



**THE PREPARATORY CHAPTER COMMISSION
FOR THE DRAFTING OF THE INSTRUMENTUM LABORIS
DESCRIPTION & METHODOLOGY**

Subject: *Sharing of guidelines and operational instructions regarding the work of the Commissions, Secretariats, Offices, and other services in preparing for the 2027 General Chapter.*

Dear Brothers, May the Lord give you peace!

As the Preparatory Chapter Commission responsible for drafting the Instrumentum laboris, we are writing to you to begin a conversation about guidelines and operational instructions for the work of our Commissions. The hope is that this dialogue will help our Commissions' sharing be a service to the entire Franciscan Order and an effective tool to help guide the 2027 General Chapter.

The 2027 General Chapter is called to be a synodal, fraternal, and spiritual event. The proposals that have emerged thus far and been shared show that participants want an open, inclusive, and well-prepared experience, in which the voice of the entire Franciscan Family can be heard.

The theme of the Chapter is evangelization as we move together into the future. Below are the main topics that will serve as a structure for the Chapter's work, which we hope will be discussed and discerned at length during our time together.

**Friars Minor on Mission:
Following Christ and Proclaiming the Gospel Today
and into God's Future**

**Following the Gospel of Christ in the face of technological
developments, pluralism, and human frailty as we strive to be a
prophetic Franciscan presence in our time.**

"Behold, I am with you always, even until the end of the age." (Mt 28:20)

In this context, we consider that Francis was a man who embraced the Gospel as a way of life in the midst of the challenges of his day. He helps us to view new challenges not as paralyzing threats, but as opportunities in which the Spirit calls us to a more humble, creative, and courageous mission.

The four pillars of the theme

What follows is offered as a summary and orientation, developed in dialogue between the Definitory and the Minister General. It is not a definitive text, but an outline that gathers the essential elements of the Chapter theme, applying them to areas for reflection while asking practical questions. This outline does not replace the work of the Commissions, but should help guide their theological-charismatic direction with the following points in mind:

- to maintain a unified **central thread** linking theology, charism, and our practical choices;
- to orient the preparatory work toward **missionary discernment**;
- to prepare the Chapter as a **kairos in the Spirit**, in honor of the Centenary of the Death of St. Francis (2026);

1. Theological foundation: "Following Christ into God's future"

Central Core: Discipleship is a personal encounter with Christ and a form of evangelical life. It is the generative principle of our charism. Before any structure or strategy lies the fundamental question: "*What does it mean to have the Spirit of the Lord and his holy working?*" (Rb 10:8).

Following Christ is embodied in the Trinitarian dynamic. To follow Christ means entering into the kenotic movement of the Son (cf. Phil 2:7), fulfilled only in love. It is the theological foundation of Franciscan minority.

The quotation from Mt 28:20 — "*I am with you always, even to the end of the age*"—places following Christ within the promise of Christ's constant presence: it is the Risen One who walks with us. The future is not complete mystery: it is "God's future," a future being guided by God's promises. This theological awareness prevents both catastrophism and triumphalism: it roots us in hope.

2. Charismatic foundation: “Proclaiming the Gospel Today”

Central Core: Our charism is a life to be lived, not merely a heritage to be preserved.

The Order’s *Ratio Evangelizationis* states this clearly: “*Before any word, it is our life that evangelizes.*” Truly, our actual fraternities are the first evangelization.

Our style is that of minority, which is not a virtue among others, but permeates all dimensions of our existence. As the final document of the Meeting of Lay Brothers (2025) states, minority is the vocation of every Friar Minor, not just of a few.

The “today” of the theme is not generic: it refers to this day and age, made up of cultural and religious pluralism, of migration, of advanced secularization in some areas and of charismatic vitality in others. The choice to hold the Chapter in Vietnam is already a powerful sign: it compels us to look at the Order with fresh eyes, from the perspective of the young Churches, of the Asian cultures, all within the context of where Franciscanism is growing and bearing fruit in new soil.

Discernment regarding the Order’s structures is not an administrative matter separate from the Chapter, but rather should be a direct implication of what is discussed at Chapter. If following Christ calls us to evangelical freedom and itinerancy, then our structures must serve this freedom and not stifle it.

As the process of restructuring the Provinces has shown, the most subtle temptation is to anxiously preserve what was, rather than courageously build what will be. Structures must serve the mission of an Order that is continually moving forward.

3. Anthropological foundation: “Between Technologies, Pluralism, and Human Fragility”

Core Focus: Humanity is being challenged in new ways (technologies/AI, pluralism, fragility), and this raises radical anthropological questions: what does it mean to be human in an age where much of reality is controlled by

computer algorithms? Where is the boundary to be drawn between person and machine? How do we safeguard the God-given dignity of every human being while also being creative and critical of this digital age?

Fragility is not merely a condition to be overcome, but a theological space to be explored, and our sensitivity to fragility challenges the Order today on multiple levels. On a personal level, vocational crises, weariness, and departures from the brotherhood affect many entities of our Order. These are not merely problems to be solved, but signs to be interpreted and opportunities to be seized. On the community level: intercultural tensions, generational conflicts, and the difficulties of living a healthy communal life are the real terrain where evangelical fraternity is played out. On the institutional level: our decline in numbers (in some places), our economic fragility, and the complexity of governance require not technical solutions but a conversion of the heart.

Proclaiming the Gospel to young people will be one of the explicit priorities of the Chapter's work. It is not merely a matter of "proclaiming the Gospel to them," but of allowing ourselves to be evangelized by their thirst for authenticity. We ask ourselves: are we projecting an image of religious life that is still attractive and authentic to the young? The causes of departures—vocational reevaluation, the search for alternative fulfillment, the crisis of institutional belonging—call for a serious examination of conscience regarding our formation practices, the quality of the fraternal life we offer, and our ability to accompany young men into human and spiritual maturation.

The Chapter will explicitly include a look at the **protection of minors and vulnerable adults** as an "essential condition for credible evangelical witness." This is not an external detail added merely to fulfill our canonical obligations: it is a fundamental theological and anthropological statement about the rights and dignity of each individual. It is not possible to proclaim God's tenderness while at the same time tolerating abuse, or being complicit through silence, or valuing the institution over and at the expense of victims.

Following Christ concerns not only our relationship with God and with our brothers and sisters, but embraces **the whole of creation**. The Canticle of Brother Sun, whose 800th anniversary we celebrated in 2025, is not just a nice piece of poetry but a theological vision in which every creature is proclaimed brother or sister because every creature bears within itself the imprint of the Creator. The Chapter will strive integrate the ecological dimension of life into the overall vision of our mission, not as a separate agenda but as an expression of minority and universal brotherhood.

4. Kairological foundation: Centenary and Chapter in Vietnam

Central Theme: The 2026 Centenary must mark a “transition,” or a shift from certainties to trust, from preservation to mission, from fear to evangelical freedom. Like in Francis’ day, the Chapter must be the place where the Order entrusts itself anew to the Lord, letting go of what is no longer needed and welcoming what the Spirit stirs up in us anew.

The Chapter will call us to be “a prophetic Franciscan presence in our time.” This is not reserved for a few, but a constitutive dimension of evangelical life. Pope Francis, in **Evangelii Gaudium**, calls for a “missionary conversion” to step out of our comfort zones and reach all the peripheries that cry out for the light of the Gospel. The question is provocative but necessary: Can we consider ourselves missionaries or have we given up on the call to evangelize?

The General Chapter in Vietnam will not be merely an administrative or electoral event, but a *kairos*: a time of grace in which we ask where the Spirit wishes to lead the Friars Minor. The very geographical location is prophetic: holding the Chapter in Asia reminds us that missionary evangelization is not something we do, but the reason for our existence.

The election of the new Minister General around Pentecost symbolically marks this bond between the Spirit and the governance of the Order. Whoever will be called to lead the Friars Minor in the coming years must

embody the very spirit of the Chapter theme: radical discipleship, courageous proclamation, and openness to God's future.

WHERE OUR CHARISM IS VERIFIED

The following of Christ, our mission, anthropology, and the kairological reading of our times find, so to speak, their verification in our encounters with and the sharing of our life with the poor.

In this way, the Lord's promises are fulfilled. "Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age"(Mt 28:20). God's closeness is seen in human history and Jesus' observation regarding the presence of the poor in that same human history is realized: "The poor you will always have with you" (Mk 14:7).

"As the Body of Christ, the Church feels the lives of the poor in her own 'flesh,' for they are a privileged part of the people on the journey. For this reason, love for those who are poor—in whatever form that poverty may take—is the Gospel guarantee of a Church faithful to the heart of God. "Indeed, every ecclesial renewal has always had this preferential attention to the poor among its priorities" (Leo XIV, Apostolic Exhortation *Dilexi te*, 103).

Precisely because the 2027 General Chapter is decidedly future-oriented, it must take into account the "life of the poor" both in the formulation of its guidelines and mandates and in their evaluation over the course of the next six-year term. This focus will help us be more concrete and may constitute a key element in evaluating our journey.

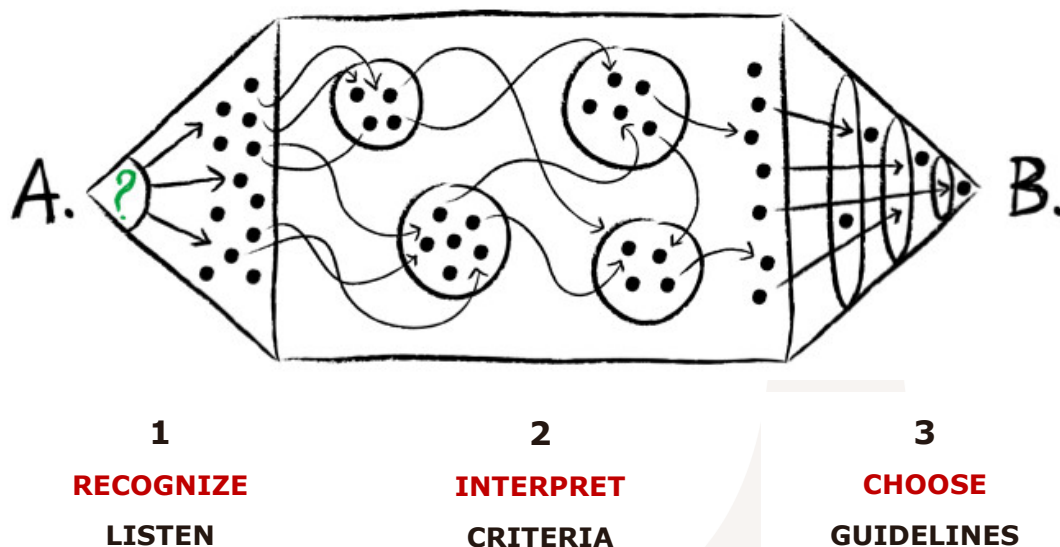
The preparatory journey toward the 2027 General Chapter

The Chapter is a unique experience of discernment, and as such, both the work in this preparatory phase and that of the Chapter assembly should be structured according to the three stages of discernment: '**recognizing,**' '**interpreting,**' and '**choosing**'.

In the **preparatory phase**, “recognizing” will mean listening to the various members who make up the body of the Franciscan family. In this regard, it will be helpful to avoid repeating old methods and focus of listening used in the preparatory process for the Chapter of the Mats. A focused, distinctive, and new approach to listening must therefore be proposed, taking care to diversify the selection of those to be consulted. What emerges from this listening process will need to be ‘interpreted’ while taking into account the themes subject to discernment already shared by the Definitory, the questions raised by the CPO, the Chapter of the Mats, and the 2021 Chapter—such as, for example, the definition of the Definitory’s role within the specific context of the Conferences and Provinces—and the review of the Chapter mandates shared at the CPO. The work of the Preparatory Commission for the drafting of the *Instrumentum laboris* will concretely translate the moment of “choosing” inherent in discernment.

During the Chapter phase, the three moments of discernment must be translated into concrete work that, beginning with a listening process based on the *Instrumentum laboris*, the preparatory documents for the Chapter, and the Reports, will then develop a set of guiding criteria for discernment and help identify the priorities that will lead to mandates in the drafting of the final document.

THE 3 STAGES OF DISCERNMENT



In order to avoid repeating a listening process similar to that carried out in preparation for the Chapter of the Mats, it is deemed appropriate to **differentiate** and **focus** the **listening** process by selecting certain individuals who have particular insight into the issues under discernment.

It is deemed appropriate to differentiate the consultation into two modalities:

- Consultation of the **Commissions**;
- Consultation within the various contexts of the Conferences, making use of friars who act as “explorers,” working on specific themes with particular originality and innovation, as facilitators.

TWO GENERAL CRITERIA FOR LISTENING

1. The Franciscan Family in Mission

The CPO 2025 emphasized the importance and necessity of giving the Franciscan Family special attention, in order to embody a real and effective shared responsibility in listening and discernment.

In this perspective, also thanks to the advice of the Conference Teams (see below), the individuals to be involved and the related schedules will be evaluated, giving priority to already scheduled events. Cross-cutting listening initiatives can foster this involvement.

2. Missionary Evangelization (No. 12 of the Ratio Evangelizationis)

This is the central theme of the Chapter and therefore must be integrated into every area of listening. It must be the theme that holds the entire Chapter together.

THE CONFERENCE TEAMS

In each Conference, it is deemed appropriate to establish a Conference Team that works in collaboration with the Preparatory Commission and the Secretariat and assists the latter in carrying out the listening process within the local contexts through the use of the worksheets prepared for each area for this purpose. This Team is composed as follows:

- **President and Secretary of the Conference:** Worksheet on the Local Chapters
- **Secretary for Formation and Studies:** Worksheet on Ongoing Formation, Fragility

- **Secretary for Mission and Evangelization:** Worksheet on Youth
- **Animator for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC):** Worksheet on Justice and Peace
- **Communications Office Representative:** Worksheet on Communications and Technologies

This Team, with the assistance of its counterparts in each Entity (Provinces/Custodies), will help support the processes of co-responsibility and involvement of the Franciscan Family, identify the most suitable persons during the listening phases, and maintain attention on the ongoing process

