



Message to the English Speaking African Conference (ESAC) Formators' Course

Dear Brothers,

May the Lord give you peace!

I extend my heartfelt greetings to all of you participating in this important formators' course in Harare. I want to express my deep gratitude for this valuable initiative, which demonstrates our Order's commitment to excellence in formation throughout Africa and beyond.

As we reflect on the challenges and opportunities of Franciscan formation today, particularly in the rich cultural context of Africa, I would like to share three fundamental principles that I believe are essential for our formation work, drawn especially from our *Ratio Formationis Franciscanae*:

1. Integral Formation: Human, Christian, and Charismatic Unity

Franciscan formation must be integral, embracing the human, Christian, and charismatic dimensions in dynamic unity. As our *Ratio* reminds us, "*Franciscan formation is a continuous process of growth and conversion that involves the entire life of the person, called to develop their human, Christian, and Franciscan dimension, living the holy Gospel radically*".

We must pay special attention to human maturity—affektive and relational—while offering a robust proposal of Christian faith and our Franciscan charism. Human formation serves as the foundation, for as we know, "full human, Christian and religious maturity" is our goal. The human qualities that Article 39 of our Constitutions mentions—familiarity of spirit, mutual friendship, courtesy, jovial spirit—are not peripheral but central to authentic Franciscan life.

2. The Importance of Personal and Fraternal Accompaniment

In our Order, we often speak of formation in terms of "accompaniment". This method reflects fraternal relationships—being alongside others recognized as brothers, with whom we share something in common. True accompaniment requires specific competencies and must occur at two levels:

- **Fraternal accompaniment** that we mutually offer through our life in fraternity
- **Personal accompaniment** by those entrusted with this ministry: Ministers, Guardians, formators, and spiritual guides

The quality of this accompaniment depends not on accumulated knowledge or offices, but on personal experience and the will to serve with love. Every authentic witness requires



the truth of the person – with possibilities and limitations, talents and frailties, wounds and gifts.

3. Careful Attention to Inculturation and Overcoming Clericalism

The Gospel must be incarnated in the diverse cultures among which you live and minister. This inculturation of our charism requires sensitivity to overcome clericalism, which threatens to prevent the authentic rooting of the Friars Minor charism in local contexts.

Our fraternity is “*our way of being in the world and in the Church*” – it does not exist except as fraternity. We must ensure that our formation truly prepares brothers who live as equals, avoiding hierarchical structures that contradict the Gospel principle that “*you are all brothers*” (Mt 23:8). This is especially crucial in contexts where clerical culture may be deeply embedded.

The diversity of cultures across Africa offers a tremendous gift to the universal Church and our Order. Each culture brings unique insights into living the Gospel according to Francis’s vision. Our formation must help candidates discern how to be authentically Franciscan while remaining deeply rooted in their cultural heritage.

Conclusion

Brothers, the work you are undertaking is fundamental to the future of our Order in Africa and beyond. Through your dedication to integral formation, authentic accompaniment, and careful inculturation, you are planting seeds that will bear fruit for generations to come.

May Saint Francis intercede for you, and may the Lord give you His peace as you continue this essential ministry of formation.

With fraternal greetings and every blessing,

In Christ and Francis

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Minister General