of the PUA, the Secretary General for Formation and Studies pointed out the need to prepare courses for the formation of those responsible for ongoing formation. As far as the tools for vocation animators are concerned, the issue becomes more complicated for the different contexts of life in the world and it is difficult to offer a single tool. In any case, all the important questions, which concern different stages of formation, from vocation animation onwards, are thought to be covered in the letters of the SGFS to the different groups





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of formators, which are agreed with the General Definitory, and of which two have been sent, at the end of June the letter for the Moderators of Ongoing Formation will be sent, while the fourth letter will be addressed precisely to the Animators of the Pastoral Care of Vocations.

**13.** *Prompted by the Final Document of the 2018 Synod and by the 2018 PCO of Nairobi, the 2021 General Chapter calls for a renewed focus on young people by all entities of the Order through a program of vocational accompaniment that welcomes, listens, accompanies, evangelizes, catechizes, and immerses in Christian values the youth of today who come from post-Christian and new societies. An international congress or continental meetings might be part of this project (Orientation).*

This guidance is addressed to all *Order Entities* and not directly to the SGFS. Of course, a possible international congress should be organized by the SGFS. With all the other meetings at the level of the Entities, Conferences and international meetings, organized by mandate of the last General Chapter or by the decision of the General Definitory: International Meeting of the Lay Brothers with the previous meetings in the Conferences, Chapter of Mats with the previous chapters in the Entities and Conferences, meetings of the three Offices of Animation with the respective offices of the Conferences, It did not seem appropriate, in this six-year period, to organize another series of meetings. Such an organisation would exceed the current possibilities of the SGFS.

**14.** *Following an evaluation at the level of the Conferences and Entities, the Minister General and his Definitory should formulate adequate proposals for the accompaniment of brothers in human and/or vocational difficulties, using the document “Our vocation: leaving or remaining faithful” (2019, of the Fidelity and Perseverance Commission), and fostering the sense of fraternity as a means whereby the brothers can heal the wounds they bring from their personal and institutional histories and reconcile with the friars. (Orientation).*

With regard to the fulfilment of this orientation, we can mention the *Resource for the Theme of the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Adults in Ongoing and Initial Formation OFM* and the Appendix to the *Ratio formationis* on the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Adults, prepared in collaboration with the Commission and the Office for the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Adults. The preparation of a document on affective maturity in formation has begun, but it encounters difficulties with regard to sensitivities and ways of expressing oneself in different parts of the world and of our Order. From meetings with formators and other groups of friars over the past four years, the SGFS has learned of the need for a revision of the *Ratio Formationis Franciscanae*, which should, among other things, also take greater account of the accompaniment of friars in difficulty. It is planned to propose the beginning of this work in the next General Chapter, with a list of demands and proposals.

**15.** *Each Entity and/or Conference should promote the participation of some of its members in the new Licentiate in Philosophy in Integral Ecology at the PUA (Orientation).*





This is an orientation aimed at Entities and Conferences. The SGFS has tried to promote such participation, but it is up to the Entities to decide.

*16. Given the great potential of social media to bear witness to the Gospel in simple and hope-filled ways, the GSFS, working with the Entities and Conferences, should develop orientations and protocols for the best use of social media, taking into account cultural and geographical contexts, as well as protocols for the treatment of social media addictions (Orientation).*

In the General Definitory it was decided to entrust this work to the SGME in collaboration with SGFS. In September 2024, the Commission on the Use of the "Digital Continent" was appointed by the General Definitory, conformed by the friars and lay people, experts in different forms of communication. A draft of the guidelines has been sent to all Entities for their contributions. The final draft of the guidelines has been distributed to all entities for validation and will be submitted for approval during the Tempo Forte meeting in September 2025.

#### IV. MISSIONS AND EVANGELIZATION

The area of Missions and Evangelization is the one that has received the largest number of Mandates from the General Chapter. That sounds like a good thing, since it is said that we often focus too much on ourselves, on our domestic problems. This area invites us, instead, to consider our mission: to go out into the world to proclaim the Gospel.

*17. Friars who want to take part in a missionary project outside their own country should undergo a serious discernment process conducted by their own Minister Provincial or Custos (or by someone delegated by the Minister Provincial or Custos) using the profile for candidates for mission provided by the GSME (Orientation).*

Regarding proper discernment for missionary projects, a systematic process of discernment has been implemented in the Provinces/Custodies using the *General Animation Guidelines for the Accompaniment of New Missionaries*, approved by the General Definitory in July 2024. These guidelines were presented to all the Presidents of the Conferences and then translated into three languages for publication on the Order's website. We have specified the profile of the candidates for the mission, together with the necessary paths, asking in particular for a trial time on mission before the most stable commitment. In fact, the difficulty of remaining on mission is growing.

*18. The Minister General and his Definitory, through the GSME, should provide adequate formation programs for candidates who want to take part in missionary projects of the Order, both those dependent on the Minister General and those dependent on the Conferences, Provinces and Custodies (Orientation).*





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The SGME, together with the OFMConv and OFMConv Secretariats, has developed and implemented an eight-week training and accompaniment program for friars going on mission, which has now also been joined by the Third Order Regular. It is called the Interobedience Missionary Course, it is in line with the course previously taught in Brussels and is now offered on various continents. It started in 2022 in Africa and each year moves to a different location: Asia, Latin America and, this year, Africa again.

In addition, the *General Guidelines of Animation for the Accompaniment of New Missionaries*, to which we referred earlier, clearly specify the preparation, formation and accompaniment that missionaries must have.

**19** *In coordination with the Conferences, the Minister General and his Definitory must pay special attention to the structure of government, formation programs and financial sustainability of the entities in those areas of the world where the Order is growing (Mandate).*

The General Definitory, in coordination with the Conferences, has launched several concrete actions to modify some structures, formation and economic administration in some regions of the Order. To cite a few concrete examples: the PNG Foundation (Papua New Guinea), through the management of the SGME, is implementing a Master Plan designed to assist the friars in administration, formation and economic sustainability. A restructuring of the China Project was made, the Hong Kong office was closed, and the Custody of St. Francis of Assisi in mainland China must now communicate directly with the Minister General and not through the China Office, and the Allegra friars were invited to the renovation. The Mission in Thailand has been reopened as guardian of the Province of St. Anthony of Padua in the Philippines. One of our houses in Russia has been closed. The friars of the "St. Francis of Assisi" Foundation in Sudan and South Sudan have all passed to South Sudan. New conferences in Africa and the Middle East (CONAMO, French-speaking Africa, English-speaking Africa) have been held.

**20.** *GSME will draw up a Ratio Evangelizationis for the Order that is in harmony with the magisterial teaching of the Church and the documents of the Order, through a grass-roots process at the level of the Conferences and Continents and building on the process already underway by SGME. The Conferences, Provinces and interprovincial initiatives should then formulate their own Ratios reflecting the particular circumstances and context of their region (Mandate).*

The process for the elaboration of the *Ratio Evangelizationis* was initiated with the synodal method, with the participation of CEME (Executive Council for Mission and Evangelization), CIME (International Council for Missions and Evangelization) and the various entities of the Order, through an *Instrumentum Laboris*. In this way, we want this text to be born from the life and reflection of the friars of the Order to animate and revitalize our evangelization. The draft is in its final stages and could be approved before the end of the year.





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From that moment on, the SGME will begin to assist and provide a "roadmap" to the Conferences, Provinces and/or interprovincial bodies on how to formulate their own Ratio, reflecting their particular circumstances.

**21.** *The new Ratio Evangelizationis should consider both missionary projects dependent on the Minister General and those dependent on Conferences, Provinces or Custodies as missionary projects of the Order, in such a way that a true solidarity in animation, in the sharing of resources for the formation of missionaries, financial resources and personnel is promoted in the Order (Orientation).*

It is expected that the final text of the *Ratio Evangelizationis* will contain this vision of the missionary projects of the Order, including those carried out in the various Entities of the Order. For its part, the SGME has already held a meeting with the brothers of Asia who participate in the missions among the ethnic and original peoples. A similar meeting will take place in Guatemala in October of this year for the Latin America area.

In addition, the Development Office of the General Curia is always open to accepting funding projects for missionary works carried out by the brothers in the various regions of the world.

**22.** *GSME will expand the existing network of collaboration with the Secretaries for Mission and Evangelization of the Conferences and Entities. (Orientation).*

Meetings, networking and collaboration mechanisms were established between the SGME and the Secretariat for Formation and Studies, as well as with the JPIC Office, and meetings of the Provincial Secretaries for Missions and Evangelization were held at each Conference of the Order.

**23.** *As a means of evangelization to young people and their families, the Minister General and his Definitory, through GSME, should evaluate and further develop the principles, praxis, and processes of the Order's substantial engagement in educational pastoral ministry in our schools and educational institutes (Orientation).*

A Commission for Educational Pastoral Care has been established, with a General Animator, with the task of promoting school evangelization. The commission met in 2023 to examine the current situation on the various continents. In some places pastoral education activity is growing, while in others it is decreasing. It is growing in Africa and Asia and decreasing in Latin America and Europe. The need for a revision of the "*Go and Teach*" document was considered. We do not want to reduce the work of the Commission only to large events such as Congresses of Educators and we seek ways for an animation that focuses on a Franciscan educational project and on network collaboration between our institutions.





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**24.** *The Minister General and his Definitory, through GSME and GSFS, should favour opportunities to prepare friars engaged in pastoral ministry in such areas as spirituality, pastoral care, communication, formation, cultural dialogue and finances. (Orientation).*

The Orientation is quite broad and does not offer many explanations. Study opportunities are always open and strengthened by scholarships. As far as studies in Rome are concerned, we can say that we have a very high interest from the Entities, so much so that we now have problems with the lack of rooms for students at the Antonianum.

**25.** *In all areas of evangelizing activity, the brothers should strive to collaborate with the laity in a spirit of “shared mission” and “synodality” (Orientation).*

**26.** *In evangelization and mission, special attention should be given to young people, valuing their cultural and generational richness and viewing young adult ministry as a natural venue for vocational animation (Orientation).*

Guideline 25 is the only one explicitly addressed to the friars of the Order in general ("the friars") and the subject of guideline 26 is indeterminate ("si presti"), it being understood that it is also addressed to the friars in general.

The topics covered concern collaboration with the laity in the mission, with priority attention to young people and with a consideration for the vocational promotion of young adults. It is necessary to pay attention to young people and young adults, in terms of evangelization and pastoral care of vocations, while recognizing that we are distant from their languages and cultures and that we must keep pace with the Spirit who continues to call young people to faith and to raise up vocations.

It is difficult to know what has been done at the level of each Entity or Conference in this regard. However, the SGME has given new impetus to the call for New Forms of Life and Mission, as proposed by the document *Ite Nuntiate*. Commissions have been established in Europe, Africa, Latin America and Asia, with the primary objective of encouraging and inspiring the friars to respond to the needs of the marginalized, to the realities of our time and as an essential expression of our Franciscan charism. It should be remembered that one of the elements that has been highlighted as constant in these fraternities has been attention to the pastoral care of vocations and the readiness to "*actively collaborate with lay people and with the Franciscan Family*".<sup>3</sup>

In line with the General Chapter's requirements in these guidelines, the SGME is actively working with the Commission for Parishes and Shrines, the Commission for the Service of Dialogue and, in the context of the 800th anniversary of the Cantic of the Creatures, preparing

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<sup>3</sup> *Ite, nuntiate... Guidelines for new forms of life and mission in the Order of Friars Minor*, Rome, Easter2014.Revised January 2017, 31.





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the first Congress of friars who evangelize through music and other arts, which will be held in November this year.

## V. JPIC

With regard to the area corresponding to the promotion of the values of justice, peace and the integrity of creation, the General Chapter approved two proposals, one with the character of mandate and the other of orientation. We present what has been done according to the mandate and then the orientation.

**28.** *The Minister General and his Definitory, in collaboration with the JPIC Office and GSME, must continue to implement the Franciscan Network of the Mediterranean and the Latin American Franciscan Network for Migrants, and will continue to encourage and accompany similar projects and processes in favor of migrants in Africa, Asia and in all the Order's border areas (Mandate).*

The General Office of JPIC collaborated and accompanied in

- To strengthen the Franciscan network for migrants in the Americas through the incorporation of new member countries and co-responsibility.
- Implement the Franciscan Network of the Mediterranean by defining its three areas of work: migrants and refugees, dialogue/peace and youth.
- To promote the Franciscan Network for Peace and Integral Ecology in Asia, approved by the provincial ministers of the two Asian conferences.
- To accompany the development of the Franciscan Network for Peace building and Ecological Justice in East Africa.

Each of the four Franciscan networks has coordination teams composed of members of the Franciscan Family, *Franciscans International*, and the JPIC General Office, whose work dynamics are shaped by the synodal journey. The *Fraternitas Foundation* and the General Bursar contribute to the development of these networks.

- There are three current challenges:
  - continue to define the identity, structure and design of each network.
  - subsidiarity that guarantees the continuity of the process.
  - to involve the Franciscan family involved in the territories more, in particular the First Order.





**27.** *The JPIC Office should connect, develop, and support projects on integral ecology, paying particular attention to formation on JPIC issues in the different contexts of the Order (Orientation).*

As regards this approach,

- International JPIC courses for new entity animators have resumed and are open to the Franciscan family.
- A communication strategy was defined to highlight the experiences and work of the confreres of the Order.
- The presence of the OFM in various ecclesial and social spaces committed to integral ecology has been encouraged.
- Funding for the centenary of the Canticum of the Creatures and an asynchronous virtual course in Spanish are being developed.

Challenges and opportunities:

- The creation of Franciscan educational and academic networks in integral ecology.
- Promote peacebuilding processes at the local and regional levels as part of an integral ecology.

## VI. GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

The last five Chapter decisions concern the structure of governance of the Order, at the general level, in terms of Conferences and Entities, and the structure of the General Curia. The first four are addressed to the Minister General and his Definitory, and the last to the Entities.

**29.** *The Minister General and his Definitory should initiate a global review of the structure-organigram of the functioning of the Curia and the Order, creating a simplification and activating a circularity capable of expressing our charism more practically today, through the Secretariats, the Offices, and the other structures of the Order. (Orientation).*

In order to revise and lighten the structures of the General Curia, a Commission was appointed and began its work. An audit of the Offices has been carried out and changes have been adopted: updating of the Regulations of the Offices of the General Curia OFM (2013), strengthening the use of digital tools, sharing calendars in Outlook, strengthening of some Offices: Communications, Protocol, Procuratorate and Development Office with a second friar, meeting of all the officials with the General Definitory every Tempo Forte, new Database for the General Curia, collaboration between the SGFS-SGME-JPIC and the Development





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Office, collaboration between the Development Office-Bursar-Foundation, culture of verification within the General Definitory and between the Offices.

With respect to the structures of the Order, we are accompanying and directing the processes of restructuring Entities in various parts of the world, both for the union of Entities, as well as for the birth of new ones, with all the issues, often very complex, that these paths bring with them. Africa is the continent that sees the birth of the most Entities, Europe and North America more unions, Asia and Oceania new Entities that take shape or that have to rethink their current structure.

**30.** *The Minister General and his Definitory should review and adapt the selection and formation processes for the service of Visitor General (Orientation).*

The General Definitory has been very careful in the selection of the Visitors General, given the very delicate task entrusted to them: firstly, through the zone definitors, we take into consideration the names suggested in the Visitor's letter of request, if any, the names suggested by the Visitor in the visitation form in which they highlight friars who can render a service to the Order (form 2). After considering the qualities of the candidates, we always seek to obtain the opinion of the Minister or Custodian of the proposed friar, and then finally consult the candidate himself on his availability.

The course for Visitors is prepared taking into account the checks and suggestions collected in the previous courses. The preparation provided concerns the various aspects of the visitation: fraternal listening, evaluation of the various aspects of our life, canonical matters, preparation of reports, preparation of the chapter, etc. Each Visitor dialogues personally with the Minister General and the Definitory of the area in which the Entity to be visited is located.

A general assessment should be made, listening to some of the friars who have served as Visitors, to identify areas for improvement.

**31.** *The Minister General and his Definitory must undertake a complete review of the current structure of the Conferences and, where necessary, make the appropriate adjustments in the configuration of the Conference structure, favoring dialogue and exchange between the General Definitory and the Entities and Conferences (Mandate).*

In these four years we have spared no time, effort and resources to remain close to the Conferences, both through the presence of the definitors at the periodic assemblies, and through the meetings that the entire General Government has had with each of them.

On the other hand, we have strengthened the annual meeting of Presidents, wanting to make it almost an "enlarged" Definitory, consulting it more on matters important to the Order and giving it the faculty to approve the annual budget of the General Curia, as a style and practice of transparent fraternal economy.





We also conducted a study on the history of the Conferences and their structure and reflected on possible changes to be made to this mediation, always listening to the Presidents of the Conferences. We have therefore made some changes to the structure of some Conferences.

COMPI and CONFRES have become the Conference of Southern Europe (CEM). The African Conference is divided into the Anglophone Conference (includes Portuguese-speakers) and the Francophone Conference, while the Holy Land, Egypt, Morocco, the Guardianship of Turkey and the presence in Libya have formed the North Africa and Middle East Conference (CONAMO). The ESC is rethinking its future structure.

**32.** *To ensure more practical and effective accompaniment, the Minister General and his Definitory must continue the process of studying when and how best to entrust to the Provinces and/or Conferences those foundations and missions currently under the authority of the Minister General (Mandate).*

We understand that it will always be better for dependent Entities to be accompanied by provinces or custodians close to them. However, in the case of Entities dependent on the Minister General, it is not always possible to find a Province or Custody strong enough to take responsibility.

What has been done in recent years is described in the commentary on *mandate 19*: the accompaniment to the Papua New Guinea Foundation, the restructuring of the China Project, the entrustment of the Mission in Thailand to the Province of St. Anthony of Padua in the Philippines, the closure of one of our houses in Russia.

**33.** *Entities should encourage the growth of interprovincial, international, and intercultural cooperation, as well as inter-religious dialogue, as much as possible (Orientation).*

The orientation is aimed at the Entities of the Order and refers to interprovincial collaboration, openness to internationality and cultural diversity. It will be up to the Entities to communicate on what has been done so far.

However, the Minister General and his Definitory have taken every opportunity (various meetings, meetings with conferences, letters to chapters, etc.) to encourage the friars and the Entities to greater collaboration both at the level of mission and evangelization, and at the level of formation. We will also consider what has been said about Mandates 4 and 5.

The Minister General in his letter *Brothers and Minors Today* underlined the need to open ourselves more and more to this international and intercultural dimension of our Order: *"We need concrete international projects, such as the Chapter called us to<sup>4</sup>. Though rare now, historically our experiences of mission have been too dependent on the autonomy of one particular Province. It seems to me that we have reached the time to reflect together and make*

<sup>4</sup> DF, Mandates and Orientations, n. 33.





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*decisions as an international, interprovincial Fraternity, beginning with the period of initial formation where candidates would benefit from being called beyond the confines of their Province to experience the world. Such houses already exist but we need more concrete steps to be taken in this direction as the General Chapter of 2027 will discuss."*<sup>5</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The path traced by the 2021 General Chapter, with the challenges indicated and the hopes kindled, with its mandates and orientations, must continue. We hope that this Plenary Council will give us new impetus not only to review and reprogramme what the Chapter indicates, but above all to open ourselves to the Spirit and live today with renewed fidelity our vocation as brothers and minors sent into the world as witnesses of peace and reconciliation.

From this Holy Place, where through the merits of the Mother of God our Order began, let us invoke her maternal intercession, so that she may continue to protect us and help us to progress in holiness and apostolic fruitfulness.

***Let us begin, brothers...***

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<sup>5</sup> Fr. Massimo Fussarelli, OFM, *Brothers & Minors Today*, 6.

