

GOING TO
THE PERIPHERIES
WITH THE JOY
OF THE GOSPEL

*Fratres et Minores
in Nostra Aetate*

Document of the General Chapter
Order of Friars Minor
Assisi, Pentecost 2015

General Curia OFM
Rome 2015

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PRESENTATION by the Minister General

Dear Brothers,

The text presented here is the result of the last General Chapter, celebrated in Assisi around the Feast of Pentecost. Of course, the Chapter was an experience much greater than what the written texts can express; but we believe that through these texts we can share with you some of the essential elements of the experience we had. In this way, we hope to set in motion a similar experience, and perhaps an even better one, for all the brothers of the Order.

Three texts are being offered: the final document, the decisions of the Chapter for the next six years and the texts that relate to the wonderful audience granted to us by Pope Francis. While the document takes as its starting point the experience we shared in Chapter and sets forth some general reflections that emerged during those days, the decisions are more operational and practical in their style. Finally, the texts from the audience are a grateful memory of a “high” moment for the whole Order in the presence of the Pope.

We have sought to write a text that is quite short and to propose a limited number of decisions, out of a need for restraint that involves choosing not to multiply words but to give proper weight to what they say. In particular, I want to draw attention to the choice of using a narrative style for the final document, with many references to what was experienced in the Chapter. From the text itself emerges the firm belief that it is necessary to reflect on the situations we live in through listening to Sacred Scripture: the choice of the “biblical icons” that underpin this text seeks to express this firm belief.

The document’s title: “Going To The Peripheries With The Joy Of The Gospel” expresses a fundamental choice, i.e. that of going outside of every kind of boundary that contains us in order to bring the Good News today to those who need it more than ever, with the joy that springs from the Gospel.

The subtitle of the document, “Fratres et minores in nostra aetate”, is an expression of the form of our going about the world: not on our own, but in

fraternity; not with powerful means, but as lesser ones, with the poor instruments that we have and that we are.

We entrust these texts to you at the beginning of this sexennium, so that we can all renew our choice of being truly brothers and lesser ones in our age, moving resolutely towards the peripheries with the joy of the Gospel.

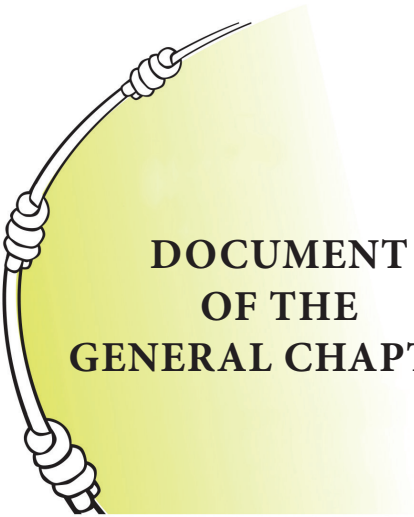
May the Lord accompany us today and always!

Rome, 1 November 2015

Feast of All the Saints

Br. Michael A. Perry, OFM
Your Servant and Minister General

Prot. 106007



**DOCUMENT
OF THE
GENERAL CHAPTER**

1. Greetings of peace and good from Assisi! We, your brothers, some 129 Friars from diverse countries all around the world, have gathered at the Portiuncula for the 2015 Pentecost Chapter. For the past month, we have prayed and listened to each other in a congenial and positive atmosphere that has fostered our work on behalf of the entire Order. We, your Ministers and Custodes, wish to pass on to you the results of our work together and let you know what we discussed and decided, as expressed in the mandates that gained our approval. We do so because these matters concern all of you personally. Additionally the Chapter as a whole also desires to reach out to you through this document, to make clear the values that underlie those decisions and the reasons that inspired us make them. It means to give all of you, our brothers, a new energy and a new enthusiasm in the journey that lies ahead of us. In addition, to the document of the Chapter 2015 we enclose, in Appendix 1, the decisions we voted on and, in Appendix 2, the *greeting* of the general Minister to Pope Francis and Pope Francis's *discourse* to us. We do this not only to remember the event, which is mentioned in the text (Cf. Nos. 19-20), but because the *greeting* points to the horizon towards which we walk and the *discourse* reveals what the Church expects today from the Friars Minor.

Listening to the Friars

2. Francis wanted the Chapter to take place during the time of Pentecost, a feast that recalls not only the gift of the Holy Spirit, but also the gift of the Law at Sinai. The book of Exodus recounts that when Moses read the book of the covenant before the people, they replied “all that the Lord has said we will do and we will listen.”¹ Israel promises to act and then to listen. For this reason, in the Jewish tradition Israel is compared to an apple tree, which first bears fruit even in the blossom and then produces leaves. The Biblical tradition emphasizes that to understand a teaching, one must first put it into practice; one needs to act in order to understand. Moreover, because the wisdom of God is revealed to the little ones and the poor,² Francis also stands within this tradition; he begins our Rule by stating that “the life and rule of the Friars Minor is this: to observe the Holy Gospel, by living in obedience, without anything of one's own, and in chastity.”³ He understood this Biblical perspective very well, and reaffirms it when he invites us to “have the Spirit of the Lord and its holy operation,”⁴ because he

1 *Ex* 24:7.

2 Cf. *Mt* 11:25.

3 *RB* 1.1.

4 *RB* 10.8

knew that “a person knows as much as he does.”⁵ Action is profoundly linked to the Spirit; a person understands the Gospel only when he or she puts it into practice. Persons do not understand what love means if they are not loved and do not love.

3. Our world today is experiencing many radical changes, such as the economic revolution connected to globalization; the digital revolution, with the Internet that allows one to spread news instantaneously; and the revolution in bioethics, which has disrupted how we treat nature. New forms of poverty are also emerging; we think of the growing number of young people who cannot find jobs, the globalization of violence and fear, and tens of thousands of people migrating to other countries. As well as these, we must also add climate change, which is becoming a matter of concern for all governments, and other major ecological problems, such as deforestation, the loss of biodiversity, and the pollution of our environment, which affect poor people above all.⁶ We are at an important crossroads in human history. A new world is being born and we are suffering the birth pangs. A woman who is in labor is in pain but when her child is born, she regains her joy.⁷

4. Like the rapidly changing world around us, our Order too is facing major changes. The Order has young Entities full of dynamism and new initiatives which, given the blossoming of a large number of vocations, must invest heavily in the formation of formators and necessary training centers. On the other hand, there are Provinces where the majority are senior Friars who deserve our thanks for their fidelity and perseverance. For all of us, this message desires to be a message of hope and encouragement.

We would like to present four images from the Scriptures to accompany our reflection, which we hope will help you understand the approach taken during this Chapter.

Listening to God's Word

5. The first image presented to us on the very first day of our meeting, the story of Jesus' calming of the storm: “He got into a boat and his disciples followed him. Suddenly a violent storm came up on the sea, so that the boat was

⁵ *Assisi Compilation*, 105: “*tantum scit homo de scientia, quantum operatur*”; cf. also Giles of Assisi, *Dicta* 16.

⁶ Cf. POPE FRANCIS, Encyclical letter, *Laudato Si'. On Care for Our Common Home*, 2015.

⁷ Cf. *Jn* 16:21.

being swamped by waves; but he was asleep. They came and woke him, saying, and “Lord, save us! We are perishing! He said to them, “Why are you terrified, O you of little faith?” Then he got up, rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was great calm. The men were amazed and said, “What sort of man is this, whom even the winds and the sea obey?”⁸

6. All of us have known such storms, when everything goes dark and the boat of our life begins to take in water from all sides, while Jesus seems to be absent or asleep. During our first days together, we talked about the raging waves that are buffeting the boats of our various Provinces. These are the challenge of an aggressive secularism and the weakening of traditional religious faith; growing proselytism by evangelical Christian ecclesial communities; the economic crisis created by the growing disparity of income between the rich who are few and the poor who are many; the challenge posed by radical elements within Islam; and the numerical decline of many Entities. To these we can add our consequent withdrawal from places where the Order had long been established; and the identity crisis caused by the restructuring of our Provinces.

7. Storms can also erupt in our local communities when we are not truly brothers: when we do not pray together, when we do not hold effective House Chapters, when we do not pay enough attention to listening to the Word of God in our personal and fraternal lives, when we isolate ourselves from the other brothers on our personal computers, when we consider our houses simply as hotels. In such cases, the temptation to leave the Order becomes stronger. The Eucharist is a moment of our fraternal life that calls us to remember that Christ should be the center of our lives and that brotherhood is a gift of the Risen One.

8. In addition, all of us have to deal with the effects of the storm that struck the general Curia of the Order: a financial collapse that has caused some Friars to even lose confidence in our central government.

We are convinced that our brother Francis is inviting us to see and understand how God might be working even in these challenging moments of life, as he himself had to learn in different circumstances.

9. A text from Paul’s Letter to the Romans helps us cope with the challenges that confront us: “We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.”⁹ Note that Paul says “all things” and St. Augustine adds “*etiam peccata*”¹⁰ - even sins.

8 Mt 8:23-27.

9 Rom 8:28.

10 AUGUSTINUS, *De libero arbitrio* 3, 9-26; *De doctrina christiana* 3, 23-33.

For us then, this difficult and sad event can become something that works for our own good: it is important that we turn this difficult situation into an opportunity for new fidelity to the Gospel.

10. The main message of the calming of the storm is that we must hold on to our confidence in God. On that day, what saved the disciples from shipwreck was the fact that “they had taken Jesus with them into the boat”, before beginning the voyage, and the fact that they woke him up when they were in trouble. To have Jesus with us is for us a guarantee amidst the storms of life. The way to keep Jesus in the boat of one’s own life and that of our Franciscan Family is faith, prayer and surrender to his will.

11. In the past, when storms broke out at sea, sailors used to throw excess baggage into the water, as the book of Jonah attests.¹¹ Therefore, we are invited to return to poverty, freeing ourselves from what is superfluous. In our times, we must throw away our false securities and ride the waves of fear and anxiety by means of our faith in God. The apostles’ lack of faith that Jesus reproached on that occasion was that they doubted that he cared for them and their safety: “Do you not care that we are perishing?” We must believe in the Lord and renew our radical trust in Him.

12. When the storm has finally subsided, Jesus and the disciples land on the other side; the land of the Gentiles who wait for a message of liberation. Today it is urgent that we dialogue with other religions and cultures in the spirit of Assisi. Islam, in particular, was very much present to the mind of Francis. To bring light and hope to the clash of civilizations, a dialogue with Islam is required of us, in the East as in the West, in the North as in the South. The construction of that peace which is worthy of the beatitudes of Jesus means that we collaborate in the construction of justice and peace, with respect for creation.

A Time of Exile

13. The second image we would like to consider comes from the Hebrew Scriptures. This is the profound crisis experienced by the people of God during the Babylonian exile, when they were separated from the Temple, the priesthood, their structures, and their land. This journey in the darkness must have seemed like the end of the world for them: it was truly the “night time” of their traditions and institutions. Stripped of all its distinguishing marks and dispersed among the pagan nations, Israel was brought back to its primitive nakedness,¹²

11 Cf. *Jonah* 1:5

12 Cf. *Ezek* 16.8.

experiencing an existential poverty such as her people had never before known. They could no longer hear the voice of God. Walking in the darkness, they no longer knew what God wanted. They no longer saw themselves as the chosen people of Sinai but a people crying out from the depths of a broken heart: “A humbled, contrite heart, O God, You will not spurn.”¹³

Changed at her very core, Israel experienced a new birth. The people of God rediscovered the importance of having a “new heart and a new spirit.”¹⁴ From the depths of this abyss, a new indestructible hope emerged. The people began to learn that they could in fact make it through the darkness by light of the Word of God. They would come to meet the God who restores to life that which was once dead.¹⁵

14. If we want to be children of God and *Brothers Minor* in the midst of this postmodern world in which we find ourselves, we too must renew our trust in the God who speaks even in the darkness, whose Word is ever alive. We must trust the God who calls us to live the Holy Gospel through the sacrament that is our brotherhood in this very day and time. We too are being invited to rediscover the radicalism of the Gospel as we strive to truly be brothers and children of God in the world today. We must make our own the statement of Peter and John to the “paralytics” of the modern world who seek alms from us: “Gold and silver I have not, but what I do have, I give to you. In the name of Jesus, rise and walk”¹⁶

Yes, Christ is risen and is alive and has granted us faith in Him. Therefore, we must give witness to Him in the midst of a secularized world, always preaching peace to the world: “Peace to you. Be not afraid.”¹⁷ Our human world and all of creation urgently needs peace, especially in the many countries where Christians are once again being persecuted, as well as those places that are lacking in resources. We must banish any fears that prevent us from embarking on new initiatives, despite the advanced age of many Friars, or the fact that others have left our ranks.

15. This upcoming jubilee year dedicated to mercy, is also coincidentally the 800th anniversary of the Portiuncula Indulgence. St. Francis invites us in a special way to take care of each other: “If a mother loves and cares for her son according to the flesh, how much more diligently must one love and care for his

13 Ps 51:19.

14 Cf. Jer 31:33.

15 Cf. Ezek 37.

16 Acts 3:6.

17 Jn 20:9, Mk 16:6.

brother according to the Spirit”¹⁸. When he uses the image of “mother,” Francis places before our eyes the ideal of a natural mother, but he also invites us to grow into a spiritual motherhood. For to be merciful means having the heart of a mother who wants to give everything good to her child. This year of mercy also reminds us that the conversion of Francis occurred when he “showed mercy to lepers”¹⁹. Today we too are being asked to be especially attentive and compassionate to the marginalized people of our own time. In addition, a desire for deeper communion is arising among the First Order and Third Order Regular Friars; we endorse the clear steps in this regard that have been presented for the years 2016-2018. Striving to overcome our historical divisions, we want to take initiatives to collaborate so that we can learn again to walk with one another as brothers.

Pope Francis calls all Christians to live the joy of the Gospel and to reflect on the fact that “in a family when we lose the ability to dream, our children stop growing and love stops growing. Life begins to diminish and eventually fades away.”²⁰ We must kindle our dreams for fuller life once again.

16. Among the problems we face, particularly that of the challenge of dialogue between religions and cultures, which has already been mentioned, it is important that we draw special attention to the growing gap between the rich and the poor. The rich are becoming richer and fewer in number while the poor are growing in number each day and include many people who were formerly part of the middle class. We hear the cries of the poor and join our voices to theirs in challenging the sinful structures that create and perpetuate this situation. We must be agents of change, ever more convinced of our call to embrace the situation of our brothers and sisters whose life of poverty is not voluntary like ours, but on the contrary is dehumanizing.

17. We are called to demonstrate that our fraternity and minority offer an alternative way of life, one that is valid and prophetic to the men and women of our times. Our fraternity protects us from some of the harsh realities of life, and it offers a concrete model to overcome a major difficulty of many people today, namely the loneliness and insecurity that stem from the isolation that so many experience, whether on the economic, relational, or personal levels. Our minority calls us to live soberly and to discover the true reasons for human happiness, as distinct from those touted by consumerism. Our life should continually call others to faith and love, which are the only factors that can give rise to the joy that makes our religious life attractive.

18 *RB* 6:8.

19 *Test* 2.

20 POPE FRANCIS, *Address in Manila*, January 16, 2015.

Like the Blind Man, Bartimeus

18. The third image comes from a Biblical passage read at the Eucharist toward the end of our Chapter. This is the account of Jesus' cure of the blind man, Bartimeus.²¹ We meet him sitting on the side of a dusty road at the entrance to Jericho, receiving the occasional small coin in his outstretched hand. . . . and holding onto those few coins tightly, because they could be the difference between hunger and survival. Moreover, he knew that tomorrow would be the same, as would the day after that. But, suddenly on this day he heard voices in the crowd saying that Jesus was coming along the road - a man that he had heard could cure people of their illnesses. Bartimeus somehow knew in his heart that this Jesus could help him, that he had one chance for his life to be changed. This was it! And so, he summoned up his loudest voice and cried out: "Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me!"

19. Brothers, we believe that we are at such a critical juncture in the history of our Order. What is needed at this moment, if we are to ever fulfill some of the dreams we have outlined above, is that we Friars Minor admit our need of healing and cry out to the Lord for his pity and compassion. In the third week of our Chapter, we travelled to Rome for an audience with Pope Francis. He reminded us that minority means first of all that we recognize our true condition: that we are "small, needy, and sinners before God." In fact, "the more we are aware of this, the closer we are to salvation; the more convinced we are of being sinners, the more disposed we are to be saved." Therefore, we want to recognize that we Friars Minor are at times weak, sinful men and thus in need of the mercy of God and of his people. In particular we wish to acknowledge that mistakes, some very serious, have occurred in the administration of our temporal goods.

20. Like Bartimeus, we brothers gathered in general Chapter have asked the Lord "that we might see." Certainly, the one reality that stares us in the face at this Chapter is the serious damage caused by the financial crisis that has hit the general Curia of the Order. This event has indeed been dramatic proof of our minority - that we Friars Minor are indeed poor and needy people. The damage is not simply material, but spiritual and moral as well. At this Chapter, we see right before our eyes the effects this crisis has had on us. We sense the irritation of those brothers who generously subsidized the central administration of the Order from the fruit of their labors, and now wonder where this support has gone. We feel the pain of those brothers, especially in the emerging new Entities, whose pressing needs the central administration is finding difficult to meet due to the straitened condition of our finances. We recognize too that this situation

²¹ *Mk* 10:46-52.

has damaged some relationships with men and women who over the years have generously supported us Friars, as well as many projects of the Order. And so we must take to heart both the comfort and challenge of Pope Francis's closing words to us: "You have inherited an authority with the people of God with your minority, fraternity, meekness, humility, and poverty. Please preserve this! Do not lose it! The people wish you well, they love you." We therefore are taking measures at this Chapter to ensure greater transparency in the administration of our general Curia and provide greater oversight of the good things that we have received from the Lord and his people. We ask all of you to renew your trust in the Order, especially in the brothers we have chosen for leadership at this Chapter. As they take up the task we entrust to them, may they hear the healing words of Jesus through your compassion and confidence: "Be on your way, your faith has healed you."

21. Nevertheless, the current financial crisis affecting our central administration – as well as the challenge of Pope Francis mentioned above – touches an issue that concerns all of us "Lesser Brothers." This deals with the way we use money and material goods. There is another interesting detail in the story of Bartimeus. When he is told by the disciples to "take courage, get up, Jesus is calling you," he "throws aside his cloak" to come to Jesus as quickly as possible. Bartimeus has thrown away the prized possession of any beggar who lives on the streets – his cloak that gives him warmth during the night. And he has probably dropped and lost the few coins he had clutched in his hand because of his excitement in response to Jesus' question, "What do you want me to do for you?" The call to the new Gospel life that Jesus offers has made him forget his old securities. As we recall at this Chapter our vocation to be truly Brothers and Minors, we must remember our fundamental Franciscan commitment to live "without anything of our own."²² This year of consecrated life has many times reminded us of our call to live in joyful poverty. Unfortunately, all too many of us seem to have forgotten about this commitment. We must ask if whether we treat the good things that have been entrusted to us by the People of God as our own personal possession – to use as we see fit - without any sense of responsibility to our benefactors and to people who actually are poor. Do we perhaps retain for ourselves the fruits of our labor, without entrusting them to the common good of the fraternity? And do some local communities possibly hoard money for themselves without a sense of responsibility toward the needs of the entire Provincial brotherhood? And do some Provinces perhaps seem mainly intent on assuring their own security and comfort, ignoring the needs of the entire brotherhood of Friars Minor? The current financial situation we are going through should bring us all back to the foundation of our Gospel life: our desire "to follow the teach-

²² *RB* 1.1.

ing and footprints of our Lord Jesus Christ, who says ‘if you wish to be perfect, go sell everything you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come follow me.’”²³ This means we should indeed have nothing of our own, but be bound together as brothers in one family, enjoying the blessings of God together, freely sharing those goods with each another and with God’s poor. Francis tells us we must be Lesser Brothers, without distinction.”²⁴

22. We might also reflect on the last words of the story of Bartimeus: “When he received his sight, he followed Jesus on the way.” His future path would not mean returning to his former life, but joining a community of disciples, following Jesus on the road to his death in Jerusalem and his rising to new life. At this Chapter, we have prayed each day for courage to follow the footsteps of Jesus by “observing the Holy Gospel” as our Rule of life tells us, and to be “Brothers and Minors in our times.”

23. We know that this means we must follow Jesus’ path of self-emptying, humble service, moving further together to the peripheries, to the “the Galilee of the nations,” becoming even closer to the poor and those whom no one cares for. This is what Francis says in the earlier form of our Rule of Life: “They must rejoice when they live among people considered of little value and looked down upon, among the poor and the powerless, the sick and the lepers, and the beggars by the wayside.”²⁵ The risen Lord is already present and alive in those peripheries. During the Easter season, we have just concluded we heard example after example in the Acts of the Apostles of how those first companions of Jesus were challenged to constantly expand their horizons and to recognize that God’s Spirit was already active among the unclean Gentiles, and in strange - even hostile - places. But to follow Jesus to these peripheries we, like Bartimeus, must cast aside the old cloak of our security, and like Peter and Paul, lose some of the things and preconceptions we hold on tightly for various reasons, and place our faith in Jesus, walking together joyfully toward the Reign of God.

Like Abraham and Sarah

24. With statistics in hand, the general Chapter has shown us that the Order of Friars Minor is declining and aging in some parts of the world, while in others it is growing, filled with dynamism. A realistic vision must consider both elements: the crisis of some Entities and the growth of others. Where the

23 *RnB* 1.1-2, cf. *Mt* 19:21

24 *RnB* 6.3

25 *RnB* 9.2.

Order is in numerical decline, even though there may be many positive initiatives happening, some Friars begin to wonder about their own future. Faced with this crisis of decline, it is possible for an attitude of discouragement to take over: “The boat is sinking. Save yourself if you can.” Perhaps this is not shouted from the rooftops of our friaries, but some brothers think this way without openly admitting it. In addition, with this as an excuse, they begin to withdraw from fraternal life, setting up private bank accounts to fund their personal credit cards. This attitude is contrary to the radical faith to which the Gospel calls us. The only positive attitude is not to remain in the suffering of the night, but to pass through it with the light of Scripture, “until the day dawns and the morning star rises in our hearts.”²⁶

25. The call to remain hopeful is lived out in a prophetic way by the patriarchs, especially Abraham, who received the promise when he was an old man, already 100 years old;²⁷ his wife Sarah was 90. Three strangers passed by the oaks of Mamre. Abraham, a good Middle-Easterner, offered hospitality to these strangers. He had water brought to wash their feet. He had a little bread prepared. He killed a young calf and prepared sour milk. Abraham called the three guests, “My Lord.”²⁸ The author of the Letter to the Hebrews says “Some welcoming strangers received angels”²⁹. We might add that some Friars, practicing hospitality, have received novices.

26. Sarah overheard the angel’s message: “Your wife will have a son.” Her smile at this, which she herself wanted to deny, could be interpreted as a sign of a lack of faith. But this smile also calls to mind the smile of God in Psalm 2 that sweeps away every perplexity: “The Lord laughs and makes a mockery of his enemies.”³⁰ God’s laughter knows how to transform humanity. God laughs at our obstacles. His laugh disarms us.

Nothing is impossible for God. This phrase will be repeated by the angel Gabriel to Mary at the Annunciation. And so Sarah believed. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews confirms that “It was equally by faith that Sarah, in spite of being past the age, was made able to conceive, because she believed that he who had made the promise was faithful to it.”³¹.

26 *2Pt* 1:19.

27 Cf. *Gen* 21:5.

28 *Gen* 18:3.

29 *Heb* 13:2.

30 *Ps* 2:4.

31 *Heb* 11:11.

27. Our fundamental problem is a problem of faith. In a rapidly changing world, it is a question of welcoming our present condition with faith, seeing it not as a catastrophe, but as a mystery full of signs that are part of God's design. "We possess the prophetic message that is altogether reliable. You will do well to be attentive to it, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns."³² We need to continue Sarah's laughter and be witnesses to joy. God who opened Sarah's womb can still render fruitful the Franciscan Order, which is now more than eight hundred years old.

28. During the Chapter, we could also see the dynamism and energy of some Entities of the Order through the beautiful videos, prepared by the various Provinces, which illustrated their life. In addition to a word of gratitude and encouragement, we want also to express our confidence and esteem to all brothers of the young Provinces and Custodies, who are the future of the Order. You are a gift from God to us.

29. With a sense of humility and realism, we would like to make some suggestions, without lapsing into paternalism. Without copying Western cultures, the young Entities must live the Franciscan, Gospel-inspired way of life, respecting local cultures and integrating them in the spirit of Assisi. Francis was a universal man and the beauty of his charisma is able to transform all cultures, by inserting a new leaven. It's up to everyone to undertake the necessary discernment.

30. We know that the quality of vocations is just as important as the number of vocations. In a special way, well-prepared Formators should convey to young Friars the sense of family that characterizes our Order. They should not fall victim to the *virus* of activism that affects many parts of the world. We must not repeat the same mistakes made by the older Entities.

31. The son of Abraham and Sarah was called Isaac, which means "the son of the smile." The call to our younger Entities is to become a smile of God in their own cultures for all those around them. In this way the joy of the Gospel will be transmitted to a world that seeks peace. Through openness to the Spirit, we can become prophets to the world. May St. Francis teach us to accomplish the will of God, as Isaac agreed to do.

Called to go forth with joy

32. Brothers, there is one message that has resounded clearly throughout the month of the general Chapter: that we are being called once again to go out

³² 2Pt 1:19.

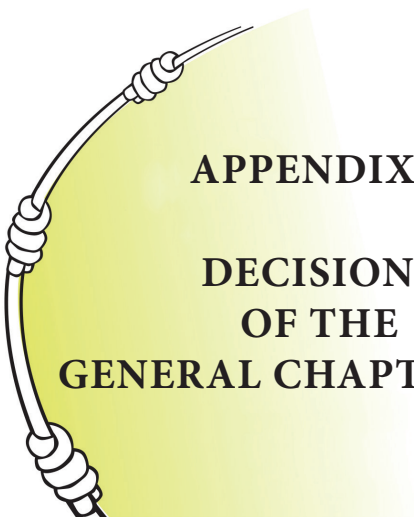
from the comfort of our homes and our lives. Eight centuries ago, in this place of the Portiuncula, Francis sent out his first brothers “two by two” to preach the Gospel by example, using words if necessary. And so we are being called to be, once again, ministers of the joy of the Gospel. We are being called to be ministers of the mercy of God. And we are being called, once again, to move out to the peripheries, to the margins, to those places where people need these gifts the most – whether these peripheries be as far away as the other side of the world or as near as the street where we live. This has always been the very core of our Franciscan way of life and we are being challenged “to begin again.”

33. During this past month, we have carefully examined the many challenges facing us. Challenges internal to the Order and those emerging from the world around us. The many signs of life in our Fraternity have also invigorated us. The sense of us brothers gathered at the general Chapter has not been one of resignation in the face of difficult realities, but rather a profound sense of hope and possibility. That hope, however, will be realized only if we all renew our commitment to our Gospel way of life. We must all make the choice – on the personal, local, and provincial levels - to become truly Brothers and Minors, going out to the places in our world where God’s joy and mercy are so desperately needed. In this way this document will not remain a piece of paper, but will be made flesh in our lives.

34. As we leave this place consecrated to Our Lady of the Angels, let us ask for her guidance in the words of Pope Francis³³:

*“Mary, Virgin and Mother, . .
help us to say our own “yes”
to the urgent call, as pressing as ever,
to proclaim the good news of Jesus. . . .
Obtain for us now a new ardor born of the resurrection,
that we may bring to all the Gospel of life which triumphs over death.
Give us a holy courage to seek new paths,
that the gift of unfading beauty may reach every man and woman.
Star of the new evangelization,
help us to bear radiant witness to communion,
service, ardent and generous faith, justice and love of the poor,
that the joy of the Gospel may reach to the ends of the earth,
illuminating even the fringes of our world.”*

33 POPE FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* 288, 2013.



APPENDIX 1

**DECISIONS
OF THE
GENERAL CHAPTER 2015**

Decisions of the General Chapter 2015

A. At the general government level

Mixed institute

1. The government of the Order and the other Entities are to foster the equality of the Friars (CCGG3) reinforcing the identity of the lay Friar in the Order.
2. The general Chapter mandates the general Definitorium to address once more a request to the Holy Father so that all that is indicated concerning mixed institutes in *Vita Consecrata* 61 might be realized.

Initial and ongoing formation

3. The general Definitorium, along with the general Secretariat for Formation and Studies, is to foster the culture and pastoral care of vocations, as well as the ongoing and initial formation of the universal fraternity. It will take as its starting point the RFF and all the OFM documents, and will provide appropriate pedagogical tools, as well as organizing Congresses of formators for Conferences and for the whole Order on the theme of accompaniment.
4. The general Definitorium, along with the general Secretariat for Formation and Studies, is to foster the development of the Franciscan intellectual heritage by means of research, teaching and publications of a high scientific level. It is to encourage collaboration between the OFM Centers of Higher Studies, and is to convoke a Congress for the OFM Study Centers on current themes for the life and mission of the Order in the Church, starting from a global cultural and theological perspective. It is to study and encourage the possibility of a greater academic collaboration between the PUA and other OFM Study Centers, and with the whole Franciscan Family.
5. The general Definitorium, along with the general Secretariat for Formation and Studies, is to continue to encourage inter-Provincial, international, and intercultural houses and formative experiences, and is to accompany missionary experiences in the international mission projects of the Order, as well as accompanying the life project of the Franciscan Fraternity of “Blessed Gabriele Allegra” in Rome.

Fidelity and Perseverance

6. The general Definitorium is to maintain an international Commission for the Service of Fidelity and Perseverance, in collaboration with the general Procura of the Order, the general Secretariat for Formation and Studies, the general Secretariat for Missions and Evangelization, the Pontifical University *Antonianum* and other experts in the field. This Commission's remit is to study in further depth the reasons for the crises of vocation and to propose strategies for the renewal and strengthening of fidelity to the charism by means of: ongoing and initial formation; the local chapter and the service of authority; a study of today's cultural challenges and of the various stages of life; *online* guidelines to assist the Friars and fraternities in a continuous reconsideration of the question of their vocation.

Guidelines for a hermitage and house of prayer

7. By means of the publication of Guidelines and an indication of concrete steps to be followed, the general Definitorium is to encourage each Entity, or at least each Conference, to set up a community as a hermitage or a house of prayer (cf. SSGG 15, § 1), particularly devoted to the life of prayer and devotion. The Friars are to be given permission to dedicate time and formation to a style of Franciscan prayer that can also be of assistance to other fraternities.

Study guide for life as "poor and minors"

8. The general Definitorium is to draw up a study guide to assist Provincial Ministers, Custos and all the Friars in animating and evaluating regularly how honestly, concretely and authentically we live as "poor and minors" among the poor in order to ensure that all the Entities and local fraternities might become communities of presence and solidarity "with" and "in" the service of the poor.

International Commission for Economic Affairs

9. The general Definitorium establish an international economic affairs committee (SSGG 160), composed of experienced Friars and lay professionals, The committee will make annual reports to the general Definitorium and at the annual meeting of the Conference Presidents.

Study guide for the care of creation

10. The general Definitorium is to draw up a Study Guide on the care of creation that will have a solid biblical, ecclesial, Franciscan and scientific foundation, and will give guidance so that our Entities might be able to respond to the ecological challenges of our time.

11. Each Entity, through the Moderator of Ongoing Formation, the Animator for Evangelisation, and the Animator of JPIC, following the guidelines of the general Study Guide, is to prepare a programme to help ensure that this dimension becomes a part of our lifestyle and of the life and pastoral and social activity of the Entities. This objective will be evaluated in the meetings of the Presidents of the Conferences with the general Definitorium.

New forms and fraternities of presence and evangelisation

12. With a renewed and prophetic Franciscan life in mind, the government of the Order and the government of other Entities, in collaboration with the respective Secretariats for Formation and Studies, Missions and Evangelization, and the office of JPIC, are to foster in the Order (at all levels) experiences of outreach towards the poor and towards the geographical and existential margins through new forms and fraternities of presence and evangelization. They will do this in line with the seven points contained in the document *Ite Nuntiate* (2§1) and will take account of the categories indicated in the *Instrumentum laboris* of the general Chapter nos. 84 and 98.

Guidelines on missionary evangelization

13. The general Definitorium, with the general Secretariat for the Missions and Evangelization, is to draw up Guidelines (cf. Mandate 16 of the 2009 general Chapter) on missionary Evangelization, taking as a starting point the proposals contained in the Report of the SGME to this Chapter.

Missionary Formation

14. The general Definitorium, through the general Secretariat for Missions and Evangelization, is to continue the “initial and ongoing” formation of missionaries in the Fraternity “Notre Dame des Nations” in Brussels, which is open also to other members of the Franciscan Family, and in anticipation of the involvement of UCLAF in a similar project for Latin America.

Support for the Apostolic Vicariates entrusted to the Order

15. The general Definitorium is to continue to give support to the Apostolic Vicariates entrusted to the Order, making the whole fraternity aware of this service requested by the Church, and assisting the Entities charged with this responsibility in terms of personnel and economic resources, while monitoring, in dialogue with the Holy See, the sustainability of the present number of Vicariates.

Economic support for the SGME

16. The general Chapter establishes that the obligation foreseen by Art. 72 §2 of the general Statutes (*The general Secretariat for the Missions and Evangelization is to be supported by the contributions of all the Entities of the Order. The general Chapter is to determine ways and means of providing such help*) must be satisfied by means of the structure based on the current system of “bands”, used by the Order for the “solidarity contribution”.

Economic support for the SGFS

17. The practice that was established by the general Definitorium in association with the Presidents of the Conferences in May 2012 regarding the funding of the general Secretariat for Formation and Studies be continued until the next general Chapter, with an annual review during the meeting with the Presidents.

B. At the level of the Entities

Fraternal life: planning and evaluation

18. The Provincial Minister and his Definitorium, the Custos and his Council, together with the Guardians, are each year to plan and evaluate how to animate the fraternities in the essential aspects of fraternal life.

Ecological program of the local fraternity

19. Each fraternity, in its project of life and mission, is to draw up an ecological program that is to promote concrete styles and choices of life that demonstrate a respect and care for creation (cf. the Study Guide *Care for Creation in the Daily Life of the Friars Minor*, published by the general Office JPIC in 2011). The general Visitators, in their service to the Entities, are to be careful to evaluate and foster this program.



APPENDIX 2

**GREETING OF THE
GENERAL MINISTER
TO THE HOLY FATHER**

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE FRANCIS**

1. Greeting of the General Minister to the Holy Father

Clementine Hall, 26 May 2015

Your Holiness, our beloved Lord Pope Francis, with deep joy I offer you the most cordial of greetings from all the members of the General Chapter of the Order of Friars Minor.

We have been gathered in Assisi since last May 10th at Santa Maria della Porziuncola, where St. Francis of Assisi wanted his brothers to gather.

Each one of us and all together want to thank you so very much for the kindness that you have always shown us. We are particularly grateful for the audience that you give us today and for the exquisite attention you have had for our Chapter by way of the very amiable presence of your delegate, Card. Francisco Javier Errazuriz Ossa, who in his brotherly discretion and paternal authority was able to transmit to us the attentiveness and loving care of the Pope for our Order.

We have summed up the theme of our Chapter in a short phrase: *Fratres et minores in nostra aetate*. There are two aspects to this motto: *brothers* and *minors*, which is the name chosen by St. Francis for himself and for his companions. Attention to our day is the perspective from which we want to ask ourselves how to be more and more *brothers* and increasingly *minor*. We are, in fact, convinced that the prophecy that the contemporary world expects of us is above all that fraternity and minority to which we want to give credible witness.

We came here with to you, “Lord Pope,” as St. Francis used to say, to express our firm resolve to be always faithful to the holy Roman Church, and also to receive indications, corrections and suggestions so that we might follow ever more faithfully in the footprints of Jesus.

We know that before long you will make us sharers in your reflection on the theme of ecology. This is a subject very dear to all of us Franciscans. We promise right now to do everything possible to translate into concrete options whatever you will tell us in this area as well.

Within the general Chapter and in this meeting with you we want to recover new impetus, courage and audacity for our life as Friars Minor. In this way, we can return to the countries of the five continents from which we come, confirmed in the desire and renewed forces necessary to be able to announce

peace, as the gift of the Risen Christ, and to be witnesses to the joy of the gospel, *Evangelii Gaudium!*

But it happens, that sometimes our witness of life falters, making us not very credible. As you well know, Holy Father, our consistency with the charism of minority and poverty has recently failed, especially because of questionable choices of economic management. In this Chapter, we have sought to speak with honesty and clarity about this issue. We ask God that these problematic and provocative situations may be, by the grace of God, a death that blooms into the resurrection of the gospel life, the Gospel that we have promised to live. The Gospel is the only solid foundation of our lives. We ask the Lord to heal, with his Holy Spirit, the wounds to brotherly confidence that these events have caused.

In the beginning and end of our *Rule*, St. Francis intimately unites “to observe the Holy Gospel” with “obedience and reverence to the Lord Pope Honorius and his successors canonically elected and to the Roman Church.” Therefore, I want to end this greeting with the phrase that concludes our *Rule* and which explains why we are here today in front of you: “being always subject and submissive at the feet of the same holy Church, grounded in the Catholic faith, we may observe poverty and humility and the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, which we have firmly promised.”

BR. MICHAEL A. PERRY, OFM
Minister General

2. Address of His Holiness Pope Francis

Dear Friars Minor,

I welcome you! I thank the general Minister, Friar Michael Perry OFM, for his kind words and I wish him well in the duty conferred on him. Extending my greeting to the whole Order, especially to the sick and elderly confreres, who are the memory of the Order and the presence of Christ Crucified in the Order. In these days of reflection and prayer, you have allowed yourselves to be guided especially by two essential elements of your identity: minority and fraternity.

I asked advice from two Franciscan friends, young men from Argentina: “I have to say something about this, about minority, give me some advice”. One said to me: “God grants it to me every day”. The other told me: “It’s what I seek to do every single day”. This, what these two young Franciscan friends from my homeland told me, is the definition of minority.

Minority calls one to be and to feel small before God, entrusting himself totally to His infinite mercy. The prospect of mercy is incomprehensible for those who do not see themselves as “minor”, that is, small, needy and sinners before God. The more aware we are of this, the closer we are to salvation; the more we are convinced that we are sinners, the more willing we are to be saved. This is what happens in the Gospel: people who see themselves as poor before Jesus are saved; those who instead maintain they don’t need salvation don’t receive it, not because it isn’t offered but because it wasn’t accepted. Minority also means coming out of yourselves, out of your own agenda and personal views; it means going beyond structures — which are also useful if used wisely — going beyond habits and securities, in order to witness real closeness to the poor, the needy and the marginalized in an authentic attitude of sharing and service.

The dimension of fraternity also belongs in an essential way to Gospel witness. In the early Church, Christians lived fraternal communion to the extent of establishing an eloquent and attractive sign of unity and charity. The people were astonished to see Christians so united in love, so willing to give and to forgive one another, in such a fellowship of mercy, of benevolence, of reciprocal aid, unanimous in sharing the joys, sufferings and experiences of life. Your religious family is called to express this concrete fraternity, by restoring mutual trust — and I emphasize this: restoring mutual trust — in interpersonal relationships, so the world may see and believe, recognizing that Jesus’ love heals wounds and renders all as one.

From this perspective, it is important to recover the awareness of being bear-

ers of mercy, reconciliation and peace. You will make this vocation and mission fruitful by being increasingly a congregation “going forth”. After all, this corresponds with your charism, as also attested in the “*Sacrum Commercium*”. In this narrative of your beginnings is recounted that the early Friars were asked to show what their cloister was. In response, they climbed a hill, showed the wide world as far as the eye could see, and said: “This is our Cloister” (cf. SCom 63). Dear brothers, in this cloister, which is the entire world, you go, still today, inspired by the love of Christ, as He invites you to be St Francis, who says in the *Regula Bullata*: “I counsel, warn and exhort my Friars in the Lord Jesus Christ, that when they go about through the world, they are not to quarrel nor contend in words, nor are they to judge others, but they are to be meek, peaceable and modest, meek and humble, speaking uprightly to all... Into whatever house they may enter, first let them say: ‘Peace to this house’. And ... it is lawful to eat of any of the foods which are placed before them” (cf. RB 3,10-14). This last thing is good! These exhortations are most timely; they are a prophecy of fraternity and minority even for our world today. How important it is to lead a Christian and religious life without becoming lost in disputes and gossip, by cultivating a peaceful dialogue with everyone, with meekness, gentleness and humility, with humble means, proclaiming peace and living soberly, content with how much is offered to us! This also calls for a decisive and clear commitment to the ethical use of goods, in solidarity and in a style of sobriety and divestment. If instead you are attached to possessions and to the world’s riches, and place your security in them, it will be the Lord himself to strip you of this spirit of worldliness in order to preserve the precious heritage of minority and poverty to which He has called you through St Francis. Either you be willingly poor and minor, or you will end up being stripped.

The Holy Spirit is the animator of religious life. The more space we give Him, the more He gives life to our relationships and to our mission in the Church and the world. When consecrated people live by allowing themselves to be enlightened and guided by the Spirit, they discover in this supernatural vision the secret of their fraternity, the inspiration of their service to their brothers, the power of their prophetic presence in the Church and in the world. The light and power of the Spirit will also help you to face the challenges that are before you, in particular the decline in number, the increase in age and the ebb in new vocations. This is a challenge. Then I say to you: the People of God love you. Cardinal Quarracino once said this phrase to me, more or less: “In our cities there are groups or people who are somewhat priest-eaters, and when they pass a priest they say certain things to him: ‘Crow’” — in Argentina they say this to him — “they insult him, not harshly, but they say something to him. Never, never, never — Quarracino told me this — do they say these things to a Franciscan habit”. Why not? You have inherited authoritativeness among the People of God,

through minority, through brotherhood, through meekness, through humility, through poverty. Please, preserve it! Don't lose it! The people care for you, they love you.

May you be encouraged on your journey by the esteem of this very good people, as well as by pure affection and appreciation for Pastors. I entrust the entire Order to the maternal protection of the Virgin Mary, whom you venerate as a special Patroness with the title of Immaculate. May you also be accompanied by my heartfelt blessing which I impart to you; and, please, do not forget to pray for me, I need it. Thank you!

POPE FRANCIS

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