



Rome, June 14th 2024

OFM Fundraising Partners meeting 2024

- General Secretariat of Franciscan missions
- Franziskaner Helfen
- Fondazione OFM Fraternitas
- Curia Generale OFM

"Our cloister is the world"

Dear Brothers, Sisters and Friends,

Allow me to extend my fraternal greetings to you all on the occasion of this VI Conference of the OFM Partners. I thank you for being engaged in the work of fundraising in support of OFM projects, spread out to all the peripheries of the Order, present today in 120 countries.

INTRODUCTION

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The territorial extension of our presence well illustrates the theme I have chosen for my intervention, recalling an expression attributed to St. Francis. According to tradition, from the top of a hill, he indicated the space all around as the *cloister* of the first friars¹. This illustrates a clearly open and dynamic vision of our own vocation, a witness to a fully evangelical charism, reaching out to the world.

Our brother Francis chose a pilgrim and mendicant evangelical life, with which he prioritized **meeting others** over solitary contemplation, **service** over teaching in a classroom, **listening** over preaching in the temple. Francis wanted to show the primacy of being *children of the heavenly Father* (cfr. 1 LfF 1:7) and, therefore, brothers of Jesus Christ and the least of all creatures. These brothers and sisters are at the service not of themselves but of real people whom we meet along the way. This choice takes place in the light of the choices of Jesus, *the Son of God who made Himself our way* (TestCl 5), who, together with his disciples, called "brothers", walked the roads and crossed the boundaries of the villages, to go out to meet everyone. He purposely chose the suffering and unbelieving ones, announcing the presence of the kingdom of God, allowing the gift of salvation of the Gospel to burst into the world. Looking to Christ, therefore, Francis established the style and the choices for our common journey.

In this way, he became, and still is for us, his followers, the expert of the Spirit, capable of **contemplating and praising** the Almighty in all his creatures; the Master of life, capable of **forming and allowing himself to be educated** by generations of men and women

¹ *Sacrum commercium Sancti Francisci cum domina Paupertate* n.63.



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of good will on the path of peace; **the Herald of the Gospel**, who makes *everyone know that no one is almighty except Him* (LtOrd 9) and proclaims all: "*May the Lord give you peace!*" (Test 23), the seed of authentic fraternity open to all.

In a nutshell, his way of **meeting, serving and listening** corresponds to the way of **minority**, in which it is possible to recognize the primacy of the Creator over all His creatures, who recognize themselves as marked by His imprint and therefore bound together by a **fraternal bond**. This attitude became the reason why St. Francis felt a true and proper familiarity moved by charity towards every person and every creature, whom he, therefore, and simply, called each "brother" or "sister". Our Saint has handed down to us a way of entering a relationship with each other and with Creation that reveals our common belonging to God the Father and, consequently, our responsibility towards the reality in which we live, given to us by Him. Pope Francis, in this regard, in *Laudato si'* reminds us of the importance of "cultivating a common identity", taking "care of the world and of the quality of life of the poorest, with a sense of solidarity that is at the same time an awareness of living in a common home that God has entrusted to us" (LS 232).

Being sons and daughters, brothers and sisters and minors is therefore the main way of the living spiritual experience of St. Francis, to be cared for and strengthened like leaven, so that this dynamic may continuously mature within us. Hence the value of always nourishing our universal sense of family, as children of the same heavenly Father who calls us to receive and return the gift of His love as brothers and sisters.

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THEME: THE WORK OF PARTNERS, A FORM OF FRATERNITY AND MINORITY

The occasion of our meeting here in Rome is also an opportune moment to discern how this Franciscan inspiration operates today through your work and your service in support of the many needs and emergencies, which you welcome in the form of **projects** and which you support through **fundraising**.



Can we affirm that your patient and diligent work (in collecting requests, in taking care of their presentations in the form of projects, in planning fundraising, in the careful execution of the cycle of projects from acceptance to verification, in the care of relations with donors from appeal to thanksgiving and reporting, in the management of administrative and office work, in compliance with the many rules and regulations required today) truly represents just one of the many forms of: *being creatures/children, brothers/sisters and minors?*

A few considerations may provide us with the answer.

- 1) **In my journeys, during the occasions of my fraternal visits** to more than 60 Entities and to numerous other Franciscan realities in the world, I have been able to listen to the strong cry of so many people who find relief and hope in our structures and in our churches. When our friars are truly at the service of the least ones and learn to live among them, the newness of Christian fraternity takes shape, giving voice to the Word of the Lord: "*Come unto me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Mt 11:28)*".

It is precisely in many of these places that I had the grace to see the effectiveness of your action, through the small and large projects that you have supported and that have enabled our friars *to meet, to listen to* and *to serve* the cry and suffering of so many of our brothers and sisters. Thanks to you and to all your collaborators, our Franciscan charity is able to take concrete form!

We must also say, however, that this cry seems tragically to increase and spread more and more, as I have seen during my visits to places oppressed by war, in places like Ukraine, Holy Land, South Sudan and Kivu in the Democratic Republic of Congo. That is why, during my journeys, I collect requests and projects that, then, I submit for your attention. I recognize you as collaborators in the humble desire to let a little hope and peace shine in the world, helping to sustain the foundations for a more just and fraternal society. Your work increases and strengthens the great project of universal brotherhood to which we all firmly adhere. According to the declarations contained in the Abu Dhabi Document², in fact, the mutual commitment of the parties is necessary in the construction of a culture based on the recognition of the dignity of every life and on the values of goodness and peace, in defense of the oppressed and the most marginalized ones. The intent of the whole Church is to be *united and to work together* so express the primary vocation to human fraternity, safeguarding Creation and supporting every person, especially those most needy and poor.

- 2) **In dialogue with today's world**, we all experience the difficulty of bringing a new, effective, comprehensible and engaging message.

In the history of the origins, Christians lived fraternal communion to such an extent - as the Book of Acts 2:44; 4:32 testifies - that it was an eloquent and attractive sign of

² *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*, February 4th, 2019, in <http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/events/event.dir.html/content/vaticanevents/it/2019/2/4/fratellanza-umana.html>



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unity and charity³. People were struck by the way in which Christians lived and co-existed, so bound together in love, so willing to give and forgive one another, so united in mercy and mutual help, in sharing the joys, sufferings and experiences of life⁴.

Today, your action to involve **donors** in the good causes you present, to maintain a relationship with them, to speak with them the universal language of gift and charity - which keeps the human value of our interventions high - reflects the characteristics of the Christian and Franciscan mission of being close to all peoples, touching hearts, sharing goods, supporting needs, just as the first disciples of the Lord did and as Francis of Assisi wanted to experience at the beginning of his conversion and then throughout his short earthly existence.

3) **Friars and laypeople work together in your activities:** this characteristic shows us the importance of recognizing, within our mission, the value of sharing tasks in co-responsibility, being open to participation in different areas of professional work competence. This requires maturing the serene awareness so that today proclamation also passes through with the ability to operate within structures regulated by civil laws, with roles that require precise preparation, as well as a properly “lay vision” of the organization, with a rhythm of work that differs from the one we, as friars, are accustomed to. Your contribution, therefore, appeals to our ability as friars to work in highly professionalized contexts, without failing in our specific contribution to amplify the Franciscan message through the new array of digital communication and commercial promotion, proposing non-profit support for many Franciscan projects.

4) **In my visits to the formation houses of the Order,** which I got to know first as Secretary General F&S of the Order (2003-2009) and now as Minister General, I have been able to see how crucial your support is for the full functioning of the activities and for the economic sustainability of the entire process of the initial formation of the friars. In particular, your support for scholarships in favor of the Order's Entities that have many vocations but fewer financial means, is a sign, for us, of a real possibility of giving everyone, in any part of the Order, the same opportunities for access to the highest academic degrees.

In the context of professional formation, many entities of the Order understand the importance of preparing friars for collaboration with lay professionals in the field of the new frontiers of knowledge and professions. A new generation of friars must find space and capacity in the authoritative management of the processes of planning and development of activities. Just as there must be friars capable of working in the field of fundraising in order to be present and interact where gift and gratitude become a meeting ground where we bring the Franciscan message of evangelical charity. Are we friars really prepared to interact correctly and in line with the non-profit world, which has its own rules and which we often neglect due to lack of preparation and know?

³ In At 2:42 and 4:32 one of the objectives is *koinonia* in order to build the Kingdom of God. In the sharing of resources early Christians found happiness and honor, putting fraternity before personal interest, that is “relational” goods before material ones.

⁴ Cfr. *Discorso del Santo Padre Francesco ai partecipanti al Capitolo Generale dell'Ordine dei Frati Minori*, May 26th, 2015.



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5) **In caring for every single project**, I see the importance of establishing the correct relationships between applicants (the friars), beneficiaries, donors and philanthropic mediators (yourselves). This whole cycle of work well represents a vital and organic model of how in the Order there is the possibility of bringing to completion some of the fundamental values of our life. We express these values in the categories of the various projects (construction of formation houses, social and health works, scholarships, emergencies, academic centers) but above all in the testimony of so many of our friars. Admittedly, they are not always able to stick to the "rules of the game", but they give of themselves entirely, in situations that are often extreme and exhausting.

Through your diligent work, you bring into contact the *gift* of the friars themselves, who dedicate their lives to charitable service, and the *gift* of the benefactors, who recognize the value of these projects, and, within them, they do recognize the true *project*, i.e. the choice of evangelical life, exemplarily accomplished in Francis of Assisi.

From the considerations made so far, the answer to the question of whether your work today represents one of the many forms of fraternity and minority seems to be abundantly positive.

CONCLUSIONS

Currently, the whole Church is questioning the importance of the **synodal path** as an instrument of unity and participation for a shared journey of listening to and discerning the signs of the times.

In my opinion, your service is also an expression of this dimension of our ecclesial identity. Your ability to convey Franciscan values through your projects and to involve organizations and individuals in adhering to the many good causes you propose, becomes an expression of this participation that then creates fraternity, promotes opportunities for integral human development and strengthens structures of justice and peace in society. In this way, you are proceeding on a path marked by good works, which you know how to build day by day through the dense network of philanthropic mediations, but also through the various professional skills that you refine in the field of the ever-new frontiers of communication.

Through a deliberate **synodality of giving**, a more fraternal and humane economy finds space and reality, placed at the service of a social progress that includes all peoples, *leaving no one behind*. I believe that this is where your greatest contribution lies.

The activity of this new network, which is growing in favour of the Order's projects, has potential new extensions in some fundraising centers throughout the various entities of the Order. In this regard, I fully support the initiative of the OFM Partners to convene, in 2025, the first **OFM Fundraising Conference**, which I will definitely attend, thanks God.

I hope that on that occasion we will be able to start new collaborations, to strengthen a common vision and to better assess the impact of our charitable activities on the various areas of the world. Likewise, I hope that in 2026, the eighth centenary of our Founder's



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death, there will be an opportunity for meeting and study in order to tease out the meaning, and indeed, the deepest value of our fundraising activity. St. Francis made collecting alms a form of response to the needs of the Gospel for a life of poverty and concrete help in favour of one's neighbour in line with the custom of the first communities of Christians. It would therefore be useful to further investigate the transition, that occurred historically, socially and theologically, **from the tradition of begging to today's fundraising perspectives.**

I would also like these initiatives to provide useful insights and information to formulate action guidelines for the friars engaged in serving the Order in the activities of project management and fundraising; guidelines that will mature over time through other initiatives that may contribute to shaping this new space of work and service for the new generations of friars.

Finally, may I add my personal thanks to you for what you have done so far and I offer my thanks on behalf of the entire Order to all the donors, who, with their generosity, remind us how much more joy there is in giving than in receiving, because every good belongs to God. As Francis of Assisi invited us to do, our common commitment is to return all we have to the Father, through good deeds and a dignified conduct of life. Our "abiding" in charity (cf. Jn 15:9b) may lead us to say, humbly: *our cloister is the world*, and to meet each person, open to the many whom we encounter along our paths!

Thank you for listening.



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