

Order of Friars Minor



**SENT TO
EVANGELIZE
IN FRATERNITY
AND MINORITY
IN THE PARISH**

Handbook for Parish Ministry

*by the
Secretariat General for Evangelization*

*General Curia OFM
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PRESENTATION

We are in 2009, the year of the eighth centenary of the founding of the Order. It is a providential occasion for us to live with renewed enthusiasm that which we are by our birth, a fraternity-contemplative-in-mission. Francis, indeed, has sent us in the world to announce by life and word the good news. This mandate also implies that we place ourselves at the service of the local church in parish ministry with varied types and services, in places and situations very diverse and with a stable number of friars.

The present document, *Sent to Evangelize in Fraternity and Minority in the Parish*, which I have the pleasure of presenting to you, aims to offer assistance to our universal fraternity, especially to fraternities present and ministering in parishes, and to recognize that this particular form of evangelization is in accord with our charism – especially in regards to fraternity and minority.

The current context of parochial ministry offers serious challenges for evangelization in the parishes. The document refers to the phenomena of globalization, new technology, urbanization, cultural and religious pluralism which have given rise to profound changes in various sectors of the lives of persons, families and communities. In some way they offer new possibilities for the proclamation of the Gospel, for the life of the Church and for a pastoral ministry which is more missionary. In other ways these changes introduce new and complex problems which make more complicated our social and communitarian life and more difficult the renewal of pastoral care in parishes.

It belongs to the fraternities inserted in parishes to read and interpret the signs of the time in their specific situation and to welcome the orientation of the local church regarding evangelization in the context of parochial ministry. At this point permit me to recall what I wrote in the report to the Extraordinary General Chapter of 2006: "Without relinquishing our attention to liturgical acts, to administration of the sacraments and to the practices of devotion, we have to work at recovering the centrality of faith and at motivating the baptized to be active agents of evangelization.

Without forgetting the baptized committed to the construction of the Kingdom, we have to turn a particular eye to the multitude of non-evangelized baptized, to the new realities of our time, to the great mobility of people and to the extraordinary phenomenon of migration. Without forgetting ‘the ninety nine sheep of the flock’ we have to go out in search of the ‘lost sheep’ because she also is an addressee of the Kingdom.” (With Clarity and Audacity, number 112)

Moreover I wish to underscore the fundamental importance of the Franciscan characteristics of evangelization in parishes, so well highlighted in the Sussidio. In truth, the problem is not whether to assume parochial ministry or not, but how to conduct it as Friars Minor. In this sense the document, in reflecting on our manner of being present and conducting pastoral ministry in parishes, takes into account the special aspects of our charism. Furthermore to indicate the modality of this form of evangelization, the text in Chapter III offers as a proposal, based on our legislation, the Franciscan characteristics of our pastoral ministry in parishes. In this way it offers practical assistance on how to integrate parish ministry with our fraternal life and on how to harmonize the demands arising from parochial ministry with what is properly expected of a Friar Minor. Such a contribution is articulated in five dimensions: visible witness to the Word (*martyria*), celebration (*liturgia*), communion (*koinonia*), service (*diaconia*), and a missionary thrust (*missio*). For each dimension the two ways of conducting an effective pastoral action is clearly recalled: testimony (witness) of personal and communal life along with the conduct of varied pastoral activity.

Finally I ask you to pay attention to what is said in the introduction regarding the active and creative reception of the Sussidio. The parochial realities where the friars live and minister are so diverse that a text intended for the whole Order certainly cannot include everything and cannot address all local needs. For this it is necessary to receive the Sussidio or document as an instrument for personal and community reflection to review together the way to develop a ministry of evangelization in parishes that is both faithful to our charism and at the same time responds to the expectation of the ecclesial communities.

I want to give heartfelt thanks to the members of the Commission, named by the General Definitorium, which has helped the General Secretariat for Evangelization in the elaboration of this Sussidio. My sincere thanks go especially to Brother Fernando Uribe, Brother Hans-Georg Löeffler, Brother Ivan ar evi , Brother Lawrence Hayes, and Brother Vito Bra-

cone. My appreciation also goes to Brother Massimo Tedoldi for the first draft of the text in Italian and to Brother Luigi Perugini for the definitive revision of the text and for taking care of all technical details of publication.

May the Father of mercy who sent his Son into the world to be his Gospel and the Holy Spirit to animate the Church in its evangelization, vocation and mission, through the intercession of the most holy Mary, who became Church, and Saint Francis, Herald of the Great King, bless all the friars who work in parishes and make fruitful their service to the local churches.

Rome, January 6, 2009

Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord

Brother Jose Rodriguez Carballo, OFM
General Minister

INTRODUCTION

The Document of the General Chapter of 1997, when treating of evangelization, requested the General Definitorium to carry out a study of our presence and pastoral care in parishes and in particular to reflect on the “style” of our pastoral action, singling out new forms and new methods of evangelization in communion with the local church and in fidelity to our charism.¹

To facilitate what was requested by the General Chapter, the General Definitorium named an international commission which had the task of gathering data from all the entities and on the basis of the extensive material received, elaborating for the use of the General Definitorium a study of the current evangelizing practice.

This is considered a first step. In fact, the Minister General in his report to the General Chapter of 2003 observed: “we anticipate a long journey both to examine our presence in parishes and to indicate new forms of presence and ministry in as far as we are Friars Minor. All of us are and will be involved in this process to develop new plans, manners and ways, and way to offer the People of God and people of today a generous and effective service consistent with our form of life.”²

To make concrete this long and complex process and to encourage a new mentality the International Council for Evangelization meeting in 2004, proposed the elaboration of a *Sussidio*, a helping document, for the animation of pastoral care in parishes.

The General Definitorium approved the recommendation of the Council and appointed a Commission to assist the General Secretariat for Evangelization in the elaboration of the *Sussidio* of animation of parochial ministry. The General Definitorium approved the recommendation of the Council and it nominated a Commission to aid the Secretary General for Evangelization in the elaboration of the *Sussidio*. The Commission met many times to fulfill the task entrusted to it.

After a long and laborious gestation, finally the *Sussidio* is complet-

1 *From Memory to Prophecy: Orientations and Proposals*, Document of the General Chapter 2007, number 14. See also *The Priorities for the Sexennium 1997-2003*, 1998, number 4; *The Lord Give You Peace*, Document of the General Chapter 2003, proposal 19; *OFM Priorities 2003-2008: Followers of Christ for a Fraternal World*, 2004, number 4.

2 Giacomo Bini, *God has Called Us to Go through the World*, Report to the General Chapter 1003, page 19

ed. Taking in account, on the one hand, the recent documents of the Order on evangelization, especially the document *Fill the earth with the Gospel of Christ* (1996) and, on the other hand, the large number of friars who live and minister in parishes in places and situations extremely diverse, the *Sussidio* intends to offer a series of elements as starting points for reflection to enrich their motivation for service and to renew the original fruitful inspiration.

The goal to which the *Sussidio* aspires, practically, is to aid the friars in conducting this traditional ministry of evangelization according to our charism without ever forgetting that the Friars Minors are sent in the world to render “testimony in word and work and that there is no one omnipotent but the Lord. “ (*Letter to the Order*, 9)

The *Sussidio* consists of three chapters. In the first Chapter there is an examination of the parish itself, seen as a portion of the People of God in its strategic dimension of closeness to people and its canonical structure seen as the operative choice of the Church.

In the second the parish is examined as seen within our Order of Friars Minor: a quick glance at the difficult history which has characterized the hyphenated title Friar-Parish; a review of the multifold types of parishes served by the friars today and careful attention to the legislation pertaining to our theme.

In the third chapter the *Sussidio* presents as a proposal the Franciscan characteristics of pastoral care in a parish and thus offers a practical help on how to unite parochial ministry with our Franciscan life and on how to harmonize the demands arising from parochial ministry with what is proper for the life of the Friar Minor. This contribution is articulated in five dimensions: witness to the Word (*martyria*), celebration (*liturgia*), communion (*koinonia*), service (*diakonia*), and a missionary thrust (*missio*).

At the end of each chapter there are inserted suggestions for a personal and communitarian deepening, fundamental for a creative acceptance of the *Sussidio*. It does not treat it as something only to be read and to be studied in order to evaluate validity of its content and nor to apply it to every situation. Instead, it demands a confrontation of the points for reflection and the motivation offered in the *Sussidio* with the concrete reality of the parish entrusted to us and with the pastoral care offered in it.

The General Secretariat for Evangelization hopes that the *Sussidio* can serve as a further stimulus, in harmony with “the grace of our

origins” to raise up the pastoral ministry in parishes as a site and form of evangelization according to the Franciscan manner in fraternity and minority, in communion with the Church and in response to the needs of our time.

Brother Nestor Inacio Schwerz, OFM
Secretary General for Evangelization

1

SENT TO EVANGELIZE
IN FRATERNITY AND MINORITY
IN THE PARISH

THE PARISH PORTION OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD

In this first chapter the reality of the parish itself will be described in terms taken from the fruitful post-conciliar reflection on the nature of the current challenges arising from the complex social-cultural and ecclesial context of our times. Finally some options for the renewal of pastoral care in parishes will be indicated.

1. The parish in the Church

“A parish is definite community of the Catholic faithful established on a stable basis within a particular church; the pastoral care of the parish is entrusted to a pastor as its own shepherd under the authority of the diocesan bishop.”³ According to the description in the Code of Canon Law, the parish is a portion of the diocese, which in turn is a part of the People of God, entrusted to the pastoral care of the bishop who is assisted by his presbyterate. Together with its pastor, united in the Holy Spirit through the Gospel and the Eucharist it constitutes a particular Church in which is present and operates the Church of Christ – one, holy, Catholic and apostolic.⁴

The recent magisterium of the Church, which springs from the vision of the Second Vatican Council⁵ highlights some defining aspects of the parochial reality itself and the dynamic complexity of pastoral care to be adapted according to times and places in order to respond faithfully to the Gospel and to people.

The insights developed in this sense focus on the following perspectives:

- *The relationship between the parish and the particular church.* The parish constitutes the link to the particular church and in fact in the fundamental nucleus of the ordinary life of the Diocese.⁶
- *The parish as a community of the faithful.* According to the Apostolic Exhortation of 1988, *Christifideles Laici*, the parish is not principally a structure or territory, but rather it is the “family of God.” As a fraternity animated by a spirit of unity ... it is founded on a theological reality in as far as it is a Eucharistic community ... a community of faith and an organic community ... in which the pastor, who represents the diocesan bishop, is the hierarchical link with the entire particular church. The parish, therefore, is the localization of the Church. It is the very Church which

3 *Code of Canon Law*, canon 515, paragraph 1

4 *Christus Dominus*, Decree of the Second Vatican Council on the Pastoral Office of Bishop, 1964, number 11

5 *Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution of the Second Vatican Council on the Church, 1965 especially chapters 1,2,5,7,8

6 John Paul II, *Pastores Gregis*, post synodal exhortation 2003, 45

lives in midst of the houses of its sons and daughters.⁷

- *The parish as a pastoral option.* Just because the parish is the localization of particular church, the place where the faithful can have a concrete experience of the Church, it is the historical option of the Church, the pastoral option, to give in many various ways form to the Gospel in the very heart of human existence.⁸
- *The parish as a presence near to the people.* According to the document of the Third Assembly of the Bishops of Latin America, the parish in a certain way, makes real the total function of the Church in as far as it accompanies persons and families throughout their lives in the formation and growth of faith. It is the center for coordination and animation for community, groups and movements. The celebration of the Eucharist and the other sacraments makes the globality of the Church felt in a unique way. The parish comes to be for the Christian the place of encounter and fraternal sharing of persons and goods rising above the limitations of the small communities. In the parish, in truth, a series of services beyond the capabilities of the small communities is undertaken especially in the area of mission and in the promotion of human dignity thereby reaching out to the more or less stable immigrants, the marginalized, the distant, the non believers, and in general to most needy.⁹

2. Some challenges

The parish, in as far as it is a cell of the particular church, has the task of incarnating the gospel message and putting at the disposition of all the superabundant riches of salvation which Christ entrusted to the Church. Therefore the parish must always be conscious of a twofold fidelity: to the Gospel of Christ, to unveil its inexhaustible richness; and to the Church, to make known to the one destined to receive the message that the Church does not travel an easy road throughout history. To be less than faithful regarding this twofold reality would mean that the Church presents itself with empty hands to people of today or that she does not know to whom to give the Good News.

7 John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, post synodal exhortation 1988, 26

8 John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America*, post synodal exhortation, 1999, 41

9 *Puebla Document* 64

It is appropriate to remark that there is an absolute necessity for the parish to *know the audience to which its efforts are directed*, and it offers a concise cross-section of the current social cultural and religious context. In fact it is only by knowing contemporary humanity, with all its great potential and dynamic complexities, so that the parish can dialogue effectively with it and offer to it the good things of which it intends to be the diligent administrator.

1. The social-cultural context

The current social cultural religious context is especially characterized by these phenomena:

- *Globalization and new technology*: On the one hand the world has become a global village with great facility in communication, production, distribution of products and information. On the other hand, the world assumes the appearance of a “global market” with marginalization and social exclusion of a multitude of people, thus giving rise to an intense migratory wave. Promoted by the constant avalanche of messages which such a phenomenon circulates, globalization tends to have at once a devastating impact on outlook, ethics, rapport with creation, relationships with persons and finally on family life. In contrast, however, globalization prepares the way for the tendency to close in on one’s own “world” and on one’s own “village.” But such a reaction ends up in splintering and forming ghettos, and immoderate forms of individualism.¹⁰

Globalization presents a challenge to the parish. In fact, if the parish is the localization of the Church, it is also true that it is called to become a place of welcome and hospitality and to have a universal face.¹¹ - For us Franciscans the cloister is the whole world to the extent that we embrace the problems and needs of the human family.

- *Urbanization*. The concentration of people, most all in the large peripheries of the cities, leads to a depersonalization and the lack of a point of reference. The shortage of space and contact with nature harms personal and community equilibrium. There is the pollution of the atmosphere, of which auditory and vi-

10 John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, post synodal exhortation, 1999, 41

11 John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Europa*, post synodal exhortation, 2003, 100

sual are often on the extreme side of a more profound pollution which taint the interior climate and interpersonal relations. It is also an occasion for us to evaluate our presence, so as to stand with the people and especially to be present among the homes of the people as an evangelical fraternity and thus to be a place of humanization and socialization for every person.¹²

- *Cultural and religious pluralism.* Today people find themselves living in a multi-cultural and multi-religious society. Such a reality can offer the occasion to cultivate openness to others and thus favor mutual enrichment, but it can give rise to fear of the “different” and the erection of walls between persons and different cultures and religions. In face of this phenomenon, pluralism puts us in an attitude of indifference and a closed mentality resulting in difficulty in witnessing and transmitting the values of the Christiana faith or even in comprehending its true identity.¹³

2. *The ecclesial context*

Within the Church one can notice a rich ferment of change, but also one of opposition and regression. Likewise the reception of the post-conciliar ecclesiology, with the subsequent in-depth analysis and subsequent developments, is not to be discounted. In particular we can underline some emerging trends.

- *The tension between diverse ecclesiologies:* Alongside a Church which, spurred on by *Gaudium et Spes* to open wide its doors to the world, there exists also a Church turned in on itself without fervor and strength to face new situations.
- *The growth of ecclesial movements and new communities:* The growth of the importance of the role of the laity is perceptible, even while there is still in general a strong clericalism. Not infrequently, in fact, the laity are “for employment” by the clergy and they make it difficult for them to play their role in evangelization.
- *The search for experiences of spirituality:* In the effort to satisfy the thirst for spirituality one can encounter forms of religiosity without a personal God, or with an aversion for today’s world,

12 *Ecclesia in Europa*, 15

13 *Ecclesia in Asia* 29

society, culture, politics, and which considers this reality as “tainted.”

- *The absence from communitarian and sacramental practice:* It seems that today the parable of the lost sheep is to be read in reverse: not one, but ninety nine sheep are abandoning the fold.
- *The phenomenon of those who return:* In some situations where the number of those who were alienated and later have returned to the community of faith has increased. They call for a great pastoral patience, a generous welcome and a personalized accompaniment.
- *The ordinary pastoral care of a parish,* conducted according to habitual plans and with a grand commitment of means and energy, is directed to a small number of persons (the sheep remaining in the fold) with the result that for the alienated (the other ninety nine) there does not remain more time and effort.
- *The demand on the part of many of the faithful* who seek to have a Church more ministerial, with a greater participation of the laity, with the courage to dialogue, and with solidarity with the poor.
- *The necessity for a genuine social pastoral care:* This is rather weak or absent in the ordinary pastoral praxis. Its absence or weak attempts, however, does not favor the proper balance between the ministry of the Word, of Liturgy and of charity. Thus the dimension of charity suffers from the obvious lack of attention, and where it does exist, it easily has the character of merely granting assistance. Often it lacks a clear commitment for the poor, for human promotion, for the defense of human rights, and for an effective social transformation.

3. Options for the renewal of the parish

The current context, both social-cultural and religious-ecclesial, raises some deep questions for the parish. The fact that the parish is the Church near to the people imposes the obligation not to close itself to the needs of contemporary humanity, not to neglect the requests that often become a cry from so many brothers and sisters who are thirsting for meaning they hope to find in their proper area. For this the parish is constantly spurned on to a pastoral dialogue which present these options:

- *To rise above a pastoral care merely preserves of what already exists* in order to welcome with a new broad and courageous spirit the challenges of our time

- *To opt for mission as the true model of evangelization:* That implies a shuffling of the usual and customary pastoral care, a review and renewal of all models of pastoral care
- *To take a positive approach* to those particular situations which are present on the world level: religious pluralism, immigration, an *ad gentes* approach within the local situation.
- *To develop a communal model of pastoral care* with the involvement of all the components present within the parish: the religious community, associations, movements and groups. Only in that way will parish ministry be pastoral care of solidarity where one and all can feel at home and develop their own service for the benefit of all. In that case the parish can be “the Church which finds itself living among the homes of people, living and working, deeply inserted in human society and in intimate solidarity with its aspirations and difficulties.”¹⁴
- *To favor personal contact* which constitutes the first path of evangelization in which the good shepherd always gives primary importance to direct encounter with people, frank and constructive dialogue, ready welcome to real situations which present themselves in his journey.
- *To perform gestures of new life* such as a change of lifestyle, the choice of poor means for all that concerns the mission of the Church, the commitment for effective justice on the local and international level, closeness to those who suffer on account of the many forms of marginalization, solidarity with the weak and victims along with the defense of their rights, the witness of an evangelical option in conflicts, etc.
- *To appreciate the following icons* of the parish: *a Church rooted in a place* for which nothing is extraneous and everything receives attention; *a Church close to the people* with a loving welcome to all, and in particular for those of no account or who feel marginalized; *a Church simple and humble*, a door of access to the Gospel for every person; *a Church of the people*, instrument of association; *a Eucharistic Church* with its mystery of communion and mission.

14 *Document of Santo Domingo*, IV Assembly of the Bishops of Latin America, 1993, 59. See also *Document of Puebla*, 649-650; *Ecclesia in America* 41; John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, post synodal exhortation, 1995, 88ff

Suggestions for reflection on the first chapter

- 1) Read, analyze and interpret the social-cultural-religious-ecclesial context in which the parish finds itself*
- 2) Recognize the signs of renewal already present in parochial life*
- 3) Identify the most important and urgent challenges for the evangelizing mission of the parish community*

2

SENT TO EVANGELIZE
IN FRATERNITY AND MINORITY
IN THE PARISH

THE FRIARS MINOR AND THE PARISH

After a historical introduction, which reveals an often difficult relationship between the parish and the Friars Minor, this chapter presents an interesting typology of the parochial ministry conducted by our fraternity in various parts of the world. Finally it synthesizes the many things the legislation of the Order says to us on this matter.

1. In the light of history

Even though the Franciscan apostolate at the beginning was popular and itinerant, it entered almost at once into a relationship with the parish. In fact, according to the indications of Saint Francis, the friars had to go two by two into various regions of Italy and Europe to preach penance and peace, but first they always had to seek permission to preach from the bishop or the local pastor.

It was first Franciscan missionaries in Bosnia, at the beginning of XIV century, who obtained from the Pope the faculty to organize parishes and to remain as pastors, but only in missionary territories where there was no diocesan clergy. This began a tradition which has continued until our day. Meanwhile there developed a great debate among the jurists of the time about the whether or not to assign of parishes to religious. The debate continued until the XVI century when the question was reserved to the decision of the Holy See.

With the Tridentine Reform (XVI century) a universal “model” of a parish was formulated to include the following structures: a territory, an irremovable pastor, and a benefice. Such a model continued until the Second Vatican Council.

In the XVIII century the same religious mistrusted the parochial ambient and considered it as unsuitable for the promotion of religious virtue. Up to the 1700’s there was only one pastor inscribed in the book of saints, Ives of Brittany, who was included in the Franciscan Martyrology more as a tertiary than as a pastor.

Pope Benedict XIV, towards the middle of the 1700’s decreed that the pastoral ministry in parishes was forbidden to religious except in the case of special necessity.

In the new countries of Latin America the friars were orientated to a more open and itinerant mission among the native populations, as they left the organization of parishes to others.

In Europe, when the very juridical enlightenment was imposed, the authorities accepted only those ecclesiastical ministers who would have a base of economic subsistence. And such was possible only thanks to the parishes. The religious, including the Franciscans, thus saw themselves often coerced to assume the parochial ministry - likewise for the mere question of survival.

In Hungary, as in some Slavic countries, the administration of parishes came to be imposed on the friars and their conventual churches had to be transformed into parish churches under the penalty of closure. Instead in Austria the assignment to schools came to be preferred by and for the Franciscans, perhaps because they did not require an intense commitment to the administration of property. In Italy, following the laws of suppression in the middle of the XIX century, the friars were able to continue only if they accepted the administration of parishes. In Mexico, after religious life was declared illegal in 1859 and later suppressed in 1867, some friars could continue to live under the cover of the “parochial rectory” or “college.”

After the 1917 Code of Canon Law, which confers on the parochial institution a more religious, pastoral and almost missionary dimension, reference to parishes began to be inserted into the legislation of the Order, among the decrees of general chapters, and in some articles of the general constitutions and statutes. In 1921 after the favorable dispositions regarding parishes, there followed once again the old hesitations about the dangers which parishes can constitute for the common life and obedience. It was also said precisely that the acceptance of parishes brought with it a request for a dispensation from precepts of the Rule, which could be justified by the motive of the higher good, namely “the good of souls.” In 1927, 623 parishes were counted as being under the care of the Order, even if it was clear that the temporary character of the service was requested because of the lack of diocesan clergy. In 1957 though assuming other ministries as alternatives to the pastoral care of parishes like popular mansions, preaching and mission *ad gentes*, the number of parishes assumed during the last sexennium was estimated at 144.

After World War II, because of the great migration from Europe to the United States of America, the Franciscans, to be able to accompany their fellow nationals, established “personal parishes,” a practice which was repeated in many countries where immigration was considerable.

In the new missions in Africa almost all bishops permitted the friars to open fraternities provided they would assume the care of some parishes.

The increase of parochial commitments by the Franciscans expressed the willingness to respond to the needs of the Church, as had already been stated by Saint Francis: “we have been sent as a help

to the clergy for the salvation of souls, in a way to supplement their lack” (2*Celano* 146). Pope Paul VI in a dialogue with the General Minister and Definitorium of the Friar Minor Capuchins said: “I know the characteristic form of Franciscan life. You do not want to reduce it to the narrow limits of parochial ministry. You want to be free to develop other forms of apostolate. However, you still must make some exceptions.”¹⁵

In the General Constitutions OFM of 1970, after the treatment of Franciscan identity requested by the Council, there is a request to undertake parish ministry where it is possible to live the spirit of minority and fraternity. In the General Constitutions of 1987, repeated in 2004, parishes are one of the possible forms of the apostolate (cf. *GGCC* 84, 111.115; *GGSS* 54) always safeguarding the life and witness of fraternity and minority and the spirit of collaboration with the bishops. According to the most recent statistics elaborated in 2003, 27% of the Friars Minor dedicate themselves to parishes as their principle activity.

2. In the light of specific situations

The missionary thrust towards new frontiers and the willingness to help the local Church have given rise, and it continues to grow, to a varied range of Franciscan pastoral and parochial services with very different appearances among them. From this there is the attempt to present this rich overview of parishes animated by our fraternity, offering a brief characterization of the type of parish with their opportunities and values and also with their limits and dangers.

From the following list it is possible to intuit how often the missionary spirit knew how to unite and integrate itself with the most disparate situations verified in history and in the different contexts of the whole world.

- *Parishes situated in the context of mission ad gentes*: In so many missions the parish is a way, sometimes the only way, to make the Church present and to bring about the implantation of the Church. Often the bishops with great insistence ask the missionaries to undertake such a form of presence. The Franciscan

15 *Audience with the Minister General and Definitorium of the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin, December 17, 1963* in *Analecta Ordinis Fratrum Minorum Cappuchinorum* 79 (1993) 384-385

fraternity aims in a special way at missionary evangelization and the inculturation of the Gospel, while attention to the implantation of the Order and the spread of the charism receives less emphasis.

- *Parishes in the context where Christianity is a minority:* Our Order is a presence in countries with a Muslim majority or with a majority of another religion or church. The parish becomes the only way to have a Catholic presence recognized also on the part of the civil government. In this context the pastoral care in a parish presents an indispensable service to “a little flock, cares for human promotion and offers a silent testimony to the Gospel and the Faith. Usually this deals with a pastoral ministry of “conservation,” not of announcing and missionary creativity. In some instances it is also a presence of collaboration and inter-religious and ecumenical dialogue.
- *Parishes in well organized dioceses* with many programs and many precise directives on all parochial activity: Often in such particular churches there is not space for creative diversity within the community, for visibility of our charism (friar priests and lay friars) and for service (organizing fraternities of the Secular Franciscan Order and GIFRA, commitments for justice, peace and the integrity of creation, dialogue in a Franciscan key, typically Franciscan devotions, etc).
- *Parishes of great extension:* In many cases we are present in particular churches where our charism is appreciated and respected by the bishops and clergy and where we are entrusted with parishes of great extension with a large number of inhabitants and faithful. Often to visit the communities one must travel long distances in dangerous conditions. In such cases, it is difficult to offer true evangelization but rather only sacramental pastoral care. The enormous distances and the forced absences of some friars weigh heavily on the fraternity which makes difficult living the fundamental elements of our charism such as the common life, prayer in community and local chapters.
- *Parishes in the context of big cities:* There are presences in urban parishes in the center and in the periphery of large cities where one lives immersed in religious pluralism which presents the fraternity with multiple opportunities and challenges. In these cases an evangelizing presence quite creative and of high

quality is necessary in order to reach the faithful where they find themselves and to be capable of dialogue and to be committed to human promotion.

- *Parishes with solid structures and with a glorious history of pastoral activity*, but, in need of a renewed evangelization: Many of our parishes find themselves inside a solid particular church with stable structures, with a long tradition of presence and pastoral care but in a situation of profound cultural and religious change. The parishes themselves have a long history, often with a large beautiful church, which bears the glorious signs of so many centuries of faith and art. Here the danger is to maintain more or less the same style of pastoral activity, while the surrounding reality changes and the pastoral response can remain the same as in the past.
- *Parish and Sanctuary*: A consistent number of our parishes are organized around a sanctuary, which generally attracts a multitude of faithful because of the fame of the saint venerated there, because of the characteristics of the place and for the spirituality which breathes there. This is not to say that automatically there is a membership of an ecclesial community. In such a case the danger is to adjust to a “use and discard” religiosity which does not penetrate the deep fabric of the faithful.

3. In the light of the legislation of the Order

The word “parish” appears only once in the current General Constitutions. Nevertheless this unique reference is of great importance, since it occurs within what the Code of Canon Law considers the fundamental law. The mention is found in the fifth chapter which treats of one of the fundamental aspects of the Franciscan vocation, that of evangelization. The title of this chapter: “God has sent you into the entire world for this reason” is taken from “The Letter to the Whole Order,” thereby underlining that mission, in its original meaning, occupies a place of first importance in the understanding of the Gospel by Saint Francis.

It is significant that the article which refers to parishes forms part of the general principles on which is based the evangelizing vocation of the Friars Minor. In effect, after having declared that all the friars

are sent to proclaim the Gospel (GGCC 83, §1) and that their evangelizing is realized by word and example (GGCC 83, §2), the article in the third paragraph presents evangelization as a responsibility of all and follows that by listing the manifold contexts in which it can develop. Among these is the parochial ministry. Thus the text expresses “Wherever they are and whatever they do, the friars are to dedicate themselves to the task of evangelization in fraternal fellowship through their contemplative and penitential life and the various tasks they perform for the fraternity; in human society through their intellectual and material activities, through the exercise of a pastoral office in parishes and other ecclesiastical institutions; and finally by announcing the coming of God’s Kingdom through their witness of a simple Franciscan presence.” (GGCC 84)

In the first place the universal (*wherever*) and the pluralistic (*whatever*) context in which the friars carry out their commitment to evangelization is to be noted. In the second place, the pastoral ministry in parishes is conceived fundamentally as an evangelizing work and not as an administrative task, nor as another type of endeavor but as a ministry. In the third place it is treated as a ministry among the many others which the friars minor can exercise. Such a principle is reaffirmed in article 116: “Our entire fraternity is missionary and shares in the mission of the Church, following the example of Saint Francis and the desire he expressed in the Rule. Each friar, therefore, conscious of his own responsibility, is to play his part in missionary work.” (GGCC 116)

In the light of the preceding characteristics, it is logical these characteristics can apply to parochial ministry, on the one hand in the light of the general principles guiding the evangelizing mission, and on the other hand in the light of the criteria which the General Constitutions give regarding the manner of Franciscan evangelization and the organization of ministries.

The application of the general principles for evangelization to parish ministry means that this ministry is considered within the following of Christ in penance and fraternity. This is intended as an attitude towards communion with the family to which one belongs (Order, province, house) and with all that is human, beginning with the testimony of life. Also included in the expression of fraternity is the union and collaboration with all the members of the Franciscan Family, and insertion among the poor and in the secularized environment are given a privileged position. (cf. GGCC 85 – 88)

Among the criteria regarding the characteristics proper to Franciscan evangelization it is worth recalling that

- *The dimension of the witness of our form of life* manifests itself in a humble, staunch and joyous profession of the Catholic faith, and as minors always being attentive to respond to the problems of being human today so that the human person regains its dignity. (cf. GGCC 90 – 96 – 97)
- *The announcement of the Word of God* is a priority for this. Beyond our identity, an accurate preparation is sought. So that preaching be useful and edifying for the people it is necessary that the preacher nurtures himself from the true sources of revelation, and roots himself in profound faith fortified in prayer; and that his life is coherent with what he says and that he knows how to use adequate and measured words. (cf. GGCC 200 – 104)
- One of the tasks prioritized in parochial ministry is that of promoting the *sanctification of the faithful* by means of an adequate administration of the sacraments among which that of reconciliation merits special care. (cf. GGCC 108)
- For evangelization and human development *the use of the means of social communications* is appropriate. Always, on the one hand, they are not to be transformed into an end in themselves but they are to retain their character as a means; and, on the other hand, they are to be used in a spirit of minority. (cf GGCC 109)

In the General Constitutions there is a great preoccupation to preserve the fundamental values of Franciscan life, especially fraternity and minority. So when there is reference to the service of evangelization, the Constitutions admonish us that “our Order can take on all the activities that promote the mandate of evangelization to be completed by the people of God and that are not incompatible with our state of fraternity and minority.” And again: “The friars who work in the particular churches are to be ready to help the bishops and their collaborators to carry out their pastoral plans, particularly those which are in keeping with our Franciscan charism.” GGCC 111, 115 §1)

It is evident that in the texts of the general legislation referring to the ministry of evangelization and to pastoral activity the parishes are included also. On their part, the General Statutes of the Order are much more explicit in this regard, since they demand that “in accepting parishes of which the Minister General must be informed, the

Minister Provincial is to have preference for those in which witness to minority and fraternity can better shine forth.” (GGCC 54, §1)

From this brief glance at the legislation of the Order regarding pastoral ministry in parishes, it is evident that this ministry is conceived as a form of evangelization in which the specific elements of our charism must shine.

In conclusion, in the General Constitutions of 1987 and 2004 and in the General Statutes of 2004, for the first time, parish ministry receives a clear legitimization since it is presented as one of the possible forms of the Franciscan apostolate.

Regarding the animation of pastoral ministry in parishes: the responsibility is that of the provincial secretary for evangelization in dependence on the provincial minister: “It is the duty of the provincial secretary for evangelization to coordinate, in dependence on the provincial minister, all evangelization in the province. It pertains to the coordinator of evangelization to coordinate, in accordance with the particular and special statutes, all activity that belongs to the different forms of evangelization.” (cf. 49, §1 and §3) For this reason there is a need to elaborate peculiar statutes to specify the duty, competence and manner of organizing the animation in a manner that the pastoral care in parishes comes to be seen within the competence of the secretariat.

Suggestions for reflection on the second chapter

- 1) *Make a historical remembrance of the parish and recognize the moments of vitality and crisis*

- 2) *Search for the motives for which the friars have accepted responsibility for the parish and recognize their specific contribution in the course of the history.*

3

SENT TO EVANGELIZE
IN FRATERNITY AND MINORITY
IN THE PARISH

THE FRANCISCAN CHARACTERISTICS OF PASTORAL CARE IN PARISHES

Based on the Franciscan Sources and the documents of the Church and Order the following points of reflection are offered to harmonize parochial service with our Franciscan life and to offer an aid to live that which is characteristic of the Friar Minor in this ministry.

For that purpose we will consider five complimentary dimensions: listening and witnessing to the Word (martyria), celebration (liturgia), communion (koinonia), service (diakonia) missionary orientation (missio).

1. Witness and Servants of the Word (martyria)

“Incline the ear of your heart and obey the voice of the Son of God, keep with all your heart his precepts and fulfill perfectly his counsel” (Letter to the Order, 6)

The beginning of the *Letter to the Whole Order* by Saint Francis, while it highlights the life giving relationship he had with the Word of God, it also offers us some invaluable directions to develop the specific nature of service in the parish. With logical development he indicates that the Word first of all is heard with reverence and with openness to prompt obedience, then is kept in one’s heart and finally takes flesh in work. This consequential movement, from external to internal and then from the depth of the heart to the visible concreteness of work, marks out a coherence way. As if to say: the ear which hears the Word must be joined by the heart that meditates on it, and the hands to put it into practice.

1. THE FRATERNITY AND THE WORD

“Incline your ear – obey the voice”

There are many words which are pronounced and heard in the ambient of a parish. Often overwhelmed by them, especially in noisy and frenzied contexts, there is the risk of losing the ability to select them and to give them their authentic meaning.

Saint Francis suggests that we incline our ear to hear the words which are spirit and life. The expression “incline your ear” calls for a desire to hear, consequently, to an asceticism of listening and directing the ear towards the Lord who is speaking, even though this is rarely welcomed in our time. Likewise the parish needs that asceticism of listening so as to emphasize the primacy of the Word. The danger, similar to all the others, can be avoided by this inclining of the ear that says at the same time there is the desire to listen to the Word of God and the commitment and ensure that this listening is made possible. It is necessary to give priority to this listening, if we wish to incline our ear, with the attention, to hear the voice of the brothers.

In a parish directed by the brothers, they themselves as a fraternity must be the first to incline their ear to hear the Word of God by taking care to reserve time and place dedicated to this priority. In the Eucha-

ristic celebration, in the Liturgy of the Hours, in the Prayerful Reading of the Word, and in other celebrative and personal forms the brothers take on the language of God, assume his way of thinking little by little and convert day by day their own carnal person, such that renders us miserable and contrary to good, but ready and willing to do evil (*RnB* 22,6) so that there comes to be born daily a spiritual man and indeed a spiritual fraternity. Each friar is invited to make is own the words of the Prophet Isaiah “make my ear attentive every morning so that I listen as the initiated” (*Is* 50, 4), The Word itself, then, acting through its power to unite, tends to make the friars one, infusing in them the same criteria for interpretation and promoting a common manner of expression, such as the sons have learned together from the Father.

In this manner the religious fraternity is already in its very presence an exegesis of the Word of God.¹⁶ It is an exegesis which speaks eloquently to those who live in the parish, to induce each one to incline the ear of his own heart to the Word which saves. It favors the formation of groups of persons who desire to listen to the Word of the Father together, as brothers.

A fraternity of those called who consider themselves called together by the same Word of life cannot but become a “place of prophecy” feeling called to the world as an evangelizing fraternity, which lives and announces the Gospel, in the following of Jesus Christ, through a life of poverty, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, in brotherhood with all creatures.¹⁷

Keep with all your heart

The recall of Saint Francis leads us back to the gospel parable of the seed: that which remained on the road or among the rocks was not able to take root, similarly that which was suffocated by the thorns and did not have sufficient space to be able to live. The life in the seed was determined by profound welcome and by the will to guard it with the conviction that among all the words the Word of the Lord has the first place.

The call of Saint Francis today has taken on a very special significance. “To keep with all our heart” represents for us today a grand challenge from the moment we find ourselves living in a hurry and in

16 Benedict XVI, *Discourse on the Occasion of the XIII Day of the Consecrated Life*, February 2, 2008

17 Hermann Schalück, OFM, *Fill the earth with the Gospel of Christ*, letter for Pentecost 1996, 72

a riot of contradictory messages offered with the most sophisticated seductions. The permanent distraction renders difficult the keeping of the Word and the superficiality of the life in which we are immersed tends to rob it and to make one slip away from the message and its prophetic force.

The most salutary care in order not to lose the accepted Word accepted, is to “*stand with it.*” This *to stand* in the course of our Christian tradition has taken various names and forms: prayerful reading, meditation, study, rumination, prayer, contemplation, *lectio divina*, etc. It is along these lines that Minister General encourages the friars to “frequent the Word, to bring themselves close to it, to enter inside and to court it, to create silence for it and to listen to it, to become familiar with it, to guard in the treasury of memory of this Word which in some moment caused our heart to burn, to allow ourselves to be surprised by it, and which allows us, like Francis, to move according to the rhythm of God. “*Our life will find its youth.*”¹⁸

The inspiration *to stand* finds a truly exemplary model in Francis. “Truly he was very much engaged with Jesus. He always carried Jesus in his heart, Jesus on his lips, Jesus in his ears, Jesus in his eyes, Jesus in his hands, Jesus in all his members.” (*I Cel 115*) In these expressions it is easy to observe how the welcomed Word assimilated by the listener to himself, little by little rendering him similar to the content of the Word, and finally similar to the one who is the Word himself, Christ. Thus the stigmata also is a sign of a Word welcomed and guarded which has borne fruit rendering the one loving similar to the one loved (cf *LegM 13,5*) transforming Francis into *Alter Christus*.

In the parish “to stand with the Word” means setting aside the opportune time for it and letting oneself be evangelized by it. The passage from being a disciple to being an apostle takes place in this *standing*. It is here that there occurs the vital encounter which lets one take from the biblical text the living word which questions, orientates, and nourishes existence.¹⁹ The Master reveals himself and educates the mind and heart. “It is here that the vision of faith matures learning to look at reality and events with the very outlook of God to the extent that one has the thoughts of Christ.”²⁰

18 José Rodríguez Carballo, OFM, *Mendicants of Meaning, guided by the Word*, Letter for Pentecost 2008, 20

19 John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, apostolic letter 2002, 39

20 CIVCSA, *Starting afresh from Christ...*, instruction 2001, 24

On this point Pope John Paul II, speaking to the consecrated, said: “It is necessary that you not grow tired in pausing to meditate on Sacred Scripture, and, especially the Holy Gospels, because the passages of the Word Incarnate imprint themselves on you.”²¹

To render fruitful this pause and to imprint on the face of the parish the visible signs of God, it is indispensable to attend to

- the prayerful reading of the Bible
- time for personal meditation
- study and deepening knowledge of Sacred Scripture
- updating in theology
- community reading and interpretation of the signs of the time
- recognition and continual attention to culture or to the local cultures in view of the inculturation of the Gospel
- ongoing formation for dialogue on all levels

One particular form of *standing* with the Word in order to observe it subsequently with all one’s heart is study. The Franciscan tradition teaches us that the edifice of the Order must be built on two pillars, namely on holiness of life and knowledge (cf. *Eccleston* 90). For this reason the Franciscan masters are proposed as wonderful examples of this fruitful dialogue between science and holiness.²² Being an indispensable support in announcing the Gospel, studies for us are “a fundamental demand of evangelization²³ and this is why that “today it is more necessary than ever to promote intellectual formation in our Order²⁴ always keeping in mind that studies “are for the service of the quality of our life.²⁵ For this reason also biblical groups, such as meetings on the Word of God, should hold a significant pace in our parishes.

Fulfill perfectly

After listening and readiness to observe the Word, Francis joins a decisive and indispensable element: put into practice that which has been received. “Meditation, as a matter of fact, aims at living and incarnating the Word.²⁶ Without this operative element, without the incarnation of the Word, there is no true gospel understanding. Know-

21 John Paul II, *Homily on the Occasion of the V Day of the Consecrated Life*, February 2, 2001

22 *Ratio Studiorum OFM*, 2001, presentation

23 John Paul II, *Message to the General Chapter of San Diego*, 1991,6

24 *The Order and Evangelization Today*, Document of the General Chapter, 1991, 10

25 *Ratio Studiorum*, 2001, l.c.

26 *Mendicants of Meaning...*, 27

ing detached from life will lead to death. “ those religious -Saint Francis admonishes - who do not wish to follow the spirit of Sacred Scripture” (cf *Adm* 7: cf. *Adm* 5).

For Francis and the Franciscan school, indeed, the only true way to know and incarnate the Word is implementing what it says. It treats of experiential knowledge, in which we involve ourselves with the Word in an interior climate where there is constantly present the question “Lord, what do you wish that I do” and the answer is “Willingly I will do so, Lord” (*3Comp* 6,13). The Holy Father, on the day he opened the Synod on the Word of God, said of the Church: “If to announce the Gospel constitutes its reason for existence and mission, it is indispensable that the Church know and live that which it announces, so that its preaching be credible, not withstanding the weakness and poverty of the men proposing it.”²⁷

Our Franciscan tradition to promote in the parish is, therefore, a basic appreciation of experience and concreteness of the Word which continually makes itself incarnate in such disparate daily situations.

2. THE FRATERNITY AT THE SERVICE OF THE WORD

An evangelizing fraternity offering service in a parish finds in the Word “food for life, for prayer and for the daily journey, the principle for unifying the community in a oneness of thought, the inspiration for continual renewal and apostolic creativity.”²⁸ Thus the friars become free men, evangelical, prophetic and are able to be authentic “servants of the Word in the commitment to evangelization.”²⁹

Nourished by the Word, the friars feel a burning zeal to nourish with the same Word the brothers and sisters they meet, to communicate in life and word what they have heard, seen, contemplated and touched (cf. *1 John* 1, 1), The parish can truly become a grand table on which is arranged the banquet of the Word of God to dispense with generosity, competence, and with that authority derived from lived experience. Thus it can become a place for the experience of God in which it is possible to contemplate in all its profundity the mystery hidden in being human, in events, in history, in nature and in that which tends towards the living God.³⁰

27 Benedict XVI, *Homily for the Opening of the XIII Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*, February 5, 2008

28 *Starting afresh from Christ...*, 24

29 *Novo Millenio Ineunte*, 24

30 *Starting afresh from Christ...*, 24

For us there is an internal demand on the part of the Word of God: after having called and gathered the friars into a fraternity, after having evangelized and assimilated them to itself, now it is the Word itself which sends. It is the dynamism of the Word so evident in the prophets and apostles. It is the same dynamism we find in the life of the saints. So it also became for Francis who, inebriated by the Word, became its servant to the point of affirming “Since I am servant of all, I am bound to serve all and to administer the fragrant words of my Savior” (cf *2Lf2*).

As followers of Francis, the friars are convinced that the first service rendered to the Word is that of praise to the Lord (cf. *LOrd* 8).

Perhaps in our parishes this attitude of praise must be reclaimed, as an element typical of the Franciscan rapport with the Word of God. The praise, the mystery, the amazement, the wonder, the joyfulness speak of an understanding of the heart not to be separated from intellectual understanding. The very invitation Saint Francis directed to the friars spread from the conviction that we are to speak of God and to praise him “since for this reason I have sent you into the whole world so that you may render testimony to his voice in word and deed and make known to all that there is no one omnipotent except him” (cf. *LOrd* 9).

The Franciscan characteristic of the parish seems to give a priority to evangelization by sacramental and devotional practice paying attention that these also become a place for evangelization. The parish is the privileged place where the Word is received and welcomed and from which the Word sets out towards persons. Particular attention must be taken to intensify the offering of multiple forms of announcing of the Word:

- biblical formation
- missions to the people
- moments and space of an experiential character to favor an encounter with the Lord
- retreats and spiritual exercises
- personalized listening and accompaniment
- utilization of various means of communication
- catechesis adapted for groups of initiation to the Christian life and for maturation in the faith
- different initiatives for dialogue and encounters

A parochial fraternity motivated by the Word will pay attention to those who are far from the ecclesial community, to the young, to the

socially excluded, to those who have abandoned religious practice and to those who feel alienated. Together with lay collaborators, having apostolic creativity and pastoral imagination - typical fruit of communion - the fraternity will be able to undertake new forms of encounters employing missionary visits, promoting occasions for welcome and contact. It will be the same Word of God suggesting the opportune steps and supporting them with its force.

The bond between the Word of God and contemporary man reminds us of the necessity to maintain a twofold fidelity: to the Gospel message and to people of today. For this complex challenge the friars will have to support themselves in a special way through collaboration with the laity. With this as motivation in the Franciscan parish much will be invested in the formation of the Christian faithful so that they will be in a position to give a reason for hope and faith, and for dialogue with the current culture, with religions and with the pluralism of today's society.

An important step in announcing the Word is preaching. And the homily represents a significant aspect of this. The parochial fraternity knows well that for the major part of the faithful the homily is the principal moment of encounter with the Word of God. And for this reason it is going to be held in great importance. The Franciscan tradition on the point of preaching has a rich patrimony to pass on. Let us look at some elements.

- *A great attachment to the listener:* Our preacher saints had a keen understanding of the culture and language of the people. They spoke the language of God in the language of the people. Their example moves us to a greater knowledge of the people of our time and their language, if we wish to be understood. Thus incline your ear to hear the voice of the Son of God does not excuse the parish nowadays from inclining its own ear to hear the voice of the sons of God.
- *Simple and popular:* Saint Francis, in his Salute to the Virtues, unites Queen Wisdom to her sister, pure and holy Simplicity (Salvir 1). Simple speech - in a brief way - is easily heard by all and naturally centers on the essential of what is to be communicated. Also the popular approach is a typical Franciscan characteristic appreciated by many saints who loved to nourish their preaching with examples, stories, experiences of life, facts from chronicles that excited great interest among the listeners without

in any way boasting or exalting themselves because of the good words and works God was able to raise up through them. (cf. *RnB* 17, 6; *Adm* 2,3; 8,3; 12,2; 16,1; 21,2; 28,1). In the end the example for this method is offered by the Lord himself who loved to speak in parables and take off from concrete life to capture the attention of the hearer and thus sow his message.

- *Concrete content*: There is that which springs from the very sources of revelation from which the preacher must always slake his thirst by prayer and study, and on which his own faith must rest. Moreover Saint Francis writes in the Rule: “I admonish and exhort the friars that in the preaching they do, their words be examined and chaste for the utility and edification of the people announcing to the people vice and virtue, punishment and glory, with brevity of speech, since the Lord made his word brief on earth (cf. *Rb* 9,3-4). Saint Bernardine gives us a splendid witness of incisive and inculturated preaching that can be summed up in three adjectives: good, short and clear.
- *Speak with authority*: The Franciscan tradition offers us models of preachers who were announcing the Gospel message by their lives even before by their words. Their tongue was not embarrassed due to the distance between their words and their actions! This conferred on them a great mantle of authority and an explosive prophetic force capable of carrying the hearer to a decisive interior question: “what must we do?” (cf. *Acts* 2, 37). Saint Bonaventure in a marvelous synthesis states that there are three things necessary for one who intends to present the Word of God; the first is knowledge which gives content, the second is eloquence to explain it and the third is life which confirms both. To present the Word of God without knowledge which gives content is dangerous, without eloquence which explains it is useless, without life which decorates both is ignoble.”³¹
- *Creativity*: Recognizing the Holy Spirit as the protagonist of evangelization, Franciscan preaching is always open to his influence

31 Saint Bonaventure, *Sermoni Domenicali 17,1*, Rome, Citta Nuova Editrice, 1992 “Primum est scientia regulans, secundum est facultia exprimens, et tertium est vita utrumque confirmans. Proponere enim verbum Dei sine scientia regulante est periculosum, sine facultia exprimente est infructuosum, et sine vita utrumque decorante est ignominiosum. (Domenica III in Quadragesima, Sermi I. Introductio in Opera Omnia, IX, 222a, Ed. Quaracchi.)

which no homiletic outline can contain. Thus Saint Francis used to unite word and action and the later sometimes substituted for the former. So great were his eloquent gestures! Various styles of preaching from the past, not suitable for today, responded fully to the demands of the people in that precise time. If they cannot be repeated materially because of cultural distance, they stimulate us to search for new expressions to inculturate the Word of God in our time.

Suggestions for reflection on this dimension

1. Read, meditate and confront

- *Mark 3, 13-19; Luke 10: 1024; Romans 10, 14-17; I Corinthians 9, 15-18*
 - *RnB 17, 1 -7; Rb 9*
 - *General Constitutions articles 22, 83, 99, 100, 103, 103; Fill the earth with the Gospel of Christ 49, 50, 58, 62, 65, 84, 85; Ratio Formationis Franciscanae 12, 27, 29; Ratio Studiorum OFM 63-66*
 - *The Lord speaks with us on the Way 14, 17; Evangelii Nuntiandi 11-12; 43*
 - *Novo Millenio Ineunte 39-40; Vita Consecrata 94; Starting afresh from Christ... 24*
- #### *2. What aspects of this dimension are present in the life of the fraternity and in that of the parish? After a communitarian discernment adopt or strengthen some initiatives.*

2. Adorers in spirit and truth with all of creation (liturgia)

I adjure you, brothers, with the charity of which I am capable that you show all the reverence and all the honor of which you are capable towards the most holy body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. LOrd 12).

Saint Francis lived the mysteries of Christ (cf. *1Cel* 217), present and operative in the liturgy, making of the Lord the center of his total existence. This centrality of Christ Francis experienced in the liturgy which he celebrated not only according to the directives of the Church but also by opening himself to the inspirations of the Spirit, the true soul of every action and gesture of the liturgy, in a truly wonderful creativity, where his whole person, even Brother Body, found adequate space. In his love for the Passion of the Lord, for example, he continually read it, wept over it, prayed over it and relived it. (*Test* 4-5; *LegM* 4:3, 13: 1-5; *3Comp* 24). It was the Spirit who suggested the diverse ways to celebrate his relationship with God. In fact, it is the Spirit who dwells in the faithful making them his temple and so capable of adoring the Father in spirit and truth (cf. *RnB* 21,30; *Adm* 1,12; *1Lf* 1,6; *2Lf* 10,48). Francis is totally convinced that for him indeed the preached words of the Gospel are “words of the Holy Spirit (cf. *Rb* *2Lf* 3) and to desire to possess the Spirit of the Lord above all else constitutes the highest aspiration for any Christian (cf. *Rb* 10, 8), For this reason he proclaims the priority of the spirit of prayer and devotion to which all other temporal things must be subservient (cf. 5,2).

1. EUCHARISTIC FRATERNITY

Francis contemplated in the Eucharist the daily birth of the Son of God who gives himself to his brothers as food, realizing in this way his real presence in the midst of men until the end of time (cf. *Adm* 1). For him “the centrality of the Eucharist is a lived reality expressly commended to the whole Order.”³² Francis truly states: “We have and see in this present world nothing corporally of the Most High except the body and blood, the names, and the words the means by which were created and redeemed from death to life” (*1Lch* and *2Lch* 3; cf. *Test* 19). And, according to the usage of the time, he wished that “in the places in which the friars dwell there be celebrated only one Mass a day according to the form of the Holy Church” (cf. *LOrd* 30). And

on diverse occasions he recommends the communion of the Body and Blood of Christ (cf. *Rnb* 20,5; *Adm* 1, 12-13; *1Lf* 1,3 2,2;; *2Lf* 22-24,63; *LOrd* 17-19).

After the example of Francis, the fraternity intends to live the Liturgy as ‘the goal towards which the action of the Church is directed and, at the same time, the font from which flows all its strength, according to what Vatican Council II teaches us,³³ and especially to live the words of Christ and the gift he makes of himself in the Eucharist as two inseparable realities which constitute the root of Franciscan and parochial community.

1. *When the fraternity is centered in the Eucharist:*

- *It is formed and constituted at the table of the Word and Bread of Life.* Concerning the link between the Word and the Eucharist the Minister General writes: “I wish to remind the brothers that there is an intimate and profound relation between the Word of God and the Eucharistic community, between obedience to the Word of God and the life of the community which celebrates the Eucharist, between the force of faith and attachment to the Word of the Lord, between discernment of the will of God and assiduous meditation on his Word.”³⁴ Also at the beginning of the Synod on the Word, the General Relator said: “that if it is in the form of the Word to be believed or the flesh to be eaten, the Word proclaimed and the Word pronounced over the offering participate in the same sacramental event.”³⁵
- *It acquires the art of fraternal communion,* of reciprocal welcome, of respect for the diversity of brothers to accept “in their own reality” (*GGCC* 40). It is a sort of liturgical grammar which renders the Eucharist the life in fraternity.
- *It nourishes its spirit of minority* in the likeness of Francis, who saw in the Eucharist an annihilation in which is manifest the humility of God: “O admirable greatness and stupendous lowliness, o sublime humility and humble sublimity, that the Lord of the

33 *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council, 1963, 10

34 Jose Rodriguez Carballo, *With clarity and audacity*, Report to the Extraordinary General Chapter, 2006, 55

35 Cardinal M. Ouellet, *Report to the First Congregation for the Synod of Bishops*, October 6, 2008, 11,1a

universe, God and Son of God, humbles himself to such a point as to hide himself for our salvation under the small appearance of bread (cf. *LOrd* 27-29; *Adm* 1, 16-18). From this contemplation of a “minor” God easily is born the preferential love for the little and the “minors” eloquent images of divine humility.

- *It draws its energy for evangelization* from the consciousness that no work can be built without the foundation of the Eucharist, which is seen as the source and goal of all evangelization.³⁶ In effect the missionary thrust “is a constitutive part of the Eucharistic form of Christian existence.”³⁷
- *It obtains the strength to seek and give pardon* especially through the prayer which the Lord taught us: “forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.” This is as pedagogy of pardon, “because the one who pardons or seeks pardon understands that there is a Truth greater than himself.”³⁸ Then so that the interior act of pardon becomes a stable disposition there is the continual need to experience the merciful love of God.³⁹
- *It appropriates the method of the incarnation* that makes the Word pass into life, thereby eliminating the danger of separating praying from doing. The ineffable words which constitute the very heart of Christian faith - the Word became flesh - is likewise the unsurpassable teaching of how to deal with the Word received: it can be only become flesh.
- It becomes a fraternity of peace as day by day it exchanges the sign of peace which it lives interiorly and which it can speak and give in truth and joy.
- It likewise grows in solidarity with the poor and commitment for justice and the integrity of creation, because it is conscious of the connection between the Bread of Life and daily bread.

2. THE FRATERNITY EVANGELIZES WITH THE LITURGY

Recently our Order described itself as a Fraternity-contemplative-in mission. In this expression is contained the awareness that announcing

36 John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, encyclical letter, 2003, 22

37 Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, post synodal exhortation, 2007, 84

38 John Paul II, *There is no peace without justice and there is no justice without pardon*, Message for the XXXV Day for Peace, January 1, 2002, 13

39 Cf. The Congregation for the Clergy, *The Priest: Master, Minister, Guide*, circular letter, 1999, 3.3

the Gospel is our reason for existence and the conviction that the roots of evangelization are intertwined with contemplation. Only a heart rich with God can speak of him. Standing with him already constitutes a marvelous evangelization which a parish can offer to its faithful.

In various ways the fraternity evangelizes by means of the Liturgy, especially as we recall our rich spiritual and pastoral tradition. In this we find one constant: the care to offer to the faithful something ‘palpable’ which unites mind and heart to the mysteries of the Savior. Here are only some examples: the crib at Greccio, the living attraction to the crucifix, the name of Jesus, the way of the cross, the adoration of the most holy Sacrament, Lent, ejaculatory prayers, a special veneration of the Immaculate Virgin, devotion to the angels and the saints.

To evangelize the People of God by means of the liturgy and the “art of prayer”⁴⁰ taking account of the multiform richness of the Franciscan tradition and its creative capacity some orientations are being suggested:

- *Cultivate Eucharistic celebration and spirituality.* The best catechesis-evangelization on the Eucharist is its celebration itself conducted with dignity. “Among the numerous activities performed in a parish none is as vital and formative of the community than the Sunday celebration of the Day of the Lord and its Eucharist.”⁴¹ Saint Francis himself teaches us that before and more than the quantity of forms of devotion we should privilege the quality of the Eucharistic cult in an uplifting and transforming encounter under the action of the Holy Spirit, opening the way to a mystical experience of the Sacrament.⁴² How can we not recall, at this point, the enormous crowds of faithful who participated in the Masses celebrated by our saints where the passionate celebration was already an eloquent splendid homily?
- *Show reverence and honor the Eucharistic sacrament* making present the words of Francis: let all those who administer such most holy mysteries, however, especially those who administer them illicitly, consider how very dirty are the chalices, the corporals, and altar linens upon which HIS Body and Blood (cf. *2Lch* 4). The love of Francis and Clare for the Eucharist is evident, as

40 *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 32

41 John Paul II, *Dies Domini*, apostolic letter, 1998, 35

42 R. Falsini, *Eucharistia* in *Dizionario francescano*, Padua, Ed. Messagero, 1995, 623, 611 – 639

we read in their writings, in thousands of acts of caring for and their most tender attachment to the Body and Blood of the Lord, the possession and only vision of the Most High which we have on this earth (cf. *Test* 10; *Le2 Lch* 3; *LegsC* 28). Their testimony reaches us and exhorts us to show “all the reverence and all the honor to the Most holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ” (cf. *LOrd* 12).

- *Assign a place of importance for the Liturgy of the Hours* in the prayer life of the parish. It is “the prayer of the Church par excellence, designed to give a rhythm to the days and seasons of the Christian year, offering, above all by means of the Psalter, daily food for faith.”⁴³ The fraternity that prays with the parish feels stimulated, consequently, to make for itself the Liturgy of the Hours, especially Morning Praise and Vespers, nourishment for the spiritual life of the People of God.⁴⁴ *Create different and new forms of celebration and sharing of faith*: One practice recommended by the tradition of the Church is *Lectio Divina* or the Prayerful Reading of the Word of which the Minister General reminds us. “It is a journey towards God and, as in all journeys, this also must be appropriate to the pace, energy and rhythm of the traveler. The result of this is a meeting with God by means of the Word read, heard, welcomed, prayed, contemplated and seen in the ordinary days of our existence.”⁴⁵
- *Unite Liturgy and life*. According to the example of Francis who used to bring his concrete life to the Liturgy and made his daily life become a prayer, the parish becomes the “gymnasium” where the passage of Liturgy to the concrete life of people takes place in such a way that the faithful, regenerated in the celebration, feel impelled to commit themselves to building up the Kingdom in the reality in which they are immersed.
- *Prepare places suitable for meditation*, as oasis of silence and of peace. In the space of the parish, near the area set aside for meetings, it will be well to reserve some corner for personal

43 *The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church*, final message of the Synod of Bishops, 2008, 9

44 Cf. Paul VI, *Laudis Canticum*, apostolic constitution, 1970, 8 and Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Principles and norms for the Liturgy of the Hours*, 1971, 40

45 *Mendicants of Meaning*, 25

prayer and, where it is possible, an ambient where nature can help the spirit regenerate itself and find itself in harmony with creation and the Creator. Only in intimacy with him, indeed, is it possible to understand the significance of life, while experiencing the joy that makes one say with Peter on Tabor: “Master, it is good for us to be here’ (Luke 9, 33).⁴⁶

- *Recognize the value of popular religiosity* as a source of spirituality and as a way of inculturation, since for many “the desire to live and celebrate their faith in a manner congenial to their character is a great desire” (GGCC 92 §2). Besides it is proper that the popular genius which has inspired so many forms of piety and devotion be respected and wisely purified according to the genuine spirit of the Gospel.
- *Support Franciscan spirituality in the parish.* Knowing the great human and spiritual richness in the rather different expressions of the traditions of the Order foster a turning to the Father under the banner of our Lord Jesus in the force of the Holy Spirit (cf. LOrd 50-52).
- *Promote celebrations with an ecumenical character* taking on the “spirit of Assisi” and fostering meetings of prayer with the followers of other religions, having in heart the peace of the world.
- *Find an effective way pedagogically for the celebration of reconciliation* either in the Sacrament of Reconciliation or to nourish in the faithful a reconciled spirit with God, with the brothers, with creation.
- *Offer simplicity and welcome.* The whole liturgy should breathe the beauty of simplicity, not only in the liturgical actions, but beginning with the sacred spaces, convents and neighboring areas to favor the spirit of welcome in an easy and serene climate.
- *Remember that “the pastoral work of greatest importance results in spirituality.* Any pastoral plan, any missionary project, any dynamism in evangelization, that leaves aside the primacy of spirituality and divine worship will be destined to failure.”⁴⁷ Not only, but the eye trained in contemplation is that which better sees what is to be done to forge that type of supernatural in-

46 Cf. John Paul II, *Spiritus et Sponsus*, apostolic letter on the fortieth anniversary of the Constitution “Sacrosanctum Concilium” on the Sacred Liturgy, 2003, 11

47 Congregation for the Clergy, *The Priest, Pastor and Guide of the Parochial Community*, instruction, 2002, 11

stinct⁴⁸ and which knows how to look at appearances and how to direct itself towards true evangelical choices.

Suggestions for reflection on this dimension

1) Read, meditate and confront

- *John* 4, 21-24; 13: 1-20; *Matthew* 26: 26-29; *I Corinthians* 11: 17-27
- *Adm* 1, 8-23; 3; *LOrd* 23-37; *General Constitutions* 19; 20; 21; *Fill the earth with the Gospel of Christ ...* 78; *Ratio Formationis ...* 13, 14, 15
- *Evangelii Nuntiandi ...* 47, 48; *Novo Millenio Ineunte ...* 32-37; *Vita Consacrata* 95
- *Starting afresh from Christ...* 26

2) What aspects of this dimension are present in the life of the fraternity and in that of the parish? After a community discernment, to adopt or strengthen some initiatives.

48 John Paul II, *Vita Consacrata*, post synodal exhortation, 1996, 94

3. Signs and workers for communion (*koinonia*)

“Seeking with all persons that fraternal communion which they cultivate among themselves” (GGCC 87 #1).

Francis, thinking of the ideal Friar Minor, describes him in the following way: “a good friar minor will be whoever unites in himself the life and attitude of the following friars: the faith of Brother Bernard ... the simplicity and purity of Brother Leo ... the courtesy of Brother Angelo ... the attractive appearance and good sense of Brother Masseo with his pleasing and devout way of speaking ...” (*Spec* 85). It is in this Fraternity, and even more, in this concrete Fraternity, where the true Friar Minor lives, which has precisely the characteristics of each that compose it.

It is the logical consequence of how Francis wished his Order: “I wish that this fraternity be called the Order of Friars Minor” (*2Cel* 38, cf. GGCC 1 §1). That is to say, fraternity constitutes the basic element of our charism, shows the qualities of the group formed around Francis, and indicates the manner in which this group relates to the outside world. Therefore, the title of the third chapter of the Constitutions, “you are all brothers” (cf. *RnB* 22, 23), while it evokes our origins, finds its explanation in the title of the fifth chapter of the same Constitutions, “for this God has sent you into the world” (*LOrd* 9). This is our way of being and remaining in the world.⁴⁹

1. THE FRATERNITY TESTIMONY OF COMMUNION

In his letter *Novo Millenio Ineunte*, John Paul II cites among the priorities which is to “be faithful to the design of God and also to respond to the profound expectations of the world,” to “promote a spirituality of communion, since communion incarnates and manifests the very essence of the Church.”⁵⁰ In the apostolic exhortation *Vita Consacrata* the Pope had already entrusted to consecrated persons the task to “foster the growth of the spirituality of communion, first of all in its own internal life, and then in the same ecclesial community and beyond its confines by opening or reopening constantly the dialogue of charity.”⁵¹

49 Cf. Andrea Boni, *Fraternità* in *Dizionario francescano*, 715 -730 and *With clarity and audacity*, 59ss

50 *Novo Millenio Ineunte*, 42

51 *Vita Consacrata*, 51

We Friars Minor can and must bring our contribution to the *school of communion*, also in parochial pastoral care, since we were born as a fraternity-contemplative-in-mission: a fraternity where communion lives and which forms itself for communion, a fraternity which nourishes itself at the same table of the Word, a fraternity whose reason for existence is to spread this Word.

Concretely this happens

- *with being a community of brothers loving each other in the Lord*, which gives priority to the Word of God, which finds itself together gathered around the Eucharistic table, which prays in common, and which remains together, sharing also moments of work and planning, of participation and evaluation, of gratitude and recreation. Today more than ever the communitarian testimony of holiness also is necessary. There is a need to have consecrated persons “experts in communion”⁵² interiorly formed by God of communion.”⁵³
- *with the involvement of all the members of the community*: The testimony of life can and must be rendered by all the friars composing the fraternity: clerics and lay, young and elderly, healthy and ill, in the diversity of duties and the appreciation of charisms.
- *with the realization of a balance between space and time demanded by the fraternity and the commitment required by the pastoral ministry*: This is a serious challenge for our times. The example of the Lord Jesus and of Saint Francis who, in addition to an intense apostolate, knew how to dedicate to God and to the brothers due moments for prayer and for fraternal communion, will be for us a help in the difficult task of determining with peaceful equilibrium the time for being and for doing, the internal and the external.

2. THE FRATERNITY AT THE SERVICE OF COMMUNION

The fraternity which lives internally a true human and spiritual communion cannot be other than at the service of community for all, beginning with the parishioners. It must be a fraternity

- *of communion and dialogue*, where a true catholicity lives in an attitude of openness to solidarity and universal fraternity; a religious family motivated by a missionary spirit, attentive to the

52 *Vita Consacrata*, 46

53 *Starting afresh from Christ...*, 29

interaction between space and territorial concerns, to formation of multicultural communities, to collaboration with other parishes and with the diocesan Church.

- *with a pastoral plan*, developed and realized as a fraternity where each can offer his proper contribution beginning with being a member of the fraternity. Neither the guardian nor the pastor has received all the charisms, but the charism of whole, namely the ability to recognize the talent of each one. In the same way, the relationship between the two figures of the guardian and the pastor - often seen as an unresolved question, or at least difficult one, in a fraternity engaged in parochial service - can resolve itself only in the logic of communion.
- *in which co-responsibility is in force*: A fraternity experiencing co-responsibility among all the friars then has the ability to be an exporter of communal value. It makes the laity responsible; promotes the diversity of gifts, of personal charisms and ministries; respects the relationship with ecclesial movements; gives a just importance to the various parish councils
- *which knows how to collaborate with the Franciscan family*: With particular care the friars in the parish will promote the presence of the SFO and GIFRA, respecting their autonomy and at the same time offering them the necessary formation and orientation for effective insertion in the pastoral action of the parish, whereby they can spread secular Franciscan spirituality and involve themselves in favor of the values of the Kingdom in a properly secular reality. The presence of GIFRA is an offering primarily for the young in search of the meaning of life, of a solid spiritual experience, of a meeting with the Gospel, of insertion into the life of the Church.
- *conscious of being sent by the provincial fraternity and living in union with it* according to the direction of the provincial project for evangelization.
- *which lives in a communal and constitutive relationship with the diocese*, above all cultivating “an effective and affective relationship with the pastors never forgetting that to love Christ is to love the Church in its persons and institutions,”⁵⁴ as did Saint Francis; and then in participating and collaborating, especially

in the pastoral directives and programs, carried out in the Franciscan style. Such style must be clearly evident in the agreement drawn up between the diocese and the province to safeguard our charism, a gift of the Holy Spirit to his Church (GGSS 53).⁵⁵

- *which uses the methodology of “we:”* This consists of impressing the spirit of fraternity, of dialogue, and communion in all the aspects of pastoral care in the parish; in the methodology of projects, in the manner of organizing communities, in the rapport with other local social groups, with other religions and diverse cultures.

Suggestions for reflection on this dimension

1) Read, meditate and confront

- *John 15, 1 -17; Matthew 18, 15 - 22; I Corinthians 12: 1 - 30*
- *RnB 5, Rb 10, TestSiena 3*
- *General Constitutions 38, 39, 40, 42, 52, 55; Fill the earth with the Gospel of Christ ... 69 – 72, 86 – 87; Ratio Formationis ... 19 – 21; The Lord speaks with us on the Way ... 31*
- *Evangelii Nunitiandi ... 77; Vita Consacrata 41 - 42; 46; 48 – 52; Starting afresh from Christ...28 – 32*

2) What aspects of this dimension are present in the life of the fraternity and in that of the parish? After a community discernment to adopt or to strengthen some initiatives.

55 Cf also the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes and the Congregation for Bishops, *Mutuae Relationes*. Note directive 57b in 1979. According to our legislation and that of the Church, the agreement between the bishop and the provincial minister, to whom belongs the acceptance of parishes, is not optional. It must be done in writing and dutifully signed by the contracting parties. Its purpose: to indicate the responsibilities and rights of the province, the fraternity and the pastor, as well as the duties and rights of the diocesan bishop; to safeguard the identity of our charism. In fact we must animate the parish as Friars Minor.

4. Content to be among the poor and promoters of peace (*Diakonia*)

“And the Lord himself led me among them [the lepers] and I showed mercy towards them. And withdrawing from them, that which once seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of soul and body” (Test 2 - 3).

“And they should be happy when they live among people of little account and the despised, among the poor and weak, among the infirm and lepers and among the beggars along the street (Rnb IX, 2).

“The Lord revealed to me that I should use the greeting: “The Lord give you peace” (Test 23).

The Word and the Liturgy reach their natural development in charity. Between Word, Liturgy and charity there exists a deep interaction, as we can perceive in the person of the Lord Jesus. His being the revealing Word became the highest Liturgy with his offering himself as “altar, victim, priest and unsurpassable charity, when in his mortal life he went doing good and healing all who were prisoners of evil.”⁵⁶ Also in the life of Francis, we find the same profound connection: the Word welcomed and meditated gives rise to a passionate celebration and concretizes itself in brotherly love.

In particular, the charity of Francis directs itself towards the last of society, towards those minores easily rejected, exiled or eliminated because they count for little in as far as they are sick, weak, or beggars. In his preferential love for the last, Francis intended to honor the Most High who wished to choose the way of minority in the incarnation and in the Sacrament of the Altar where he wished to humble and hide himself “under the little appearance of bread (cf. *LOrd* 27). The Poverello wished to make his own the style of God, who having stripped himself assumed the condition of a slave, humbled himself and became obedient even unto death on a cross (cf. *Philippians* 2, 5-8), was “poor and a guest” living on alms with the Blessed Virgin Mary and his disciples” (cf. *Rnb* 9,5). For this he resolutely decided to follow the example of the Lord and urges his followers to do the same: “all the bothers should commit themselves to follow the humility and poverty of our Lord Jesus Christ” (cf. *Rnb* 9, 1).

“Peace between heaven and earth, peace among all people, peace in our hearts” so sings the hymn of Morning Praise on Sunday, which seems to picture the peaceful heart and peacemaker Francis, who wanted to give the greeting and message of peace to all, as revealed to him by the Lord: “The Lord give you peace” (*Test 23*). Convinced that true peace comes only from God, he felt himself filled with this gift from God, so that he made himself its herald for all.

1. THE FRATERNITY TESTIMONY OF MINORITY

Minority describes how to be a Franciscan fraternity in a parish. It must shine in the way the friars are and live through a life of poverty, conducted in humility, characterized by confidence in God, capable of sharing and in solidarity with the most poor and suffering, placing itself joyously at the service of all and having as a model before its eyes the icon of the washing of the feet.

Furthermore, the friars who work in a parish must with complete humility consider all others as superior to themselves (*Philippians 2, 3*). So by being instruments of peace and justice they are committed to human promotion and to the defense of human rights and the right of the environment and of life in all its manifestations, by studying and by making known the social doctrine of the Church, educating for peace and promoting it where there exist situations of conflict; bearing witness by being close to the poor, sick, suffering and excluded, as they seek to know the causes of their situation and the means to help them achieve a dignified life and to always cultivate the awareness of being in mission in the heart of the world.

A parish entrusted to the Friars Minor finds in minority an inexhaustible richness to offer: that God who became “minor”, who made himself an infant, asking as a loan the garment of flesh, who passed through the streets of the world as a pilgrim and stranger not having a place to lay his head, who allowed himself to be arrested and placed on a cross and died for the love of his brothers, who gives himself every day as the food for life. Who can fear such a God? Rather the proclamation of God who saves, making himself a servant, will be able to touch a deep cord in the human heart and who will know how to soften even hardened hearts. Conscious of this inexpressible grace, the friars will strive in every way that such announcement be made first with the testimony of life more than with words, so living minority as the style which the same God incarnate wished to make his own.

And so without boasting nor exalting themselves because of the works and words which God does and says through them, but restoring all to him, the true author of all good (cf. *Rnb* 17, 6; *Adm* 2,3; 8,3; 17,1; 18, 21,2).

2. A FRATERNITY WHICH SERVES IN THE HEART OF THE WORLD

“As pilgrims and strangers in this world, serving the Lord in poverty and humility (Rb 6, 2).

We live fraternity as *minores* in the heart of the world, experiencing the signs of life and death, especially with the most poor thus proposing again “the way of being and working of Jesus.”⁵⁷ The parish conducted in the style of Franciscan minority must always have before its eyes the example of the Lord Jesus who stripped himself to serve and humbled himself to obey the project of the Father. The great gift of minority which the Lord gave to the Church and the world through Francis and his sons infuses into parochial pastoral care a special unmistakable character which becomes itself a great witness and strong evangelizing message.

To live minority in parochial service there needs to be:

- *an attitude of service among the people*: Being among the people we involve ourselves more, we put ourselves in the other’s shoes; we understand more and share better. Sharing life with others permits us to make our own once more the first way of evangelizing which is personal contact: a poor way which does not need many instruments and nevertheless is very effective. Thus we follow the good shepherd who always placed primary importance on contact with persons.
- *sign of relation*: This implies: promoting an evangelization which deepens the relation between the world and faith, between social life and the life of faith, between politics in the broad sense and the Gospel. It also implies forming a social-political and cultural commitment, according to the orientation of the social doctrine of the Church and according to the Franciscan vision of the human person, of power, of peace, of goods, of nature; fostering collaboration with the SFO and GIFRA, especially in the effort for human promotion and its presence in society. It also involves teachers, people of culture and politicians in some

form of organized service, animating them with the values of the Kingdom, and interesting them in actively participating in the open and solid projects of the parish.

- *sober and joyous*: This means not depending on powerful and costly means, not even for humanitarian work or social development, but rather preferring poor means. It also means a prophetic denunciation of the adoration directed to the idols of the world and of consumerism. Rather it supports the culture of the sober, of the essential, with the resulting joy flowing from freedom from things.
- *poor*: The friars who serve in a parish, remembering that religious life is “a living exegesis of the gospel page in the light of the final judgment (cf. Mt 25, 32ss), will provide care for the hungry, thirsty, strangers, sick, imprisoned, and those who are in need. Such attention to the poor, “who are our masters” (GGCC 93, §1) will be conducted not only in the form of social assistance but of presence and closeness and listening, along with human promotion, organization with the coming together of all and solidarity in various initiatives. As a priority it means going to meet, setting aside time, spending energy of mind and heart to seek together the solutions to problems. And so it will be possible that the parish will live: “free from hindrance and dependence, poor and friend of the poorer, welcoming every form of poverty, new and old.”⁵⁸ Particular care will be reserved for the reality of “without” - without work, without land, without roof, without documents, without education, while still caring for the drug addicts, the victims of AIDS, those trapped by prostitution, persons or socio-cultural classes rejected by those who direct political processes. The spirit that must animate all this commitment what is proper to us, namely to live in the following of the poor Christ.
- *the yeast of fraternity*: is to open the ecclesial community to the surround reality. By being the yeast of fraternity, of a commitment for life, peace, justice, the poor, for ecumenical interreligious and intercultural dialogue, seeking in other religions and cultures “the seeds of the Word and the hidden presence of God (GGCC 93, §2); to offer Christian laity an adequate preparation

- for an active presence in society including political involvement.
- *singers of creation*: Specifically in the area of respect for creation, a parish animated in a Franciscan way will have to raise its voice against the plunder directed against *Sister Mother Earth*, making its own the attitudes which value and respect it, according to the example of Francis who contemplated it and sang of it as a monstrosity the beauty of God.
 - *in love with the Lord*: Before every initiative and involvement, we ought to remember always that only the one who lives in the love of the Lord is capable of attracting and serving people in an effective way, especially the poor and needy. Truly his love is the only one to give effectiveness to any pastoral action and its force does not rest on human capability but on the power of the Risen One.⁵⁹

Suggestions for reflection on this dimension

1. Read, meditate and confront

- *Matthew* 5, 1 - 12; 6, 24 - 34; 20, 24 - 28; *Philippians* 2, 1 - 11
- Rb 3, 10 - 14; 5; 6; Rnb 4; 5; 6; Test 19 - 23
- *General Constitutions* 64 - 71, 93, 96, 97; *Fill the earth with the Gospel of Christ ...* 120, 121, 149 -164; *Ratio Formationis ...* 22 - 25; 88; *The Lord speaks with us on the Way ...* 28, 35
- *Lumen Gentium* 8; *Gaudium et Spes* 40; *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 29, 30, 32, 37, 38; *Novo Millennio Ineunte ...* 49 - 52; *Vita Consacrata ...* 82; *Starting afresh from Christ...* 36

- #### *2. What aspects of the dimension are present in the life of the fraternity and in that of the parish? After a community discernment to accept or strengthen some initiatives.*

5. Sent to the whole world (*missio*)

For this I have sent you to the whole world, that you may bear witness to His voice in word and deed and bring everyone to know that there is no one who is all-powerful except Him. (LOord 9).

The Synod on the Word of God in the life and mission of the Church reminded us that the Word has a voice, Revelation; a face, Jesus Christ; a house, the Church; a street to walk, mission.⁶⁰ Jesus has made himself the way to meet all and to plant himself in the heart of humanity, as the Word of Father. Behind him walking under his banner, every missionary of the Gospel has crossed the streets of the world to plant the gospel. So it happened for Francis who saw in the street an effective pulpit for proclaiming the Word of God.

If to be disciples of the Lord it is necessary to remain with him listening and guarding the Word, to become his apostle it is necessary to go in his name. In this way the remaining and the going are united by a vital relationship in which each of the two moments become indispensable for each other. To be able to go to announce, it is first required to remain with the Word and, likewise, the remaining with the Word puts the feet in motion to go to announce.

1. THE FRATERNITY LIVES THE MISSION

From the beginning it was clear to Francis that the purpose of the Order founded by him was “go, beloved, two by two, to the various parts of the world to announce to people peace and penance for the remission of sins” (*1Cel 29*). And this when there were only eight! He did not back off from this conviction, not even before the strong urging of Cardinal Ugolino to limit his activity. “My Lord, do you think or do you believe that God has sent the friars only for this region? But I say to you in truth that God has chosen to send the friars for the good and salvation of all people in the whole world.” (*LegPer 82*).

It is fitting that, while connecting with our origins and calling to mind the great crowd of missionaries who in the course of centuries have filled the earth with the Gospel of Christ, the Order today gathers itself as a fraternity-contemplative-in-mission: a fraternity which while remaining with God, continues to be a brotherhood of minors sent to

60 Cf. *The Final Message of the Synod of Bishops*, 2008

carry the Good News in all the world; a fraternity which sets off on a journey with the same program as Jesus summarized in “a heart which sees”⁶¹ convinced that “in the depth of the heart of man, of culture and of religion there is a thirst for “living water.”⁶²

In 1982 John Paul II, addressing himself to the friars about to begin a mission in the City of Rome, pronounced these words: “Go you as well to encounter the men and women of our time! Do not wait for them to come to you! You yourselves seek to bring them together! Love impels us to do this. The words of Jesus: ‘Go in all the world’ confers universality without limits on evangelization and finds a remarkable analogy in your spirituality characterized by itinerancy”⁶³ In the sorrowful message, the Pope has simply recalled for us our vocation, that of going to meet, of not waiting, of searching for our brothers, underlining that such a dynamism comes from love, and better still is patterned on the comportment of God in Jesus Christ. Indeed God not only speaks to man but seeks him.”⁶⁴

A parochial fraternity lives and acts on this missionary dynamism as a true demand of love. Rejecting all temptation to an intimist life, it will strive in all ways that the imperative of Christ - “Go” - continuously resounds in its life and work. Every program, therefore, will always seek to have in front of it the going of Christ and Francis. For the rest, is not mission perhaps the paradigm most enlightening every pastoral plan and project? Again is not mission perhaps “the greatest expression of “restitution” a Friar Minor offers to God for the vocation he has received?”⁶⁵

We must not hide from ourselves the fact that in a parish the harmonious composition of remaining and going is not easily realized. There exist certain risks in remaining which do not unite with being missionary. We are treating a pastoral temptation which conditions the Franciscan conduct of a parish that clouds the horizons of the universal Church and the whole world. Let us look at some.

- being content with the faithful who attend, preserving what exists, being frozen in tradition, this is how it is always done.

61 Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, encyclical letter, 31

62 *Ecclesia in Asia*, 18

63 John Paul II, *Discorso ai Francescani impegnati nella missione al popolo*, Rome, 1982, 15.11

64 *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 18

65 Cf. OFM Latin-American Meeting, *Document of Cordoba (Argentina)*, 2008, 4

- being “closed” in the sacristies and convents reducing pastoral care to celebrating the sacraments.
- being overly occupied with what is secondary, that has the risk of becoming real dangers, “like those of bureaucratization, functionalism, democratizing, planning more managerial than pastoral, and accumulating, not infrequently, the weight of a combination of structures that are not always necessary.”⁶⁶
- spending more energy in doing, in organizing many initiatives, and much less in forming persons.
- emphasizing the clerical dimension of the Franciscan charism.
- not developing the Franciscan characteristics of parish management.

To avoid the risks of a pastoral ministry of conservation and closure, of standardization and exaggeration of certain peripheral aspects, the parochial fraternity must bring about a kind of *Copernican revolution*, recovering with strength the characteristic dimensions of our spirituality, and must aspire continuously to assume the Franciscan style of mission, always remembering that evangelizing mission is the reason for the existence of the Order, and so becoming:

- *An attractive fraternity* gives testimony of life which makes visible and fascinating the person of Jesus, the first missionary of the Father, by spreading the perfume and desire for sanctity of which the people see such a great need. The challenge of the friars is to be first of all masters of genuine witnessing to the Gospel, living the beatitude of fraternal correction and of being under the feet of others (cf. *Adm* 19, 4). That fraternity knows that the first pastoral option is holiness to be lived and proposed by means of a higher level of Christian life.⁶⁷
- *A fraternity on a journey*: A fraternity capable of witnessing, on the one hand attracts the faithful, and on the other hand it is urged by desire and commitment to go to meet families which do not come to the parish in order to listen to them, encourage them and show them solidarity and to share with them their own faith. It is drawn by those living in situations of sickness, sorrow, of being marginalized and perhaps not having other ears

66 *The Priest, Pastor and Leader of the Parish Community*, 29

67 *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 30 – 31

in which they can pour out their suffering. It looks at those sectors not yet enlightened by the Gospel such as the world of communication, of art, of culture, of economics, of politics, and of entertainment.⁶⁸ In short it is a fraternity which feels sent by its Savior, “having as footgear the zeal to propagate the Gospel of peace” (*Ephesians* 6, 15) and in its heart the desire to give the faith which is strengthened by giving it away.⁶⁹

- *A welcoming fraternity* is able to celebrate true human and spiritual encounters, to offer a warm welcome beginning with listening, in the Sacrament of Reconciliation and by the ministry of consolation. Such a fraternity knows how to welcome those standing beyond the horizons of the Church. Indeed the consecrated life cannot live only in the Church and for the Church. It extends itself with Christ to the other Christian churches, to the other religions, to every woman and man not professing any religious conviction.⁷⁰
- *A prophetic fraternity* according to the example of Francis, who “became all tongue” (*1Cel* 97), proclaims with its fraternal life, with the liturgy, with the common program of the Word which invites, which proposes the good and the beautiful and which illumines the value of life. It rises up in favor of the poor lending its own voice to those having none and denounces with courage the evils of the world with “the sword of the holy Spirit, that is the Word of God” (*Ephesians* 6, 17). It commits itself to new actions, especially eloquent today, because they are alternatives to the dominant ones: change of lifestyle for a more evangelical sobriety, choice of poor means, practical closeness with the marginalized, solidarity with the weak.
- *A fraternity with its doors always open* knows how to harmonize the conventual schedule with the rhythm of the life of the people. A fraternity which because it is pilgrim and stranger nurtures an innate sympathy for the pilgrims and strangers, for those hurt in the complex journey of life or those lacking confidence and on the margins of existence.

68 *Redemptoris Missio*, 37

69 *Redemptoris Missio*, 2

70 *Starting afresh from Christ...*, 40

2. THE MISSIONARY FRATERNITY FORMS THE MISSIONARY PARISH

Being composed of friars, missionary by vocation and charism, the parish fraternity lives on the universal horizons of mission, animated by the desire that all the residents of the parochial territory know Christ and experience his love. Aware that today evangelization must be “new in its ardor, in its methods, and in its expression”⁷¹ the parish fraternity intends to live a renewed Franciscan missionary dynamism to be used in evangelizing the parish as a way to become

- *a parish of missionaries* In the Church “continuing in the course of history the mission of Christ himself”⁷² the parish wishes to build within its confines a portion of the Kingdom of God as it commits itself to reconciliation, pardon, peace, welcome of strangers, justice, truth. In a special way the evangelizing fraternity shares with the ecclesial community its conscience, its spirituality, and its dynamism in order to transmit to Christians the awareness of their missionary vocation and to stir up and promote vocations to mission *ad extra*. Thus the evangelized laity become in their turn evangelizers, missionaries in the parish itself and *ad extra*. A parish of missionaries every day does these three: listens, welcomes, goes.
- *a parish in which resounds the first announcement of the Gospel* “Announcing, in fact, has permanent priority in the mission.”⁷³ A parish which allows itself “to be pervaded by the apostolic ardor of apostolic preaching following Pentecost”⁷⁴ places the first proclamation as the cornerstone of the project of evangelization. Precisely because this is to generate faith, the parish addresses itself above all to those who do not know the good news, such as those belonging to other religions or those who have not yet accepted it, or those who have abandoned or forgotten it, or to those who are still weighing their choice in view of that sort of “table” of religions particularly abundant today. Next to the first announcing, as its natural development, no longer can there be absent the “eschatological memory” of the glorious coming of the Lord, that future which fills the present with hope, and even more gives it meaning..

71 John Paul II, *Discourse at the Assembly of CELAM*, Haiti, 19

72 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, number 82

73 *Redemptoris Missio*, 44

74 *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 40

- *a parish with good communication* by means of a more understandable and suitable language always effectively announces the Word of God in the words of the man of today. A parish which, convinced that dialogue is the privileged method of evangelization, sees in it a real gymnasium to train itself in openness, in the ability to listen and to welcome, in integration with the different while respecting its own identity. And so that such communication can be productive, it is necessary, as Paul VI said, to “look at the world with immense sympathy.”⁷⁵
- *a family parish* which encourages the transmission of the faith in the family, the “domestic church,”⁷⁶ structures the parochial family always more like an open and welcoming family articulated in diverse roles and ministries especially for the laity. Here every one can find an adequate space for his vocation and the concrete possibility to make available his own gifts which are manifestations of the presence of the one Spirit. Evangelization involves all the members of the People of God, inviting them to live and practice their baptismal priesthood beginning with the transmission of the faith on the part of the Christian family. Those responsible open “the mouth of all the faithful, because in every faithful person breathes the Holy Spirit.”⁷⁷ We work for unity which will never be uniformity but an organic integration of legitimate diversity.
- *a parish of cloister “without borders”* which develops a practical collaboration with some *project* of mission *ad gentes*, preferably with the *projects* of the Order, by stimulating the formation of missionary groups within which become known some type of missionary catechism that is composed of the numerous texts of the Magisterium and of the Order inspired by mission. Once formed the laity can also help them to think again about the form in which they express their missionary zeal.
- *a parish sensitive to and passionate about the poor of every type in the territory*: It promotes forms of service and of charity for the less fortunate and in the service of peace. It lives being an instrument of the peace of the Lord and of reconciliation among those

75 Paul VI, *Discourse at the Grotto of Bethlehem*, 1964, 6.1

76 John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, post apostolic exhortation, 1981, 21. Cf *Ecclesia in Africa*, 63 and 92

77 *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 45

who are different, among the different cultures, with mother earth, towards every creature on which shines the image of God, seen in the glorious recognition of the Creator

- *a parish with the heart of Francis*: Here grows the perfect joy of feeling like the “little flock” guided by the good shepherd to whom is entrusted confidently the life and journey of the parish, knowing that his pastoral plans teach the certainty of the promise “I am with you always all days until the end of the world” (Mt 28, 20).

Suggestions for reflection on this dimension

1. Read, meditate and confront

- *Matthew 28, 16 - 20; John 20, 19 - 23; Acts 1, 6 - 8*
- *Rnb 16, 1 - 13; Rb 12, 1 - 4a*
- *General Constitutions 116 – 118; To Fill the earth with the Gospel of Christ ... 143 – 148, 165 – 175; Ratio Formationis ... 32 – 33, 37; - 38, 71 – 74; The Lord talks to Us on the Way ... 33, 37 – 38*
- *Ad Gentes I; Evangelii Nuntiandi 51 – 56; Redemptoris Missio 33 – 34, 37 - 38, 72 – 74; Vita Consacrata 77; 97 – 103; Starting afresh from Christ... 37 – 38*

2. Which aspects of this dimension are present in the life of the fraternity and in that of the parish? After a community discernment, to accept or strengthen some initiatives.