



ORDO FRATRUM MINORUM

SECRETARIATUS GENERALIS PRO FORMATIONE ET STUDIIS

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To the Secretaries for Formation and Studies

Rome, 25 March 2025

Prot. 114062 (FS 026/25)

Subject: Letter to the Secretaries for Formation and Studies of all the Entities

Dear Brother,

May the Lord give you peace!

As already mentioned in the January 25th letter of the Minister General to the Ministers and Custos of the Order, it is time to turn our attention to those responsible for Formation, to you, Secretaries for Formation and Studies for all the OFM Entities. Within the next two years, we will again address the Moderators of Ongoing Formation, the Animators of the Pastoral Care of Vocations, and the Directors of the Postulancy, Novitiate and Post-novitiate programs. The purpose of these letters is to offer encouragement and some important points for your own ongoing formation. These letters are always written in collaboration with the General Definitory.

Biblical Icon

Jesus said to them [his disciples]: "My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest will come?'" Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, which are already yellow with the harvest. He who reaps receives his wages and gathers fruit for eternal life, so that he who sows may rejoice together with him who reaps. For in this proverb is truth: one sows and another reaps. I sent you to reap what you did not labor for; others labored and you have reaped the harvest" (John 4:34-38).

We begin by reflecting on this passage from the Gospel of John. It comes right after Jesus has met with the Samaritan woman and offered her the life-giving water that springs up to eternal life (cf. John 4:14). When the disciples arrived and saw that Jesus was speaking with an unclean foreign woman, they did not dare ask him anything but instead offered him food. Jesus took the opportunity to show that true "food" is "doing the will" of the Father (4.34).

Jesus seemingly changes the subject, ignoring his disciples' concerns. Instead he responds to their greater needs, taking advantage of the moment to point them to the will of God. It seems that the Evangelist had in mind the text of Genesis where Jacob, in the land of Haran, meets Rachel next to a well (cf. Gen 29.1-30). In Jewish tradition, the kiss that Jacob gave to Rachel has been greatly discussed. Some have seen it as a violation of the moral law (Gen. Rabbah 24:10). Similarly, after the meeting between Jesus and the Samaritan

woman next to Jacob's well, the disciples also wonder about the morality of this action of Jesus.

In the Old Testament tale, it was the will of God that brought Jacob to Rachel, who, though previously barren, would become the mother of Joseph and Benjamin, two of Jacob's twelve sons. Thus, a barren woman also became one of the mothers of Israel. Similarly, in the New Testament story, the Samaritan woman, a foreigner and a woman considered sinful, would be able to bear the fruits of faith. This is an anticipation and early announcement of the fruitfulness of the Church even among foreign populations.

In this context, Jesus begins to speak about the will of God. The disciples should not worry about appearances, should not be misled by their own prejudices, their own ideas about right conduct, but must seek only the will of God. And Jesus shows himself as the model of such behavior, the one who came only to do the will of the Father and carry out his works.

And so, Jesus asks his disciples to lift their eyes (cf. Jn 4:35), and raise their minds from their fixations and preconceptions, to be attentive to the signs that God is showing them about his holy will. It calls to mind the final exhortation of Saint Francis, according to the story in the *Second Life* by Thomas of Celano: "I have done what is mine to do, may Christ teach you what is yours to do!" (2Cel 214). This call from Francis is important for every Friar Minor but particularly for every Formator. Dear brother, keep your eyes raised up to the Lord and always seek only his will.

It is true, this is not easy; it takes courage to consistently do the will of God. This is clear from the *Paraphrase of the Our Father* written by Saint Francis, where the will of God is realized in the love we show towards others, in attracting everyone to divine love, in enjoying the good things that happen to others as if they were happening to us, and in bearing evils and challenges together with others, without giving offense to anyone (cf. *Pater* 5). This can be difficult.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus is opening the eyes of the disciples so that they can truly see others. He quotes the proverb: "One sows and another reaps" (Jn 4:37). For the work that God needs done in this world there are different tasks, different responsibilities and different roles, and every soul matters. The apostle Paul also reminds us of this when he talks about the different gifts and the various ways that one may serve. What unites us in this is the one Spirit (cf. 1Cor 12, 4-11) through which we work together to pursue a common goal.

After having met with and presented this letter to the Minister General and the members of the General Definitory, I pass along to you their gratitude that you have agreed to carry out this office of Secretary for Formation and Studies. Your office is one of the utmost importance for our Order, as you are answering the call to enliven the spirit and life of our brotherhood.

Working towards the Same Goal

Dear Brother, as we all know, in the formation process there are different stages and requirements, and different offices needed to see them through. You, as the Secretary for Formation and Studies, have the task to "promote and coordinate, in dependence on the Minister Provincial, all the educational activity of the Province" (SSGG art. 82 & 2).

Furthermore, the General Constitutions require that "those engaged in formation in the Order, in the Provinces and the Conferences of Ministers Provincial are to consult with one another so that they may study their own experiences, foster mutual cooperation and promote unity of orientation by means of common criteria." (CCGG art. 143).

From this call, we see your task as coordinator of the formation process to include the challenging work of promoting and implementing collaboration between the formation directors in your Entity. It is up to you to foster a spirit of dialogue and cooperation between formators, to visit your formation houses, to collaborate at the Conference level and to work with other offices, such as with the Secretary for Missions and Evangelization and with the Animator for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (cf. RFF Appendix II). Naturally, in this work you must not neglect the actual Friars in formation, both initial and ongoing, seeking out their opinions and attending to their needs.

This will require different types of meetings, with formators and formandi, as you seek to direct the entire formation process, giving it continuity and focusing it towards the same goal. We are well aware that in many of our Entities it is not easy to organize such meetings, sometimes due to distance, reluctance, or the lack of availability of the Friars. Nonetheless, these meetings are your responsibility and we believe you must make every effort to see that they happen.

On the topic of continuity of formation, we cannot ignore the difficulties we encounter in our Order. Some formation programs are too subjective, led by directors who forget their role. Instead of being guided by the Franciscan charism and our documents, some try to reinvent the wheel, based on their own ideas and preferences. It is clear that each Formator must offer a personal witness to the faith and their vocation, but this does not mean that he can create a program outside the framework offered by our Order. In such cases, it would be your task, as Secretary, to identify these situations and propose ways to resolve them.

Fraternal collaboration

Fraternal collaboration must have a central role in the field of Formation and Studies. The Secretariat for Formation and Studies, of which you are the head, must see to this. The Secretariat has the task of ensuring that Formation is organic, gradual and coherent for all the Friars of the Province and for all our candidates (RFF Appendix I, 2).

Based on what we have seen in different Entities of our Order, we have concluded that the Secretariat must have regular meetings. The Particular Statutes of the Provinces and other normative documents establish the frequency of the Secretariat meetings, however, it seems to us that such meetings should be organized a minimum of four times a year. With the technical means that we have available today, it is also possible to organize them online. These meetings can take different forms and also serve for the ongoing formation of the formators.

It would be good in these fraternal gatherings to discuss and verify the consistency of the formation program and the continuity between the stages, always taking into account the specific needs of the actual men the Lord sends to us. Furthermore, it is the task of the Secretariat to verify the *Ratio Formationis* and the *Ratio Studiorum* of their Entity and to propose any needed changes.

These meetings are also necessary to continue along the path laid out at the meetings of the animation offices on the Conference level, in which all the Secretaries for Formation and Studies, Secretaries for the Missions and Evangelization and the JPIC Animators of the various Entities participate. One cannot talk about Formation and Studies apart from a true and concrete knowledge of the missionary and evangelizing work of the Entity and the Order, and with the contributions of the JPIC Office. We encourage you to continue collaboration at the Conference level, seeking to involve and inform all members of your Secretariat.

Furthermore, we ask you to start serious discussion within your Secretariat for Formation and Studies to identify Friars who could be proposed to the Provincial Minister

or the Custos as future formators and to suggest ways they might be prepared for such ministry. This includes Moderators for the area of Ongoing Formation.

When it comes to fraternal collaboration, in the context of different tasks and offices, we encourage you to collaborate closely with the Moderator of Ongoing Formation in preparing the formation of the Guardians, who are responsible for formation in their Fraternities.

Finally, we remind you that at the beginning of this year we published the Appendix of the *Ratio Formationis Franciscanae* which concerns “Protection in ongoing and initial formation.” We ask you to work together with the other Friars responsible for Formation, for the implementation of this document.

A Final Request

The last General Chapter gave us the following task: “The General Secretariat for Formation and Studies shall work with the Secretaries of Formation of the Conferences and Provinces to ensure that all program 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 or other specializations.”

In the last meeting of the International Council for Formation and Studies (CIFS), held in Rome from 5 to 8 November 2024, in which the Secretaries for Formation and Studies of the Conferences took part, we identified some proposals for possible modifications of the *Ratio Formationis Franciscanae*. The text of the Proposals prepared by the Council are as follows:

1. The CIFS feels the need for the contemplative part of our vocation to be emphasized more in the RFF, with concrete proposals and suggestions.
2. The RFF should address finances and budgets, proposing transparent models that can be used in initial formation.
3. The RFF should offer the means to address the tension between tradition and the need for innovation in an ever-changing world and society. These means should help us discern between respect for healthy tradition and empty traditionalism and should open us to whatever new challenges we might face.
4. Integral ecological themes should be integrated throughout the RFF.
5. The findings of the gatherings of lay Friars at the level of the local and international Conferences must be integrated into the RFF.
6. More attention should be paid to the work of human formation in our programs.
7. Both ongoing and initial formation should be thought of in a synodal way, taking a candidate on a journey from his own world and ideas to those of the Order.
8. Other issues that should be more prominent in the RFF are: protection of minors and vulnerable adults, and the correct use of the means of communication available, with particular attention to the issue of social media dependence.
9. The RFF should promote the exchanging of ideas and mutual collaboration between the Entities.
10. Particular attention should be paid to the different ages of candidates entering into our initial formation programs.

11. The RFF should promote reevaluating and potentially changing our structures (both mental and physical) that we do not get locked into one way of doing something, without considering the needs of our maturing fraternity.
12. The RFF should contain an entire chapter dedicated to the charismatic Franciscan experience during the time of temporary profession.
13. The RFF should promote a sharing of personal faith experiences among all brothers, those in initial formation and in ongoing formation, between formator and formandi.

We ask that you please discuss all these proposals in the Secretariat for Formation and Studies, with the Secretary for Missions and Evangelization, and with the JPIC Animator of your Entity. Please send any thoughts, opinions, or concerns regarding these things to the General Secretariat, along with other proposals you may have, before September 30, 2025, using the email address: formgen@ofm.org. We hope to present the fruits of this process of reflection at our next General Chapter.

We thank you in advance for your willingness to collaborate in this way.

Finally, I send you greetings from the Minister General with his Definitory.

Fraternally,



Br. Darko Tepert, ofm
Secretary General for Formation and Studies