



Responding to the Invitation of the Holy Spirit as Lesser Brothers in the Church and World

*For I know the plans I have for you,
says the Lord...
to give you a future with hope.*

(Jeremiah 29:11)



FINAL DOCUMENT OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER 2021

Approved by General Chapter
17 July 2021

Introduction

Blessed Francis wrote for himself and his brothers present and future, simply and in few words, a form of life and a rule. He used primarily words of the holy gospel, longing only for its perfection. He inserted a few other things necessary for the practice of a holy way of life (1Cel XIII, 32).

The essence of our identity as friars minor is enshrined in the Gospel, which for Saint Francis was the beginning and the continuous place where he found energy and inspiration. Therefore, he did not want to burden the Rule with many "rules" so that it would be clear that the Gospel is the heart of our life, that is, our Lord Jesus Christ, the good news for the salvation of all human beings.

Asking ourselves once again what our identity is, means never tiring of listening to the Gospel; in its pages and in those words that our lives, the lives of our brothers, the men and women of our time, the many signs of the times in which we are immersed, make it possible for us to read with greater light. So, we believe that even our challenging time is favourable for this listening to the Gospel and for finding today's faces and words of life that help us renew our vision.

This is what we wanted to hear in this General Chapter. What is the Spirit saying to us today through the lives of so many, particularly the least and poorest?

This is the real question to know where our Order is going. Not only concerning numbers, works and projects, but also concerning the courage to listen and the passion for truly living the Gospel today.

May St Francis accompany us today to remain open to the voice of the Spirit as brothers ready to make bolder choices, leaving behind the inertia that often weighs us down and believing that it is possible to live the newness of the Gospel and enjoy its freedom and joy, to be shared with many.

Faternally



fr. Massimo Fusarelli of

BR. MASSIMO FUSARELLI, OFM
Minister general and servant

Rome, August 11, 2021
Feast of St. Clare of Assisi



Final Document

2)

1. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, we, your brothers, more than one-hundred friars from around the world, gathered at the Capuchin Franciscan Collegio Internazionale San Lorenzo da Brindisi in Rome for the 2021 General Chapter of the Order of Friars Minor. While every gathering of the brothers is an opportunity for rejoicing, this General Chapter was a particularly joyful occasion and a sign of hope.

2. Despite the manifold challenges that face the church and world today, we friars minor recognize that there are also opportunities amid the difficulties. Over the course of the fifteen days of this condensed General Chapter, many of the themes and good work that began at the 2018 Plenary Council of the Order (PCO) in Nairobi were carried forward and developed. The major theme of the PCO was 'listening' to what the Holy Spirit was saying to the Order today. In response to that attentive listening, we friars recognized a number of invitations that God was extending to us in the church and world.

3. We wish to communicate to our brothers throughout the Order some of these invitations and encourage one another in a spirit of fraternal solidarity to take up the invitations that the Holy Spirit presents to us with eagerness, humility, and passion.

Invitation to Gratitude

4. The Order of Friars Minor is the first religious order of the Roman Catholic Church to gather and carry out the duties of a worldwide General Chapter since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Originally scheduled to take place in Manila, Philippines in May 2021, it is nothing short of a miracle that we were able to convene in Rome and faithfully, safely, and successfully fulfill our responsibilities to the Order and the Church. We give thanks to God and to the many brothers who worked tirelessly before and during the General Chapter to ensure it could take place.

5. The experience of being able to gather in Chapter has renewed in all of us a spirit of gratitude for the gift of our fraternal vocation. All the brothers throughout the world have known the pain of separation and





distance from one another during this time of pandemic. May what we have experienced in Rome during these days serve as a symbol for all the brothers of our shared desire to gather together again in person.

6. We also give thanks for the fraternal hospitality and solidarity of our Capuchin Franciscan brothers who graciously hosted us at the Collegio Internazionale San Lorenzo da Brindisi. We were profoundly moved by their humble service to us. Their generous and welcoming spirit reflects the deep roots of our common fraternity and offered yet another sign of hope that our shared commitment to the Rule and Life of Saint Francis unites us to one another in the Holy Spirit.

Invitation to ‘Renew our Vision’

7. As we opened our General Chapter, more than four million people had already died of COVID-19 worldwide, and millions more continued to suffer the consequences of this unprecedented disease. The presence of ‘our Sister Bodily Death’ (*Cant* 12) was never far from our thoughts as we called to mind the many friars and millions of other men, women, and children who had died. At the opening liturgy we prayed for the hundreds of brothers who died of COVID-19 and during our days together in Rome we learned of more friars who have been afflicted by the virus. Pope Francis has rightly called this moment in our history a ‘crisis’ and a ‘time of reckoning.’ The Holy Father reminds us that, ‘The basic rule of a crisis is that you don’t come out of it the same. If you get through it, you come out better or worse, but never the same’ (Pope Francis, *Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future*, London: Simon & Schuster, 2020).

8. An honest reflection on the ‘signs of the times’ both within and outside the Order reveal that, over these last six years, there have been and continue to be many ‘griefs and anxieties’ afflicting the human family and the rest of creation (*Gaudium et spes*, 4, 1). And yet, as lesser brothers we profess to ‘follow in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ’ (*RnB* 1, 1), who has called us to be ambassadors of the gospel, which announces good news to all people. It is within this context that we friars are committed to renewing our vision and embracing our future, recognizing with the





Holy Father that we cannot simply be the same as we have been before the crises the world now faces.

9. One of the major themes to surface during our General Chapter was the need for renewal of our Franciscan identity and fraternal life. We recognize that like all people, we also are affected by the shifting contexts of our local and global communities. As Pope Francis has said, ‘We are not living an era of change but a change of era,’ which can be experienced personally and collectively as destabilizing’ (Pope Francis, ‘Meeting with the Participants in the Fifth Convention of the Italian Church,’ Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore, Florence, 10 November 2015). Members of the Order of Friars Minor are not immune from such changes, but we must recall that our vocation is to be ‘pilgrims and strangers’ in the world (*RB* 6, 2; *Test* 24) and therefore to be ‘missionary disciples’ (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 120) in the world but not partisans *of the world*.

10. The task of renewing our Franciscan identity requires discernment, study, formation, and action. We cannot simply rely on the *status quo* as sufficient for justifying our sense of complacency. The People of God demand more from us by virtue of our public commitment to be lesser brothers after the example of St. Francis. We must never be afraid to ‘begin again’ for, as Thomas of Celano reminds us, that at the end of his life, St. Francis ‘did not consider that he had already attained his goal, but tireless in pursuit of holy newness, he constantly hoped to begin again’ (*1Cel* 103).

11. We recognize that our name as *friars minor* contains the core of our identity and what some members of the chapter described as ‘the two lungs that give life to all our actions’ as Franciscans. These ‘two lungs,’ which allow the breath of the Holy Spirit to animate our whole way of being in the world, are *fraternitas* and *minoritas*. We are brothers first, and the mode of our fraternal life is one of voluntary minority in society and the church. Social pressures like the prevalent culture of individualism and ecclesial pressures like clericalism have no place in the authentic embrace of Franciscan life.

12. This renewal is a concrete challenge to each friar and every entity of the Order. As some of the brothers noted during the General Chapter, the core of our Franciscan identity to be *lesser brothers* requires a radical





commitment to take up the Spirit's invitation to identify with the poor, marginalized, abandoned, despised, and forgotten of our societies. It is not enough to merely call ourselves 'friars minor.' We must also put into practice what our name demands: to take up the cause of those who are involuntarily 'minoritized' in our world, so that we who voluntarily identify with those at the margins can accompany and advocate for our sisters and brothers in need.

13. The invitation to embrace fraternity and minority as the core expression of our Franciscan identity, the 'two lungs' that animate our very being, requires a renewal in our approach to both initial and ongoing formation. In response to this need, we see an invitation to engage more deeply in intercultural thinking, fraternity, and ministry. The General Chapter discussed proposals for the General Secretariat for Formation and Studies that would help facilitate resources and models for such renewal in a concrete fashion. We encourage all entities of the Order and every local fraternity to reflect together on how fraternity and minority are understood and lived out in practice, while always being attentive to where the Spirit may be inviting further conversion, change, and growth.

14. It also came to light in our discussions that we must not only attend to the situations and circumstances of our sisters and brothers outside the Order, but also attend to real needs of our brother friars who are struggling or are in some way afflicted. As St. Francis says in the *Rule*, "Let each one confidently make known his need to the other, for if a mother loves and cares for her son according to the flesh, how much more diligently must someone love and care for his brother according to the Spirit! When any brother falls sick, the other brothers much serve him as they would wish to be served themselves' (*RB* 6, 8-9). The 2019 document *Our Vocation: Leaving or Remaining Faithful*, prepared by the Commission on Fidelity and Perseverance, offers insight and concrete proposals on some of the many ways our fellow brothers are struggling today. The members of the General Chapter encourage local fraternities to consult with this resource and take up the invitation to embrace its concrete proposals.

15. The 2018 PCO proposed a paradigm for renewal of our Franciscan identity in terms of becoming better 'contemplative fraternities in mission.'





6

As a General Chapter we affirm this call and continue to challenge our brothers throughout the world and ourselves to take concrete actions to protect and promote a 'spirit of prayer and devotion' (*RB* 5, 2; *LtAnt* 2), which is the foundation of our fraternal life and, therefore, our mission. For, as the PCO reminded us, 'We are a mission in this world; this is why Friars Minor exist and we are completely dedicated to this' (100).

16. Throughout the General Chapter we noted how providential it is to be living during the pontificate of Pope Francis. The first Bishop of Rome to take the name 'Francis,' the Holy Father not only has a profound respect for the founder of our Order, but he also exhibits a keen understanding of the Franciscan charism. We acknowledged that we are living in a distinctively 'Franciscan moment' in the life of the Church and that Pope Francis's magisterial teaching – especially the encyclical letters *Laudato si'* and *Fratelli tutti* – is both a challenge and a guide for Franciscan action in the modern world. We not only encourage every local fraternity to study and pray with these texts, but also invite all the entities of the Order to use them as the guiding resources for the concrete animation of Franciscan renewal in the coming six years.

Invitation to Conversion and Penance

17. Two of the hallmarks of St. Francis's spirituality are the experience of ongoing conversion and a life of penance. At the end of his life, he recalled his fundamental vocation to be a lesser brother as a call to a life of penance: 'The Lord gave me, Brother Francis, thus to being doing penance in this way' (*Test* 1). And many in the early Franciscan movement were known as a community called the 'brothers and sisters of penance' (cf. *1LtF*; *2LtF*). In the spirit of our original calling as friars minor, we acknowledged several themes that invite us to greater conversion and penance today.

18. We expressed our continued commitment to the ongoing work of safeguarding minors and vulnerable adults. Sadly, there is no part of the world in which the crisis of sexual abuse has not affected the Order of Friars Minor as it also has the universal Church. As *lesser brothers*, we renew our dedication to accompany victim-survivors of sexual abuse and



abuses of all kinds, while striving always to ensure that all places entrusted to the Order are safe environments for all God's people, especially the most vulnerable.

19. Concrete proposals and legislation have been advanced at the Chapter to make clear the obligation that all friars and entities of the Order have to cooperate fully in the prevention, reporting, and cooperation with all appropriate civil and ecclesiastical authorities in the work to guarantee justice and transparency in addressing accusations of abuse throughout the Order. We acknowledge that this is a challenging but necessary commitment, which arises from the heart of our identity as Franciscans and is also an invitation to greater conversion and penance.

20. We give thanks for the tireless work of the outgoing General Government of the Order and the exceptional generosity of individual benefactors, foundations, and various entities of the Order. Thanks to their work and support, the financial crisis experienced by the General Curia has been addressed in substantive and ongoing ways. New structures of accountability and transparency have been introduced and the road to economic sustainability for the General Curia and those important ministerial projects, missions, and entities dependent on it for financial support has been outlined.

21. Nevertheless, we recognize that the financial crisis was a 'reality check' and 'wake up call' for the Order that we cannot simply handle the financial matters of the Order in the same way we always have. The financial crisis was also and above all a crisis of confidence and trust. There is no turning back; there must be a new way forward. This is required of us to be faithful stewards of the manifold gifts our benefactors have entrusted to us. In his report to the General Chapter, the General Bursar used the language of a 'fraternal economy' as one way to think holistically about how to integrate the mission, values, and responsibility we have as custodians of the generous gifts of others into the life of the friars.

22. Another theme that surfaced frequently during the General Chapter is that of clericalism within our fraternity. Despite the continual exhortation of St. Francis that 'we are all brothers' (*RnB* 22, 33; *Adm.* 7), and the clear





articulation in the General Constitutions of our Order that ‘all friars are completely equal’ within the fraternity (GGCC 3,1), we nevertheless acknowledge that what is said in this regard is not always translated into practice in all entities and local fraternities around the world.

23. The 2018 PCO, citing a definition of Pope Francis, reminds us that clericalism ‘extinguishes the prophetic flame to which the entire Church is called to bear witness to the heart of her peoples’ and that clericalism ‘forgets that the visibility and sacramentality of the Church belong to all the people of God, not only the few chosen and enlightened’ (103). As the PCO document states clearly, this is not an abstract danger present in the Church, but a real threat to our authentic fraternity, gospel witness, and Franciscan identity. We recognize that too little has been done at the local and regional levels of the Order to address the persistence of clericalism in our communities and in the hearts of many friars. Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle addressed us early in the General Chapter and challenged us to attend to this issue, noting that one of the gifts we provide to the Church is our fraternal witness and religious life.

24. To this end, we call for new ways of fostering our ongoing conversion in this area, inviting all the friars to never lose sight of the fact that *all of us are brothers first* prior to any ministry, position, or title we may exercise or hold. We should not shy away from the penitential attitude needed to acknowledge the ways in which the evils of individualism and clericalism distort our sense of self and undermine our true vocation as *lesser brothers*. The General Chapter also has called for new ways forward in approaching initial and ongoing formation in this area, with special attention to emphasizing the distinctive vocation of those brothers not called to ordained ministry.

Invitation to Mission and Evangelization

25. Our life as friars minor is oriented toward mission and evangelization. We know that our mission is not that of our own making, but participation in the *missio Dei* – the mission of God. St. Francis always made clear that our call comes from the Lord and, as he reminds us in his *Admonitions*, every good work we do belongs to God (*Adm* 5). Likewise, it is God who





calls us to be preachers of the Gospel by our whole lives (*RnB* 17, 3), which is why we refer to the form of our life (*forma vitae*) as the ‘Gospel life’ (*vita evangelica*).

26. What this looks like in practice today is described well by Pope Francis when he reminds us that, ‘In virtue of their baptism, all members of the People of God have become missionary disciples’ and adds that, ‘Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God’s saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are “disciples” and “missionaries”, but rather that we are always “missionary disciples”’ (*Evangelii gaudium* 120). If this is true for all the baptized, how much more are we friars, who have vowed to live ‘the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ’ (*RB* 1, 1), called to be evangelizers in the world?

27. Cardinal Tagle reminded us that the Church has a future when it is missionary. This is also true for our fraternity. We will not have a future if we are only concerned with ourselves. We will have a future if we live out our vocation for others as an evangelizing fraternity. Through many prayerful and engaging discussions of the General Chapter, we have discerned several invitations from the Holy Spirit for us to deepen our commitment to mission and evangelization in concrete ways today. We are called to go out into the world and be close to all God’s people, especially those who poor and are in any way marginalized. We also know that evangelization is a two-way street, and that our desire to remain close to the poor is an invitation for us also to be evangelized by our sisters and brothers.

28. At the end of his life, St. Francis recalled that at the outset of his conversion ‘it seemed too bitter for me to see lepers’ but that, ‘the Lord Himself led me among them and I showed mercy to them. And when I left them, what had seemed bitter to me was turned into sweetness of soul and body’ (*Test* 1-2). Similarly, there are many populations of people in our world today that our societies have deemed ‘too bitter’ to be seen or even loved. It is these people that the Holy Spirit first invites us to accompany and bear witness to the Gospel through our loving, merciful, and fraternal actions.





29. We feel invited by the Holy Spirit to accompany young adults, particularly at this time in history when so many young people no longer trust institutions like the Church, are disaffiliated from the faith traditions of their families, or are even ‘unchurched’ or never introduced to religion. We encourage our brothers to study the ‘Final Document from the Pre-Synodal Meeting’ of young adults in March of 2018,¹ which reflects well the ‘signs of the times’ of our young sisters and brothers who rightly demand of the Church, and therefore our Order, mentorship, accompaniment, and opportunities to participate and be leaders in the Church. While vocation promotion is important, we know that our primary invitation is to walk together with young adults as collaborators and fellow ‘missionary disciples’ in today’s world. This generation of young adults has a discerning heart for what is authentic, which should challenge us to be better *lesser brothers* in all aspects of our life and ministry.

30. Another invitation we recognize the Spirit offering us is the work of justice, peace, and integrity of creation. Returning to the essential magisterium of Pope Francis in *Laudato si’* and *Fratelli tutti*, we are challenged to put into action projects that promote integral ecology, which must always recognize the interconnected ‘cry of the earth and cry of the poor’ (*Laudato si’* 49). In this moment of climate crisis, where the poor will suffer first and most dramatically, we are committed to being leaders in the Church and world to advocate on behalf of all the voiceless, the human and nonhuman alike.

31. We are witnessing how we ourselves are destroying our planet. This is an invitation for us to care not only for our own human future, but also for the future of ‘our common home’ (*Laudato si’*). We are invited to a new lifestyle shaped by concrete actions. This is one way today that we can live out our vow of evangelical poverty. We are also increasingly aware that environmental catastrophes and devastation, added to widespread political unrest and violence, has contributed to a scandalous rise in refugees and migrants fleeing their homelands in search of safety and freedom. We know

¹ <http://www.synod.va/content/synod2018/en/news/final-document-from-the-pre-synodal-meeting.html>





the Holy Spirit is inviting us to a greater commitment in care for and accompaniment of our refugee and migrant sisters and brothers.

32. Part of what it means to respond to the invitation to mission and evangelization today is to enter into what Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI called ‘the digital continent’ (‘Message of the Holy Father Benedict XVI for the 43rd World Communications Day,’ 24 May 2009). We know as well as anybody else that most people spend a significant part of their time on the Internet, using various social media platforms, and engaging with new forms of technology. While there are certainly dangers present online, part of the invitation to evangelize in the digital age is to be present on this ‘digital continent’ to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ by our words and deeds. It is an indispensable tool for vocation promotion, social organizing, ministerial outreach, and nearly everything else we do as friars minor in the modern world.

33. All of these developments in technology and shifts in society show us that more training is needed in areas previously unconsidered by the Order. Regarding social media and digital technology, we see an opportunity for establishing guides to assist our brothers and others in navigating the tumultuous ‘digital continent’ as ‘missionary disciples.’ In terms of the shifting social realities, we know we must work to incorporate better intercultural training and praxis into our programs of initial and ongoing formation. The invitation to mission and evangelization is important, but so too is the appropriate preparation we need as lesser brothers to be effective messengers of the Gospel. In announcing the Gospel, we invite our sisters and brothers into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and with one another. It is an invitation to ‘come and see’ what the Lord has in store for those who respond to this call.

Invitation to ‘Embrace our Future’

34. The trend of a collective decline in the numbers of friars across our Order is well known and was reiterated on several occasions in reports and discussions during the General Chapter. This is especially the case in the Western countries where the Order is present. While this statistical trend could be viewed in exclusively negative terms, we wish to speak an encouraging word to our brothers around the world.





35. Drawing from a longer historical perspective, we come to see that the numbers of our fraternity have always ebbed and flowed. What began as the solo project of the young man Francesco di Bernardone in the early thirteenth century grew within his lifetime to contain a multitude of men and women inspired to live his vision of the *vita evangelica*. Famously, that tremendous growth also caused forms of pain and difficulty previously unforeseen. Similarly, there have been periods of numerical decline not unlike the present trend. This is not necessarily a sign of ruin or cause for alarm, but a moment for creative renewal. Perhaps the experience of becoming numerically smaller is an invitation to rediscover and live out our call to *minoritas* in new ways. Our future does not depend solely on our numbers, but on the quality and authenticity of our life according to the Gospel.

36. To *embrace* our future means that we walk as brothers together into the unknown that lies ahead of us, called by Christ and inspired by the Holy Spirit, as lesser brothers in mission. We should also look to the parts of the world where there is new growth and possibilities. Oftentimes, these entities are in need of special assistance in terms of sustainability.

37. During the General Chapter we noted that in the coming six years the Order will be celebrating a number of important commemorations, beginning this year with the eight-hundredth anniversary of the *Regula non bullata* (1221-2021). In the coming years we will mark the centenaries of significant texts, such as the *Regula bullata* (2023), the *Canticle of the Creatures* (2025) and the *Testament* (2026); key historical moments, such as the *Christmas in Greccio* (2023), the *Impression of the Stigmata* (2024) and the *Transitus* of our Holy Father St. Francis (2026); and important regional events, such as the arrival of European missionaries, including Franciscans, to the so-called ‘New World’ of the Americas.

38. We do not want these occasions to be missed opportunities for renewal and evangelization. As the three Ministers General of the First Order wrote in their October 2020 letter ‘To Live and Follow’ in anticipation of the 800th anniversary of the *Regula non bullata*, ‘let’s avoid celebrating this commemoration with the attitude of those who visit a museum without caring, those who have a tourist’s vague curiosity, without the slightest desire to be fully engaged; who only visit because “they must” or because “that





museum is famous.” Instead, we believe that each of these historical markers is a *kairos* moment, a further invitation, an opportune or chosen time for renewal and hope. We are calling on all the entities of the Order to celebrate these events with an eye toward what can be generative and novel, an opportunity to ‘embrace our future’ rather than just review the past again.

39. Related to the marking of these important anniversaries, we believe that the Holy Spirit is inviting us to embrace a greater sense of collaboration among the branches of the Franciscan Family, between the three First Orders and the Third Order Regular, the Poor Sisters of St. Clare, the Secular Franciscan Order, and the Franciscan Youth. These commemorations are opportunities for something of a ‘family reunion’ in which we can come together, invited by the Spirit and united in our shared Franciscan vocation, to build on the good work that has already begun and strive in practice toward that fraternal unity that is already reflected in our common identity as *lesser brothers*.

40. We discussed the need to review the structures of the entities of the Order, keeping always in mind that the Lord sends the Spirit not only to ‘renew the face of the earth’ (*Psalms* 104) but also renew the ‘face of the Order.’ We believe it is necessary to review the way we organize ourselves at all levels (for example, the General Curia, conferences, provinces, custodies) in order to be sure that how we relate to one another in terms of the Order’s governance best serves our mission in a manner in keeping with the spirit of fraternal solidarity. This is especially important as we think about intercultural, interprovincial, and international collaboration and joint ministerial projects.

41. We also recognize that our future is not simply our own, but is meant to be shared with others. We might imagine the Spirit’s invitation to collaborate more broadly, both within and beyond the broad Franciscan family, as a call to embrace another form of *sine proprio*. We must overcome the temptation to territorialism and ‘provincialism,’ which threatens communion and destroys fraternity. How may we open our local fraternities and ministries to greater collaboration with our lay sisters and brothers, other religious orders and congregations, and all people of good will regardless of their religious affiliation or status? In an age distinguished by increasing sectarianism, violence, and division, we can provide a prophetic witness of universal fraternity to a world in need of such a model.





42. The PCO has asked us to ‘listen’ to what the Spirit is telling us. Now it is up to us to respond to the Spirit’s invitation and ‘arise’ (*Ephesians 5:14*) from the slumber of our *status quo* in order to renew our vision and embrace our future as lesser brothers in the Church and world.

Concluding Prayer

43. As we move forward into the next six years, striving to always ‘renewing our vision’ and ‘embracing our future,’ we invite all our brothers to join us in the prayer St. Francis gave at the end of his *Letter to the Entire Order* (LtO 50-52).

Almighty, eternal, just and merciful God,
give us miserable ones
the grace to do for You alone
what we know you want us to do
and always to desire what pleases You.
Inwardly cleansed,
interiorly enlightened
and inflamed by the fire of the Holy Spirit,
may we be able to follow
in the footprints of Your beloved Son,
our Lord Jesus Christ,
and, by Your grace alone,
may we make our way to You,
Most High,
Who live and rule
in perfect Trinity and simple Unity,
and are glorified
God almighty,
forever and ever.
Amen.



2021 OFM General Chapter

Mandates and Orientations

The following propositions were voted on by the General Chapter. At the end of each proposition, there is a clarification as to whether it is a Mandate or a Orientation: this qualification was also desired by the Chapter. By mandate, we mean a more binding directive for the Minister and his Definitory, and usually they are more specific intentions; by orientation, we rather mean the indication of some values that must guide the choices of the Minister and his Definitory.

I. OUR IDENTITY

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 ever-increasing 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*).

3. Over the next few years, we will have occasion to commemorate centenaries 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-filled Franciscan message that responds to the problems and concerns of our times (*Mandate*).





II. FRATERNAL LIFE

a. *In general*

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, inter-generationality, 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*).

b. *Fraternal Life: Economy*

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*).

c. Fraternal Life: Safeguarding 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:

- 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*).

III. FORMATION

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*).

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*).

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*).

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*).

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*).

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*).

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*).





IV. MISSIONS AND EVANGELIZATION

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*).

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*).

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*).

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*).

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*).

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





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*).

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

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*).

V. JPIC

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*).

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*).





VI. STRUCTURES OF GOVERNMENT

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*).

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

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*).

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*).

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



Message of the Holy Father to the Participants of the General Chapter of the Order of Friars Minor

Dear Brothers!

I greet all of you who are participating in the General Chapter of the Order of Friars Minor with affection. My grateful thoughts go to Fr Michael A. Perry, who has concluded his service as Minister General, and I offer my best wishes to Fr Massimo Giovanni Fusarelli, who has been called to succeed him. I extend my greetings to all your communities throughout the world.

Because of the pandemic, we have found ourselves living in emergency situations of isolation and suffering for many months now. On the one hand, this critical experience encourages all of us to recognise how much our earthly life is a journey to be made as pilgrims and strangers, itinerant men and women, ready to lighten our load of personal goods and demands. On the other hand, it is a favourable opportunity to intensify our relationship with Christ and with our brothers and sisters: I am thinking of your communities, called to be a humble prophetic presence in the midst of God's people and a witness to fraternity and a simple and joyful life for all.

In these difficult and complex times, when there is a risk of being “paralysed”, you are nevertheless experiencing the grace of celebrating your Ordinary General Chapter, which is already a reason to praise and thank God. In this Chapter, you propose to “renew your vision” and “embrace your future”. You are guided by the words of St Paul: “*Arise... and Christ will give you light*” (Eph 5:14). It is a word of resurrection, which roots you in the Paschal dynamic because there is no renewal, and there is no future except in the risen Christ. With gratitude, therefore, you open yourselves to welcome the signs of God's presence and action and to rediscover the gift of your charism and your fraternal and minor identity.

Renewing one's vision: this is what happened to the young Francis of Assisi. He himself attests to it, recounting the experience that he places at the beginning of his conversion in his *Testament*: the encounter with the lepers, when “what was bitter was changed into sweetness of soul and body” (Test 1-4). At the roots of your spirituality is this encounter with the least and the suffering, in the sign of “doing mercy”. God touched the heart of





Francis through the mercy offered to his brother, and he continues to touch our hearts through the encounter with others, especially those most in need. The renewal of your vision can only start from this new gaze with which to contemplate the poor and marginalised brother or sister, a sign, almost a sacrament of the presence of God.

From this renewed gaze, from this concrete experience of encounter with our neighbour and with his wounds, can come a renewed energy to look to the future as brothers and as minors, as you are, according to the beautiful name of “friars minor”, which St Francis chose for himself and for you.

The renewing strength you need comes from the Spirit of God, from that “holy operation” (*Regula Bullata* 10, 8) which is the unmistakable sign of his action. That Spirit, who transformed the bitterness of Francis’ encounter with the lepers into sweetness of soul and body, is still at work today to give new freshness and energy to each one of you if you allow yourselves to be stirred by the least of our time. I encourage you to go out to meet the men and women who suffer in soul and body, to offer your humble and fraternal presence, without grand speeches, but making your closeness as lesser brothers felt. To go towards a wounded creation, our common home, which suffers from a distorted exploitation of the earth’s goods for the enrichment of a few while creating conditions of misery for many. To go as men of dialogue, seeking to build bridges instead of walls, offering the gift of fraternity and social friendship in a world that is struggling to find the path of a common vision. To go forth as men of peace and reconciliation, inviting those who sow hatred, division and violence to conversion of heart, and offering the victims the hope that comes from truth, justice and forgiveness. From these encounters, you will receive an impetus to live the Gospel ever more fully, according to that word which is your way: “The Rule and Life of the Lesser Brothers is this: to observe the Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ” (*Regula Bullata* 1,1).

As much of the Order faces the challenges of declining numbers and ageing, do not let anxiety and fear prevent you from opening your hearts and minds to the renewal and revitalisation that the Spirit of God brings about in you and among you. You have a spiritual heritage of inestimable riches, rooted in the Gospel life and marked by prayer, fraternity, poverty,





minority and itinerancy. Do not forget that we receive a renewed gaze, which can open us to God's future, from our closeness to the poor, the victims of modern slavery, the refugees and the excluded of this world. They are your teachers. Embrace them as St Francis did!

Dear brothers, may the Most High, Almighty, Good Lord make you ever more credible and joyful witnesses of the Gospel; may he grant you to lead a simple and fraternal life; and may he lead you on the paths of the world to sow the seed of the Good News with faith and hope. For this, I pray and accompany you with my Blessing. And please do not forget to pray for me too.

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 15 July 2021

Franciscus





Order of Friars Minor
www.ofm.org