



PLENARY COUNCIL OF THE ORDER

Towards the Future with Faith and Audacity

Minister General's Address for the Closing of the Plenary Council of the Order 2025

Dearest Brothers,

At the Heart of the Franciscan Charism

Today, here at the Porziuncola, where Francis convoked the first Chapters of the fraternity, we close an important moment. Not for the decisions made - though important - but for the way we made them. Not alone, as administrators of an institution, but as a spiritual family that listens together to the Spirit.

Five days ago, exactly in this place, the International Chapter of the Mats concluded with a certainty that today has become flesh: the Franciscan charism is not our exclusive patrimony to be jealously guarded, but living leaven that ferments history when we share it with generosity. It is above all leaven of reconciliation and peace in this moment of history we are living, so marked by conflicts, divisions and forms of rejection of others, especially the weakest, together with the climate crisis. A time also wounded by indifference toward the dimension of faith and often the rejection of Christian heritage and its value for today. We always remain attentive to the signs of the times when we rethink our form of life today.

The Gift of Continuity: From the Spirit of Pentecost

The icon of Pentecost that we contemplated at the beginning accompanies us even now. You came from Conferences of all continents, bringing different sensibilities, but the common work has brought forth a shared vision. The synodal method was not an organizational technique, but a spiritual experience that has changed our way of looking at the future of the Order.

It is not by chance that our Plenary Council flowed naturally from dialogue with lay people and religious to the structural choices of the Order. The Chapter of the Mats had already opened a path for us: the Franciscan future is built together, not alone.

A New Climate

I have observed something precious in these days: the climate of research and dialogue has been good and open, not "political" in the deteriorated sense that sometimes crosses even our assemblies.

We have discussed structures, numbers, composition of the Definitorium, geography of the Conferences, but I remember to always keep our gaze fixed on evangelical life in mission. We have sought together, with patience and humility, some elements of God's will for our time. This was possible because the experience of the Chapter of the Mats had already freed us from a certain fear of change. Having worked side by side with lay people and religious





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showed us that opening up does not mean losing identity, but finding it purer and more authentic.

The Great Movements that Cross the Order

Your proposals, brothers, have not been marginal adjustments. They design three profound movements that cross the entire Order:

First Movement: From Conservation to Creative Transformation

In my initial report I had asked you for the audacity to rethink our way of being an international fraternity. You have responded with prophetic courage:

- Yes to a General Chapter of 25 days to allow for a true synodal experience
- Yes to the partial and structured opening of the Chapter to lay people, overcoming eight centuries of purely clerical tradition
- Yes to new modalities of accompaniment for Entities in growth and transformation
- Yes to a capitular preparation that involves the entire Franciscan family

This is not superficial reformism. It is the same audacity of Francis who refused the previous monastic rules to be *novellus pazzus* in the world. It is the creative fidelity that knows how to distinguish the essential from the accessory, the charism from its contingent historical forms.

Second Movement: From Centralization to Effective Co-responsibility

Faced with the indication of the general definitorium to make the government of the Order more effective, you have not chosen the path of greater control. You have chosen the evangelical path of shared responsibility.

Your proposals redesign the relationships between the General Curia, Conferences and Entities:

- The Conferences become increasingly operational instruments of "participatory" government
- The Conference Presidents become effective collaborators of the General Definitorium
- The possibility of a Conference secretary with a fixed mandate is introduced
- Extended General Assemblies are foreseen to coordinate formation, evangelization and JPIC

In an Order that changes geography and needs, government can become a network of co-responsibility that values the richness of every territory without losing the unity of mission.





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Third Movement: From Historical Geography to Current Geography of the Order

The most significant change concerns our way of reading the Franciscan map of the world. For centuries we have thought of the Order with its center of gravity in Europe. Today reality is different.

The Order grows in Asia and Africa, reconfigures itself creatively in Latin America, transforms itself without passively suffering the decrease in Europe and North America. Your proposals look far:

- Rethinking the composition of the General Definitorium so that it reflects the current geography of the Order
- Possibility that the General Chapter 2027 be celebrated in Asia or Africa, where the Order knows new spring
- Reorganization of the Conferences according to criteria of effective capacity for collaboration

This paradigm shift does not cancel the precious patrimony of Franciscan West. It puts it at the service of the global growth of the Order, in a spirit of true catholicity.

Concrete Responses to the Challenges of Our Time

To the specific challenges I posed in the initial report, precise responses have come:

On Formation and Vocations: We have not limited ourselves to asking for the revision of the *Ratio Formationis Franciscanae*. We have proposed concrete mechanisms of collaboration between Conferences to share qualified formators, develop common curricula, create networks of vocational accompaniment.

On More Effective Government of the Order: We have begun to rethink the system of government, clarifying roles, competencies, modalities of coordination. The General Definitorium can grow as a node of a network of co-responsibility that involves the Conference Presidents.

On Franciscan Economy: We have faced the economic challenges realistically, proposing concrete criteria for the accompaniment of Entities in transformation. Fraternal economy is not only a spiritual ideal, but a concrete praxis.

On Franciscan Identity in the Change of Era: The proposal to partially open the General Chapter to lay people is the recognition that Franciscan identity today is understood in the extended family of the charism.





The Synodal Spirit that Bears Fruit

The synodal method experienced with the Chapter of the Mats has already begun to change our way of working. We no longer fear imagining new forms, daring unprecedented paths, trusting in the Spirit who "makes all things new."

The presence of lay people and religious has freed us from a certain self-referentiality. We have discovered that the Franciscan charism is greater than us and that, paradoxically, the more we share it the more we understand it.

Towards the General Chapter 2027: An Open Vision

Now we have a clear path towards the General Chapter 2027. It will not be only an assembly of friars who decide for friars - it will be a moment of the Franciscan family that discerns together the future, in fidelity to the Gospel and to Francis.

- Your proposals design possibilities for an updated Chapter:
- More extensive (21-25 days) to allow space open to a synodal experience
- More inclusive, with moments of participation of lay people, young people, postulants and novices
- More spiritual, with greater space for listening, prayer, silence and adoration

This Chapter will have to face complex questions: our identity as brothers and minors in mission today, the relaunch of youth and vocational pastoral care, the revision of structures, the future of the Conferences, the composition of the Definitorium, the management of Entities in transformation. I hope it will do so with a new spirit, certain that the Lord continues to guide the Order through his Word, the received charism and the signs of the times.

The Realism of Franciscan Hope

Brothers, we do not hide the struggles of our Order. I have spoken about them frankly: Entities that are diminishing, economic challenges, infidelity to vocation, the plague of abuse that demands a radical change of mentality.

But we do not surrender. We do not fall into the temptation of the exiles of Babylon who said: "Our bones are dried up, our hope is lost." As Francis did not let his evangelical inspiration be limited by the ancient monastic rules, we too choose the path of reform, with faith and audacity.

Franciscan realism is the gaze of one who knows how to see reality as it is, with its struggles and its potentialities, and trusts in the transforming action of the Spirit.

The Order that Grows: Signs of Hope

I see the Order growing in Asia and Africa with young vocations and missionary thrust. I see Latin America maintaining a significant presence, with passion for evangelization and sharing with the poor. I see Europe and North America reinventing themselves creatively.





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I see a "new generation" of friars with different sensibilities: more attentive to the human and affective dimension, seeking a more spiritual experience of faith, sensitive to integral ecology, open to intercultural dialogue and collaboration with lay people. I see experiences of New Forms that rekindle the fire of evangelization.

The Spirit works also in our vulnerabilities, in our failures. It teaches us the Franciscan art of transforming rejected stones into cornerstones.

Pilgrims and Strangers in Today's World

Brothers, we leave this Plenary Council as "pilgrims and strangers" in the world, but with clear ideas. The Franciscan future is built:

- **Together with lay people, not without them.** The season of a certain self-sufficiency is over. The charism belongs to the extended family.
- **With light and functional structures, not heavy and self-referential.** What does not serve fraternity and evangelization must be lightened.
- **In real co-responsibility, not formal delegation.** The government of the Order must be service of many according to different charisms.
- **With our gaze on the places where the Order grows.** The Franciscan future speaks different languages, has different colors, expresses cultural sensibilities that enrich the original charism.

A Mandate for the Future

The Plenary Council gives us a precise mandate:

- Prepare the General Chapter 2027 with authentically synodal spirit
- Experiment with the proposed forms of collaboration between General Curia and Conferences
- Accompany the transformation processes of the Entities
- Deepen reflection on Franciscan identity and co-responsibility with lay people
- These are not bureaucratic tasks, but steps of a spiritual journey that is transforming us. Every organizational choice must also be an evangelical choice.

Final Entrustment

The Lord has given us grace in these days. We have experienced that it is possible to change while remaining faithful, to innovate without betraying, to open up without losing identity. Now it is up to us to be faithful to the insights received.

May Holy Mary, who here at the Porziuncola guards us as she guarded Francis and the first friars, obtain for us the grace of perseverance in the path undertaken.





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May Saint Francis, who here lived the most decisive moments of his conversion and the birth of the Order, inspire ever more courageous and prophetic choices in us.

May the Holy Spirit, Minister General of our Order, continue to guide us toward the whole truth, making all things new without destroying the memory of the past.

Go in peace, brothers. Bring to the world the Gospel of joy. Witness to possible fraternity. Be leaven of hope in a world that often fears the future.

The Order of Friars Minor has before it a future rich with possibilities. It is up to us, with the help of the Spirit, to prepare this future with the wisdom of serpents and the simplicity of doves.

The Lord give you peace!

Fr. Massimo Fusarelli, OFM
Minister General

Santa Maria degli Angeli - Porziuncola, June 11, 2025

