

The Order of Friars Minor

# YOU ARE ALL BROTHERS

*(Mt 23, 8; Rnb 22, 23)*

*An aid for ongoing formation  
on Chapter III of the General Constitutions*

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*Cover*

GIOTTO, Stories of St. Francis: apparition in chapel of Arles.  
Assisi (Basilica of St. Francis)

*Photo SCALA - Florence*

## Presentation

**F**raternity is our way of being in the world and in the Church. The Franciscan life does not exist except as fraternity; our vocation is to be brothers; and our basic law is that of love (*Test* 4). On the other hand, the basis of our fraternal life consists of opening ourselves up, of comparing ourselves, of accepting ourselves and of dialogue; these are the instruments for enlightening, strengthening and putting our common gospel project into action; these are the conditions for the birth of new motivations that would stimulate creativity and help us to recover confidence in ourselves and in others.

Gift and task, the fraternity is received but is also constructed. Divine call and human reality. As a divine call, the fraternity is fed on prayer, listening to the Word, the Eucharist, pardon and reconciliation. As a human reality, the fraternity has its own laws, demands and means; authentic relationships, familiarity, friendship, joviality, courtesy, service...

To help the brothers to accept the gift of fraternity and to build it up constantly, the General Secretariat for Formation and Studies, continuing the work begun in 1993, prepared, with the help of an international commission, this aid “YOU ARE ALL BROTHERS”, which offers useful material for reflection, both personal and fraternal, on the topic of fraternity during ongoing and initial formation.

While expressing my gratitude to the General Secretariat for Formation and Studies for this initiative and to Br. Joxe-Mari Arregui, Br. Pierre Brunette, Br. Johannes Freyer, Br. Saúl

Zamorano, Br. Cesare Vaiani, Br. Sebastião Kremer, Br. José Rodríguez Carballo and Br. Sebastián López for the work done in the elaboration of “YOU ARE ALL BROTHERS”, I cordially invite all the brothers of the Order to make use of this aid in order to progress, without ever tiring, in the acceptance of the gift of the brothers and in the construction of true fraternity as «a family united in Christ» (GGCC 45 §1), so that they may reach «full human, Christian and religious maturity» (GGCC 39).

BR. GIACOMO BINI, OFM  
Minister General

Rome, 16<sup>th</sup> January 2002,  
*the memorial of the Protomartyrs of the Franciscan Order.*

## “YOU ARE ALL BROTHERS”

(Mt 23, 8; Rnb 22, 23)

The General Secretariat for Formation and Studies has been working for various years on the elaboration of materials to facilitate the reading and assimilation of the *OFM General Constitutions*, published in 1987.

With that in mind, it published *Our Franciscan Identity: Towards a Reading of the GGCC* in 1993 and *The Spirit of Prayer and Devotion* in 1996. With the same objective we now present the volume «*YOU ARE ALL BROTHERS*» (Mt 23, 8; Rnb 22, 23).

We wish to make material available to the Friars and the fraternities through this volume, which could be an aid for ongoing formation that, keeping in mind Chapter III of the *General Constitutions*, could help in studying deeply one of the “priorities” of our Franciscan charism: the fraternity and, in this way, allow the Friars a «continuous renewal of spirit» (GGSS 2 §2).

The fraternity, in effect, is one of the fundamental lines of the Franciscan life project: the vocation of those called to this life is a vocation to fraternity, a vocation to be brothers.

The Franciscan fraternity has its origins and beginnings in the event to which Francis refers in his *Testament* when he says: «...after the Lord gave me some brothers...» (*Test* 14; *2Cel* 15; *TC* 25-29).

These words reveal and manifest some of the traits that constitute the originality and the principal characteristic of the fraternity of Friars Minor.

- To say “the Lord gave me brothers” is to proclaim that the Lord gives and makes a present of brothers. It is to underline the gratuitousness of the brother and the gratuitousness of the fraternity or of the group of Friars. It is to say that the brother is not without purpose, is not cost effective or productive, or functional or negotiable. The Friars are... to be of the same family, to nourish and love their brothers more than a mother loves her son (cf. *Rb* 6, §7-8). The Friars are there to give birth to other Friars.
- To say “the Lord gave me brothers” is to proclaim that the centre of all is in the interpersonal relationship of the Friars among themselves. It is to underline that the Friars are brothers if they have relationships amongst them and in the measure that they have them. It is to state that reciprocity is the constitutive principle of the fraternity, understood as relationship between brothers.
- To say “the Lord gave me brothers” is to proclaim the equality of the Friars in the group of brothers that form the fraternity of Friars Minor.

The fraternity is not just one of the nuclear topics of the “forma vitae”, but, in the internal coherence of it, it also embraces the other topics, it condenses the whole project. The fraternity is the “form of the Holy Gospel” that the Lord induced Francis to live in the Church when he “gave brothers” to him (cf. *Test* 14). Being brothers and observing the Gospel are equivalent and coincidental. Fraternity is the practical style of living the Franciscan life. The fraternity, therefore, fraternal relationship, is above all and is the end of all in the rule and life of the Friars Minor.

This centrality of fraternity as *relationship* and, consequently, of the group of Friars as *fraternity* gathered together because of their “being family” lost its prominence and importance with the evolution that the life of the Friars suffered after the first years had passed. It also lost the vision of the group of Friars as *fraternity*, the fraternity of Friars Minor. This was due to the fact that, for different reasons, other dimensions of the life of the

Friars achieved greater prominence: *common life* or *observance*, the stress on juridical relationships between the Friars rather than on that of reciprocity, the concept of authority more as power than as service, etc.

The present *General Constitutions*, of 1987, once again gather and offer the charism-option of Francis for fraternity, whether it is understood as *relationship* between the Friars of a fraternity, or as the *group* of Friars that form a fraternity, or as fraternal life in common, or the life of fraternity.

This recovery is shown, among other things, in the priority that the *GGCC* give to the term *fraternity* in order to name the gathering of Friars who make up the Order, Province or house, as Francis had done (*GGCC* 1, 1: 87). It is also shown, above all, in the constant presence of the term *Friar* (*GGCC* 1, §1-2; 38. 39 etc). It is shown, finally, in the priority they give to *personal relationships* between the friars. To do this they speak of *fraternal communion* (*GGCC* 1 §2; 42 §2), *fraternal unity* (*GGCC* 42 §1), *spiritual and affective relationship* (*GGCC* 50), *fraternal unity* (*GGCC* 42 §1; 43), *close union with the Friars* (*GGCC* 45...). They also speak of *fraternal life in common* (*GGCC* 38) or of *the life of fraternal communion* (*GGCC* 42 §2), expressed through the unanimous observance of the *Rule* and *Constitutions* (cf. *GGCC* 42 §2).

The topics that these pages develop, offered as support and aid for reflection on and review of the life of fraternal communion by the Friars, take into account the significant principles that the word *fraternity* has. Fraternity as a personal relationship between Friars, fraternity as a group of Friars that make up a friary, a Province or the whole Order and the fraternity as a way of common life.

The broad logic and complexity of the topic, to which the extensive, plural, fragmentary and partial biography that exists in this regard bears witness and that “YOU ARE ALL BROTHERS” is trying to take on, is grasped. Conscious of it, and despite the ambiguity that the dialectic of *ad intra* and *ad extra* involves, we have wished to centre our attention on some aspects of the *ad intra* dimension of the Franciscan fraternity. “YOU

ARE ALL BROTHERS” does not pretend, therefore, to be a complete treatise on the fraternity, but rather a taking into consideration of some topics that appeared to us to be most important for the life of the fraternities. The material we present in “YOU ARE ALL BROTHERS” is divided into three great blocks. The first bears the title of “*Introduction*”, the second, “*The Franciscan fraternity*” and the third, “*Animation of the fraternal life*”. These three blocks are followed by two “*Appendices*”.

The “*Introduction*” is made up of three topics: Franciscan Vocabulary of Fraternal Communion, Origin of the Fraternity and From Community Life to Fraternal Life in Community. The second block, under the title of “*The Franciscan fraternity, gift and task*”, is composed of eight topics: Constructing Fraternity, Human Reality of the Fraternity, Equality and Diversity, Familiarity between the Friars, Fraternal Correction, The “favourite ones” of the Fraternity, Friars Minor and Evangelising Fraternity. The third thematic block, “*The Animation of the Fraternity*”, is composed of the following topics: Fraternal Life and Animation of the Fraternity, Fraternal Life and Corresponsibility, The Ministers and Guardians at the Service of Animation, Fraternal Life and the Local Chapter, Fraternal Life and Ongoing Formation, Fraternal Life – Place of Communication and Dialogue – and Fraternal Life and Discernment. In the two “*Appendices*”, with which “YOU ARE ALL BROTHERS” is brought to a close, the indications of our legislation on local chapters and Guardians are found.

The topics were prepared by an international commission as outlines to be used in the different meetings of the fraternity: local chapters, reviews of life, study sessions, retreats, etc. Because of this, “YOU ARE ALL BROTHERS” has a pre-eminently practical objective. It tries to place us before the concrete problem that fraternity presents in our communities and to offer some orientations for strengthening it.

Keeping in mind this practicality and that it is a matter of each one in particular and everyone in fraternity taking note of the consequences for practical life, we believed it convenient to of-



fer, at the end of each chapter, a series of texts, orientations for reflection and questions in order to help in the interiorisation of the contents and the elaboration of *the personal life project* and *the fraternal life project*. We think that, for group work, the **methodology** could be as follows:

- Each Friar should read the topic specifically assigned for the fraternity meeting beforehand.
- The Friar entrusted with presenting the topic in common could take into account not only the materials indicated, but also other bibliographical supports on the topic. In any case, the important thing is that the topic is well centred, taking the concrete situation of the fraternity into account.
- The community work should lead to making some operative conclusions.
- One of the Friars of the fraternity should act as secretary in order to take note of the ideas that arise during the dialogue and of the conclusions.
- It would be good for the topic or topics studied in fraternity to be the object of prayerful reflection during the monthly retreat of the fraternity.

Will “YOU ARE ALL BROTHERS” be a dream or a task? Each one of us, each fraternity, has the duty to give a response in life and the task of making what may appear a utopia today into a joyful reality tomorrow.

BR. JOSÉ RODRÍGUEZ CARBALLO, OFM  
*Secretary General for Formation and Studies*

# Acronyms and abbreviations

## SACRED SCRIPTURE

1Cor	<i>First Letter to the Corinthians</i>
1Jn	<i>First Letter of St. John</i>
1Tss	<i>First Letter to the Thessalonians</i>
Acts	<i>Acts of the Apostles</i>
Gal	<i>Letter to the Galatians</i>
Is	<i>Isaiah</i>
Jn	<i>The Gospel according to John</i>
Lk	<i>The Gospel according to Luke</i>
Mt	<i>The Gospel according to Matthew</i>
Phil	<i>The Letter to the Philippians</i>
Rom	<i>The Letter to the Romans</i>

## THE WRITINGS OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

1LtF	<i>Letter to the Faithful, first version</i>
2LtF	<i>Letter to the Faithful, second version</i>
Adm	<i>Admonitions</i>
ExCl	<i>Exhortation to St. Clare and her Sisters</i>
FW	<i>Final Will to St. Clare</i>
LtA	<i>Letter to St. Anthony</i>
LtCus	<i>Letter to a Custos</i>
LtL	<i>Letter to Br. Leo</i>
LtM	<i>Letter to a Minister</i>

LtO	<i>Letter to the Order</i>
PrSD	<i>Prayer before the cross of San Damiano</i>
Rb	<i>Regula bullata (approved Rule)</i>
RH	<i>Rule for a Hermitage</i>
Rnb	<i>Regula non bullata (non approved Rule)</i>
SV	<i>Salute to the Virtues</i>
Test	<i>Testament</i>
TestS	<i>Testament of Siena</i>

## **BIOGRAPHIES OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI**

1Cel	<i>First Life by Thomas of Celano</i>
2Cel	<i>Second Life by Thomas of Celano</i>
AP	<i>The Anonymous of Perugia</i>
Fior	<i>The Fioretti</i>
LMj	<i>The Major Legend of St. Bonaventure.</i>
LP	<i>The Legend of Perugia</i>
MP	<i>The Mirror of Perfection of St. Bonaventure.</i>
TC	<i>The Legend of the Three Companions</i>

## **OTHER ACRONYMS**

CIC	<i>Code of Canon Law, 1983</i>
FEGC	<i>Fill the Earth with the Gospel of Christ, Pentecost Letter of Br. Hermann Schalück, ofm, 1996.</i>
FLC	<i>Fraternal Life in Community, Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. 1996.</i>
GGCC	<i>General Constitutions of the Order of Friars Minor, 1987.</i>
GGSS	<i>General Statutes of the Order of Friars Minor, 1991.</i>
GS	<i>Gaudium et Spes, Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the contemporary world.</i>
OF	<i>Ongoing Formation in the Order of Friars Minor, document of the General Secretariat for Formation and Studies, 1995.</i>

OT	<i>The Order Today, Reflections and Perspectives</i> , Pentecost Letter of Br. Giacomo Bini, ofm, 2000.
PC	<i>Perfectae Caritatis</i> , Vatican II, Decree on the renewal of the Religious Life, 1965.
PDV	<i>Pastores dabo vobis</i> , Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II, 1992.
PPSS	<i>Particular Statutes</i> .
RFF	<i>Ratio Formationis Franciscanae</i> , 1991.
TestCl	<i>Testament of St. Clare of Assisi</i> .
VC	<i>Vita Consecrata</i> , Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II, 1996.

First part

# **INTRODUCTION**



# I

## FRANCISCAN VOCABULARY OF FRATERNAL COMMUNION

The more-than-maternal relationship of love of the Friars among themselves has a rich and varied vocabulary in the writings of Francis. This vocabulary shows that fraternity is one of the most important characteristics of the gospel way of life chosen by Francis.

Re-reading his writings and paying attention to his vocabulary, we can better understand the origin of the fraternity in the vision of Francis, the place it occupies in his life and its most essential traits. It is a matter of reading the texts, starting with the word “brother” taken as the key term, in order to see what Francis was thinking, living and telling us with this word and other words comparable to it.

### 1. «You are all brothers» (*Rnb* 22, 33)

Within the vocabulary used by Francis to speak about fraternal communion, the first and principal one is the noun *brother*. This term, used 306 times by Francis, is the most used noun in his writings after *Lord*, which appears 410 times. It is the name that Francis gives to himself, 15 times, and it is the word he uses, together with fraternity, which appears 10 times in his writings, to designate those that opted with him «to follow the life and

poverty of the most high Lord, Jesus Christ, and his most holy Mother» (*FW* 1).

What we all are, first and foremost for Francis, is brothers on the basis of the Gospel, in order to be, on that one basis, everything else that we should be: brothers that pray (*Rb* 3, 1-9); brothers that go throughout the world (*Rb* 3, 10-14); brothers that do not receive money (*Rb* 4); brothers that work (*Rb* 5), etc.

In the fraternity of Minors there is nothing prior to or above fraternal relations, unity and equality of all under the one lordship of Christ and his Gospel (*Rnb* 1, 1; *Rb* 1, 1).

And because the term *brother* is an essentially relative term, to be a brother consists of the personal relationships that are really had with one's brothers. This means that one cannot be a brother alone and that the main thing in the fraternity of Francis is the relationship of brother to brother, between brother and brother (*Rnb* 11).

But this relationship must be *interpersonal*. Francis made this dimension outstanding and privileged through a series of words and expressions present in his writings. So, *reciprocally* appears 7 times; *alternately*, 4 times; *among themselves*, 4 times; *must serve each other*; 8 times; *one to the other*, 4 times. Other expressions could be added to these, such as: *wherever the brothers may be and in whatever place they may meet* (*Rnb* 7, 15; *Rb* 6, 7); *they should respect one another* (*Rnb* 15, 7); *as themselves* (2*LtF* 27.43; *Rnb* 4, 5; 6, 2; *Rb* 6, 9); *before him* (*Adm* 25); *towards them* (*Rb* 10, 5); *the Minister with his brothers* (*Rnb* 18, 1); *to separate himself from his brothers* (*Adm* 3, 9; *LtO* 3.14.17.20). All these expressions proclaim up to what point the interpersonal dimension of the more-than-maternal love between the Friars Minor is underlined in the writings of Francis.

Francis highlighted, therefore, the unavoidable reciprocity and inter-subjectivity that interpersonal relationship presupposes. In his life and writings he gave privilege to reciprocity, the being with, for, in and with the brother: «Let *each one* make known his need *to another* that the *other* might discover what is needed and minister *to him*» (*Rnb* 9, 10). All are, therefore, pa-



tients and agents of being *members of the same family* (Rb 6, 7-9), living face to face, shoulder to shoulder, with each other. All are responsible for the others, they are a mutual gift to each other until they become, as Celano says, «(Francis) was ready to give even himself» (2Cel 181) or, as *the Three Companions* say of the first brothers, «it seemed easy for them to give their bodies to death, not only for the love of Christ, but also for the salvation of the soul and body of their confreres» (TC 41).

## **2. The Lord gave me brothers** (*Test 14*).

Another very significant expression in Francis is «*The Lord gave me brothers*» (*Test 14*). Approaching death, summing up the most important steps and values in his life, Francis indicated the beginning of his fraternity. He stated, with a simple phrase, that the beginning of his fraternal life was an act of the will of God. «And after the Lord gave me some brothers, no one showed me what I had to do, but the Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the pattern of the Holy Gospel» (*Test 14*).

The vocation of Francis and the gift of the first brothers were inserted into a gospel plan of life. His choice of life, that is, to live the Gospel with the brothers, corresponded to obedience to divine revelation. We could say, then, that the Franciscan fraternity formed part of a vocational plan in the life of Francis, through which he responded in obedience to the will of God, assuming the Gospel as his form of life.

Francis did not conceive his vocation as a *sequela Christi* in accordance with the traditional way of the religious life of his time, but, as we have already pointed out, he conceived fraternal life as the nucleus of the following of Christ in the spirit of the Gospel.

«The Lord gave me brothers» (*Test 14*). For Francis, the brother and, therefore, the fraternity were gifts and graces in the salvific event of the holy, loved, agreeable, humble and pa-

cific Brother Jesus Christ (*2LtF* 56). The brother, therefore, is a gift of the Lord in him to whom He gives himself and is present (*1Cel* 24-25). The brother, therefore is a good brother in the good, all good, supreme good God. Said in another way: the Gospel gives us and makes us a brother (*TC* 28-29). Because there is no other Lord that does or says all that is good (*Adm* 7, 4; 8, 3; 12, 2), there is also no other love than that which the Spirit of the Lord puts into our heart to serve and obey our brother spiritually (*Rnb* 5, 12-13).

From this it is conceived that the brother is gratuitous and the fraternity also. That is to say that “being the same family”, in which the brother is revealed and made, is not without purpose, is not cost effective or productive, or functional or negotiable. The brothers are... in order “to be the same family”, to love each other with a more than maternal love, to love mutually (cf. *TestS* 3). It is not necessary to justify or to rationalise loving each other, it is justified in itself. It is a task that is sufficient for a lifetime through the great number of people in the communion of love, through making the love with which the Lord loved us present, through incarnating the communion of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, origin and model of every communion of love and the revelation that love is most excellent (cf. *1Cor* 13, 13).

### **3. The way of life** (*Rnb* 8, 9)

For Francis, fraternity was a *way of life* in accordance with the Gospel, for the purpose of following the doctrine and example of Jesus Christ (cf. *Rnb* 1, 1).

When his writings are taken into account, there can be no doubt that the vision of fraternity as a *way of life* was important for the ‘Poverello’. Francis, especially in the *non-approved Rule*, spoke insistently about the *way of life*. “When anyone, moved by divine inspiration”, desired to embrace this life (cf. *Rnb* 2, 1) and to form part of the group around Francis, he had to accept the *form of life* of the brothers (cf. *Rnb* 2, 2). For that reason all must

choose services in accordance with this *forma vitae* (cf. *Rnb* 8, 9). The Ministers themselves, who have the responsibility of always seeking the good of the brothers entrusted to them (*Rnb* 4, 6), must never go against the *way of life* embraced by the brothers in their manner of governing the fraternity (cf. *Rnb* 4, 3).

It is important to note, however, that this *way of life* in fraternity does not coincide with any kind of work or any type of religious life or sort of relationship with the world and its requirements. The *way of life*, the style of being fraternity, is something more. For Francis there was something more that gave form and generated life. All else – work, religious practice, way of relating to the world and to the Church, the very attitude that animates the meetings between the brothers –, all of this must allow itself be creatively formed by those elements of life.

Francis found the element that defines each thing in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ came to be our brother and he gives us his life as a brother. Francis, therefore, did not want anything other than «to follow the life and poverty of the most high Lord Jesus Christ» (cf. *FW* 1). In the *Admonitions*, Francis showed that he had encountered life in Christ. «The Lord said, I am the way, the truth and the life» (*Adm* 1, 1). He understood these very words of Christ as saying, «it is the Spirit that gives life» (*Adm* 1, 6). It is the Spirit that points out the following of Christ in order to find life in all possible situations: «The Lord's sheep followed Him in tribulation... and for these things they received eternal life from the Lord» (*Adm* 6, 2).

Basically, Francis chose life just as he found it in Christ while he was obeying divine revelation. He, therefore, chose the life of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for himself and his brothers: «The Rule and life of the Friars Minor is this: to observe the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ» (*Rb* 1, 1; cf. *Rnb* 2, 1). And he never tired of recalling this life of Jesus Christ according to the Gospel, which, as the only source, must give shape to fraternal life. «Let us, therefore, hold on to the words, the life, the teaching and the Holy Gospel of Him Who humbled Himself to beg His Father for us» (*Rnb* 22, 41).

So, whoever wants to form part of this fraternity, «may be received to obedience promising always to observe this rule and life» (*Rb* 2, 11). For Francis, living in fraternity was synonymous with allowing oneself to be formed by the very life of Jesus Christ just as it is found in the Gospel. And this is as valid for each individual brother every bit as much as it is to the fraternity and it embraces all the ways of being, working, praying and placing oneself in the world and in the Church.

#### **4. Living in obedience** (*LtO* 2)

Observing the values with which Francis described the parameters of his fraternity, it can be seen how he underlined obedience (21 times) more than poverty (6 times). So, in *The Letter to the whole Order* he addressed «all simple and obedient brothers» (*LtO* 2). To live in obedience is one of the characteristics that describe the way of life of the brothers (cf. *Rnb* 1, 1; *Rb* 1, 1). The context of the writings of Francis explains to us what Francis understood by the expression “to live in obedience”.

The *third Admonition*, on true obedience, interpreted it as preferring «to suffer persecution rather than wish to be separated from his brothers» and like «laying down his life for his brothers» (*Adm* 3, 9). Obedience here expresses fidelity to the brothers that especially includes the difficult situations of life. No matter what happens, the brother always continued to be a brother for Francis. Understood in this way, obedience respects the brotherhood as the basis for a relationship that goes beyond the vicissitudes of life because, as we have seen, it is a gift from God. Therefore, it is a sister to charity (cf. *SV* 3) since it helps the brothers to live charity even in cases of disagreement. Faithfully maintaining obedience to a brother was, for Francis, equivalent to obeying the Spirit, who gives life and helps to keep the body mortified (cf. *SV* 15). Conversely, to wander outside obedience is to go apart from the commandments of the Lord (cf. *Rnb* 5, 16).

On the other hand, Francis did not demand blind obedience, even though it may appear so at times. In fact, when he spoke of obedience he not only did so in relation to the fraternity and the way of life, but he also took into account the soul of the particular brother: obedience must favour the things that refer to health of soul (cf. *Rnb* 4, 3). No Minister, therefore, can demand something that would go against the conscience of a brother. His repeated and serious call to obedience, until the end of his life, when asking for total obedience to the way of life, to the *Rule* and the *Testament* (cf. *Test* 25.30-33.38), can only be understood if account is taken of his vision of fraternity as a gift from God and a place where the brothers find true life by living in accordance with the Gospel of Christ. Obedience understood in this way is an insertion of self into the very life of Christ, our Brother and, in this sense, is in favour of the brother, who once again finds the fulness of fraternal life in Christ.

St. Francis did not understand obedience in a single-directional sense, as if it only affected subjects that are obliged to obey their superiors, but rather in a reciprocal sense. It also includes, therefore, the concept of 'superior', who is a minister at the service of the other brothers. In the same way, reciprocal obedience is the way the brothers have to serve each other and obedience to one's brother is the way in which each one must take care of the needs of the other. It could also be said that obedience is the Franciscan way of reflecting one's care, one's affection for a brother, a way of being close to others. This fraternal sense of obedience, understood as fraternal service, slowly changed by being converted into an obedience to superiors and to their decisions.

## **5. Serving the Lord** (cf. *Rnb* 9, 11)

Serving the brothers, as an expression of divine love, manifests a very suggestive treatment of the fraternity when Francis shows that each one must love and nourish his brother like a

mother loves and nourishes her child (cf. *Rnb* 9, 11). The allusion to loving and feeding recalls the function, proper to a mother, of giving birth and nourishing the life just born. In this sense, the commitment of the brother is to give life, space, and the possibility to grow and to develop in an environment protected by mutual love. Besides, the image of the mother that loves and nourishes evokes the help of the brother in making life in the Spirit be born and live in the other, that is, in the fraternity itself. Loving and nourishing the brother when he is sick (cf. *Adm* 24, 1) or when he is far away (*Adm* 25, 1), are concrete expressions of this maternal spirit. In a fraternal climate based on giving and supporting, the brothers can also diligently obey in those things that refer to the health of the soul (cf. *Rnb* 4, 3).

## 6. Behaving spiritually (*Rnb* 16, 5)

The Franciscan fraternity is founded on *spiritual* relations. Seeing a spiritual brother in the other (cf. *Rb* 6, 8) creates a unity that, for Francis, goes beyond the bonds of blood because it is based on the Spirit of the Lord.

To have this Spirit of the Lord and his holy operation (*Rb* 10, 18) is the most important quest of the fraternity. The entire life of the fraternity and of each brother is a journey according to the Spirit (cf. *Rnb* 5, 5). The ministers must visit the brothers and «exhort and comfort them spiritually» (*Rnb* 10, 4), that is, to live according to the *Rule*, as the Spirit of the Lord himself indicates. In all that they do, work, study or any other thing, the brothers must have «the spirit of holy prayer and devotion» (*Rb* 5, 2: *LtA*). And they must behave spiritually in their dealings with all, especially when they go among the infidels (cf. *Rnb* 16, 5). In this specific case, the “*behaving spiritually*” has a very precise meaning: «not to engage in arguments or disputes but to be subject to every human creature for God’s sake and to acknowledge that they are Christians. The other way is to announce the Word of God when they see it pleases the Lord...» (cf. *Rnb* 16, 5).

According to this text, spiritual behaviour bears with it three elements: not to engage in controversies and disputes, to be subject to all human creatures for love of God and, when it pleases the Lord, to announce the Word of God. This is true not only for the special situation of the missions, but is necessary for the life of the fraternity in any place or situation whatsoever. This is the way the approved Rule shows it: They are «not to quarrel or argue or judge others when they go about in the world; but let them be meek, peaceful, modest, gentle and humble, speaking courteously to everyone, as is becoming» (*Rb* 3, 10). This fragment enumerates some ways of behaving that express *living according to the Spirit* along the same line that Holy Scripture expresses the just behaviour of the Christian.

The fraternity, understood in this way, is a way of living under the guidance of the Spirit of the Lord, which characterises both internal life and relations with the world.

## **7. Let everyone be called a lesser brother** (*Rnb* 6, 3)

Francis, in his *Letters*, defined himself as «lesser» (*2LtF* 87), «a worthless and weak man... a very little servant» (*LtO* 3), that is, a minor. And in the *Rule* he asked for «everyone in general to be called a lesser brother» (*Rnb* 6, 3). The fraternity according to Francis, therefore, is defined as Friars Minor and the Rule is «the rule and life of the Friars Minor» (*Rb* 1, 1). Minority expresses and marks the behaviour of the brothers within the fraternity – according to the words of the Gospel: «the greatest among you must behave as if he were the least» (cf. *Lk* 22, 26; *Rnb* 5, 12) – and in his manner of giving service asked of him outside the fraternity: «let them be lesser ones and be subject to all in the same house» (*Rnb* 7, 2). The capacity to behave as minors clearly shows if a brother really has the Spirit of the Lord (cf. *Adm* 12).

The definition as “minors” brings us close to the vision of poverty and humility of St. Francis. For him, to be poor and humble formed part of the life as pilgrims and strangers in this

world following Jesus. The minority practised as poverty and humility is a condition of this being strangers and pilgrims as visible signs of participation in the fraternity following Jesus (cf. *Rb* 6, 2). The ninth chapter of the *Regula non bullata* (*non-approved Rule*) expresses this vision of being pilgrims and strangers as minors serving the brothers more concretely. «Let all the brothers strive to follow the humility and poverty of our Lord Jesus Christ and let them remember that we should have nothing else in the whole world except, as the Apostle says, having food and clothing, we are content with these» (*Rnb* 9, 1). The humility and poverty of Christ, as an expression of the incarnation of the Son of God, was a new way of existing for Francis. Poverty eternally expresses the interior humility. Poverty and humility together make up minority. Minority, understood as a way of life, was, for Francis, the same way of life that Jesus Christ, His Most Holy Mother and the disciples lived (cf. *Rnb* 9, 5). Given that Francis wished that his fraternity would live closer to the way of Jesus, he encouraged living poverty and humility in order to follow Christ faithfully. It is important to recognise this christocentric nucleus that is at the basis of the minority of the Franciscan fraternity. This concrete way of life wishes to put the life of Christ into practice in the religious, social, political and everyday life context. It is not a matter of mere pious custom, but of a real social option in favour of the most marginalised.

## **8. Let them be Catholics** (*Rnb* 19, 1)

Francis tightly inserted his fraternity into the Catholic Church: «Let all the brothers be, live and speak as Catholics» (*Rnb* 19, 1). He wanted new brothers to be accepted, therefore, only after they had been examined on the Catholic faith: «Let the ministers examine them carefully concerning the Catholic faith and the sacraments of the Church» (*Rb* 2, 2). In addition, he promised obedience to the Lord Pope and the Roman Church in his own name and in the name of his brothers (Cf. *Rb* 1, 2ff). In the *Letter*



to the whole Order he indicated various aspects of what being Catholic meant for him, he highlighted what he considered important and declared that he wished to observe it firmly (*LtO* 40-44). The *Regula bullata* also illustrates for us what it meant for him to be Catholic. «Being always submissive and subject at the feet of the same Holy Church and steadfast in the Catholic faith, we may observe poverty, humility and the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ as we have firmly promised» (*Rb* 12, 4).

We find ourselves before the nucleus of being Catholic here: observing poverty, humility and the Holy Gospel. In contrast to the heretical movements of his time, Francis thought that in order to live according to the Holy Gospel, to be the closest possible to the life of the poor and humble Christ, it was necessary to be Catholics. It is the Church that makes the word of life, the body and blood of Christ, that is, the living Christ available to us (cf. *Test* 10.13). Francis promised obedience to the Church and piously lived the Catholic faith since this was the way to unite oneself with Christ, living by his word and sacraments. At the same time, Francis, without judging or creating conflicts, took a clear stance against the feudal Church of the time through his gospel style of life. While re-affirming his close ties with the Roman Catholic Church, he was conscious of all that was opposed to the Gospel even though practised by the same Church (as can be deduced, e.g., from his visit to the Sultan during the crusade). Francis, so devoted to the Pope, did not uncritically accept the decisions and the politics of the feudal Church of his time and he knew how to confront the decisions of the Church with the Gospel (cf. the sermon before the Pope and the Cardinals). The purpose of his obedience was the life of Christ according to the sacraments and to the word of the Gospel. He wished to address this in both the Church and the world.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

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### For personal reflection

1. Read *Rb* 6, 7-8.

In the light of this text:

- *Reflect on the trust each one has in his brothers.*

2. Read *Adm* 24 and 25.

In the light of these texts:

- *Reflect on the demands that these Admonitions present in your own life.*

3. Ask yourself:

- What do expressions like these mean in my life: “you are all brothers”, “the Lord gave me brothers”, “to prefer persecution rather than separate from the brothers”, “let them be called minors”, “let them be Catholics”? What concrete demands arise from these expressions?
- Do I feel a brother to all the members of my fraternity? To whom do I and to whom do I not? Is there something in my attitudes and conduct that is inexplicable from the fraternity point of view? What can I do and what will I do in order to live fraternally?
- How can I insert these aspects into my *personal life project*? How can I work on them in my personal life?

### For community reflection

1. Read *Rnb* 9, 1.

In the light of this text:

- *Reflect on the practical consequences for our life that follow from this text.*

2. Read *Rnb* 11.  
In the light of this text:
  - *Reflect on the relationships of the Friars among themselves.*
3. Read *Rb* 6, 7-8.  
In the light of this text:
  - *Reflect on the degree of trust there is in our fraternities.*
4. Read *test* 14.  
In the light of this text:
  - *Reflect on the actual living of gratuitousness in our fraternities.*
5. Read *FLC* 21-28.  
In the light of this text:
  - *Reflect on the living of certain human values – reconciliation, forgiveness, joy, education, friendliness, sincerity, self-control, sensitivity, sense of humour... – in the fraternity.*
  - *Reflect on the sense of gratitude in our fraternities.*
6. Let us ask ourselves:
  - What place do the above-described aspects occupy in our *fraternal life project*?
  - How can we make these aspects function in the fraternity?



## II

# FROM COMMUNITY LIFE TO FRATERNAL LIFE IN COMMUNITY

The religious life has been the object of profound transformations in recent decades. During a few years great changes were introduced into the style of life that had resisted the brunt of attacks from the events of centuries.

If we consider the historical evolution of the religious life, we would find certain important and real “ruptures”. We had, for example, the movement from the hermit way of life – which stressed the *fuga mundi* of the person in so far as he was an individual – to the coenobitic life. Here the community aspect acquired some relevance in the passage from the desert to the convent, to the great monasteries. Later still, there was the exodus from the great monasteries in order to embrace the mendicant and itinerant way of life, that is, the passage from classical monasticism to the mendicant Orders, among which is that of St. Francis of Assisi and his companions; etc.

It is no wonder, then, that the II Vatican Council, in its endeavours to renew Church structures and to adapt them to the new society that is in continuous evolution, should ask religious to return to their sources in order to recover their original identities and to adapt to the new times (CF. *PC* 2).

The religious life before the II Vatican, in fact, was characterised by its great similarity or almost sameness, the fruit of norms given by a single office that fixed the well-defined models, to which the existing Institutes and those being founded were shaped.

With the II Vatican Council there arose a new concept of the person, which led to accentuating more and more the community understood as fraternal life, which is constructed more on the quality of interpersonal relationships than on determined aspects of the so-called “regular observance”.

It is, then, necessary to recall the evolution in style of our life in common in order to understand better the phenomena that we lived in our Order. In this way the new significance of our life in fraternity, as our *General Constitutions* present it, can be more easily grasped.

## **1. Life in community before the II Vatican Council**

Life in community, before the II Vatican Council, was mainly characterised as being the place that permitted the living of a variety of religious expressions that were made objective, legislated for and transmitted by tradition. The Friars came together precisely to live together a theological structure, a combination of spiritual exercises. The organisation of community life was in function of the fulfilment of this. Therefore, its behaviour was regulated in function of the spiritual life. And when “spiritual life” was spoken about, the practice of the exercises of piety and religious virtues was understood.

Norms such as the keeping of silence, not entering the room of another brother, the keeping apart of the different stages of formation (a novice could not speak to a temporary professed!), show that the deciding factor in the concept and practice of community life was not interpersonal relations, but the *protection of the spiritual rhythm and climate*.

The purpose of the spiritual life was to facilitate the practice of spiritual exercises.

There were two great enemies of common life: familiarity between the brothers and worldliness. Familiarity referred to a kind of more personal relationship, the principal preoccupation of which was not directly spiritual fervour. Worldliness referred

to a topic that was inconsistent with the spiritual life and, therefore, had to be excluded from the ambience of our community relations.

In this perspective, *life in common* meant, fundamentally, *to carry out acts in common*, even though there was no kind of personal relationship between the members. In fact, the majority of acts had, as their only element in common, the physical co-presence since it only sought to favour individualism. Community acts in which there was some participation by the members were very rare. The only times when this participation was possible were at recreation, even if they were done with such care that interpersonal exchange was practically impossible.

Relationships between people were regulated. It was stipulated with whom one could converse, how one could converse, what subjects could be dealt with, etc. Everything was definitely subordinated to living “individually” the union with God. The numbers, therefore, created no problem, whether there were 10 or 50 Friars in the same community made no difference.

## **2. Fraternal life after the II Vatican Council**

With the II Vatican Council, the new structure of the religious life changed accent, the perception and the subjective capacity of the religious, as individuals or as a group, to arrive at an experience of God, live in community and commit themselves to an apostolic mission, were concentrated on.

There was, therefore, a displacement that accentuated the personal and community experience of the subject. The II Vatican Council, in fact, gave privilege to “the world of personal subjective relationships” in community life in contrast to that which happened in the past when community life was characterised by being “the place where acts in common were carried out”.

The community was converted into a support structure, into a place that favoured the personal experience of God. Previously, community life appeared as an ascetic element of renunciation,

of mortification, of personal sanctification through imposed sacrifices. The phrase “life in common is my greatest penance” of St. John Berkmanns, a Jesuit of the XVII century, was understood in this way. From the II Vatican on, in contrast, life in common was conceived as a place of human-Christian self-realisation, of effective support to live fidelity to God and commitment to one’s brother.

Life in common was converted into a reality that had value in itself as an enrichment of human personality. Solitude, isolation and the absence of community life appeared as threats.

From this there arose the need to reduce the number of religious in a community for the purpose of facilitating personalised living of mutual relationships. All of this generated, of course, a real rejection of great buildings, of anonymity, within the bosom of the great masses of religious living together.

The passage to a community structure composed of fewer members and in reduced spaces simply constituted the necessary beginning of a new kind of relationship between religious. The need arose to put one’s own experience of God in common. Liturgy was transformed. It is no longer simply the place of cult since the need is felt to express one’s experience of God to one’s companions through it. The physical place for liturgical celebration itself was changed so that it could favour personal and direct communication without inhibitions.

Personal and community life was submitted to periodical evaluations in community meetings. The mechanism for the review of life used by Catholic Action was adopted for this.

Community meetings multiplied, at times simply to encourage living together. They were therapeutic meetings that served in the relief of tensions.

There was a displacement of the “theological” for the “psychological”. Theological motivations were no longer sufficient, spiritual orientation was substituted by the psychological.

But, despite all, this displacement of the theological to the psychological does not necessarily carry with it a weakening of the first. It signifies the discovery of a dimension that was un-



known up to then. However, this discovery was so strong that the theological element was practically buried in an avalanche of psychology. In the end, however, a just balance was arrived at. It was a matter of finding a new way of living the theological factor. In this way, community life was converted into a privileged place for fraternal help in the conscious, free and participative assimilation of the constitutive elements of religious life.

As an irreversible aspect of this discovery, the fact is imposed that it is not possible to take away from the importance of the personal and the inter-subjective. The concept of authority, therefore, undergoes a profound transformation and religious vows are given a new interpretation.

In synthesis, we have been present at the passage from one understanding and practice of religious life, which was centred on an assembly of *spiritual principles* and on a group of regulated religious practices accepted worldwide, to one that is understood as a *life project* freely accepted, discussed and assumed in a personal, conscious and communal manner, in which subjectivity and community participation acquire relevance and in which all must pass through the mediation of experience.

In the *community* aspect, the same displacement towards living together, participation, communication, the emotional self-realisation of living with the brothers and the need to experience spiritual growth and apostolic courage in it, is produced. The importance of relationships between the members of the community influences the structural aspects of community life in a determined manner. From within fraternal life lived in common, there must arise apostolic enthusiasm and help for personal piety.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

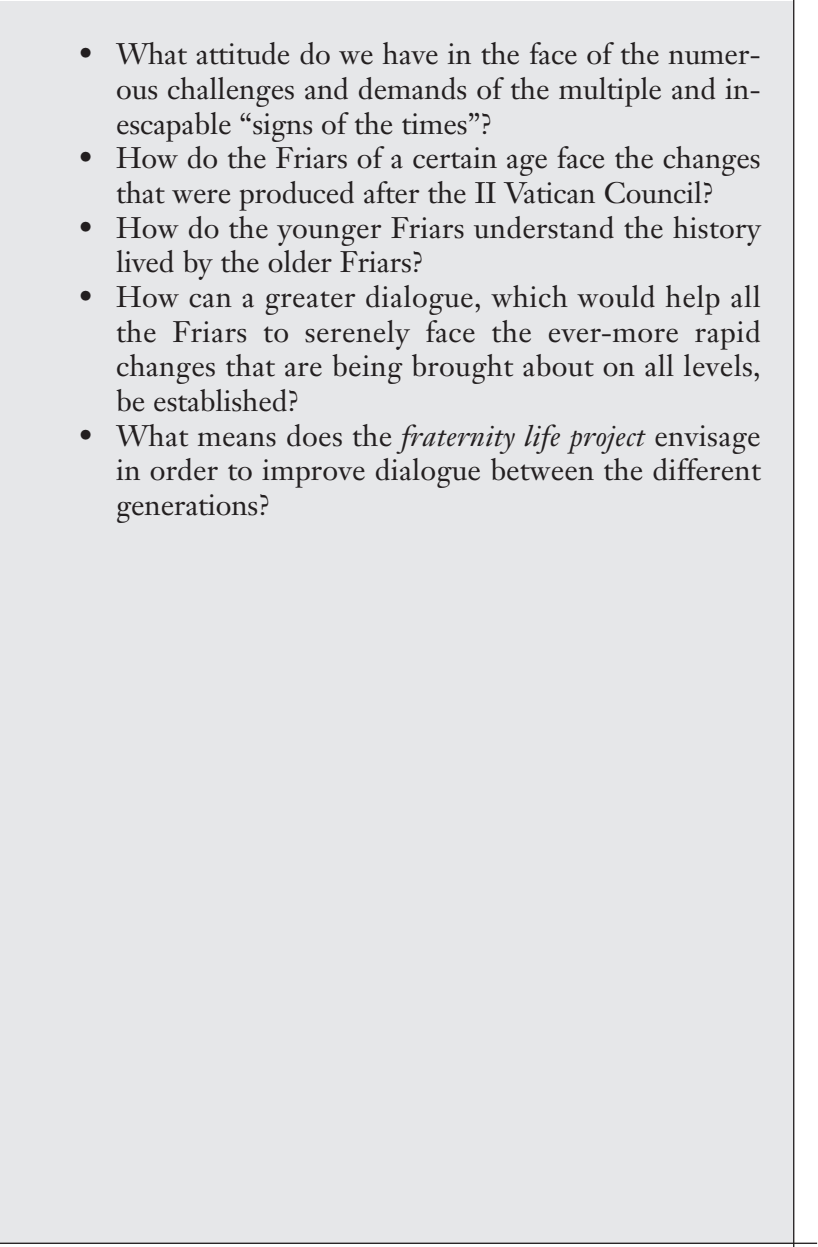
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### For personal reflection

1. Read the following texts:  
*PC* 2.3.5.6.9.12-15
2. Ask oneself:
  - What does “life in common is my greatest penance” mean in my life?
  - Is fraternal life, as it is being lived, helping you to achieve full human, Christian and religious maturity or not? Why?
  - What does returning to the sources to recover the original identity mean to you? What does adapting to the demands of new times mean?
  - What means does your *personal life project* contemplate in order to pass from community life to fraternal life in community? What means are missing?

### For group reflection

1. Read the following texts:  
*FLC* 5. 67. 68. 69. 70  
*VC* 37. 40. 44. 58. 63. 70.  
*FEGC* I.
2. In the light of these texts ask yourselves:
  - How can we assume, as a fraternity, the call of the Church to renew our life? What are the criteria for this renewal?
  - What are the signs of the times that challenge us most in this phase of history and in the context in which we live? What repercussions do they have on us and on our fraternities?

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- What attitude do we have in the face of the numerous challenges and demands of the multiple and inescapable “signs of the times”?
  - How do the Friars of a certain age face the changes that were produced after the II Vatican Council?
  - How do the younger Friars understand the history lived by the older Friars?
  - How can a greater dialogue, which would help all the Friars to serenely face the ever-more rapid changes that are being brought about on all levels, be established?
  - What means does the *fraternity life project* envisage in order to improve dialogue between the different generations?



### III

## THE ORIGINS OF FRATERNITY

(GGCC 38. 40)

#### 1. The meaning and significance of articles 38 and 40 of the General Constitutions

These two articles of our *General Constitutions* refer to the origin, the basis and the purpose of the Franciscan fraternity. In addition, they explain the importance and the role that the fraternity has in the Franciscan charism.

Art. 38: «As sons of the heavenly Father and brothers of Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit, the friars, following the Gospel way of life revealed by the Lord to St. Francis, lead a brotherly life in common, and love and support one another more than a mother loves and supports her child according to the flesh».

Art. 40: «Every friar is a gift of God to the fraternity. Therefore, even though they possess different characters, cultures, customs, talents, abilities and qualities, the friars are to accept one another just as they are and as equals, so that the whole fraternity may become a privileged place of meeting with God».

Let us see, point by point, how the two articles develop the meaning and significance of fraternity in the Franciscan life.

Article 38 places the fraternity in a trinitarian dimension. The fraternity has its origin in the Trinity: we are sons of the heavenly Father and brothers of Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. And again, it clearly points out that the end and objective of the fraternity consists of constructing a way of life in accordance with the Gospel, just as the Lord revealed it to Francis. In this way, both the fraternity and the way of life according to the Gospel, to which the life in fraternity looks, have their basis in the trinitarian mystery, as it was revealed to Francis.

These traits, which appear in article 38, are complemented by article 40. In this article it is again stated that, in its origins, the fraternity is a gift of God. Each Friar is a gift that God gives to the other Friars. The existence of each Friar, his person and his originality are a gift from God. Because of this, each Friar has to accept the others into “his own reality, just as they are”. The fraternity is constructed on the basis of the individuality of each and on the acceptance of that individuality as a gift from the Lord by all the members of the fraternity. They share the gift in the measure by which they accept the individuality of each Friar. Thus, the basis on which the fraternity is constructed is the diverse capacities, charisms, characters and talents of the Friars themselves. Only in the acceptance of this diversity is the fraternity changed into a privileged place of encounter with God, who is the origin of the said diversity.

In addition to the origin and to the basis of fraternal life, these two articles speak to us of the importance and significance of the fraternity for the Franciscan vocation and charism. Article 38 describes the fraternity as a constitutive element of our way of life. Fraternal life is the appropriate way to put the Franciscan vocation into practice. The character of fraternity was essential for the journey of Francis. Article 40 also sees in the fraternity the very originality of the Franciscan charism.

The fraternity, as the nucleus of the Franciscan life, is precisely constructed through a relationship of love between the Friars. As true spiritual mothers they have to mutually nourish the Friars (Cf. *GGCC* 38). This spiritual language of loving-

nourishing is made concrete in article 40: love is shown in the acceptance of the individual brother with his character, culture, personal history, defects and limitations. An equality is created among the different Friars as a visible sign of this loving-nourishing.

Articles 38 and 40 of the *GGCC* show us, then, the two starting points for understanding the origin, the end and the importance of fraternity in the Franciscan vision. While article 38 begins from on high, that is, from the triune God, article 40 begins from below, that is, from the Friar in his individuality as a gift of God. And while the first takes divine revelation into consideration, the second develops the importance that the individual Friar has for life in common.

A theological origin and a human origin of the fraternity can, therefore, be spoken about. The *GGCC* will again speak about the spiritual-theological origin of fraternal life, reminding us that the Friars are sons of the heavenly Father and brothers of Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. They will, in addition, make reference to the family relationship with the Trinity, a relationship that is at the base of the call to fraternal life according to the Holy Gospel revealed by the Lord to Francis. But it is important to remember, as the two articles of the *GGCC* that we are considering do, that it is not only a matter of maintaining a theological-spiritual relationship in the fraternal life. The family-fraternity must be translated into a mutual human relationship of fraternal-maternal love and of the mutual acceptance of all in equality.

In accordance with that said, we now take into consideration these two starting points in the Franciscan vision of fraternity.

## **2. The theological origins of the fraternity**

### *a. The fraternity, revelation of God (Test 14)*

Describing the essential elements of his vocation, Francis stated in the *Testament* that his life project was revealed by the

Most High. As he himself confessed, he had no intention of seeking companions to found an Order. It was the Lord that gave him brothers. In this way, Francis himself has us see that the fraternity, essential element of his gospel vocation, is born of the divine will. God constituted the first Franciscan nucleus as a fraternity. The nucleus, therefore, of the Order of Friars Minor, the fraternity, does not obey any human project, but a divine initiative.

*b. The fraternity, a gospel vocation (Test 14)*

Having received the first Friars as a gift from God, Francis did not know how to live with these Friars in practice. As he continued to explain in his *Testament*, it was the Most High Himself who revealed the gospel project of his life in fraternal communion. The biographers, for their part, show how Francis and his first companions discovered the Gospel as a life project. On the basis of some texts of the Gospel, they wrote a first *Rule* and went to Rome to present it to the Pope and asked him to confirm it in the name of the Church. Consequently, the Franciscan fraternity developed around a gospel project and became concrete in the following of Christ. The Franciscan style of fraternal life is, then, a gospel form of life. Francis and his first Friars tried to live the following of Christ by applying the Gospel to the real context of their lives. The aim of fraternal life is, in this sense, to live the spirit of the Gospel in the everyday context of reality. Thus, the fraternity itself is a place of evangelisation and promotes, as its mission, the proclamation of the Gospel in the world.

But the Gospel proposes Jesus Christ to us as a brother of humanity through His incarnation and passion: «O how holy and how loving, gratifying, humbling, peace-giving, sweet, worthy of love and above all things desirable it is to have such a Brother and such a Son» (2*LtF* 56). Becoming incarnate and offering his life for us, Christ made himself a brother, one of us. And this fraternal closeness of Jesus Christ to man is, for Francis, motive and reason for his option for fraternity. Like Jesus, he wished to



be a brother to all men and all creation. But, at the same time, when he approached all men and all creatures as a brother, he lived brotherhood with Christ himself. The fraternity, therefore, while finding its reason for being in the fact that Christ became a brother to all, is also the concrete manifestation through which the Friars Minor express their following of Christ “the brother”.

*c. Trinitarian vision of the fraternity (2LtF 49-53)*

Francis expounded his fraternity project in a fragment of the second redaction of his *Letter to all the Faithful*. Effectively, in 2LtF, on explaining the relationship of the man of faith with the triune God, Francis used various terms that indicate a family-fraternal relationship. The faithful, he stated, are children of the heavenly Father, whose works they carry out. They are spouses, brothers and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ. They are spouses when the faithful soul is united to our Lord Jesus Christ by virtue of the Holy Spirit. They are brothers of Jesus Christ when they do the will of the Father and they are, besides, mothers of Jesus Christ when they bear Christ in their hearts and bodies through divine love and a pure and sincere conscience and they engender it through holy works. In this way, the life of faith and penance creates a double relationship. In the first instance, it creates the family and fraternal relationship of the faithful with the Trinity as children, spouses, brothers and mothers. In the second instance, it creates an equally familiar and fraternal relationship between the faithful themselves as such. All are children of the same Father and brothers in Jesus Christ when they fulfil his will and carry out his works. Living thus in the salvific plan of God, an intimate familiarity of the faithful with God and of the faithful among themselves is created.

This model of family life among the believers and of these with the triune God, is changed in a certain way for Francis into the model of fraternal life for the Friars Minor. In the *Regula non bullata*, therefore, he proposed this model of fraternal-family life to the Friars under the aspect of maternity: «Let each one

confidently make known his needs to another that the other might discover what is needed and minister to him. Let each one love and care for his brother as a mother loves and cares for her son in those matters in which God has given him the grace» (*Rnb* 9, 10-11). Francis here returns to take up the family relationship expressed in the *Letter to the Faithful*, concretely applying it to the life of fraternity. For him, being a brother is expressed in maternal love, the love that gives birth, increases life and nourishes it. Every Friar Minor, as the mother he is for the others, is called to give birth and make grow in them the life of the spirit, the life of faith and to nourish it in accordance with the Gospel. The Friar Minor realises this maternal vocation through following Christ and through concrete acts of fraternal love: by giving his life for his brother, as Jesus Christ did, and giving himself to each one according to his needs.

#### *d. The significance of fraternal life in communion*

For St. Francis, being a Friar according to the model of familiarity with the triune God, which we have just pointed out, leads each Friar to a close relationship of life with all that have chosen the same vocation. All the Friars received the call from God to participate in the same gospel project of following Christ as sons of the same heavenly Father, as a brother of «such a Brother and such a Son... who laid down His life for His sheep» (cf. *2LtF* 54-56). So, a fraternity living together was created around Francis, that is, of life in communion, of common life with the aim of giving life by following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. In this way, fraternal life, which sinks its roots in the Trinity, is manifested and strengthened by sharing the reality of everyday life, work and gospel mission with the other Friars.

Fraternal life in common was, for Francis and his first companions, a way of living together in order to favour the realisation of their very vocation in the Spirit of the Lord. Fraternity in common is, therefore, the place where gospel values are shared, applied and put into practice in relationships between

the brothers themselves and with the Church and the world. They thus give witness to the goodness and wonders of God, «who suffered so much, who has given and will give in the future every good, for He is our power and strength, who alone is good, who alone is almighty, who alone is omnipotent, wonderful, glorious and who alone is holy, worthy of praise and blessing» (2*LtF* 61-62). And so fraternal life in common appears like a testimony to the intimate relationship with God the Creator, Redeemer and Saviour (cf. *Rnb* 23, 10). But, at the same time, theologically speaking, it could be said that fraternal-family life in common becomes an expression and testimony of the unity-love of God. It is born from on high as a gift in order to give witness to the internal life of love of the Trinity in the world. The love between Father and Son in the Holy Spirit becomes fraternity, is made family and visible in the gospel vocation of the Friars Minor, who live in fraternal-maternal love.

### **3. The human origins of the fraternity**

#### *a. The value of each Friar*

Article 40 of the *GGCC* gathers, as we said, the theological-spiritual sense of fraternity in so far as it develops the principle that every Friar is a gift for the others. But, at the same time, each Friar, in his individuality and with his personal talents, is changed into a human starting point for the construction of the fraternal vocation, into the origin of the fraternity. The fraternity, therefore, is constituted of real people with their personal character, culture, talents and capacities. In this sense, each member is an enrichment of the fraternity. The fraternity lives on the different personal riches with which each one of its components contributes to the construction of the whole and gives life to the values of the Franciscan vocation.

But, as the difference, even though it may be an enrichment, can become an obstacle to fraternal co-living, the Friars are ex-

horted to accept each other with mutual respect and love. The will to construct a real fraternity in a family-maternal spirit, with tolerant behaviour and mutual acceptance, helps to give privilege to the fraternity as a place of encounter with God, the supreme good, who is revealed through the gifts that the individual Friars have received as their own characteristics to be put at the disposal of all. On the other hand, the call to the equality of all the Friars reminds us that the fraternity is constructed and lives through the contribution of all. This richness of the individual Friar must not be underestimated as the starting point for the construction of the fraternity. The fraternity has life in the measure that the individual finds in it the place where he can commit himself to the others. The fraternity, therefore, is born of the acceptance of the human that the other offers.

*b. The fraternity, dialectic reality between grace and duty*

The two articles of the *GGCC* that are guiding our reflection reflect a certain dialectic between grace and duty. The vision that the fraternity is born as a gift of the grace of God is clearly expressed. It is a grace that is given through the Son of God, Jesus Christ, incarnated by the Holy Spirit in the man that feels the vocation to live according to the style of St. Francis (cf. *GGCC* 38). This divine grace appears again as a gift in each one of the Friars that comes to the fraternity (cf. *GGCC* 40). And so, the fraternity and the Friars must respond with their own lives to this grace that God has given them in the “way of life” and in the life of each Friar. The grace is converted, then, into a commitment, a commitment to follow the way of life revealed by God to St. Francis, the commitment to build fraternal life by loving and feeding one’s brother (cf. *GGCC* 40).

As if in a balance, the *GGCC*, following the track of the theological-spiritual basis, unites on the same plain the value of fraternity in common that it is wanted to construct and the value of each Friar with his original qualities (cf. *GGCC* 38). We find ourselves faced by an attempt to establish a balance between in-

sersion into the fraternity of the individual person, who will contribute to the common end with all his capacities, and the respect-love of the person of the Friar and of his vital needs on the part of the fraternity. The Friar has the duty to insert himself into the context of the common vocation by living the values of the fraternity with his contribution to its mission. At the same time, the fraternity, created by each one of its members, must respect the gift received from God through each person that makes it up. A sensitivity of respect for the diversity of the others must, therefore, be developed in the fraternity. And here again we find ourselves faced by the reality of the dialectic between the grace of the gift of being brothers and the duty of constructing the fraternity by means of this gift. The Friar is a gift from God that must be accepted, just as he is, into the fraternity. But, at the same time, the fraternity is an undertaking of relationships that has to be constructed and developed, and this commitment affects all equally.

Sharing their life and their gifts in the following of Christ, in this sense, and together putting into practice the values of the Gospel in their family relationships, the fraternity is converted into a place of encounter with God. «The Spirit of the Lord will rest upon them and make Its home and dwelling place among them» (*1LtF* 6).

#### **4. Consequences and difficulties of this vision**

A first consequence of this vision is that the vocation of our Order consists of building fraternity. The primary purpose of our vocation is not, therefore, a spiritual or pastoral commitment or project. The primary purpose is the fraternity itself. A fraternity, however, that should never build itself with a view to its own advantage. The construction of the fraternity is carried out in order to create a place of encounter with God. God, constructing the fraternity, wishes to construct for Himself a place of presence among us and in the world. Theologically speaking,

the construction of the fraternity, as a gift of God, offers God the possibility of being incarnated in the present day. Therefore, the construction of the fraternity requires incarnation in the world, in one's own environment, especially among the poor and the marginalised. In this sense, the fraternity needs to open up to divine revelation, taking into account the signs of the times, the present-day circumstances and the world in order to be close to the needs, petitions, joys and sufferings of men.

A second consequence is the respect for diversity among the members of the same fraternity. Unity cannot be achieved if diversity is not respected. In this sense, formation in the same spirit and in the same spirituality, without eliminating the differences, and respect for the individuality of each one, are requirements of our fraternal life.

The Friars Minor do not live together because they are friends. Our relationship is not based on natural sympathy. There are different characters and temperaments, often opposed, among us. The human maturity of all is not always on the same level. Formation and education are different, the rhythms of life and the personal needs are different. This makes the construction of fraternity difficult, but it should never be the cause of ruptures. To build fraternal life in common is no easy task. It requires time and a lot of openness to Him, who called us to this gospel way of life. For Him nothing is impossible and His grace will never be found wanting.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

### For personal reflection

1. Read the following texts:
  - *Rnb* 1, 1-5; *2Cel* 17; Brothers, because they are followers of the doctrine and footprints of Jesus Christ.
  - *Rnb* 1, 1-5; *TC* 29: Brothers, because they are listeners to and observers of the Gospel.
  - *1LtF* 1, 8-13; *2LtF* 48-56: Brothers, because they are brothers of Jesus Christ.
  - *Rnb* 22, 37; *Fioretti* c.14: Brothers, because Christ is in their midst.
  - *LP* 104: Brothers, because they were created by the same Creator.
  - *2Cel* 198-199; *LP* 110: Brothers, because Christ took our humanity.
  - *1LtF* 1, 14-19; *2LtF* 56-60; *Rnb* 22, 41-55: Brothers, through and in the unity of the Trinity.
  - *Rnb* 22, 33-34: Brothers, because they have the same heavenly Father.
  - *LP* 101: Brothers, because they are family asked for by Christ of the Father.
  - *2Cel* 180: Brothers, because they are sons of the same mother, the Order.
  - *2LtF* 1, 1-13; *2LtF* 48-56; *2Cel* 193: Brothers, because the Spirit of the Lord makes them sons of the Father and brothers of Jesus Christ and because the Spirit is the Minister General of the Order.
  - *Rnb* 1, 1; *Rb* 1, 1; *2Cel* 191: Brothers, because they follow the same way of life.
  - *Rnb prologue*. 2-3; *Rb* 1, 2; *TC* 46; *LP* 58. 102: Brothers, because they are gathered by the faith of the Church and through obedience to her.

- *2Cel* 158; *LP* 112: Brothers, because Jesus Christ is pastor and superior of the Friars.
  - *Rnb* 2, 9; *Rb* 2, 11: Brothers, because they have been received to obedience.
2. In the light of these texts:
    - Reflect on the basis on which my option for fraternity is based.
    - Carry out a review of life in the concrete living of fraternal life.
  3. Let us ask ourselves:
    - What does the invitation of St. Francis to the Friars to love and take care of each other with greater diligence than a mother loves and nourishes her child actually mean in my life?
    - What does the phrase “each Friar is a gift from God” mean to me? What practical requirements should this consciousness have in my life?
    - How can I insert these requirements into my *personal life project*?
    - How can I work at them so that they might be the basis of fraternal life on a personal level?

### **For group reflection**

1. Read *Test* 14; *Rnb* 9, 10.11; *TC* 25-34.
2. In the light of these texts:
  - Make out a fraternal communication on our actual situation and a comparison with the ideal in relation to the requirements and difficulties of fraternal life.
  - Reflect on the origins and purpose of the Franciscan fraternity. Exchange the different points of view.
  - Carry out a review of everyday life and of the commitments made by the fraternity as such and by its components, in order to see how to express our identity as a fraternity and its origin as a gift from God better.



- See what practical way there is of incarnating this vocation into one's environment so that our fraternities would be evangelically significant.
3. Read *Rnb* 5, 13ff, *Adm* 3.18.24.25.  
In the light of these texts:
    - Reflect on the “human virtues” that should characterise fraternal life.
    - Carry out a review of the fraternal relationships with the other Friars of the fraternity and with all those with whom we relate.
  4. Read the *GGCC* 38.39.40.  
In the light of these texts:
    - Analyse the difficulties of fraternal life in common.
    - Reflect on the gifts of each member of the fraternity. How are these gifts respected and developed within the bosom of the fraternity and, at the same time, how do the talents of each one contribute to the growth of all?
  5. Read *VC* 14-22.  
In the light of this text:
    - Reflect on the actual living of fraternal life in the light of the communion of trinitarian life.
    - Review the concept of the vows in the light of the Trinitarian, Christological and missionary vision.
  6. Let us ask ourselves:
    - What image of self do our fraternities give?
    - Does our fraternity – its voice, reason for existence, its message – actually reach the people? Or, said in another way, does the prophetic charism continue to live in your fraternity? Give some indications.
    - What place do the aspects that emerge from the above mentioned texts occupy in the *fraternal life project*?
    - How can these aspects be worked out in ongoing formation and in the life of the fraternity?



Second part

**THE FRANCISCAN FRATERNITY,  
GIFT AND TASK**



# I

## CONSTRUCTING THE FRATERNITY

### 1. “Called to build fraternity”

We Friars Minor have learned and inherited from Francis of Assisi, *forma minorum*, the healthy custom of building and constructing. Francis understood his vocation as a «go rebuild My house, as you see, it is all being destroyed» (cf. *2Cel* 10).

Francis’ vocation was forged and consolidated, at least in the beginning, while he reconstructed churches (as is known, he rebuilt 3 or 4 small churches), since it is in the Church that one hears the call and where every vocation is made stronger. Later, Francis and his brothers understood this “re-build my Church” as a call to live the Gospel and to follow Jesus. This was the way they re-built the medieval Church, with the aim of returning to it the freshness and beauty of Jesus, of whom the Church is an image and living manifestation.

We Friars Minor have inherited from Francis this call to continue constructing the Church, building the fraternity of Friars Minor. We feel the urgency to build the people of God (cf. *GGCC* 95 §2) and we do so by being what we are meant to be, brothers and minors.

The call to build the fraternity is urgent, then, even though fraternal communion is *already* a reality through the Spirit, we feel the *not yet* of our commitment together with all. Communion is a fact that pulses and lives within us, and this constructs the *greatness* of our vocation. But, on the other hand, we feel the

frailty of our communion, since we daily chew on the bitter dish of our divisions and dissension, of our big and little disputes and rivalries, and this constitutes the *misery* of our vocational living.

*Greatness and misery*, reality and promise, *joy* and pain... are the two faces of our communion and they call on us to unite forces in order to continue building this trinitarian communion that is proposed to us as the reality and promise of our fragile lives. Fraternal life is not something static, an already given, but something that is being done or undone, being constructed or being destroyed, since it is a living reality, made up of living persons, strong and fragile at the same time.

## 2. In the light of the General Constitutions

In our *GGCC* there is a key and clear text in this respect:

«... are to seek to build up the fraternity "as a family united in Christ"» (*GGCC* 45 §1).

Besides this expression, the *GGCC* contain a series of details, terms and ways of speaking that indicate understanding fraternity in the sense of growth, as a process, as an impulse. For example, verbs such as “construct”, “build”, “foment”, “promote”, “support”, etc. appear everywhere.

No less significant is, perhaps, in this sense, the expression «... *and with the assistance of the friars*» taken from the formula of profession (cf. *GGCC* 5 §2). The profession of the Friar Minor is not a goal, where one can rest once it has been reached, but rather the beginning of a process that is prolonged until death itself and in which the friendship and the assistance of the Friars is counted on in order to *learn how to be a Friar*. Our way of life is not professed because one is already a Friar, but rather does one profess *in order to* learn and to become one among brothers and with their help. The vocation to fraternity requires, then, a permanent creation of oneself, an ongoing constructing of the vocational response.

This reading of our vocation as a process, besides setting each Friar and each fraternity on a journey, shows the need to assume the task of building and constructing the fraternity.

### 3. A broad task

The Franciscan fraternity, in its smallness and minority, is also a vast task because our vocation aspires to goals that are beyond the controllable. We are men like any others, but called to be brothers: fragile and weak like others, but called to live on the promise of the “Almighty”; rooted in this earth, but called to the utopia of the Kingdom that is history and meta-history; rooted in a concrete fraternity and, however, open to the great fraternity built by all the Friars of the entire world; living a simple history and, at the same time, open to the history of salvation that God wishes to realise; limited like the other poor, but complemented by the presence of so many brothers that make fraternity possible; giving services that occasionally are insignificant and are, at the same time, the light and strength of the Gospel for those that contemplate the communion of brothers; devoid and stripped of power, but with the aspiration of being the ferment of fraternity in the world for the most underprivileged; sent to the world as brothers, gentle and pacific in the face of aggression and opposing forces, but with the aspiration of being a proclamation of messianic peace that the Lord Jesus brought us.

And this profession is also broad because being a brother is not a question of some ideological-intellectual apprenticeship, but a question of heart, of a heart capable of «having in mind what was also in Christ Jesus» (cf. *Phil 2, 5*), of a heart capable of loving even as far as giving one’s life for one’s brothers. And we all know from experience that this learning is something that never ends. When we think we have reached the goal we are surprised, in the language of Paul, by the experiences of the “old man”, a man with the “spirit of the flesh”, as Francis repeats so often, egoist, violent, “greater”, selector, judge of one’s brother and it is necessary, therefore, to begin again.

#### 4. A task for all

Article 45 §1, cited above, underlines the place and role of all the Friars in the construction of the fraternity. It says in effect: «In close union with the friars entrusted to them, the Ministers and Guardians are to seek to build up the fraternity».

The ministers and guardians, given our identity, certainly have a great service to give: they are those primarily entrusted with building the fraternity. But they are not the only ones, or, perhaps, the most important ones in this task. The duty and joy of building corresponds *to all the Friars*, to each one in his own way.

If the importance of *corresponsibility* (it is not in vain that our vocation is defined as “mutual and loving obedience”, as the desire for fidelity to the unique project professed in fraternity) is insisted upon in our life project, corresponsibility is not only vital but also the starting point in the topic of building fraternity. In this way, bi-polarity between superiors and subjects, which has been a constant during many moments of our history, is avoided. In the building of fraternal communion, nobody is superfluous and all are needed: the ministers, as a stimulus and example of communion; the Friars, as the place where the said communion is verified. Therefore, neither ministers without Friars nor Friars without ministers, but all, one and the other, in fraternal and edifying communion in an integral way.

#### 5. Build, not destroy

The objective sought is to build, to construct. The Friars must try, therefore, to use affirmative and positive words: motivate, support, gather, stimulate, propose, facilitate, push, etc.

The first way to build consists in not destroying, in not knocking down that which already exists, in not eroding, in not opening up breaches in the fraternity. There are subtle ways – and clumsy ones also – through words or gestures, by deed or omission, of destroying fraternal life. Article 43 of the *GGCC* reminds



us, therefore, that the «Friars are to refrain from any activity that may harm the fraternal union».

This call to build the fraternal life appears ever so much more important when in many places the Friars and the fraternities feel the temptation of individualism, superficiality, materialism, inhibition, etc.

Our times, so dense and surprising in many parts of the Order, require of us a series of background attitudes. They are, definitively, the attitudes of every good “builder” of fraternity. Let us call to mind a few:

*a. Creating positive bonds*

We all grow thanks to the care we offer each other in a climate of gratitude. To belong to a community is a right and a duty. And this means that it is in the community – as home and house – that we can receive and offer responses to our basic needs in the rotation and reciprocity of giving and receiving.

Creating positive bonds means the capacity to take care of the other and to give him life, to share reciprocally the fruitfulness. There is need of wealth in the interior world and of generosity to do this. To care for another is to make it possible for a balance to exist between the satisfaction and frustration of our needs.

These positive bonds must be given alternately – now you, now me -, in reciprocity, in mutual giving, as Francis untiringly repeats in his writings.

*b. Generating hope*

It is the realistic capacity of the mature man, who, instead of taking – inside or outside the fraternity – magical positions in the face of desires, unease, joys and suffering, or before the utopia, faces up to life with daily commitment, assiduous work and generous commitment by using his reason, heart and ideas, as well as his emotions, resources and suitable structures.

The popular collection of proverbs brilliantly expresses this idea when it says: “no gain without pain”, “fortune favours the brave”

and “he who wants strives”. To want to know something is nothing less than “putting oneself into a process in order to really know it”. To live as men, brothers, religious (“tied up”), be a sign and prophecy of the Kingdom in the world and generate hope among the poor, is to *mobilise oneself* without stepping on or subjugating anyone; to escape from the imagination, light-headed discussion, complaint and nostalgia; to pass through fear and advance with doubt, putting into play one’s best resources and those of others, reviving the sense of Him, who *convokes* and reunites us.

*c. Containing the pain and accepting life*

Wherever there is love and passion, there is always pain. Pain is the loss, the surprise, the nakedness, the good that cannot be enjoyed at the moment because life is being made concrete each day and I cannot have it all at once.

In the life of a fraternity there are always little and great pains. Sometimes the others do not fulfil our expectations; at other times the project does not succeed, in other cases, it is the illness or death of a Friar; or, perhaps, a Friar leaving our Order... And we ask what meaning does this suffering have, or how can we overcome it. This can, then, give us the measure of our capacity to love.

How should a community face up to pain? The maturity of a fraternity is measured by its capacity to assume pain, difficulty and the cross in an adult and correct way. To construct fraternity also means confronting the questions that are like a thorn in our life, but which, understood well, make us mature and progress, even though at the price of blood at times.

Meaninglessness is a profound cause of suffering. Suffering caused by pain can take almost everything away from us, but not the desire for meaning, the last redoubt of the freedom that gives meaning to naked existence. Whoever has a *why* in life, finds a *how* to bear the pain. This is borne out by the testimony of so many people that have borne and overcome pain and even failure, because they had a cause that motivated them.

It can happen that pain becomes anxiety, anguish or resentment. To avoid suffering disintegrating us is only possible by giving meaning to the pain and accepting the passage through the phases that the assimilation of all conflict presupposes.

These are some of the proposals in order to continue building and constructing our fraternal life. They are not the only ones, but they can be of interest in our mutual growth.

## **6. Means for building fraternity**

There are many means available for continuing the ordered construction of fraternal communion. The *GGCC* point out various, especially in Chapter III. We will highlight some:

### *a. Reciprocity of life and services*

There is no fraternity if there is no reciprocity, since we have not come together to be at each other's side, but to be thrown together in vital reciprocity. The terminology used by Francis in respect to reciprocity, traceable back to the vocabulary of the New Testament, is very important (*alter alterius, invicem inter se...*).

### *b. Corresponsibility*

Only when it is accepted that the fraternity is the “home of all”, since we are all equal even if our antecedents are distinct, do we build fraternity. We all feel called to respond to the Lord, who convokes and calls us to follow Him. This corresponsibility must be made concrete in the various areas of the life of faith, of life itself and of mission.

### *c. Chapter or encounter of the fraternity*

The fraternity is built, equally, in the fraternity chapter, that assembly – place of the celebration of faith, area for encounters

of the Friars and place of formation and fraternal correction – in which “two or three are gathered in the name of the Lord” trying to discern His will.

*d. Community project*

The *GGCC* do not explicitly cite the community project: however, its line of thought, its little concreteness, its non-dictating of concrete norms in many cases, etc. leave the need for the community project to be understood. This is a concrete means for the fraternity to clarify and to decide on how to be fraternity and how to build it.

*e. Do not hurt fraternal union*

Article 43, quoted above, points out a concrete and realistic way of building fraternity. Perhaps it is the primary way of building: not destroying it, not undermining its foundations, not exposing it to dead-end processes. That is to say, it is necessary to avoid all individual and/or group activity that could hurt the union.

*f. Giving service to the fraternity*

Chapter III of the *Constitutions* could be entitled: *How to build communion*. And its articles could be read as an enumeration of the services that must be given in order to bring about this building of communion. The *GGCC* point out many services that the Friars can and should give reciprocally. Some are of a spiritual nature, others are “human”, existential, etc. They range from the service of continually giving incentives to hope, peace and joy, up to taking particular care of the old, the sick and the weak and creating an environment of fraternity that is «a place of encounter with God» (art. 40).

Only in this way, day by day constructing communion in mutual fraternal stimulation, can the Friars be the constructors of new fraternities within the People of God (cf. *GGCC* 95 §2).

## SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

### For personal reflection

1. Read the following texts:
  - *Jn* 17, 11. This text appears various times in the writings of Francis (*1LtF* 1, 27-28; *2LtF* 56-60; *Rnb* 22, 41-55). With it, Francis proclaims the source and model of the more-than-maternal love relationship between the Friars: the love of the Father and of the Son.
  - *Jn* 15, 12. This text is found once in the writings of Francis (*Rnb* 11, 5). Francis proclaims the christological character of the more-than-maternal love relationship of the Friars with it.
  - *1Jn* 4, 8.16. This thought is found nine times in the writings of Francis, although the text of *1Jn* is never quoted literally. Francis once again proclaims through it that the origin of love is in God.
  - *1Jn* 3, 18. This text is found once in the writings of Francis (*Rnb* 11, 6). Francis, with it, proclaims the necessary operative nature of love, a subject that is very much present in his writings with regard to fraternity and other areas.
  - *Mt* 5, 44. This text is found four times in the writings of Francis (*2LtF* 38; *Adm* 9, 1; *Rnb* 22, 1; *Rb* 10, 10). With this text, Francis proclaims the radical character that is found in the relationship of more-than-maternal love between the Friars and between them and the rest of men.
  - *Mt* 7, 12. This text is found ten times in the writings of Francis (*Adm* 18, 1; *2LtF* 43; *LtM* 17; etc.). With this text, Francis proclaims the respectful, reciprocal

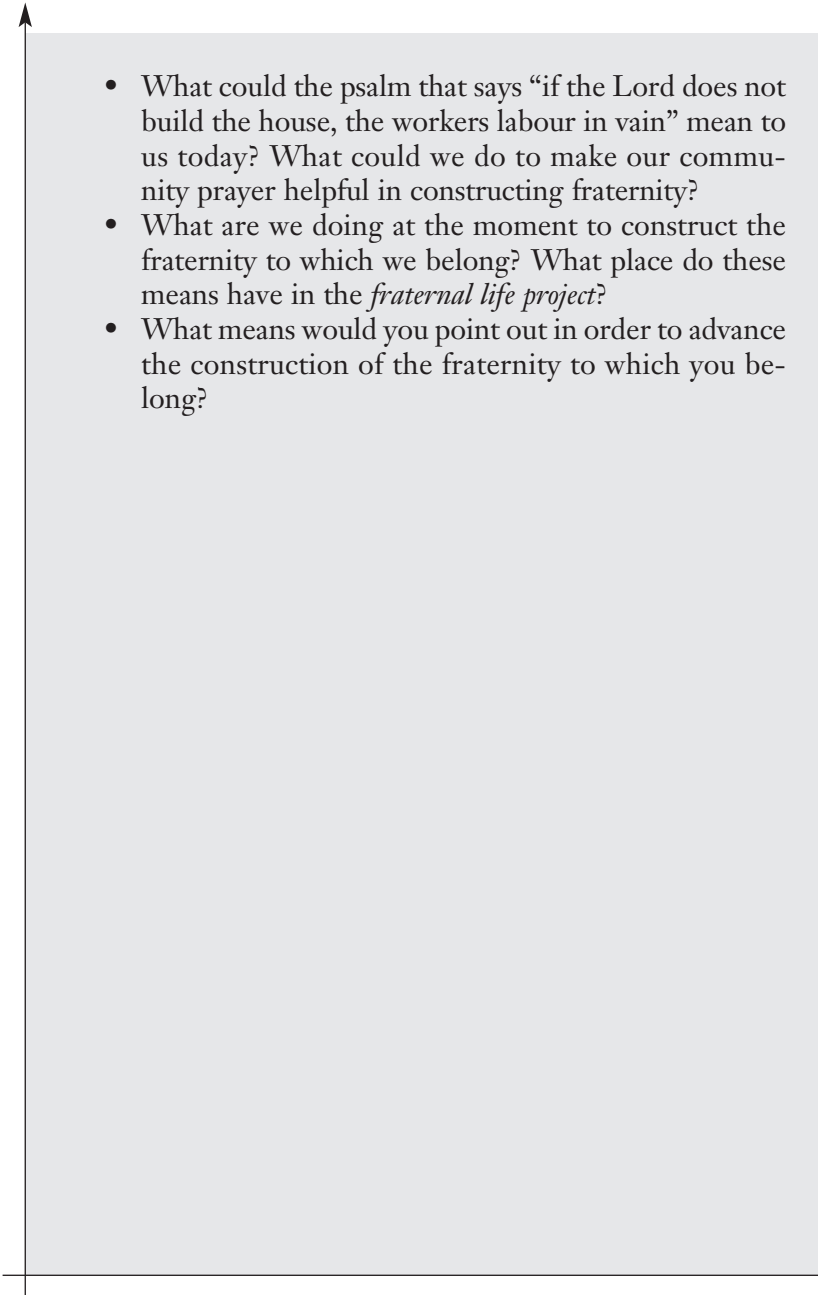
character of the more-than-maternal love between the Friars.

- *Mt* 20, 25-28. It is found three times in the writings of Francis, although never literally. Francis quotes only the phrase (He did not come) «to be served, but to serve» (*Adm* 4, 1; *Rnb* 4, 6; 5, 9-12). With this text, Francis proclaims the servile nature that the relationship of more-than-maternal love between the Friars should have. In fact the words *serve*, *servant* and *ministers* are abundant in his writings, undoubtedly making reference to this gospel text.
  - *Lk* 22, 26. The text is found twice in the writings of Francis, although never literally (*2LtF* 42; *Rnb* 5, 12). The term *minor* appears 16 times in his writings and, undoubtedly, makes reference to this text.
2. In the light of these texts:
    - Reflect on the requirements of fraternal love and the concrete consequences in your own life and in relation to the others.
  3. Ask yourself:
    - Am I conscious of my irreplaceable role in the process of constructing the fraternity?
    - What changes in my life does the vocation to construct fraternity demand? What positive attitudes must I strengthen and what negative attitudes must I avoid?
    - What do I consider essential in our fraternal life? Am I disposed to a fraternal dialogue on the essential and to allow myself be uninstalled by the truth, come what may?
    - Do I consider prayer to be the means par excellence for constructing fraternity? What importance (in appreciation, time, constancy and fidelity) has personal prayer in my life?

- What are the concrete means that I must put into action in order to build fraternity and what place do they occupy in my *personal life project*?
- How can I work on the demands of fraternal love in my life?

### **For community reflection**

1. Read the following texts:
  - *1Cel* 34-36; *LP* 115.
2. In the light of these and other texts:
  - Identify and analyse the kind of relationship that is found in the respective fraternities where each one lives.
  - Recall, from the writings and biographies, the ways and means that Francis had for reconstructing fraternal life.
  - Point out some attitudes and constructive behaviours that we have observed in some Friars of the community. (Telling the positive things will construct).
  - Recall also the ways and means that, according to Francis, destroy and hurt fraternal life.
  - Review our Eucharistic celebrations and the other moments of community prayer to see if they are a sign of fraternity life or the fruit of routine.
3. Ask yourselves:
  - Is the fraternity in which I live a gathering of people? Is it a conventual life of community? Is it a group of people who work together? Is it a group of friends who are together? Is fraternity being constructed?
  - What, concretely, can the building of fraternal communion mean to us today? Give concrete ways of doing it.

- 
- What could the psalm that says “if the Lord does not build the house, the workers labour in vain” mean to us today? What could we do to make our community prayer helpful in constructing fraternity?
  - What are we doing at the moment to construct the fraternity to which we belong? What place do these means have in the *fraternal life project*?
  - What means would you point out in order to advance the construction of the fraternity to which you belong?



## II

# HUMAN REALITY IN THE FRATERNITY

### 1. Called to trinitarian maturity

Article 38 of our *GGCC* places the vocation of the Friar Minor in the context of trinitarian communion: we have been called to participate in the communion of life and vitality that exist in the bosom of the Trinity.

Article 39, as if wishing to complement or make explicit the call to communion, presents our vocation as a vocation to anthropological and human unfolding. The call to be a Friar Minor is also a call to live and unfold all “human” potentialities and capacities. And this is not seen as something different to the theological-spiritual call, but as its complement or it being made explicit: in the human and total unfolding, the greatness of our vocation is seen. It is a matter of being and living all the aspects of communion, which are donation, grace, unfolding, festival, commitment, going out of self, going towards the other, etc.

Article 39 points out some of these capacities or human qualities: familiarity of spirit, mutual friendship, courtesy, jovial spirit, etc. And it calls on us to cultivate «all the other virtues...» (cf. art. 39). It is a question of the *anthropological-human dimension of our vocation*.

It is an aspect that must be very much kept in mind, since we are asked for human maturity in our vocation from all sides. The *Ratio Formationis Franciscanae*, on speaking about the candidates that wish to share our life, continually asks for a *human, Christian and Franciscan growth* in our vocation (cf. *RFF* 45 and follow-

ing, especially number 56). The document on fraternal communion by the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life equally speaks of this integral growth. «It may be useful to recall that in order to foster communion of minds and hearts among those called to live together in a community, it is necessary to cultivate those qualities which are required in all human relationships: respect, kindness, sincerity, self-control, tactfulness, a sense of humour and a spirit of sharing» (*Congregavit nos in unum Christi amor* n. 27).

As much again is said in the document *Pastores dabo vobis*, which, on speaking of the dimensions of priestly formation, quotes first of all «human formation as the foundation of all priestly formation» (cf. *PDV* 43).

This call to human maturity is not, however, new in our Franciscan tradition. Perhaps it could be said that sufficient attention was not paid to it during long periods of our history since other topics were stressed: however, despite all, it was always present. Francis of Assisi was a “humanly mature” man: the traits that identify him coincide with the traits that modern sciences consider proper to a humanly mature person.

In the writings of Francis we find a multitude of signs that stress the need for and the importance of human maturity. Francis made it possible and demanded of his Friars “that human maturity”. Here is a small sampling:

- joy (“do not show yourselves hypocritically grim”);
- understanding (“do not judge others”);
- mutual and generous pardon;
- equanimity (“do not question...”);
- love like that of a mother (“because if a mother loves and cares for...”);
- availability to others;
- freedom in order not to be entrapped (to leave an office...);
- put up with offences (*Admonitions*, passim...);
- A significant text is that of *MP* 85, where Francis highlights, among the traits of the “perfect Friar” (that is, mature), qualities such as courtesy, sensitivity, welcome, servility, etc.).

Our fraternities, then, are called to make possible and strengthen the signs of human maturity, with the aim of being through this also a «place of encounter with God» (cf. *GGCC* 40).

## 2. Some signs of human maturity

When can we say that a Friar has reached maturity or that a fraternity is made up of mature Friars? What are the signs that would enable us to identify the maturity of a person?

Many are the signs that indicate the maturity of a Friar. Above all, there are conducts and behaviours that make the fraternity grow, just as there are also conducts that threaten the fraternal communion. The authors are not always in agreement in the enumeration of these signs. Here we will limit ourselves to quote some, as an example. We will synthesise them into six. The Friars can, then, enumerate others, completing the list:

- a. Internal harmony
  - With a convergence and integration of all human potentialities.
- b. Ability to communicate
  - in a profound and positive relationship with others.
- c. Transcendence
  - personal contact and communion with a supreme Being that gives meaning and life.
- d. Efficiency
  - In the intellectual, material, social, etc. fields. That is, that the person, wherever he is, is capable of developing his qualities and carrying out his projects efficiently: teacher, cook, intellectual, gardener, etc.
- e. Sense of humour
  - It is the rare capacity that some people have to love themselves deeply and, precisely because of this, to know how to laugh at themselves; to love the world profoundly while knowing how, at the same time, to laugh at it.

- It is necessary to distinguish the one with the “funny man” sense of humour, who takes everything as a joke and at whose “funniness” others “laugh”.
  - He that takes things seriously, but is capable of laughing at what he does and of making his projects and intentions relative, has a sense of humour.
- f. Creativity
- The capacity to create something or to have an original experience.

Other traits of human maturity could, undoubtedly, be described (positive image of self, self-esteem, the capacity to accept criticism and adversity, capacity to postpone the satisfaction of one’s “needs” and to do so with agility, the capacity to open up to others, etc.), which figure among the traits considered as classical. It would be a good fraternal exercise for the same fraternity to add and comment on other traits.

### **3. Some difficulties**

We are called to be an image of trinitarian communion and yet, how alone we can find ourselves at times! Convoked to be signs and sacrament of the new humanity of the resurrected Christ and yet, how many wounds and death bites there are around our fraternities! Called to be a sign of abundant communion and yet, how many crumbs and wounds there are around our tables!

Called by grace to this fraternal communion, in the image of trinitarian life, we recognise that there is a great distance between the ideal and the reality. The lack of human maturity, in not a few cases, is the cause of difficulties and tensions that convert our fraternity into “a terrible place” where our limitations, wounds, “escapes” and even our inability to live with others in peace are in full view. It is a threat to our vocation to communion and unity.

At times these difficulties for peaceful cohabitation are intrinsic difficulties for the development of people:

- “This Friar would not be admitted to the Order today”
- “He is a very strange person”
- “This Friar is full of complexes that result in great inhibition or in notable aggressiveness”.
- “Insufficient development during infancy and adolescence have caused this Friar to be a difficult person”.
- “A negative experience in another fraternity has made this Friar into a person closed in on himself and unsociable”.
- “He is burned out”, etc.

These are some of the expressions that are often heard during our conversations on fraternity.

All this is real, as real as our unexpressed and inexpressible “needs and desires”, “wounds” and lacks, our fears and inability, our difficulty in accepting ourselves in our truth, our unreal imaginations... And we must take all this into account because “we are not heroes called to sanctity, but poor men convoked to the table of mercy of the Lord”. And as long as we do not accept this state of human humility and weakness, we will not be able to construct a real, mature and significant fraternity.

#### **4. Some means for growth**

Simply stating these facts of our immaturity are of little or no value. It is necessary to do something in order to make it possible for all the Friars to progress in the process of maturing.

- a. Becoming “men”
  - «Even before being men, they already want to be similar to God» (*Adversus Haereses* IV, 328, 4).
  - This phrase of St. Ireneus, addressed to the gnostics of his time (III century), can serve us very well to make the first detailed statement on the human means in community life.

- In order to become men, it is necessary to acquire gradually a series of convictions and attitudes.
- It is necessary: *to accept and love oneself in one's own personal humanity*, in one's body; to develop in oneself the masculine or feminine dimensions that form part of one's being. The masculine and feminine aspects must complement each other in each person: the *animus* (spirit, intelligence) and the *anima* (open to the mystery) must complement each other and be united.
- It is necessary *to learn to be autonomous, independent*, to be capable of living and deciding alone, without the need to seek continually the approval or the opinion of others. Through this autonomy, the capacity to accept one's limitations is linked to the capacity to accept the limitations of others, knowing how to bear in silence the inevitable deficiencies and frustrations of life.
- *Responsibility, the consciousness of duty*, fidelity to oneself and, especially, the acceptance of others and being open to them, the possibility of living and forming with them a human life and gospel project, are other traits of real humanity that we must seek.
- We need *openness to the world in which we live* and which is the place where our ego is built, this world from which we must not flee, which we must not flatter or curse, but, on the contrary, know, love, use with discernment in all its cultural, scientific, social, political, etc. complexity. To become men today requires taking our world, with all its complexity, into account.
- *Control of the relational*: one becomes an 'I' by pronouncing 'you'; one progresses in his journey towards human maturity when one offers oneself to an encounter with the other. The mature man is he who knows how to open up to the other and accept him in his difference. This other is one's neighbour, man, but is also, undoubtedly and first of all, the Absolute, God.

b. Acceptance of the other

*What is acceptance of the other?*

- To receive lovingly the person in his unique individuality;
- the disposition to assess positively his way of acting, his feelings and intentions;
- the capacity to perceive what the other feels in the originality of his interior life;
- to trust intensely in the person's capacity for growth.

*What is non-acceptance of the other?*

- being always in agreement with the behaviour of the other;
- always justifying and approving his conduct;
- studying the person from afar;
- having excessively avid curiosity about the intimate life of the other;
- having a predominantly critical attitude;
- judging the other with one's own mental and emotional schemes;
- avoiding *all conflict* by hiding negative feelings.

*How can the acceptance of the other be facilitated?*

- Trying to feel things in the same way that the other does;
- being authentic and frank, but not at any price, but by gauging what the other can assimilate;
- strengthening the *positive* feelings;
- giving signs of a desire to approach the other;
- showing interest in the other;
- being patient in listening;
- being a witness to hope;
- being interested in the other's things, especially in his feelings.

*When is the acceptance of the other made difficult?*

- When he is assessed only in function of his qualities, efficiency or edifying conduct:
- when there is an excessively evaluative tendency;
- when there is a disregard for the other;
- when there is little hope for the other.

*Stimulating factors of community life*

- Finding space to express oneself freely;
- an ambience of a certain *emotional warmth*;
- assigning tasks and duties that are *significant and suitable* to each person in accordance with his competence, allowing a margin for *creativity*;
- having the stimulus of consistent reports;
- unceasingly feeding a generously lived ideal;
- a participative ambience in up-to-date and significant projects.

c. Community climate

Nothing has been shown to be as efficient for the Friars to achieve maturity as a good community climate; it is “point zero” from which other things can be spoken about, but without which it is impossible to progress along any path of growth.

A good community climate includes, among other things:

- an agreeable ambience and mutual acceptance;
- the absence of murmuring and hyper criticism of the group outside the group;
- joy in meeting with the Friars and in their presence;
- availability for collaboration;
- agility in understanding and excusing a Friar;
- a sufficient level of communication, including that of feelings;
- a relationship of a certain depth with the Friars;
- generosity in mutual forgiveness;
- the cultivation of a “group mystique”...

When a fraternity is capable of creating this ambience or assertive community climate, it is unsuspected how far it can go. There, in this welcoming climate that we call “point zero”, everything is possible, even the most real confrontation between the Friars... But without it, it is almost impossible to progress and the growth of the Friars is unthinkable.



Is it not true that those who loved us most have been those who helped us most in life? To help in mutual human growth presupposes mutual acceptance that leads us to a simple, but real, love that takes us out of our prisons and “immaturity” that are damaging us within.

However, before arriving at this acceptance of a Friar, something of an ideal, it would be worthwhile thinking about personalising at least these other attitudes, which are basic in a fraternity:

- Respect for the feelings of the other.
- Always avoid value judgements.
- The distribution and coordination of activities.
- Appreciation of each person.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

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### For personal reflection

1. Read the following texts:
  - *GGCC* 39.
  - *FLC* 35-38.
2. In the light of these texts:
  - Reflect on the living of the human virtues.
3. Ask yourself:
  - Which of the signs of human maturity pointed out are missing in my life and in the life of the other Friars? How can I grow and help others to grow in them?
  - What means am I using to grow humanly? What place do they occupy in my *personal life project*?

### For reflection in the group

1. Read the following texts:
  - *Rnb* 11; *Rb* 3, 10-14; *Rb* 10, 7-12; *MP* 85.
2. In the light of those texts:
  - Exchange feelings, experiences and opinions about human maturity in your concrete fraternity.
  - Point out some signs and traits of a humanly mature person according to the opinion of the members of the fraternity. Indicate, comment on and enumerate them in the order of importance.
  - Enumerate the difficulties that the Friars of the fraternity feel in living together in a humanly mature manner. Describe the traits and symptoms.
  - Indicate realistic means that could help contribute to a suitable human growth.

3. Ask yourselves:

- Are our fraternities, called to be like “green zones” in our society, becoming provocative signs of hope for an authentic humanity, where God is breathed in and where human and gospel values are cultivated?
- Which social virtues seem to you to be indispensable for living in fraternity? Which are missing in yours? How can they be acquired?
- How can one advance along the path of human maturity?
- Which means should be used to accompany the Friars, especially those who find it more difficult, in growing, progressing and being animated in fraternal communion?
- What place do human values occupy in the *fraternal life project*?



### III

## EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

Our fraternities are formed by us, who are equal yet different. We are equal, because each one is fundamentally a brother that is recognised as substantially equal to the rest on the basis of a common *Rule*, professed by all. But we are different, because each one has his own characteristics, values, defects, offices and ministries that distinguish him in an unmistakable way.

Many of the riches and problems that characterise our life are born of this equality and diversity. It is important, therefore, for us to become aware of it in order to assume, with consistency, this aspect of our vocation. Our *Constitutions* also invite us to it when it states:

Article 40: «Every friar is a gift of God to the fraternity. Therefore, even though they possess different characters, cultures, customs, talents, abilities and qualities, the friars are to accept one another just as they are and as equals, so that the whole fraternity may become a privileged place of meeting with God».

Article 41: «All the members of the Order are brothers and minors in name and in fact, although they may exercise different offices, duties and ministries».

## 1. The grace and gift of diversity

It is important, first of all, to consider the diversity that distinguishes us as a grace and a gift. This diversity can include the most diverse areas, from our physical constitution or health situation to our spiritual journey, which is so singular and different in each one, passing through those subtle and interior aspects relative to character, customs, small manias or great qualities.

This diversity is nothing new. It is enough to take a glance at the history of the Order and, in particular, at its great saints, to notice that no two Franciscans that were equal have ever existed. If we compare the great saints of Franciscan history, we will discover evident and macroscopic differences. All were Franciscans, all were saints, but, at the same time, each one was so different to the others! Undoubtedly, a great part of this diversity is due to the different historical context in which they lived and which comprises very different epochs and places. However, it must be recognised that a certain appreciation of the diversity appears to be inherent in the nature of the Franciscan vocation. On the other hand, we can also show notable differences between contemporary personages. It is enough to think, for example, of St. Anthony of Padua, a contemporary of St. Francis and an exemplary Franciscan, but so different in many aspects, to the Saint of Assisi.

If we consider our times and the Friars of today, it would be impossible to ignore the profound diversity that distinguishes us. We can find Franciscans involved in the most varied of activities: with immigrants, with men of study, with prostitutes, with the sick, with the rich, with the poor, etc. And these differences do not refer only to the context in which each one carries out his activities. They also refer to the deep motivations that sustain the different options, up to the point where some Friars consider it a moral obligation to commit themselves to certain activities or fields that other Friars do not consider urgent.

We see these differences in sensitivities and options in our meetings, from local chapters to provincial chapters, in which

diverse proposals and opinions always arise and are defended with equal sincerity and passion by profoundly different people. The spiritual richness and apostolic fruitfulness of our fraternities depend a lot on this extraordinary difference of sensitivity, of characters and of opinions. It is a matter, indeed, of a grace. The different sensibility of the Friars allows us to catch a glimpse of the range of distinct perspectives of ours, to which we would never have arrived alone and which are revealed to us on many occasions as valid and fascinating.

On occasions we can experience the burden of this diversity: when it is necessary to make a decision in common, the different opinions can appear to be an obstacle or a weight. There is often an impression that they obstruct community progress. It may happen that some decisions must be taken with the consent of all and then the diversity is presented as a weight that obstructs a more rapid and, perhaps, a more prophetic or creative progress.

## **2. The grace and task of equality**

It is necessary to observe that, together with the confirmation of our diversity, the common knowledge of a bond of profound equality makes us all brothers of each other, including those we see for the first time but are presented to us as members of the same great family that our Order is. This animates us.

From where does this feeling of fraternal equality stem?

To respond to this question, it would be possible to evoke the sense of belonging that characterises a whole human group and that also constitutes a psychological characteristic of our fraternity. We could equally refer to the feeling of equality that characterises the social relations of our times and which is expressed, perhaps, as a clear preference for democratic and egalitarian methods. But if we want to get to the bottom of the analysis of our fraternal equality, we must state that at the root is found the consciousness that «Every friar is a gift of God to the fraternity» (GGCC 40). If each Friar is a gift from God to the fraternity, one

cannot be privileged to the detriment of another or think that he can judge the gifts of the one God in different ways. That attitude would be equal to judging God, author of those gifts and who knows very well what he is doing when he gives us these brothers. If there is a conviction of faith to the fact that each Friar is a gift from God at the basis of our fraternal equality, then we will understand that fraternal equality is expressed through the signs of common belonging to the same family, the Order. Profession is equal for all in its essential contents as are the path of initial and ongoing formation, which urges and helps all to be true Friars Minor, the equality of rights and of obligations and the common effort to dedicate ourselves fully to the good of the Friars.

It is a matter, certainly, of a path that, at least in part, still has to be travelled. It is a grace and a task, as often happens with what we receive from the Lord, who grants us gifts and graces to make us bear fruit by using them in the service of others. The gift of the common vocation, which makes us recognise a special gift of God in each Friar, is a grace that we have to use for the good of the fraternity.

On the other hand, this is the attitude taught to us by St. Francis, who, at the beginning of his vocation, did not think of gathering brothers about him or, less still, of founding a religious Order, but to whom, as we read in his *Testament*, “the Lord gave me brothers” and “revealed to me that I should live according to the form of the Holy Gospel”.

Therefore, if equality consists of accepting each Friar as a gift from God, this acceptance is a goal that must be sought each day. It is thus that the great sign of the Kingdom of God, which is fraternal communion between equal but diverse brothers, is brought about.

### **3. Areas of equality and progress made** (*GGCC* 3)

The topic of equality refers to relationships within the bosom of our fraternities. The different tasks and ministries carried out



by the Friars constitute one of its specific environments. Our *GGCC* clearly state «all the members of the Order are brothers and minors in name and in fact, although they may exercise different offices, duties and ministries» (art. 41). This assertion helps us to correctly focus our reflection.

When “distinct ministries” among us are spoken about, the reference is evidently to the priestly ministry, which distinguishes the priest Friars from the lay Friars and which is a point that affects the equality-diversity relationship within the fraternity.

When we take a look at our history, we see that the distinction between clerical and lay brothers has deeply marked the development of the Order. Some traits of the Order desired by Francis of Assisi, a fraternity that was open to clerics and lay without distinction, changed during the early decades. The Order of Friars Minor soon changed into a clerical Order. It took on activities and offices that were clearly clerical, such as preaching in churches, the administration of the sacrament of penance or pastoral care and opted for entrusting the service of authority in the organisation of the internal life to the clerical Friars only.

We are the inheritors of that history and we have assisted at important changes down through the ages. During the years following the II Vatican Council and obeying the Council invitation to renewal by returning to the original charism and being faithful, at the same time, to the signs of the times, our Order discovered anew the “fraternally equal” character of its early times and of our original identity that is above any distinction between cleric and lay and that is pushing it towards the non recognition of itself as either a clerical Order or as a lay Order.

It is a matter, as we well know, of the question tied to article three of our *General Constitutions*, which says:

§1. «The Order of Friars Minor is made up of clerical friars and lay friars. By their profession, all friars are completely equal in their religious rights and obligations except for those that arise from Sacred Orders».

§2. «The Order of Friars Minor is included by the Church amongst the clerical Institutes».

The first paragraph expresses the consciousness that the Order has of itself today. The Order has repeatedly asked the Apostolic See for the power to change the redaction of the second paragraph, since it does not appear to reflect our identity. After the Synod of Bishops in 1994 and the later exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, a new way of thinking was officially initiated. In addition to the clerical and lay religious Institutes, there are Institutes known as mixed, which correspond better to our identity and in which the Order hopes to see itself placed as soon as possible.

It was useful to recall this question in order to face up to various aspects that affect us closely. Effectively, although the debate on art. 3 may appear simply a juridical affair, it is important for all to face the substantial question. It is not only juridical. It profoundly effects our life since it arises from the conviction that our vocation has its own consistency and identity apart from the priestly ministry, which, of itself, is not constitutive and essential to the true figure of the Friar Minor. This is not to deny that the said ministry can be integrated perfectly into the vocation of the Friars Minor called to it and who are in fact a considerable percentage of the Order. It is not a matter, evidently, of excluding the perspective of priestly ministry, but of understanding it correctly in accordance with our vocation as Friars Minor!

#### **4. The secular temptation and the new temptations of inequality**

In the past, the distinction between clerics and laity constituted an objective element of possible inequality and, in fact, came to create two “classes” of Friars. This, in part, is due to the old canonical legislation that imposed different novitiates for the

clerical Friars and the lay Friars (including the obligation of repeating the novitiate if one asked to pass from one to the other group). Despite this, our Order was not among those that explicitly insisted on this distinction. Besides, some characteristic common signs were maintained (such as the same habit or the same formula of profession), which protected the memory of the early intuition of Francis of Assisi. It must also be said that the inequality between clerics and lay did not impede many Friars, cleric and lay, in achieving sanctity!

Those of us that belong to a generation posterior to the great changes provoked by the Council and who, at least in our intentions, have overcome the inequalities linked to the distinction between clerics and lay, must ask ourselves, however, if there are new temptations to inequality in our fraternities. And, if affirmative, what are they? It would be hypocrisy, in effect, to pronounce ourselves against a situation of the past, which seems to have been overcome, and to ignore the new risks of inequality that affect us more closely.

Can there not be forms of discrimination linked to the activities carried out by the Friars so that some are dedicated to works that are considered more “noble” and others to works that are more “contemptible”?

Can there not be forms of economic inequality linked to the concrete activities that each one carries out and with the opportunity to handle money or with the fact of having to ask each time, in contrast to other Friars?

Can there not be detected, inclusively, a division into “social classes” that creates obstacles between the Friars that have studied (and today they can be both priests and lay) and those other Friars? With the curious proof that at times the Friars without studies can feel discriminated against and, in turn, assume a discriminatory attitude, considering themselves the true sons and heirs of our Father St. Francis, “ignorans et idiota”!

In summary, the temptation to inequality is always present and we must continually examine and confront ourselves on it.

## 5. Forming for equality in diversity

As a conclusion to this reflection, which has helped us to deepen our identity of Friars so equal and so diverse, we must ask ourselves what are the formative processes that we must go through in both initial and ongoing formation. The convictions about our identity must find concrete forms of expression and impregnate the whole formative process. Is it not certain that some stages of initial formation have an orientation that is more focused on the formation of priests than on that of Franciscans? Is it not also true that the proposals and initiatives of ongoing formation are often directed, in fact, exclusively to those Friars that have an elevated cultural preparation, forgetting the others?

If it were necessary to take a reference point that would synthesise this topic it would be, undoubtedly, the image of the Most Holy Trinity. In it we contemplate the three Divine Persons, so equal and so diverse, living in a union that is so perfect that they are a single God. In effect, if it is true that in the Trinity the Father is not the Son and that one divine Person is not the other, so also is it certain that each one of the three Divine Persons lives this diversity in perfect equality and communion. The model that respects and, inclusively, highlights the diversity in the perfect equality and unity is at the heart of our faith, because it is the very life of the Trinity. It is clear, this model flees from all temptation of inequality that tries to level all, nullifying the differences that are precious and loved by God himself.

Our fraternities, and the entire Church, must be an image of the Trinity, mystery of unity and diversity that manifests the very life of God.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

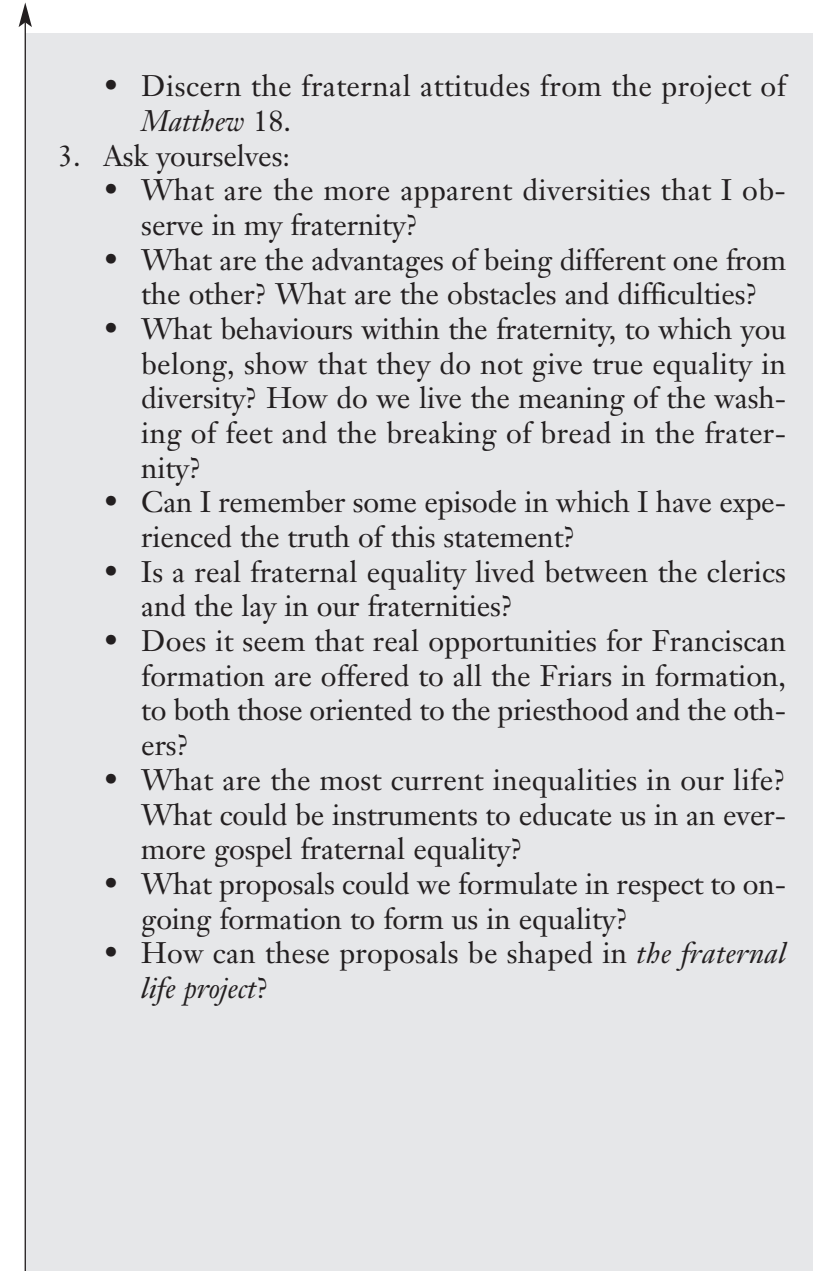
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### For personal reflection

1. Read the following texts:
  - *GGCC* 3. 40. 41.
2. In the light of those texts:
  - Reflect on your attitude towards the Friars you consider inferior.
3. Ask yourself:
  - What am I doing? and what can I do, to move towards greater equality in diversity in the fraternity to which I belong?
  - How do I stand before the diversity?
  - Do I really see that each Friar, with his own gifts, is a gift of God to me?
  - “All the Friars, in virtue of profession, are entirely equal”. How do I live this topic? How is it reflected in my *personal life project*?

### For reflection in the group

1. Read the following texts:
  - *Mt* 18, 1-8; *Gal* 6, 2.
  - *Rnb* 6, 2.
  - *Rnb* 5, 9-15.
  - *1Cel* 31.
  - *2Cel* 191. 193; *LP* 103.
  - *LMj* 3, 5.
  - *LtM* 7; *1Cel* 102; *MP* 85.
2. In the light of these texts:
  - Exchange points of view on the inequalities between the Friars that live in the fraternity and on situations of inequality that are lived in the Order.

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- Discern the fraternal attitudes from the project of *Matthew* 18.
3. Ask yourselves:
- What are the more apparent diversities that I observe in my fraternity?
  - What are the advantages of being different one from the other? What are the obstacles and difficulties?
  - What behaviours within the fraternity, to which you belong, show that they do not give true equality in diversity? How do we live the meaning of the washing of feet and the breaking of bread in the fraternity?
  - Can I remember some episode in which I have experienced the truth of this statement?
  - Is a real fraternal equality lived between the clerics and the lay in our fraternities?
  - Does it seem that real opportunities for Franciscan formation are offered to all the Friars in formation, to both those oriented to the priesthood and the others?
  - What are the most current inequalities in our life? What could be instruments to educate us in an evermore gospel fraternal equality?
  - What proposals could we formulate in respect to ongoing formation to form us in equality?
  - How can these proposals be shaped in *the fraternal life project*?

## IV FAMILIARITY AMONG THE FRIARS

(Cf. *Rb* 6, 7)

(*Concrete elements of Franciscan life*)

When we speak about fraternal life, we often have the impression that each one has a different vision of it and that, even though the same words are used, these do not reflect the same concepts and points of view. It is impossible to avoid this difference of opinion. Even more, it is fruitful and enriching. However, it is equally important that consensus exists on some points that are shared by all and which serve as a basis for dialogue and reflection in common.

In order to achieve a common understanding of fraternal life, we can base ourselves on article 42 of our *GGCC*, which explicitly deals with the topic:

§1. «In order to promote fraternal union all the more, the friars are to anticipate one another in mutual love, serve one another with a ready heart, encourage useful undertakings and rejoice when the work of others is successful».

§2. «The life of fraternal fellowship demands the following from the friars: a single-minded observance of the Rule and Constitutions; a similar lifestyle; sharing in the activity of the life of the fraternity, especially in common prayer, evangelisation

and domestic duties; and the handing over of all financial gains for the use of the fraternity, whatever their source».

The first paragraph gives some indications on how “to promote fraternal union all the more”. The second demands of all the Friars a series of elements that are indispensable for the life of fraternal communion.

Observe, first of all, that the second proposal seems fairly strange. It first of all speaks of what makes the fraternal union grow and then about what constitutes it. Here it is clearly shown that the “dynamic” is more important than the “static” in fraternal life. Fraternal life is not something already fixed or that is taken for granted, but something that must be unceasingly constructed and increased. In effect, it is only in trying to make fraternal union, which existed previously, grow at least in part, are the essential elements that configure it put into practice.

This is also the scheme that we will follow, taking care, first of all, of that which makes fraternal union grow and, then, of that which constitutes it.

## **1. Making fraternal union grow**

In order to achieve the objective of great communion in the fraternity we will draw up an itinerary that we can run over in a temporary key through a *before*, *during* and an *afterwards*.

With regard to the *before*, it is stated: “Let the Friars anticipate one another in mutual charity”. “Anticipate” refers precisely to a before, that is, advancing with the love of one’s own heart to meet with each Friar. It is a matter, then, of cultivating the charity within us, before exercising it in the actual meeting with the Friars. We should be aware that only when we allow ourselves be filled with the love of God, infused into our hearts by the Holy Spirit given to us (cf. *Rom 5, 5*), will we be able to truly love all that we meet. This is what St. Clare says when she writes in her



*Testament*: «Loving one another with the charity of Christ, let the love you have in your hearts be shown outwardly in your deeds so that, compelled by such an example, the sisters may always grow in love of God and in charity for one another» (*TestCl* 59-60).

It is a matter, then, of having love in the heart even before showing it through works, aware that charity is a gift from God and does not only depend on our efforts or our virtue. In this invitation to “anticipate each other in charity” we can recognise, therefore, the need for a personal dimension prior to the meeting of the Friars, which must be heeded (hopefully through personal prayer) in order to make the love, which is infused by the Holy Spirit alone, grow in us.

Immediately after this reference to the *before*, the characteristics that must be cultivated *during* the meeting with the Friars are outlined: “Let them give, with promptitude of spirit, reciprocal services and let them encourage good initiatives”.

Two attitudes that are developed in different and complementary directions are thus designated. Giving services arises from my initiative. We could schematise it by saying that it goes from me towards others. The encouragement of good initiatives begins from the recognition of what the others do. We could say that it arises from the reception and acceptance of the action of others. The movement is the reverse of the preceding one and goes from the others to me.

During the meeting with others these two movements are always given: from me to them and from them to me. It is only when these two currents are given can a true encounter be spoken of. It is born of the giving and taking, of the accepting and offering of both attitudes, not of one alone. Too often we meet people capable of serving others, but incapable of accepting the service of others, or people most attentive to all that others do, but lazy and without any capability to put themselves at the service of their neighbour. The real fraternal encounter or meeting requires both attitudes. Only in this way can fraternal union really grow.

The first paragraph ends with a reference to the *afterwards*: “Rejoice sincerely at the happy results of the work of others”.

“Happy results” are spoken of and, therefore, of conclusion. This attitude is only possible after the conclusion of the work of others, almost as a meditative consideration (a review of life?) that makes me reflect on the work of others and that produces happiness in me when they have ended positively. It also remains clear that this attitude is a consequence of the preceding exhortation: “Let them encourage good initiatives”. Encouraging the initiatives of others carries with it, as a spontaneous effect, rejoicing at their success.

There remains excluded, in particular, the risk of envy, which is the contrary attitude to fraternal happiness. The envious person, instead of rejoicing, suffers at the success of the work of others. Perhaps it would be convenient to remember, in this respect, what St. Francis says about envy in the *Admonitions* 8, «Whoever envies his brother the good that he says or does in him incurs a sin of blasphemy because he envies the Most High Himself, Who says and does every good thing». The words of St. Francis bring us to the deep reason for which envy cannot be accepted. He who carries out the good in a brother is, in the final analysis, the Lord. This consideration also supports the positive attitude of the one that rejoices at the success of the works of others. This success, this happy outcome, sends us back to the Lord, the source of all good, and is a confirmation of the fact that each Friar is a gift of God. God Himself, in effect, is who is at the source of the success of the work of others and about which it is possible to rejoice fully because this joy is, now and always, praise of the Giver of all good.

## **2. That which is asked of a life of fraternal communion**

The second paragraph of article 42 enumerates various necessary elements for the life of fraternal communion. They are the following:

- a. a single-minded observance of the *Rule* and the *Constitutions*;

- b. a similar lifestyle;
- c. sharing in the activity of the life of the fraternity, especially in common prayer, evangelisation and domestic duties;
- d. the handing over of all financial gains for the use of the fraternity, whatever their source.

*a. The Rule and Constitutions*

We can immediately make the observation that the *Rule*, as interpreted by the *Constitutions*, is placed as a foundation. It is, in effect, the fundamental code of our fraternity that contains the essential references for all of us. This means that the fraternal life asked of us is not a generic life, but a life characterised by specific references. In other words, we are not just simply asked for a “generic fraternal life”, but a fraternal life that incarnates the project of the *Rule* and the *Constitutions*: that is, Franciscan fraternal life. We often run the risk of living an over generic religious life deprived of its charismatic connotations and which levels off all religious Institutes into an “average style” that tries to be valid for all, but which does not express the specific nature of each one. The reference to the *Rule* and to our specific charismatic patrimony, given as the basis of the necessary traits of fraternal life, eliminates the risk of generalisation.

*b. A similar style of life*

The requirement of a “similar style of life” outlines a characteristic of fraternal life: there cannot be over diverse styles of life in the same fraternity, especially if this diversity encourages privileges or induces a suspicion that they exist. We should remember what we said about equality and diversity in our life: diversity is good and necessary, but it cannot turn into a facile excuse for enjoying certain comforts or justify a style of life in clear disharmony with that of the Friars.

It is not a matter, then, of an anachronistic “uniformity” of life in the style of that which existed in the Institutes of religious

life before the II Vatican Council, or of fear of the particularities of each one. It is a matter, rather, of an important aspect of fraternal life that imposes respect for certain common standards for all on everyone.

If we try to make this “similar style of life” concrete, characteristic traits of each fraternity in respect to the environment, activity, number and age of its members would probably flourish. It is important, undoubtedly, to understand what this “similar style of life” is in my fraternity.

*c. Participation in the activities of the life of the fraternity, especially in its common prayer, evangelisation and house work*

These affirmations go to the concrete: they speak of participation at precise moments of fraternal life, not only to the more “noble” ones such as prayer or evangelisation, but also to the more ordinary and everyday ones, such as the house chores. Evidently they are thinking of a fraternity that is a protagonist in its own life and that coordinates and shares in prayer, evangelisation and even in the organisation of the ongoing aspects of everyday life.

These indications also offer a criterion for the choice of works and activities of those making up the fraternity. If participation in these acts is fundamental for the life of the fraternity, it must be asked if it is licit to take on commitments that impede regular participation in them.

They equally invite a revision of the fulfilment of household chores, as article 80 of the *GGCC* indicates: «As far as possible the domestic work in our fraternities is to be done by all the friars themselves».

*d. Handing in to the community all that is received under any title whatsoever*

We have underlined the making concrete of these indications for fraternal life. The will to make them concrete is amply

shown in the final indication, relative to the economic dimension of our life.

The basic principle is that there cannot be real fraternity if there is not full co-participation. And real co-participation also includes the economic sphere. If we limit ourselves to using beautiful phrases, but are not disposed to put our shoulder to the wheel, we are not constructing a real fraternity!

Take note that “all financial gains, whatever their source,” are spoken about. Therefore, we are faced by a general principle that includes all cases: emoluments, pensions, recompense, alms, etc.

It is necessary to remember that our *General Statutes* chastise with singular severity the transgression of these norms (cf. GGSS 250), which is a demonstration of the importance it gives to this subject. One cannot be a Friar and have his own funds!

As a complement to this topic, it would be good to ask how the Friars manage some administrative duties, e.g., how do the Pastors manage parish administration or how do other Friars manage the money from or for the different activities that are entrusted to them. In effect, though these administrations may be legitimate and authorised, there is often the risk that they will be converted into a “private fund” to which one can have recourse when needed without the need to give an account to anybody. If this were to happen, we would be travelling along paths contrary to our spirit and we would be enjoying unacceptable privileges in comparison to the other Friars.

Finally, it would be good for the guardians and administrators to carry out an examination of conscience. Could it not happen that they sometimes use money without asking for permission from anyone and which other Friars have to seek?

## SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

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### For personal reflection

1. Read the following texts:
  - *1Cel* 24; *LP* 51: Francis gives thanks and is happy for the brothers the Lord has given him.
  - *1Cel* 25-26: Francis rejoices on meeting the Friars.
  - *1Cel* 30: Francis wishes to see his brothers.
  - *LtL* and *1Cel* 49-50: Francis occupies himself with the problems of the Friars.
  - *LP* 51: Francis venerates his brothers.
  - *2Cel* 174-176: The concern of Francis for his brothers.
  - *1Cel* 49-50: Francis shows his compassion to the sinful Friars.
2. In the light of these texts:
  - Reflect on the requirements of communion of life in fraternity on the personal level.
3. Ask yourself:
  - What is my attitude to the gift of brothers? Do I see them as a gift that the Lord has placed at my side or as an obstacle to my self-realisation? How often do I give thanks to the Lord for them?
  - Do I look after any Friar that is going through a bad time? Do I want to be/share with him? Am I happy to be/share with him?
  - What is my attitude to a Friar that is more outstanding than I am because of his exemplary life or talents? Do I recognise a work of God, “to whom all good belongs”, in the good the Friars do?
  - What is my attitude to the sin of a Friar?
  - Do I see any connection between my spiritual life and my relationship with the Friars?

- What are the means I employ to “anticipate in mutual charity”?
- Which is prevalent in my relationships with others, give or take? Am I capable of accepting the services of others and of encouraging their good initiatives?
- Do I hold back in fraternity, following the advice of “not showing your talents in community”? Do I commit myself? In which circumstances, situations and moments do I commit myself and in which do I hold back?
- Is my disposition to service mainly manifested outwards from the fraternity or is it also inwards?
- Do I really know the Friars of the fraternity with whom I live? Do I think they know me? How can we progress in reciprocal knowledge?
- Do I feel free to express my opinion and do I wish to know the opinion of others?
- How can this topic of familiarity be worked on in the *personal life project*?

### For group reflection

1. Read the following texts:
  - *Adm* 8: The sin of envy.
  - *2Cel* 178: Francis rejoices at the holy life of his Friars.
  - *2Cel* 180: Francis shares all he has with the Friars.
  - *2Cel* 160: The Friars pray for each other.
  - *TC* 42; *LP* 11: Mutual obedience.
  - *2Cel* 75: Whatever is received for work belongs to all.
  - *Rnb* 9, 10; *Rb* 6, 8; *TC* 57-59: Communication and dialogue.
  - *LtM* 15; *TC* 58: Do not judge or despise any Friar.
  - *Rb* 6, 7-9: Reciprocity and otherness among the Friars, characteristic of the Franciscan fraternity.

- *Adm* 9, 2-3; *TC* 41; *LP* 21; *MP* 51-52: Mutual forgiveness.
  - *ICel* 39. 42. 102; *TC* 40; *Adm* 18, 1: Mutual patience.
  - *AP* 25. 37: *LP* 97; *Rnb* 7, 15: Reciprocal service.
  - *Rnb* 7, 16; *2Cel* 128; *LP* 120; *MP* 96; Happiness among the Friars.
2. In the light of these texts:
- Reflect on and exchange the different points of view on the requirements of communion of life in fraternity on the community level.
  - Dialogue about the different forms of conceiving our life: as life in common, as belonging, as coexistence, as a work team, as communion of life in fraternity, etc.
3. Ask yourselves:
- With which of these forms do you identify? Have you succeeded in feeling yourself at home in your fraternity? That is, do you really consider it as a place of encounter, of acceptance, of support, of stimulus, of understanding, of forgiveness? Do you feel like a loved, accepted and valued member? Why?
  - Is there any envy in our reciprocal relationships?
  - The unanimous observance of the *Rule* and *Constitutions* presupposes our knowledge of them. Do we really know them? Up to what point?
  - What are the characteristic traits of the “similar style of life” required of all the components of my fraternity?
  - Do the activities carried out by the members of the fraternity permit them to share in “the activity of the life of the fraternity, especially in common prayer, evangelisation and domestic duties”?
  - Do the Friars carry out the domestic duties or are they entrusted to employees? Do all the Friars, from



the guardian to the most recently arrived, participate in this work? Or is it thought that domestic work corresponds to the lay brothers only and not to the priests?

- What suggestions could I give about the economic management of my fraternity? Are there private administrations? Do they create inequalities in the fraternity?
- How is the *fraternal life project* elaborated? With what criteria?



## V

# FRATERNAL CORRECTION

### 1. Our vocation to fraternity, between grace and sin

During recent decades we have been learning that our vocation to fraternity is a “grace from God”, a gift that He grants us in order to live communion with Jesus Christ, who we follow. All in all, we can never forget that our vocation is also wrapped in “sins”, since we “carry this treasure as if in clay pots”, in fragile urns. Our identity as Friars Minor, therefore, seems to be wrapped in grace and in sin, as light and cross, as gift and task. The *Rule* presents it as such. While the first chapter speaks of observing the Gospel of the Lord, the tenth speaks of the «admonition and correction of the Friars» (cf. *Rb* 1 and 10).

The *GGCC*, which are an updating of our way of life, takes for granted, in art. 43, that there can be Friars that «live according to the flesh and not according to the Spirit». And Chapter 8 has «the ministers are to admonish the Friars and humbly and charitably correct them» as its title.

It is necessary, therefore, that, in the construction of communion and in the adult behaviour of our fraternal life, we take into account and remember what should be our attitude, adult and Christian, towards the weakness and sin of the Friars and fraternity. It is necessary not to fall into *false dualistic spiritualism* that “hides” our reality, which is also made up of weakness, or into *facile despair* that separates us from the path of fraternal growth.

## 2. Friars and fraternities in growth

Fraternal correction must be understood within the dynamism of growth and vocational fidelity of all the Friars to the Lord Jesus, whom we follow. The dynamism of growth presupposes, on the part of the Friars and fraternities, the will to progress, grow and mature in communion.

It is from here that the Friar that “sins” or the fraternity that flags in its proposal of vocational fidelity must be understood. Fraternal correction is one of the means of vocational growth, although not the only one, and must be understood and used as a means. It is not, then, a means of “punishment”, or of vengeance, or a method to impose the rights of some on others, or anything of that nature, even though it has sometimes occurred as such in the past.

We Friars must learn to familiarise ourselves with this means, which we do not always employ suitably. Indeed, it has passed from being a correction done from “on high”, vertically, from the superior to the subject, with the consequent risk of authoritarianism, to another phase, in which the ministers and guardians feel inhibited and, consequently, do not give this service, or in which there are Friars that have “appropriated” this means, with the logical risk, among others, of individualism.

It is necessary to overcome both phases in the light of the *General Constitutions* and arrive at another of integration in which, the topic having been presented in a suitable way, the Friars assume the service of “mutual and charitable correction”. This expression gives it to be clearly understood that all the Friars can correct and that all can be corrected, since the fraternity is ruled by the law of reciprocity, of forgiveness and of being forgiven, of offering and accepting, of giving and receiving.

It is necessary to make this journey of maturity, during which we help each other to grow and mature through “mutual and charitable correction”. The fidelity of the Friar is the guarantee of fidelity to our vocation and, on the other hand, of our also having to know how to accept correction, since, as we read in the Gospel, “let him without sin cast the first stone”.

### 3. Vocational fidelity and fraternal correction

This context of personal and community vocational fidelity, is where the means of correction can be situated. Correction has help to the Friars and fraternities to grow in their vocational fidelity to the Lord as its *objective*. It is carried out through meetings, dialogue and fraternal confrontation. Its *arms* are charity and affectionate mercy, exercised in vocational authenticity.

Here are some *criteria* for correction in fraternity:

*a. The correction must be carried out in the context of the “community project”*

We Friars understand our existence as a Gospel journey in fraternity. What is in play is our authenticity and happiness. Therefore, as much as it makes the gospel life, shaped in our “community project”, difficult, it not only “can” be the object of correction, but it “must” be the object of attention, since our fidelity to ourselves, to the fraternity project and to the Lord depends on it.

*b. Correction, therefore, has to be done in fraternity*

It must respond to this unease: What does the Lord ask of us at this moment? How can we best respond to His will? And, from this unease and in discernment, the Friars once again put themselves into the Gospel process and try to mark out a new itinerary with new means. The “Friars, gathered in the name of the Lord” are the habitual and normal place for correction. Any other place, outside the fraternity, runs the risk of being a relief instead of fraternal correction, murmuring and judgement instead of mercy that accepts and saves. Correction outside the fraternity destroys rather than constructs.

“In fraternity” also means a correction like that which “Brothers” make, fraternal, “like a mother correcting her child”.

### *c. Done by the fraternity*

Although it is often the minister and the guardian that give this service in order to help the Friars and the fraternities to grow, however, without taking anything away from what corresponds to them, fraternal correction must habitually be made in a meeting of all the Friars. This fraternal correction must be “mutual” and “charitable”, like obedience, with which it is linked in so far as it is the will for authenticity in the common gospel project. The privilege of some to correct, therefore, does not exist. It is rather that the Friars correct and animate each other in their vocational fidelity. It is fundamental, therefore, to educate ourselves in the “law of reciprocity”, where we all learn to correct and be corrected, to forgive and to be forgiven...

### *d. With a view to the gospel project*

Correction does not habitually start out from the “small imperfections and impotencies” of each one, but from something more substantial such as the gospel project of life.

Francis of Assisi laid out some criteria through his attitude towards those that wander outside the Order, towards those who did not recite the office in accordance with the *Rule*, towards those that committed the sin of fornication, etc. (cf. *Rnb* 8, 7; 13; 19; *Test* 27-33; *LtO* 44-46).

And that must be the criterion for fraternal correction: those questions that concern the gospel project that we all promised and that remains updated in the identity as written in the *GGCC*.

## **4. The “art” and ways of fraternal correction**

It is true that much of the success or failure of fraternal correction usually depends on who does it. If somebody with “moral authority” or influence over the group or person does it, it usually goes well. At times it is accepted even when the topic has

not been, objectively, well dealt with. If, on the other hand, somebody does it that lacks influence over the group or persons, it can turn out badly, even if the topic has been, objectively, well dealt with. Despite this, when taking on fraternal correction it is good to take into account some *attitudes*:

*a. Seek the truthful from the truth*

Sometimes the subconscious plays tricks on us. What we often call “truth” is only “my truth”. On occasions it is not even this, because feelings of rivalry, or the desire for dominance, or thirst for a little vengeance or the need to feel important within the fraternity is intertwined with it. This being truthful must be sought as a basic attitude, walking in truth and always seeking truth. When one acts in this way, he may feel alone in the fraternity, but he will never lack the joy that the truth, sought with enthusiasm, always produces.

*b. With affectionate mercy*

It is the attitude of the good shepherd, of the good minister and of the good Friar. Mercy (it comes from ‘misericordia’ – miseria + cor – and means ‘putting heart into misery’) is the attitude of one that accompanies the Friar, with heart and fondness, in his vocational growth because he loves him and because he loves the fraternity and not for any other motive.

*c. On the basis of love of brother and with love*

In the construction of the fraternity, and fraternal correction is dealt with in this, there is nothing so essential as love. This is so true that anybody that does not love his brother cannot dare correct him. And when he is correcting through this love he is “patient” and humble and, therefore, never daring. For example, never correct a Friar of whom one has nothing positive to say. Said in other words: if, on correcting a Friar, I become aware

that I am unable to recognise anything good in him, this is a sign that I do not love him very much. In this case it is better to suspend the correction because it no longer is a correction “on the basis of love and with love”.

*d. In consistency and authenticity of life*

“Let him who is without sin throw the first stone” is an immortal phrase that the Evangelists put into the mouth of Jesus. It is not a question, of course, of never being able to correct anybody, since nobody is perfect. We have to advance in the process of mutual growth even though we have difficulties and inconsistencies, but always taking these into account.

Authenticity and personal consistency is something else. If one feels himself “entrapped”, involved in half-truths, living ambiguously, can he have the audacity to correct his brother? On the contrary, he that tries to live an authentic and consistent life, even though he has his imperfections, has the moral rectitude to be able to ask his brothers to change.

*e. “As you would like to be treated if you were in a similar situation”*

This norm is the golden rule that Francis of Assisi made his own in his habitual behaviour, especially with the Friars who sinned. On attempting fraternal correction, it is important to know how to put yourself in the situation of the Friar and, before correcting him, to formulate and know how to respond to this question: How would I like to be treated if I found myself in this situation? The correction made from this perspective is guaranteed to have been made from the truth and in the truth.

*f. In a confident and constructive climate*

The “zero point” of all construction of fraternal life is the climate, which must be receptive, positive, assertive, communicative, etc. When dealing with vocational fidelity and the fidelity



of Friars, it is important to create a climate that encourages the good reception of correction. If, when we make mutual correction, we are not capable of speaking about the good and positive that we see in the Friar, it would be better to interrupt it, because it is not fraternal. Correction has meaning because there is mutual appreciation, because the brother is loved, because his vocational fidelity is important to others, because his growth is sought. It is necessary, therefore, to habitually create – not artificially and occasionally for the moment of correction – a climate in which things can be said simply and fraternally.

*g. «... the Friars should not embarrass him»*

The wisdom of Brother Francis takes into account this detail: if the fraternity wishes to construct through correction, it must do it in such a way that the Friars do not feel embarrassed. This requires a correction made with elegance, knowing how to choose the right moment in which the Friar can accept the correction, with a kind tone, with courtesy and remembering that, above all, it is a matter of helping the other to grow.

*b. Seldom*

Correction must be made, as is logical, when the situation in the fraternity requires it. However, it is advisable not to do it more than a few times a year, on the occasion of the review of the community project, at the middle and end of a course, during a fraternity retreat, etc. A fraternity with *excessively* evaluative tendencies runs the risk of losing positive stimulation and of “condemning itself”.

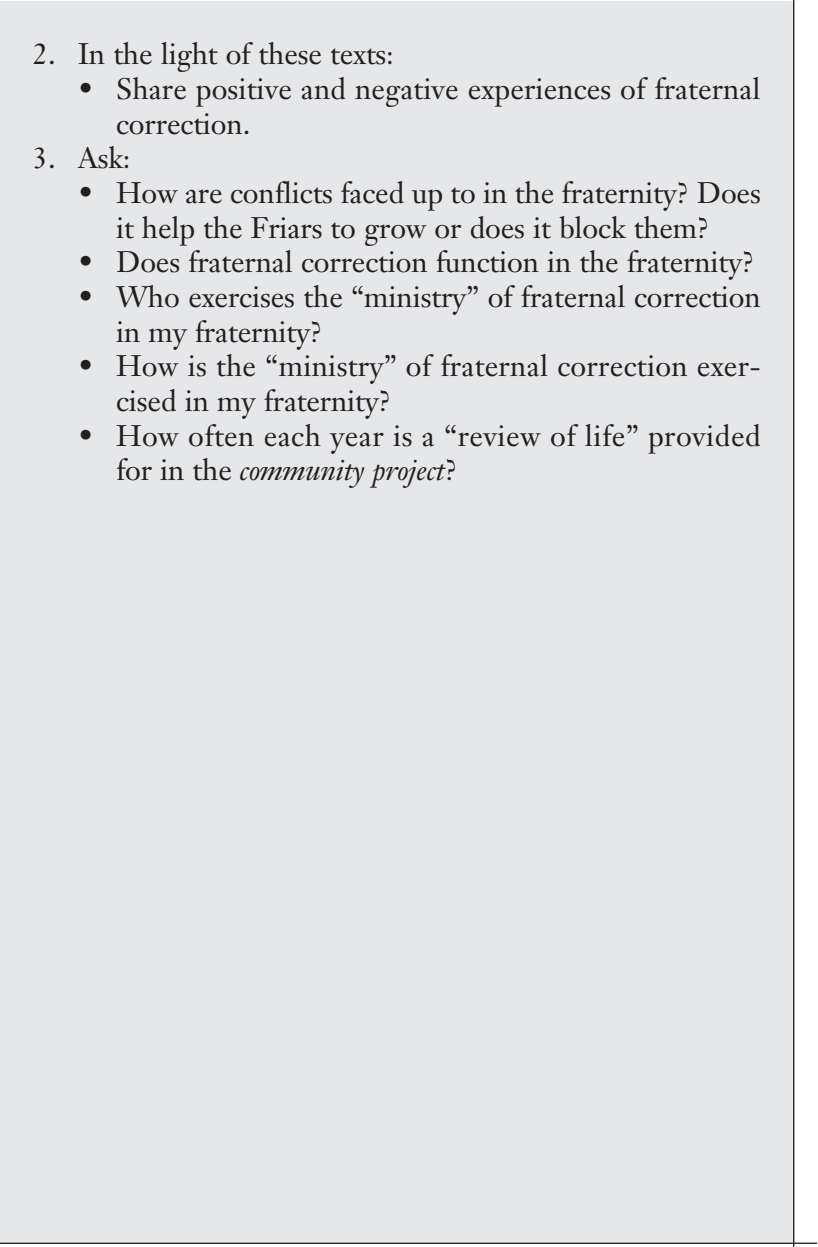
## SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

### For personal reflection

1. Read the following texts:
  - *Rb* 7, 1-3: The attitude of the Friar sinner and to the sin of the Friar.
  - *2Cel* 44, 49, 177: Francis shows his compassion for the Friar sinners.
  - *Adm* 11: Do not get angry at the sin of another.
  - *Adm* 18, 1: Compassion for one's neighbour.
  - *Adm* 25: On true love.
  - *Adm* 22: Attitude to the correction received.
2. In the light of these texts:
  - Reflect on the way I live personal conflicts and on the way I face interpersonal conflicts.
3. Ask:
  - Would you be disposed to listen to the judgement – the positive and negative aspects – that the other Friars have of you? How do I accept the corrections made?
  - What is my attitude to a Friar who sins?
  - What is my attitude to my own sin?
  - How does my *personal life project* view periodic confrontation with another? Have I a spiritual and vocational companion?

### For community reflection

1. Read the following texts:
  - *Rnb* 4, 2; 5, 5; *Rb* 10, 1: The fact.
  - *Rnb* 5, 7-10; *Rb* 10, 1: The office of superior.
  - *2Cel* 43: Correction among the Friars.

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2. In the light of these texts:
    - Share positive and negative experiences of fraternal correction.
  3. Ask:
    - How are conflicts faced up to in the fraternity? Does it help the Friars to grow or does it block them?
    - Does fraternal correction function in the fraternity?
    - Who exercises the “ministry” of fraternal correction in my fraternity?
    - How is the “ministry” of fraternal correction exercised in my fraternity?
    - How often each year is a “review of life” provided for in the *community project*?



## VI THE “FAVOURITES” OF THE FRATERNITY

Jesus frequently appears in the Gospels surrounded by handicapped, sick, “wounded” people. They are the poor, the new anawim, to whom Jesus dedicates special attention: “Blessed are the poor, for of them is the Kingdom of God”.

The same appears as often in the life and activity of Francis, who paid special attention to the Friars in difficulty, to those who could not cope with life or with the *Rule* (the sick, those that sin, etc.).

Both Jesus in the Gospels and Francis in his writings, made a “choice”, they showed a special interest in these people: they are their “favourites” and, therefore, they play an outstanding role.

Who are the “favourites” of our fraternity today? How can we love them and take care of them? Clarifying and giving impulse to this process is the objective of the following notes.

### 1. “...weak, old, sick and other Friars...”

The daily and joyful experience of our fraternal life speaks of the “grace and gift of brothers”, for could it not be said that the best thing we have in our fraternities is, precisely, our brothers? More or less holy, more or less “integrated”, more or less gifted, etc., the Friars are the gift that the Lord makes us every day in order to live communion with Jesus, our Brother, in following him. They are a grace from the Lord and how we must thank Him for them!

But that is not all. Looking realistically at some of our fraternities and taking a glance at what is happening in our Provinces, we must recognise that there are also Friars and situations that constitute a “difficulty” for living together. It is therefore necessary to state that fraternal life is, at times, a cross. The Friars are, at times, our torment. On occasions the history of the fraternity has been tinged with pain, suffering, mutual misunderstandings, wasted energies, struggles and internal rivalries, difficulties, etc. Why deny it?

Chapter III of our *GGCC*, on fraternal communion, recalls this experience of minority and helplessness with realism and asks for special attention to be paid and loving care to be given to the people that can occasion difficulty to fraternal living. It says «All the friars must serve the weak, the sick and the elderly among them "as they would wish to be served themselves"» (*GGCC* 44).

The elderly and sick Friars are evermore numerous in some fraternities, especially in old Europe and in some countries of America. A quick glance at the statistics of the average age of the Friars in the Order is enough to be convinced of it. In general, the fraternities have become aware of this reality and pay special attention to and take conscientious care of the elderly and sick Friars. Here we also authentically display our vocation to fraternity.

On the other hand, we can learn so many things from the “elderly Friars”! In the majority of cases they are, through their joyful witness in the evening of their lives, the source of stability and of vocational encouragement and stimulus. There are “sick Friars” that are a living reminder of Jesus the Servant, confidently entrusted to the hands of the Father. There equally exist “weak Friars” that, in their humility, are a stimulus and example of strength.

It is necessary, therefore, to distinguish between elderly and elderly, between sick and sick, between weak and weak.

In our fraternities, however, there are also Friars, who, precisely because they are deeply “human”, are a “weight” in one

form or another, an additional difficulty. They are the Friars that we classify as “rare ones”, “strange”; at times we call them, less fraternally, “undesirables”.

It is a question of those Friars, who, for mysterious and very different reasons:

- suffer within themselves the “wound of being men”, difficulty in accepting themselves, difficulty in having a normal relationship with their surroundings and with others;
- feel the “weight of life” and meditate on it in long solitude and difficult nights of insomnia;
- transform these personal difficulties into an incapacity for normal communication or into a strong and uncontrollable aggression or into an isolation that kills; at times this manifests itself in the incapacity to collaborate in fraternal projects of evangelisation, etc.

It is not necessary to look at the rest. Each one of us has more than once felt the bite of the wound and been aware of having the material to be converted into a “rare” Friar: it would be enough just to be missing certain supports or to be exposed to an “extreme situation”. What place do these Friars occupy in our fraternal life? What fraternal attitude could create communion in these circumstances? Which are the more correctly fraternal attitudes?

## **2. The “favourites” of the fraternity**

It is not by accident that our *Rule* speaks about the fraternity mainly on the occasion of the “favourites”: those in need (cf. *Rb* 6, 7), the sick (*Rb* 6, 9), the blameworthy (*Rb* 7), those that cannot fulfil the *Rule* (cf. *Rb* 10, 4-6), etc. We could say that they are the “little ones” of the Gospel, to whom is given, through grace, the Kingdom of God. Because of this, they also occupy a central place in our gospel fraternity. They are the poor of the fraternity, the image of the Servant of Yahweh and place of the mercy of God.

«Emptying himself through a wonderful tenderness of compassion for anyone with a bodily affliction, in the sweetness of his heart, he turned back to Christ any need, any lack he might notice in anyone. Therefore his soul melted for the poor and the infirm; to those to whom he could not extend a hand he extended his affection» (cf. *LMj* 8, 5).

The attitude of Francis towards these “little ones” of the fraternity is very well known; and he asked the other Friars to pay special, exquisite and fraternal attention to all those that find difficulty in living the *Rule*.

Especially impressive is the text of *Rnb* 22, 1-4; where Francis describes the attitude that the Friars should have towards those that make life difficult, we would say towards the “rare” Friars.

«All my brothers: let us pay attention to what the Lord says: *Love your enemies and do good to those that hate you* for our Lord Jesus Christ, whose footprints we must follow, called His betrayer a friend and willingly offered Himself to His executioners. Our friends, therefore, are all those who unjustly inflict upon us distress and anguish, shame and injury, sorrow and punishment, martyrdom and death. We must love them greatly for we shall possess eternal life because of what they bring us» (*Rnb* 22, 1-4).

For Francis, as for the New Testament, the law that governs fraternal relationships bears the seal of the cross: «Carry each others troubles» (*Gal* 6, 2). Francis recalls, for himself and his own, the words of *Matthew* 7, 12: «Always treat others as you would like them to treat you; that is the meaning of the Law and the Prophets».

Francis also recalls the Beatitudes that set down the norm of behaviour in these circumstances:



«Blessed is the person who supports his neighbour in his weakness as he would want to be supported were he in a similar situation» (*Adm* 18, 1).

And also:

«Blessed is the servant who loves his brother as much when he is sick and cannot repay him as when he is well and can repay him» (*Adm* 24).

The sick Friars were one of the major preoccupations of St. Francis. The exceptional insistence with which he refers to them in the *Rule* (cf. *Rb* 2, 15; 3, 12; 4, 2; 6, 9; 10, 8) lets us understand the depth with which he wanted the fraternity to live charity and, at the same time, the realism of the binomial poverty-fraternity, which leads at times to “extreme situations”. These situations will require extreme care.

### **3. The truth of the fraternity: the “little ones”**

The presence of weak, elderly, sick and “rare and special” Friars in our fraternities is an undeniable fact. This is especially so in Provinces where, for lack of new young vocations, the median age of the Friars has increased a lot (it is the case of a great part of the Provinces of Europe and the USA). They have elderly and sick Friars almost everywhere and they try to look after them with the greatest care.

In all Provinces there are, besides, young or elderly Friars that turn out to be a burden to the fraternities, Friars that especially make problems or are problematic. What is the most fraternally Franciscan attitude with which these can be dealt with?

The response, which must always be well thought out, depends on the situation and circumstances of each Friar. In any case, a fraternal outcome should always be sought since “the Franciscan mission is to give ones life for the Friars”. Charity is

the price and the fruit of our gospel life. In it is found the height of revelation for mutual love as the principle witness that the disciples should give to the world, the mission that reveals the love of God to men.

The truth of our fraternal life is measured by the capacity to give up one's life for the brothers, in martyrdom. The culmination of the Franciscan mission is "martyrdom", fraternal love even unto death. And not only that. According to Francis, those that persecute us or are a burden to us "are our friends" and we "must love them a lot" (cf. *Rnb* 22, 1-4). The grace and gift of fraternal life are so much more grace and gift the more the Friars opt for a life in accordance with the Beatitudes, the ultimate criterion of which is the fruitfulness of love.

The criterion, therefore, for knowing if a fraternity is truly Franciscan does not only consist in that it prays a lot and well or in that there is a good atmosphere or in that the Friars get on well together or in that they work as they should... The ultimate criterion is the capacity and will to give up one's life for the "least", for those that continually make demands without ever giving anything, for those that do not remember that we are poor and miserable... Is it not true, perhaps, that the stature and quality of a person is especially measured in time of difficulties? In the same way, the stature and spiritual height of a fraternity is measured in extreme situations, in the setbacks and adversity, in the fraternal behaviour with those that do not satisfy our "desires" and expectations.

And even more still, all of that must be considered a "grace". This is what we can deduce from the response of Francis to the minister tormented by his Friars.

«You must consider as a grace all that impedes you from loving the Lord God and whoever has become an impediment to you, whether brothers or others, even if they lay hands on you» (*LtM* 2).

## 4. Fraternal attitudes

A quick glance at the Gospel and our “way of life” is sufficient to deduce a series of necessary attitudes for a mature fraternal life. The life of “Francis, poor and weak, sick and tiny”, is a stimulus for our own life. We will recall just a few of the necessary fraternal attitudes:

### a. *Sollicitous care*

Article 44 of the *GGCC* states:

«Therefore, all the friars... are to show great care for them, visit them, offer appropriate help to them for their personal needs, both spiritual and material, and express to them grateful appreciation».

### b. *“Love them and do not demand any more from them”*

The quoted *Letter to a Minister* gives us once again the guideline for this attitude. Francis says to the Minister:

«And love those who do these things to you and do not wish anything different from them, unless it is something that the Lord God shall have given you. And love them in this and do not wish that they be better Christians» (*LtM* 5-7).

At times we have the illusory pretension of not accepting reality and of trying to change it compulsively. We would like to have sick Friars, but “healthy” ones; elderly Friars, but “young”, rare and strange Friars, but “normal”, loner Friars, but “collaborators”, Friars that are surprised in cheating, but “authentic”. The realism of fraternal life requires us to accept reality as it is. Did Francis by chance ask the lepers to change? Was it not Francis, rather, that changed his attitude in respect to them? When

one changes his attitude, then the sick even appear healthy and fraternal communion can be set up with them, and the rare one is no longer so rare and the elderly is not a burden but a fountain of wisdom.

*c. Concrete and realistic love*

During periods of study it is normal to be asked to have “experiences” in order to progress in the discipline being studied. The Franciscan fraternity is an excellent school of the Gospel and mutual love because, in it, the truth of oneself and of each Friar is experienced. The Friars that, for whatever reason, cause us difficulties must be, therefore, objects of concrete and realistic careful attention, love and disinterested commitment.

This requires patience and understanding, knowing how to put oneself into the skin of the Friar in difficulty so as to care for him as one would like to be cared for in similar circumstances.

*d. «Like a mother»*

Francis, in order to describe the Fraternal life, did not underline the attitude of the paternal figure, but the maternal figure. The Friar must love his brother as a mother loves her child. (cf. *Rnb* 9, 10-11 and *Rb* 6, 8).

The most fraternal attitude is, therefore, the “maternal”, that is, the attitude of being disposed to “love and nourish” the Friar in need.

*e. “As I would like them to treat me in similar circumstance”*

This is the idea with which Francis has sealed us Friars forever. Caring for our brothers, not from cold theoretical considerations made from afar, from affective distance, but “as we would like to be treated if we found ourselves in similar circumstances”. The reality appears very different according as it is looked at from within or from outside!

## 5. But the “difficult cases” remain

It would not be realistic not to tackle the question in fraternity about what treatment to give to the Friars of our fraternities that we consider “difficult cases”. There are so many ways of being so. And especially, how to treat the Friars that make the progress of the fraternity difficult, who create an uneasy environment, who upset the harmony, who are, inclusively, a danger to physical security...? It is not enough to say that they should not be in the fraternity!

There is so much harm done when a fraternity closes its doors on a Friar, when his presence is not accepted, when superiors are asked not to send a Friar to a determined fraternity or that he be taken out of a fraternity because he is rare!

The law of fraternity, which is nothing other than that of mutual love, must always reign, even in these circumstances. But it must be mutual love that knows how to discern the cases and help in making decisions that can even come to commitment to a specialised centre, therapies and meetings with professionals in psychiatry, etc. It would be unjust to lay down a general law for all, since each Friar is a special case and is worthy of solicitous care.

In any case, it must always be carried out maturely and with the human and spiritual stature that we demand of these “difficult” Friars.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

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### For personal reflection

1. Read the following texts:
  - *Lk* 10, 33-35.
  - *Rnb* 9; *Rb* 2; 6, 8; 7, 1; *Adm* 9. 11; *LtM*.
  - *2Cel* 22; 69. 175-177; *LP* 53. 89.
2. In the light of these texts:
  - Reflect on the parable of the Good Samaritan and see the concrete consequences for your life.
  - Reflect on the time you dedicate to the needy of the fraternity and outside and on the means you put at their disposal.
3. Ask yourself:
  - Who are my favourites? With whom do I relate? Who is in need of my friendship and fraternal care?
  - What are my attitudes to the needy Friars of the fraternity and to the needy outside?
  - Which needs of others question my way of life, my solidarity activities? Does close solidarity with the poor bring special vivacity to the evangelical councils in my religious life?
  - What place do the “needy” occupy in my *personal life project*?

### For reflection in a group

1. Read the following texts:
  - *Mt* 11, 4-6; 26, 35ff: Recovering prophecy on the basis of solidarity.
  - *Is* 58, 5, 13; *Mt* 19, 21; 5, 23-24: Gambling everything on the poor.

- *Lk* 10, 33-37: Making the Samaritan's ways ours.
  - *Lk* 6, 6-12; 7, 36-50; 15, 25-32: Living mercy as justice of the Kingdom.
  - *Rnb* 9, 2; 10, 1-2; *Rb* 4, 2; *LtL*; *ExCl* 5: The principle.
  - *Adm* 9, 11, 18, 24-25; *LtM* 5-6. 9-13; *Rnb* 9, 10-11 and *Rb* 6, 8: The care that Francis and the early fraternity gave to the poor and little ones of the fraternity.
  - *TC* 59: Francis, father and doctor to his brothers.
  - *GS* 29. 31. 32. 93: Solidarity and social justice.
  - *FLC* 63. 64. 67: Insertion in poor areas.
2. In the light of these texts:
    - Reflect on the concrete way that our option for the poor is manifested.
  3. Ask yourselves:
    - Who are, in fact, the "favourites" of the fraternity? Do our criteria coincide with the new-testament criteria and with the criteria of Francis?
    - On the basis of which relationships, structures and organisations do the Friars work and struggle for a more just society? Do we have sensitivity for new ways of being present and inserted among the poor as an expression of our charism?
    - Try to clarify in fraternity the attitudes and paths that it is necessary to travel when there are "difficult cases", remembering the law "as I would like them to do to me if I were in similar circumstances".
    - Which of the attitudes that Francis and the early fraternity showed to the poor and little ones are practised in our fraternity? Which are missing?
    - Finish the meeting with a prayer with and for the "favourites".





## VII

# FRIARS MINOR

### 1. Our identity is expressed in the name

The name of “Friars Minor”, which Francis chose for himself and his brothers, is not anything casual or without meaning. This name caught the attention of his first biographer, who explains:

«(Francis) himself originally planted the Order of Lesser Brothers and on the occasion of its founding gave it this name. For when it was written in the Rule, “Let them be lesser..”, at the uttering of this statement, at that same moment he said, “I want this fraternity to be called the Order of Lesser Brothers. They were truly lesser who, by being subject to all, always sought the position of contempt, performing duties which they foresaw would be the occasion of some affront. In this way they might merit to be grounded on the solid rock of true humility and to have the well-designed spiritual structure of all the virtues arise in them» (*1Cel* 38).

This text has been subjected to a profound and sharp historical analysis (among which we can especially recall that of T. Desbonnets). These studies warn that we should not accept its terminology “fraternity-Order” with too much ingeniousness, but praise the insistence of Celano on the connotation linked to the

name chosen: not only brothers, but “lesser brothers”. We must remember that the words written in the *Rule* (*Rnb* 7, 2) contain implicit quotations of various gospel phrases from which Francis originally took the term “lesser” (cf. *Mt* 11, 11; 25, 45; *Lk* 9, 48; 22, 26).

The adjective “lesser (minor)” profoundly qualifies the noun “brother (Friar)”, giving to the bond of fraternity a particular and characteristic quality: it is not the same to say “brother” and to say “lesser brother”. Therefore, on speaking about the fraternity, this typical Franciscan characteristic of fraternal relationship that demands that it be a particular relationship of “lesser” brothers, must be very much held in mind.

On the other hand, we can recognise an element in minority that profoundly impressed Francis in his relationship with God: the Jesus of Francis is the God that makes Himself less in the incarnation. The reference to minority, therefore, is not based on reasons of ascetics, but is the very substance of the experience that Francis had of Christ. In his following of Jesus, Francis addressed God the Father as a lesser, always seeking His holy will in obedience and total availability. One of the gospel images that expresses this intuition most deeply and particularly impressed Francis is that of Christ washing the feet of His disciples at the last supper (cf. *Rnb* 6, 4; *Adm* 4, 2). The following of Christ-the-lesser would necessarily consist in making himself less, like He did, disposed to washing the feet of the Friars.

The *GGCC* also connect this “vocation to minority” with the image of Jesus:

Art. 46: «As followers of Jesus Christ, "Who humbled himself, even to accepting death", and faithful to their specific calling as Minors, the friars are to go through the world "in joy and gladness" as the servants and subjects of all, peaceful and humble of heart».

Art. 66 §1: «In order that they may follow more closely and express more clearly the self-emptying of

the Saviour, the friars are to have the life and condition of the little ones in society, always living among them as minors. In this social environment they are to work for the coming of the Kingdom».

It will be necessary to remember, finally, that the adjective “Minor” is, “grammatically”, a comparative (= lesser) and that, as such, presupposes a comparison with another person or with others. It is not simply less, but is less than some other or others. The word “Minor”, in this sense, is a relative term, structurally involving relationship with others.

The most immediate consequence of this “grammatical” observation is that, when the terms of the comparison change, the kind of minority also changes. If we are Minors in comparison to others, it will be different to be Minors in a context of the socially deprived to being Minors in an academic context, being one in a parish environment to being one in a “frontier” situation. In other words, there is no absolute way of being minor, just that of being minor in relation to those that are around us.

## **2. Minors among ourselves**

The primary environment where we have to live our minority is our own fraternity. Even before committing ourselves to being minor to those far away or to those we meet casually in our daily work, we must be Friars Minor to those that share our life, to our brothers in vocation.

But, what does it mean to be minor than our confreres and in respect to them? There can be no doubt that this can mean different things in different contexts and in different fraternities. But it certainly means the absence of all behaviour that has indications of “superiority” in respect to others. There are various attitudes that reveal a sense of superiority: the too facile judgements about others, accompanied, perhaps, by sarcastic remarks; the expectations or explicit requests in relation to the Friars, sug-

gesting that the help or the service that others give are rights, instead of accepting all in a spirit of gratitude and thanks.

To live as minors means not having any pretensions with respect to others, but in knowing how to accept all people and different behaviours with great internal freedom.

According to Francis of Assisi, anger and upset are signs that reveal a negative behaviour towards others and, in particular, an attitude of superiority. Whoever gets angry and upset with his brother, shows that he is not minor, that he does not live internally “with nothing of his own”, but lives a relationship of “appropriation” of the other, which is a relationship of superiority. Francis, in different texts, puts us on our guard against anger and upset at the sin of our brother and considers these attitudes as a dangerous property:

«Nothing should displease a servant of God except sin. And no matter how another person may sin, if a servant of God becomes disturbed and angry because of this and not because of charity, he is storing up guilt for himself. That servant of God who does not become angry or disturbed at anyone lives correctly without anything of his own. Blessed is the one for whom nothing remains except for him to return to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s» (*Adm* 11).

Take note of how the image used is that of “storing up guilt”, that is, that of someone that is appropriating something while he that does not get angry or disturbed “lives without anything of his own”. We thus discover that, for Francis, to be minor means cultivating a spirit of non-appropriation in relation to others. This spirit is manifested in the capacity not to get angry or disturbed at the sin of a Friar.

Let us examine our anger and disturbance. Maybe they are an evident sign of our incapacity to be Friars Minor.

This attitude of minority is particularly important in Friars

entrusted with giving service of authority. The *Letter to a Minister* proposes an ideal model of this attitude to us. It describes the true disposition of the one that exercises authority as a minor:

«To Brother N., minister: May the Lord bless you. I speak to you, as best I can, about the state of your soul. You must consider as grace all that impedes you from loving the Lord God and whoever has become an impediment to you, whether brothers or others, even if they lay hands on you. And may you want it to be this way and not otherwise. And let this be for you the true obedience of the Lord God and my true obedience, for I know with certitude that it is true obedience. And love those who do these things to you and do not wish anything different from them, unless it is something the Lord God shall have given you. And love them in this and do not wish that they be better Christians. And let this be more than a hermitage for you. And if you have done this, I wish to know in this way if you love the Lord and me, His servant and yours: that there is not any brother in the world who has sinned – however much he could have sinned – who, after he has looked into your eyes, would ever depart without your mercy, if he is looking for mercy. And if he were not looking for mercy, you would ask him if he wants mercy. And if he would sin a thousand times before your eyes, love him more than me so that you may draw him to the Lord; and always be merciful with brothers such as these. And you may announce this to the guardians, when you can, that, for your part, you are resolved to act in this way».

The attitude described here is the greatest explanation of what being minor in respect to one's brothers means. And it does not only refer to the Ministers, but to all the Friars since everyone

of us is invited to an acceptance that goes beyond all merely human limits and that knows no other measuring rod than that of the Gospel.

### 3. Minors in respect to others

The attitude of minors must not only be lived in our fraternities, but also in respect to the world and all men.

What does it mean that we must be Friars Minor in relation to present-day man? It is not possible to give a single response to this question either, but, undoubtedly, here again we must say that it is a matter of carefully avoiding any attitude of superiority that could distance us from others.

Francis clearly expresses this analysis in two chapters of the non-approved Rule in which he relates the option for not appropriating anything with the benevolent acceptance of all people and even with the life of co-participation with the most despised, with those that are really considered the minors of society.

«Wherever the brothers may be, either in hermitages or other places, let them be careful not to make any place their own or contend with anyone for it. Whoever comes to them, friend or foe, thief or robber, let them be received with kindness»  
(*Rnb* 7, 13-14).

«Let all the brothers strive to follow the humility and poverty of our Lord Jesus Christ and let them remember that we should have nothing else in the world except, as the Apostle says: having food and clothing, we are content with these. They must rejoice when they live among people considered of little value and looked down upon, among the poor and the powerless, the sick and the lepers, and the beggars by the wayside» (*Rnb* 9, 1-2).

The words of Francis push us into examining if our fraternities, today, rejoice in living among despised people that count for little, among the poor and weak, or if, on the contrary, we try to place ourselves among the rich and those that count. It is certain that we must accept all, without excluding anybody. But generally, the risk we run is not that of excluding those that enjoy a comfortable situation, but of distancing ourselves from “the despised that count for little”. We should ask, for example, who do we normally invite to our table. Do we also invite the poor? Are they always people of a certain social status?

Perhaps it would not be out of place to have a brief examination of conscience on our style of life and our individual consistency: my expenditure, my clothes, the things I consider necessary... The topic of minority, however, does not only refer to the fraternity in itself, but it personally affects each and every one of its components.

On the other hand, in our charitable activity in favour of the poorest there is often the risk of placing ourselves on a pedestal of superiority in respect to those that we serve, forgetting that all the help we give to our neighbour is restitution of what we received and that we cannot behave as if we were the donators.

It is very sad to see a Friar mistreat a poor person. This mistreatment means that he has lost his awareness of the fact that we are the minors. It is necessary to have an examination of conscience to see if, at the doors of our houses, we treat the poor that come to ask help in a different manner to those that come, well-dressed, to have a conversation. Respect and good manners, even before charity, require us to behave with identical correctness with all, poor and rich, “thieves and bandits”; but do we really do so?

#### **4. The options of a fraternity of minors**

From our identity, not only that of *brothers* (which is already very compromising!), but that of Friars *Mimor*, consequential op-

tions have to arise. This is the meaning of the *preferential options*. It is not a matter of limiting the area of our activities and of our gospel mission, but, rather, of seeing that *preferential options* are linked to our identity, that is to say, options that, without excluding others, should be the primary ones.

What do we think should be preferred? What are our options? The pastoral options, the “life plans” and the programmes that each Province must give itself during the chapter or at other moments in which decisions are taken, depend on the responses to these questions.

Such options, plans and programmes must always respond to our identity of Friars Minor. Help in making these options concrete can be found in the *GGCC*, which state in Art. 53: «As a witness to their poverty and charity, the friars are bound to relieve the needs of the Church, offer assistance to those who are in real necessity, and share what they have with the poor, out of the goods destined for the use of the fraternity, in accordance with the particular Statutes».

This article indicates the objectives of the Friars’ preferential options: help to the Church, help to anyone in real need, sharing goods with the poor. There is a kind of progression shown in these indications. From help to the local Church, which is the most immediate and almost discounted way of Christian witness, they pass to help for the needy and then arrive, as if it was the ultimate objective, at not only help for but co-participation with the poor. Sharing is, in effect, the help that compromises us most. In giving help it can be enough to give over part of one’s goods, while in sharing one brings all that he has into play.

We find realistic indications for an itinerary of greater minority and poverty in these norms. Even though, in the concrete conditions of our life, it often seems impossible to deprive ourselves of all property, it would be realistic and possible, perhaps, to follow the different grades indicated in this article of the *GGCC*. First of all with the local Church. Then helping the poor. Finally, sharing our goods with them. It is a matter of a more humble and concrete itinerary than that of some big pro-



grammes, but perhaps, it is also more doable. The path to a greater poverty passes, for us, through sharing.

A concrete way of explicitly sharing indicated in our *GGCC*, immediately after art. 53 just quoted, is that which should be carried out with parents, relations and benefactors (art. 54). The possibility of economic help, as a concrete means of co-participating, is provided for in respect to parents in difficulty. It is not necessary to underline the opportune nature of these norms.

Finally, our minority is not only related to God and the Friars. We are also called to cultivate minority in respect to inanimate creatures. We inclusively feel ourselves minors and servants in respect of creation as a whole. «Holy obedience confounds every corporal and carnal wish, binds its mortified body to obedience of the Spirit and obedience to one's brother, so that it is subject and submissive to everyone in the world, not only to people but to every beast and wild animal as well that they may do whatever they want with it insofar as it has been given to them from above by the Lord» (*SV* 14).

## SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

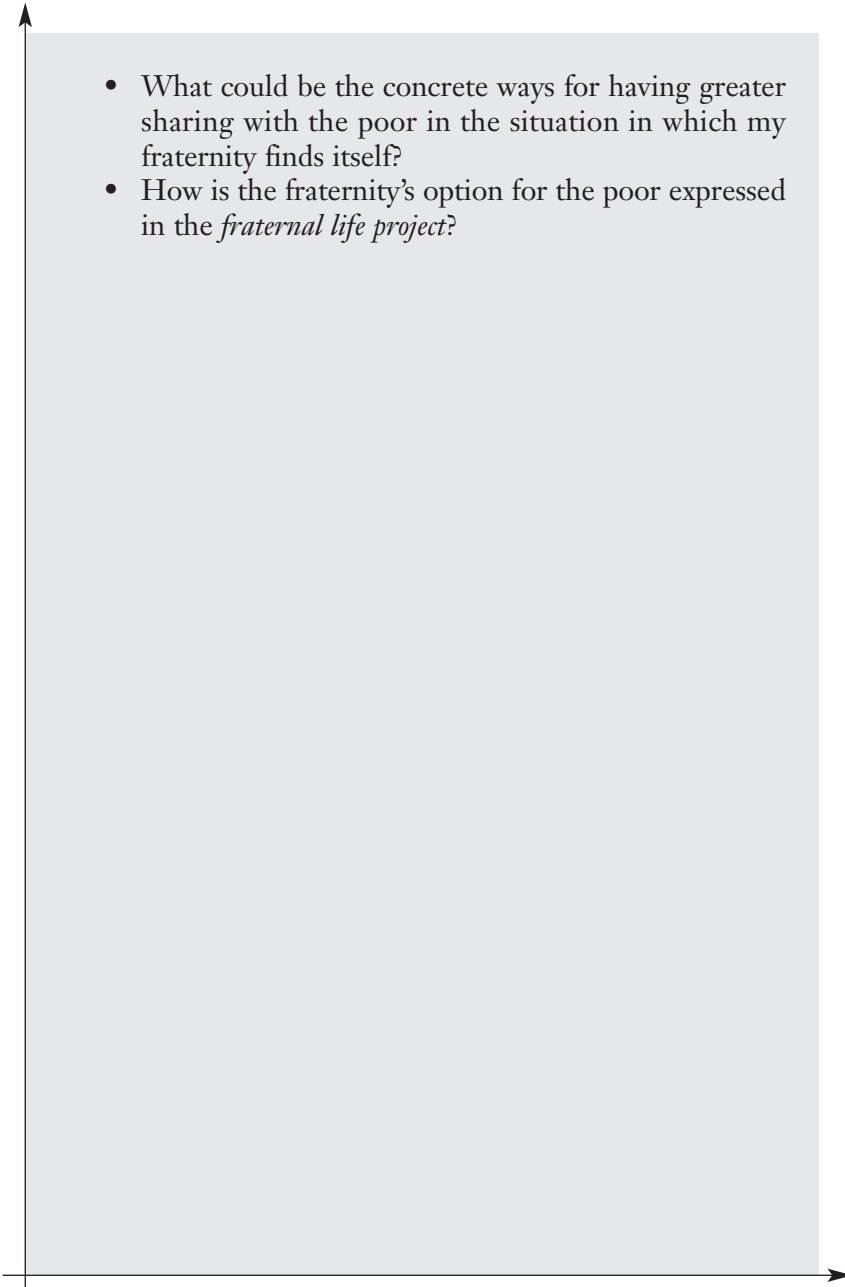
### For personal reflection

1. Read the following texts:
  - *LP* 102; *MP* 44: Francis always chose the last place.
  - *LP* 115: The only privilege that Francis wished to have was that of being submissive to all.
  - *GGCC* 64: On how we should go through the world.
2. Ask yourself:
  - What am I doing and what can I do to progress in the condition of minor and least, not only within the fraternity but also outside of it?
  - How do I face the circumstances “imposed” on me by the condition of minority?
  - Does it seem correct to me to relate “anger and upset” to the incapacity to be minors? What are the causes, in my opinion, of anger and upset?
  - Which of the characteristics described in article 64 of the *GGCC* are found in me? Which must I make grow?
  - How is the dimension of minority contemplated in my *personal life project*?

### For reflection in a group

1. Read the following texts:
  - *Rnb* 6, 2; 5, 9-15; 17, 9-16; The fact.
  - *2Cel* 106. 109. 145; *LM* 6, 5; *LP* 109: The parable of the chapter.
  - *1Cel* 38; *2Cel* 71; 148; *LP* 86. 101: The significance of the name Friars Minor made explicit.

- *2Cel* 146: Submissive to the clergy because we are minors.
  - *LP* 9: Humility, the foundation of the Order.
  - *2Cel* 145: Francis depicts, in himself, what a Friar Minor is.
  - *TC* 42: The reverence the Friars show to each other.
2. Ask yourselves:
- What would be the concrete notes that would distinguish our condition of minors as a specific vocation in the Church?
  - What are the behaviours that reveal an attitude of superiority in our relationships?
  - Does it seem possible to exercise authority and be a minor? What are the connotations of an authority carried out as a minor?
  - What social environments do my confreres normally frequent?
  - Do our activities in favour of the poor make them feel good? Do we treat the poor harshly or with disdain?
  - Are we convinced that it is necessary to make options for the poor (remembering that on opting for one thing it is necessary to renounce something else), or do we think, rather, that our vocation does not require it since we must be brothers to all?
  - Through which concrete acts can we say that we are giving, on the level of Province or fraternity, real witness to minority? Which forms of minority could we recover or invent so that our vocation as minors could exercise its testimonial function in the city or country where we live?
  - What does it mean that we must be “minors” in the local Church? What are the commitments “as minors” in my Church situation?

- 
- What could be the concrete ways for having greater sharing with the poor in the situation in which my fraternity finds itself?
  - How is the fraternity's option for the poor expressed in the *fraternal life project*?

## VIII

# EVANGELISING FRATERNITY

Each chapter of our *General Constitutions* carries a phrase of the *Rule* or of the writings of St. Francis as a title. The title of Chapter V, dedicated to evangelisation (“God has sent you into the entire world for this reason”), is taken from *The Letter to the Entire Order* and evokes a supremely significant text in which Francis explains to us why we are sent into the world:

«Give praise to Him (the Son of God) because He is good, exalt Him by your deeds. For this reason He has sent you into the whole world: that you might 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. Persevere in discipline and holy obedience and, with a good and firm purpose, fulfil what you have promised Him. The Lord God offers Himself to us as to His children» (*LtO* 8-11).

The meaning of our evangelising task can be condensed into one brief phrase: “to give witness” to the voice of the Son of God through word and deed and to make known to all that there is no other all-powerful but Him. If we think about it well, these words contain the fundamental elements of our life. They speak to us, at the beginning, of “His voice” since His Word and His grace precede all our commitments (or, using another expression of Francis, at the beginning of all spiritual life there is the action of the Spirit of the Lord). We must “give witness to His voice in word and deed”. That is, it is necessary to give witness

that is born of having seen and heard, of hearing His voice and of the faithful acceptance of His Spirit. This testimony is expressed in words and deeds, not in words alone or in deeds alone. This testimony in words and deeds will make Him known to all and that there is “no other all-powerful” but Him. This expression reflects the meaning of our life and option to live as Friars Minor. We are brothers because we have become aware that Christ is the only one worthwhile dedicating our whole life to. Any other value whatsoever, any other reality, any other love, pales in comparison to Him because there no one else “who is all-powerful except Him”.

## **1. One dimension of our life**

The words of St. Francis invite us to understand that our reflection on evangelisation is not, in the first place, a problem of organisation, of efficient initiatives, of works or of means and more efficient instruments (without excluding the need to take care of all of this). Evangelisation is, simply, one dimension of our life, which, if it is truly a life of Friars Minor, is also evangelisation.

Evangelisation, in this sense, is not a task that we propose, but is, rather, the natural consequence of the gospel life that we proposed to follow after the manner of Francis of Assisi. Francis himself, however, did not dedicate himself to preaching at the beginning of his adventure since he had not set preaching as his goal, but the total following of the Lord. But this following of Jesus also led him to preaching, with the aim of following the Lord in everything, which included announcing the Gospel of salvation to men.

## **2. Allowing oneself to be evangelised**

If, as Francis says, we must “give witness to the voice of the Son of God”, it is necessary for us to begin listening to this “voice

of the Son of God". This is what we usually indicate with the expression *allow ourselves to be evangelised*.

This means, first of all, that each one of us must feel the commitment to listen to the Word of God and to try to discover what it is indicating for his personal life and that of the fraternity. Perhaps we are not always conscious that, within the fraternity, each one is responsible for the gospel growth of the brothers and that the Word of the Lord is not only addressed to each Friar individually but is also directed at all as fraternity. It is necessary, then, to develop the capacity to share reflections, meditations and, why not, the difficulties that arise from listening to the Word. In many fraternities the custom of reading the Word of God together, perhaps once a week, and through it, encouraging fraternal listening to the Word, is being strengthened.

But allowing oneself be evangelised does not only refer to listening to the biblical text, but also to being disposed to learn from life and the people we meet: God also speaks to us through them. Article 93 of the *General Constitutions* takes this up:

§1. «The friars are to strive to listen reverently to others with unfeigned charity, learn willingly from the people among whom they live, especially from the poor who are our teachers, and be ready to enter into dialogue with everyone.

§2. The friars are to discern the seeds of the Word and the secret presence of God in the world of today, as well as in the many elements of other religions and cultures, to the study of which they are to dedicate themselves with great reverence».

The undertaking in allowing oneself to be evangelised means, then, recognising that we have things to learn both from listening to the Gospel and from the simple experience of life and, especially, from the poor, "who are our masters".

### **3. A presence that radiates**

The presence of a Franciscan fraternity has an evangelising value in itself. The very fact of being present in a certain place and of living in a certain manner is the first form of evangelisation, before even the carrying out of any special activity.

This intuition appears clearly expressed in chapter 16 of the non-approved *Rule*, where it speaks of living “spiritually among the Saracens and non-believers in two ways”. The first is the very presence and life as Minors, without causing disputes or controversies and confessing that they are Christians. The second way foresees the explicit announcement of the Christian faith, being ready to give witness that could lead to martyrdom.

All fraternities are called on to live, before all else, the first form of evangelisation, that is, they are called to live “without provoking disputes or controversies” and “to submit themselves to all human creatures for God” and “to confess that they are Christians”.

Would the poor efficiency that our evangelising task shows at times be due, by any chance, to the fact that our style of life is insufficiently and hardly convincing due to us not “being subject to all human creatures for God”?

Let us look at some characteristics of a Franciscan fraternity that wishes to evangelise through its witness of life.

### **4. A fraternity that does not seek itself**

Closing in on self is a risk that goes with the life of any group: the more interested the people that form it, the greater the risk. This risk can also occur in our fraternities, especially in those where a fairly successful fraternal relationship is lived and in which, therefore, there can exist the temptation to overestimate the pleasure of being together. Nobody will deny that fraternal life can – and must – be agreeable, but our fidelity does not aim at pleasing ourselves mutually, but at living according to the Gospel.



This means that we must have the courage to break, if it is necessary, the tranquil and supportive climate in order to speak the truth of the Gospel, which can, at times, be disagreeable or uncomfortable. This means that, as is evident, we are not together in order to feel good, but to follow the Lord after the manner of Francis of Assisi. And it also means that our fraternity, far from being a bachelors club, must be open to our contemporaries that are seeking God. Openness to people around us is a consequence of an internal conviction that arises from having understood one's identity well. If the fraternity puts the Lord in first place, everyone that seeks God will be well received because they help us to put God in first place, they help us to pursue our vocation forcibly. An important aspect of the evangelical power of the fraternity that opens up and accepts everyone that seeks God is developed in this way.

It is most important that we do not allow ourselves to be dragged along by the search for a false tranquillity in our fraternal relationships. Such tranquillity would be a falsehood or hypocrisy because it would signify giving priority to our own comfort instead of giving it to the search for God.

## **5. A creative fraternity**

The fraternity is a living organism that grows and develops with the life of its components. A fraternity, therefore, that limits itself to always repeat the same models of life, the same activities, the same ways of praying or of meeting, would be a dead fraternity since it would not respect growth and development, the fundamental law of all life.

This creativity is also expressed in the ways of evangelisation. It is not by chance that the expression "a new evangelisation", which may be, perhaps, a little vague but certainly suggestive, is often spoken about and, in this way, the dimension of creative novelty that we must develop is accentuated.

One of the paths that could be taken in order to have creativ-

ity in evangelisation grow consists of paying attention to the old and new needs of those about us. If we succeed in taking account of how the world is changing, of what the expectations and requests of present-day man are, we could make more significant and more understandable proposals.

We would thus overcome that sterile, but well understood, attitude of those that dedicate themselves to criticising the present-day world, looking only at the negative aspects and yearning for an idealised past (which, perhaps, never existed). We would be able to speak of the complete man, not of an ideal man that we have in our heads but does not exist in reality. We would know how to see the challenges and positive possibilities in the characteristics of present-day society, including those that seem to be mistaken, since we would be able to look with optimism at the world before us.

## **6. A co-responsible and collaborative fraternity**

Fraternity should be the typical trait of Franciscan evangelisation. Evangelisation is not the task of one person alone, no matter how brilliant and holy he may be, but of the whole fraternity, which collaborates, from unity and diversity, in the one evangelisation.

This is a necessary consequence of what we have said about evangelisation as irradiation of fraternal life. If our way of life is the primary and fundamental way of evangelising, all the Friars are committed to evangelisation since all contribute to creating the style of life of the fraternity.

This characteristic even marks the concrete ways of how the proposals of the fraternity are carried out and reveal a mentality of co-responsibility and collaboration.

*Co-responsibility* means that, in fraternity, all are and feel responsible for evangelisation, without considering it a task exclusively entrusted to some “specialists”. It also means that no Friars are strangers to evangelisation. If I am co-responsible for the

evangelisation of the fraternity I cannot think that the others have nothing to do with my commitment to the apostolate. To say that all “are and feel” co-responsible means that it is not enough to say it, but it is necessary to find ways that will allow and facilitate that in which all can express their co-responsibility, not only theoretically (“I feel” responsible) but also in fact (“I am responsible”). This sense of co-responsibility means that everyone feels supported by the Friars in what he does and everyone is aware of his work for the fraternity.

*Collaboration* means feeling and being capable of working together to carry out the initiatives decided on for implementation. This is one of the most difficult points for us, who, frequently, are only capable of distributing work but not of doing it together. Collaboration does not always and only mean division of tasks: it must also mean the capacity to do something together. Undoubtedly, especially in pastoral activities, it often seems more efficient for each one to carry out his own task and not get involved in the field of his companion. Each one takes care of his own sector while, at the same time, he makes sure not to step into the other’s and that the other does not step into his. But is this the Franciscan witness that is asked of us? Are we not asked, rather, for the witness of a fraternity that works united in the service of evangelisation?

Collaboration also requires knowing how to project initiatives in union with the other branches of the Franciscan Family: the SFO, Poor Clares, Franciscan Sisters, Capuchins, Conventuals, etc. This is also a challenge of collaboration.

## **7. A fraternity within the Church and the Order**

When fraternity is spoken of, it is only the small group of Friars that make it up that is spontaneously thought about, forgetting that this group forms part of a greater fraternity, the Order, and that it is inserted into the Church.

There is the risk, in fact, of opposing the local fraternity to

the broader one, creating a problem that should not exist and forgetting that the small group achieves its full value and specific importance in the bosom of the greater community of which it forms part.

This means that, in relation to the Order, the local fraternity must be aware that it was the broader fraternity, the Province, which “sent” it on mission in the concrete context in which it finds itself. We all form part of the concrete fraternity in which we are because the chapter and government of the Province decided it that way. It is important to be aware of this broader belonging that will distance us from the danger of turning in on ourselves. It will make us more open. This, naturally, is applicable not only to the local fraternity in relation to the Province, but also to the Province in relation to the Order as a whole. It is a matter of getting out of a vision that is too “Provincial” and of keeping a more open and universal perspective.

In order to focus correctly the evangelising commitment of the fraternity, it is equally important to be aware of the relationship that exists with the local Church. We cannot be separated from the Church reality of our diocese or of the parishes in which we find ourselves. Evangelisation, to be such, is always an act of the whole Church. We cannot accept that we could be seen as “another Church”, distinct from the diocese.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

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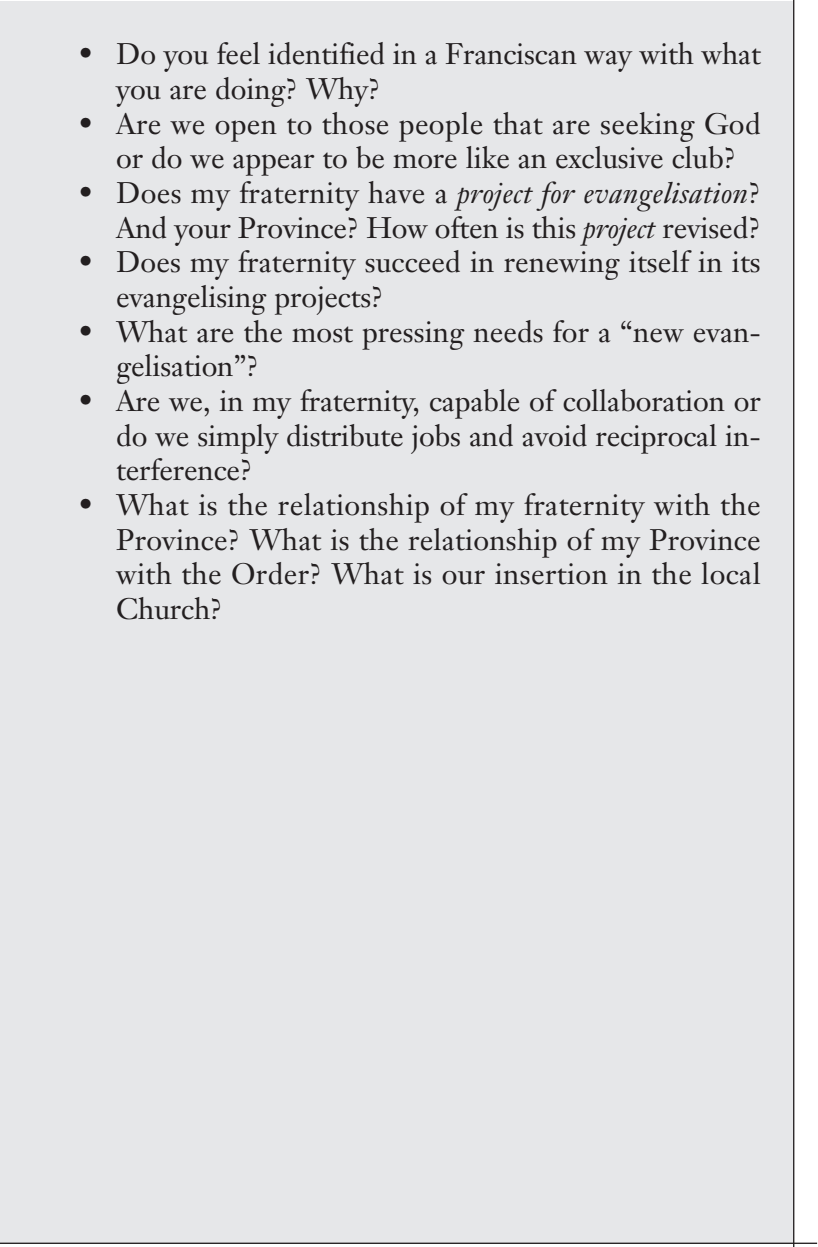
### For personal reflection

1. Read the following texts:
  - *LP* 103: Preaching does not dispense from prayer, manual work or begging.
  - *TC* 54: The efficacy of the preaching of Francis.
2. Ask yourself:
  - The primary evangelisation begins in the transmission of the joyful experience of my vocation. Do I carry it out then as a sign of my love for the Lord and as a sign of love for the Friars?
  - Do I try to live the evangelising intention in all my activities as a reason for my Franciscan vocation?
  - What does “the poor are our masters” mean to me? What does allowing myself to be evangelised presuppose in my life?
  - What positive aspects do I see in the present-day world?
  - Do I feel myself a member of a fraternity on mission in a world that is changing? Do I participate in the evangelising tasks of my fraternity?
  - What place does the evangelising dimension occupy in my *personal life project*?

### For reflection in a group

1. Read the following texts:
  - *Rnb* 14-17: The Magna Charta of the Franciscan mission.
  - *ICel* 36; *TC* 46: The Church sent Francis and his Friars on mission.

- *2Cel* 10: The Crucified of San Damiano sent Francis on a mission.
  - *1Cel* 24. 29; *2Cel* 59; *TC* 37. 58; *AP* 19: Peace, one of the missions of the Order.
  - *1Cel* 36. 65; *LtM* 4, 5: The Kingdom, a topic of preaching.
  - *1Cel* 22-23. 29. 33; *2Cel* 37; *LP* 18: Penance, a subject of preaching.
  - *1Cel* 52. 97; *2Cel* 207; *LP* 80: Preaching through gestures.
  - *2Cel* 155; *LP* 58. 112: Preaching by example.
  - *LP* 103: The mission through poor means.
  - *FEGC* III, 1-3.
2. In the light of these texts:
    - Reflect on how to cultivate and rejuvenate the evangelising dimension of the Franciscan charism that Francis left to our Order and to all the Friars.
    - Share real experiences of evangelising fraternity.
  3. Ask yourselves:
    - What is our situation with respect to personal and fraternity listening to the Word of God? Do we come together to read the Gospel? Do we succeed in sharing our reflections and our difficulties? With whom do we most easily succeed, with the Friars or with members of other groups?
    - What conversion of structures and tasks can the preference for and love of testimonial forms of gospel life presuppose in the Provincial and local fraternity?
    - Do the urgency and diversity of pastoral activities make our consistence in gospel life more difficult? Why do the Friars feel difficulty at times in integrating their fraternity life with parish commitments? Where do these difficulties lie?

- 
- Do you feel identified in a Franciscan way with what you are doing? Why?
  - Are we open to those people that are seeking God or do we appear to be more like an exclusive club?
  - Does my fraternity have a *project for evangelisation*? And your Province? How often is this *project* revised?
  - Does my fraternity succeed in renewing itself in its evangelising projects?
  - What are the most pressing needs for a “new evangelisation”?
  - Are we, in my fraternity, capable of collaboration or do we simply distribute jobs and avoid reciprocal interference?
  - What is the relationship of my fraternity with the Province? What is the relationship of my Province with the Order? What is our insertion in the local Church?





Third Part

**ANIMATION  
OF THE FRANCISCAN FRATERNITY**



# I

## FRATERNAL LIFE AND THE ANIMATION OF THE FRATERNITY

Today more than ever it is necessary that all Friars become aware of the need and urgency for animation of fraternal life. It is not only necessary for the ministers and guardians to assume with joy their “ministry” of animation in order to achieve this, but also for all the members of the fraternity to assume their obligation of co-responsibility, to develop the sense of belonging and to strengthen communion and dialogue. It is only in this way that the Friars and fraternities will enter into a rhythm of growth.

### **1. Animation, a necessity?**

Animation has always formed part of the exercise of fraternal life. Today, however, it is presented with new demands and is shown to be more important than ever in the development of a work or life community. The concept of animation, taken from the world of interpersonal relations and from the rhythm of the life of groups, evokes both the task of the growth of the individuals and of the groups and the way to proceed in their decisions and actions. Our Franciscan life is inserted along this line and underlines the need for the internal animation of all the fraternities, no matter what their size. The same occurs with the animation of the big social body that the Order is in the Church and in the world.

We have passed from a regime centred on the application of obedience in a univocal sense, of reference to timetables and fixed customs, of the strict exercise of local and provincial chapters as places of reference for the local and provincial fraternity, etc., to a well-defined regime of life. Traditional places, based on fidelity to the past, had the meaning we now attribute to animation. Because of the multiplication of models in which the Franciscan charism is incarnated, the question is put in different terms at the moment. Does fraternal animation constitute a need for us or is it a duplication of what was already prescribed? Is it an unrealisable utopia, a passing fashion or a priority for fraternal life?

The etymology of the word (XV century, *animatio*, from *anima* – spirit) helps us to identify what is in play with it: a way of giving life, of creating movement: Add to it the idea of nourishing and feeding. It is a way of procedure that claims the soul, the internal identity of the person or group, first of all. Our techniques of animation must respond to this priority. To speak of animation in fraternal life means to evoke the importance of the growth of a Friar and of his life environment. Animation becomes an art of living and acting, in such a way that the Friars want to meet, recognise each other, around the form of gospel life and to share what constitutes it. Animation presupposes that the fraternity – local, provincial or worldwide – does not consider itself made and completed once and for all and that, therefore, it feels the need to grow and perfect itself. It presupposes an incessantly repeated question: What is to be done to make our fraternal project grow and make our gospel commitment deepen? This question is based on the postulation that each Friar loves his life and wants to animate it and cultivate it. Animation encourages the search for the Kingdom and its justice in us and among the people that God entrusts to us. It is based in the Petrine idea, so beloved of Francis, of being pilgrims and strangers in the search for and practice of the Gospel in such a way as to create bonds between us and of inserting ourselves into the world.

## 2. Animation, an inconvenience!

Despite the blossoming of new forms of Franciscan life, there is a *misunderstanding*: animation is reduced for many to a function of the ministers and of those responsible for the community, as if it were one of the tasks reserved to those that exercise the service of authority, something that belongs and is exclusive to the guardian, discretorium or definitory. This temptation is a residue of the way the service of authority was exercised beforehand.

There also exists the *sectarian temptation* of considering animation as an absolute of small fraternities that have made an option of life or insertion, as if animation was something exclusively for small numbered groups. It is given up in big fraternities, in solidly established houses in favour of less traditional references. Such an attitude presupposes the opposition of certain age and activity groups and makes it understood that there are Friars from whom nothing can be expected. On the contrary, all fraternities need animation. The provincial infirmary needs it as much as the novitiate, the definitory or the fraternity entrusted with a parish. The Friars that live alone because of their activity need it as much as those that live in a big friary.

Another difficulty is derived from the *manner of animating*. Some Friars reduce animation to official acts: weekly meetings, an intense liturgical time or the diffusion of a news bulletin. It ends up taking the means for the end. Animation is something more than a fact of the chronicle or of the activities of the daily programme. It involves responsibility, an essential condition at the basis of our community itinerary. There are many means of making it concrete.

The lack of animation brings with it the *dispersal* of the Friars. An excess of activities divides us. It is enough to look at certain diaries, overloaded. The lack of animation also provokes the absolute, perhaps responding to social, pastoral or spiritual urgencies. It also runs the risk of limiting a fraternity to the strictly necessary, to the minimum of things that have to be done. It cre-

ates a climate of no hope: of not expecting anything new from one's fraternity. Community tiredness is felt here and there. It comes from an excess of meetings, study workshops and texts that have to be read. This tiredness provokes indifference towards all efforts of the group, in all environments.

A fraternity without animation is not a fraternity in the sense that our vocation understands it. We are not an association of bachelors gathered together in a common undertaking, and, less still, a group of friends gathered together for material or affective security. We are Friars and have a need for authentic relationships in the measure of our life profession. Each time that animation is reduced to the organisation of timetables or to the regulation of relationships, it is resented and considered as a luxury, as an inconvenience or as a motive of bad conscience.

### **3. Animation, a duty!**

We must mutually animate ourselves as if it was a matter of pastoral responsibility in the strongest sense of the word. This means: guiding us, making us advance, helping us by means of the paschal experience after the manner of Francis of Assisi. In few words, *take responsibility for one another*. This type of animation requires the full realisation of our life in common. We want to be better witnesses to the gospel life in the multiplicity of charisms and differences. Animation is not a distraction, but a basic condition for perfecting our life as Friars Minor. Where the Friars make the effort to improve the quality of their life, the truth of their prayer, the authenticity of their testimony, the convenience of the mission, they are preparing the expression and practice of common life. The Friars should not improvise or count on the securities of the past. Time is needed to change our mentalities, audacity is needed to take risks with new means and to enter into the radicality of our vocation.

In this sense, to be animated means *standing off a certain distance* in respect to ourselves, in respect to our way of living, in

respect to our activity and mission, in respect to the responsibilities we have, the functions we exercise and the exact situations in which we find ourselves. The animation of a fraternity presupposes the creation of a certain vital distance in order to rediscover the source, a constant review and *fidelity in the assessment and review of our life*. In all this, account must be taken of the age, health condition, differences in mentality, different generations of formation and of experiences of life under the same roof, in a single provincial entity. Animation is always *in fieri*, that is, it must be continually invented. Bernard of Clairveaux used to warn his monks about it: “He who gives to drink should also drink from the same well”. This is valid for both the Friars engaged in the paths of the Gospel and those that live together... We must take time to pause, recover our breath, drink at our own well before giving water to those at our side. This is what animation does in a fraternity.

#### **4. Choosing to animate the way of life together**

In our way of life, animation passes through the mutual consciousness and responsibilities. It avoids falling into authoritarianism of a single direction or into unsociable anarchy. It means, in addition, that authority alone should not take on the burden and that each group should establish a minimum of structures. It exercises the function of memory. It recalls the main ideas of the way of life and calls for the application of the decisions made in common. We must continually learn to live together, to share the joys and sorrows, to discern the will of God in the community project. In order to be able to progress we not only need to live on the basis of certainties acquired during the course of initial formation, but also face up to the secure references of our tradition.

This choice, consciously taken on by each Friar and fraternity, is based on an assiduous frequenting of the sources. It concerns the totality of life: human, psychological, spiritual, social,

community aspects, etc. The model of animation of the "*see, judge and act*" kind is always valid as a wisdom that is at the basis of a practice. The *Rule* and the *Testament* of St. Francis can offer examples of this model with a view to fraternal animation. We need to read, interpret and put into practice together what God asks of us through our brothers and through what the world expects of us.



## SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

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### For personal reflection

1. Read the following texts:
  - *GGCC* 9, 3; 79, 1.
2. In the light of these texts:
  - Reflect on the responsibility that each one has for the animation of the fraternity.
3. Ask yourself:
  - How do I take on the responsibility that is mine in the animation of the fraternity?
  - How do I collaborate with those that have a special responsibility for the animation of the local and provincial fraternity?
  - Is my *personal life project* a means of pushing me to take on my responsibilities in the animation of my fraternity?

### For reflection in a group

1. Read the following texts:
  - *ICel* 35: An early community discernment.
  - *ICel* 42: The experience of Rivortorto.
  - *ICel* 103: The mentality of continually beginning anew.
  - *MP* 85: A picture of the true Friar Minor, constituted by all the Friars.
  - *GGCC* 45, 1: It is up to all the Friars to build the fraternity.
2. In the light of these texts:
  - Dialogue on the responsibility of all the Friars in the building of the fraternity from all the angles that make up the fraternal project.

3. Ask yourselves:

- Where do we start from in order to share our personal experiences, values, styles of life, history, joys and dramas?
- What means should be adopted, besides those laid down in our legislation, in order to grow in the gospel project?
- Does my fraternity have its own emphasis in the options made in the light of its gospel life project?
- Is it possible to revise our way of living as a local or provincial fraternity in the truth? And to make it like a “necessary discipline”?
- How can we discern the will of God for my life and for my fraternity together?
- How can we achieve that each one should have his place in the elaboration of the local life project and in the process of making decisions?
- How can the differences in personal vision and charisms be integrated?
- What kind of animation must we develop in order to respect the variety in the over-all group and of each fraternity in a Province? Could they be of age groups, centres of interest, spontaneous visits, Chapters of Mats or meetings on certain topics?
- What importance does your fraternity give to celebrations or to feasts? Are any periods of thanksgiving reserved in order to live it? Does the fraternity reserve some time for this alone?
- Is the *fraternal life project* a means of fraternity animation? Why?

## II

# FRATERNAL LIFE AND CO-RESPONSIBILITY

Co-responsibility arises from the value that each Friar has in the fraternity and of the meaning that the fraternal project has within the plan of salvation. According to this, each member of the fraternity not only must respond to the call he has received but must also collaborate so that each one of the Friars is faithful in his response. This implies that each one of the Friars should feel duty bound to take responsibility for the others, that each Friar should feel responsible for the construction of fraternal life and that between them all there should be reciprocity and collaboration in working out the community project.

### **1. Where does responsibility begin?**

It is difficult to achieve fraternal co-responsibility if the sense of personal responsibility is missing. The time of initial formation puts down the basis of relational practice. A Friar can bear and construct fraternity only when he has already begun to involve himself in his own human growth, in taking on his own vocation and spiritual life, in his manual and intellectual development; in summary, in his process of ongoing formation. The more he is committed to this itinerary, the more community reflexes he will have and the more he will take responsibility for his brothers and the more he will forge his sense of belonging. One is not given without the other; one flows into the other and vice-versa.

Each one responds with his own life to the vocation of the local fraternity and to that of the great provincial fraternity.

## 2. Up to what point is one responsible for the other?

One of the crucial questions that the book of *Genesis* puts is that of responsibility for others. After having killed Abel, Cain had to face God. To defend himself and from his sense of guilt and of lying, he responded to God with a question: «Am I my brothers keeper?» (*Gen* 4, 9). Excusing himself, he wishes to off-load his responsibility for his brother.

Fraternal life will, sooner or later, face us with the same question: “Am I my brothers keeper?”.

The places where its impact is felt are as vast as are the daily activities, the decisive moments, the celebrations and the dramas, the entrances and going out, etc. Each event can help a Friar to become a Friar Minor, responsible for his brother or brothers. Even though the brothers have been given to us as a grace or as a test, or even as a place of evangelisation, the reflex action of Cain is always within us. All that is needed to nourish or overcome individualism, to close in on self or to be in solidarity with others, is within our grasp. Entering into communion with others carries with it a conversion of our fundamental egoism.

Francis of Assisi had a lively awareness of the inherent risks of falling back on his own will. His *Admonitions* (cf. *Adm* 2. 3. 4. 8 and 18) often give witness to it. The fraternal experience is the most immediate place to contradict the original pride and the wandering outside of obedience. The sources teach us that charity precedes obedience and the link to community. Up to what point must someone be responsible for his brother? Up to charity for the other and the stripping of oneself!

But in charity there is also reciprocity and the taking of responsibility for each other. This is the other face of “my” responsibility. The others, in turn, take responsibility for me. My

brothers are responsible for me. The end of the new formula of profession shows it clearly: «So that... with the assistance of the friars, I may bring my consecration to perfection in the service of God and Church and for the good of mankind» (GGCC 5, 2). “With the assistance of the Friars” means: with their contribution, with their part, necessary for the procurement of my Franciscan identity.

### 3. Co-responsibility, a style of life

Fraternity of life is our primary territory for evangelisation. Although co-responsibility must be incarnated into definite projects, that which unites us is not the activities or ministry, or even a pastoral mandate or social commitment. What unites us is above any bond of friendship or efficacy. At the centre of our fraternal life is the option to *make ourselves disciples in the following of Christ together*, after the manner of Francis and his Friars. What justifies our relations of reciprocity and co-participation is the faith in and adhesion to the Gospel.

The fraternal challenge implies a long apprenticeship. Each one must try to overcome what is mere co-existence in the bosom of a group of strangers in order to live together in a family or domestic type gathering, in fraternity, in which it is only possible to achieve union by accepting the differences. Being co-responsible requires a way of living that does not fall back on itself, but is open to others, our contemporaries. It is always possible to live with them, even though one cannot live in fraternity with everybody. A study on relationships of complementarity and of mutual support among Friars, Poor Clares and Christians of Penance during the early years of our Franciscan Family could be a good illustration of this point.

Let us try, on the basis of fraternal life and the co-responsibilities of some in respect to others, to locate *mutual obedience* as Francis understood it and whose characteristics are: true, charitable and perfect (*Adm 3*). Francis always points out to us the

need to discover the will of God together with others and to preserve communion. How can I be guardian, not only of my immediately close brother and fraternity, but also of the Poor Clare Sisters and of the «people considered of little value and looked down upon, the poor and the powerless, the sick and the lepers, and the beggars by the wayside» (*Rnb* 9, 2)? Co-responsibility is lived among us and with the Sisters and laity that are inspired by Francis of Assisi. There is need for it to be transformed into gestures and behaviours, into options and attitudes. Br. Constantine Koser already underlined, in the distant 1976, the urgency to be attentive to mutual responsibility and to remain open to new experiences.

The model of small fraternities is, undoubtedly, more sensitive to the imperious need for relationships of co-responsibility. Some difficulties in relationships are rapidly make obvious: parasitism, rejection, invasive leadership, isolation, chronic absences due to activism, crises, etc. But in every kind of fraternity the good functioning of the group and harmony in relationships depend on the contribution of each one. How should one act so that each one is respected in his talents, charisms and possibilities of understanding and even in his areas of weakness? This is a challenge for animation. To the question of a hypothetical visitor: “Who is responsible for your group?” the ideal would be to respond: “Each one is responsible for the others”, without falling into anarchy because of it. It is something that presupposes an incessant effort so as not to take the Friars for granted, locking them away in a compartment, in an image or in a category.

#### **4. What behaviours make one responsible?**

It is enough to look at our way of life as the *Rule* establishes it and which proposes emblematic cases to us. We cite some of them:

- care of others and their soul (*Rnb* 5, 1. 7.);
- maternal care (*Rnb* 9, 13-14); *RH* 10);

- absence of power and dominance (*Rnb* 5, 12);
- respect and protection of the other in his frailty and sickness (*Adm* 24; *Rnb* 10; *Rb* 6, 11);
- courtesy in relationships (*Rnb* 7, 16);
- mutual acceptance with affection (*Rnb* 7, 15-16; 11, 4);
- reciprocal service and obedience (*Rnb* 5, 14);
- common responsibility in respect to work, money and alms (*Rnb* 7, 8-9);
- discernment of every situation (the expression “in case of need” or “when they see that it pleases the Lord” is frequent);
- recourse to admonition, correction and support of the other (*Rnb* 5, 5-6; *Adm* 18; 22; 23);
- sense of Church and Catholic behaviour (*Rnb* 19);
- sharing in the condition of the poor (*Rnb* 9, 3) etc.

Our tradition indicates paths and attitudes that lead to responsible behaviour. We can state how co-responsibility is above any question of place, time, a task to be done or common activity. It is a matter of having a fraternal and community reflection in both simple things and in the decisive moments of life. This manner of living requires a constant discernment in order to evaluate its quality and convenience. It is necessary to insert these behaviours into the means we have at our disposal (preparation of chapters and the liturgy, sharing roles in the area of reception, initiation in tasks and new works, care of the sick Friars, etc.). But the basic question still remains. What behaviours make one responsible? Or, said in another way, what steps must be taken in a fraternity in order to achieve maturity of commitment in respect to others? How can initial formation prepare for this manner of being?

## SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

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### For personal reflection

1. Read the following texts:
  - *Rnb* 5; *Rb* 10; and *Admonitions*: Check where responsibility is expressed.
  - *AP* 25-30: The kind of life of the early Friars.
2. Ask yourself:
  - How do I assume co-responsibility in the animation of the fraternity?
  - How do I assume co-responsibility for domestic work and apostolic tasks?
  - How do I encourage co-responsibility of the Friars in the tasks that they have entrusted to me?

### For reflection in a group

1. Read the following texts:
  - *Rnb* 9, 10-11; *Rb* 6, 7-8: The Friars responsible for their brothers.
  - *LP* 76: Francis responsible for the Order.
  - *GGCC* 82, 1; 181, 4: On co-responsibility.
2. Ask yourselves:
  - What are the concrete expressions through which the sense of co-responsibility in the fraternity is manifested?
  - How is co-responsibility encouraged in our fraternity?
  - What concrete proposals would you give in order to grow in co-responsibility? How do you formulate them in the *fraternal life project*?



### III

## THE MINISTERS AND GUARDIANS AT THE SERVICE OF FRATERNAL ANIMATION

### 1. The service of washing the feet

Those to whom the service of authority has been entrusted have a living example of how to fulfil it at their disposal: the humble Christ of the washing of feet presented by John the Evangelist. On accepting the mandate to carry out the ministry of authority, they find an immediate reference in Christ. It is a question of a point of support that is important to take into account so that the function does not drown the Spirit. Offices in our Order are based on spirituality and on gospel practice.

The Franciscan sources use various terms to speak about the role of superior: minister, custos, superior (*prelatus*), guardian. The most used term is that of “minister of the brothers”, *minister fratrum*. Francis associates it with the biblical and monastic model of servant, *servus Dei*. The Friars Minor serve their brothers on the local, provincial or the entire Order levels. “Minister and servant” is said, as if one title necessarily called the other to itself. The office of superior and the responsibility for government refer to the model of the humble and exemplary servant. The image of washing the feet reveals a change of level and value, a movement downwards towards the other, a practice of divesting and charity on the part of the one who presides, is at the service of fraternal communion.

In the measure that the Friars passed from an itinerant life to a sedentary one, the need to appoint local superiors weighed on them. The term *custos*, that is, local custodian, adds a supplementary note to the office of minister, evoking the broadness of his function: to guard, protect, defend the Friars. The term *guardian* appeared much later in the writings of Francis (1224-1225). It is derived from the Latin monastic vocabulary and has the purpose of specifying the responsibility of the custodian. This term is found in Germany and England after 1221. In the Mediterranean basin, on the contrary, we first find the term *minister loci*, that is local minister.

From the beginning of the fraternity, all the functions of authority, on whatever level (*regional, provincial, of the whole Order*), turn around the idea of a *ministry understood as the care of souls and disinterested service*. The *Rule* does not fix the terms in order of importance, but they are adapted to a changing fraternal reality. Progressively, in the *Rule* and *Admonitions*, the function of the minister is configured as a form of presidency of fraternal obedience.

## 2. The Franciscan way of exercising authority

For this type of office there is no other school of formation except that of immersing oneself in it and exercising it. There is no apprenticeship other than fraternal living in the everyday. What was said in the previous topic about fraternal reciprocity and co-responsibility is equally valid for the ministers, guardians and formators, from whom precise dispositions in respect to the Friar entrusted to them are required:

- gratuitous love (*Rnb* 11, 5; *Adm* 9);
- maternal solicitude (*Rnb* 9, 14);
- solicitous care of souls (*Rnb* 4, 6) and vigilance over life (*Rnb* 5);
- spiritual help (*Rnb* 5);
- defence and protection of the life project (*RH*);

- a behaviour of mutual respect (*Rnb* 17, 16) and not of dominance (*Rnb* 5);
- the capacity to exhort and correct with charity (*Rnb* 5).

The *Rule* makes explicit how the minister behaves in respect to himself and in what manner he must carry out his duty:

- not neglecting his own soul (*Rnb* 5);
- not having a mundane style of life (*Rnb* 5);
- administering and serving by “washing feet” (*Adm* 4);
- not appropriating the office and power by becoming detached from it (*Adm* 4, 19);
- having recourse to the law of need (*Rnb*, 20).

We must recognise, however, that the *Rule* does not speak about any aspects that are inherent to the service of authority, for example, it does not speak of the loneliness that accompanies this function, of the criticism that is inevitably received, of how consultation must be carried out, of spiritual discernment, of interventions in urgent cases, etc. But, as is known, the *Rule* proposes a spirit, but does not try to establish any casuistry.

### 3. Difficulties and challenges

The ministers embody a certain memory of our gospel life, they have the mission of reminding us of the range of our commitment to follow Christ. Without our contribution they cannot take hold of the main ideas of the life project. How can the ministers be helped to create this memory, not only in words but also in their manner of acting?

The responsibility of authority can change a person, for good or for evil. Superiors need those that question them and make them vigilant in their own animation and in the exercise of the mandate they received. They do this in order to avoid the traps of adulation and “vainglory”, the seeking of personal interests, the hardening of power, etc. How can they live their role so that it is a

permanent process of conversion? How can they avoid losing sight of the fact that they are Friars and that this is more important than the function, the title or the mandate that they received?

It is necessary to avoid being confined or isolated within their role of authority. They need support, encouragement and advice. The law of charity that presides over fraternal life reaches its full importance in the relationships between Friars and their minister. What is to be done so as not to impose on them an isolation that is even greater than that inherent in the exercise of the office? Are the Friars responsible in relation to their ministers and guardians?

The ministers and guardians carry out an active role in the exercise of discernment, especially in respect to the decisive community events (options about the life style, the life of prayer, crises of personal and community growth, reception and separation, etc). From this point of view, their assignment has a pastoral significance in the strong sense: *the art of revealing the presence of Jesus Christ to people in a process*. What formation should they be given so that they may become men of discernment and spiritual accompaniment?

They carry out daily animation as part of their mandate and, through their presence, they are signs of fidelity to our *way of life*. Our expectations in the area of animation are often immense, we sometimes even reach certain inhibitions and renunciations, expecting the ministers to intervene. The ministry of authority must contribute to the sense of gratuitousness and celebration (intense times of liturgy, birthdays, anniversaries, professions, etc). What price must the Friars pay in order not to lose sight of this gratuitousness without making the ministers the only ones responsible for it?

In so far as they are factors of unity, the ministers preside over fraternal communion. This requires audacity and courage in order to have truth established and to carry out gestures of reconciliation. How are they to be helped to make themselves responsible for pardon and dialogue that brings about reconciliation?

The ministers and guardians are not only administrators of in-

ternal and external fraternal relationships. If stress is placed too forcibly on the internal life there will be the risk that the Friars will turn in on themselves. If unlimited openness is promoted, the community identity is sacrificed. If what counts is simply the response to spiritual, social and ecclesiastical urgencies, there is the risk of activism or of short duration. How can a balanced and critical leadership be favoured? What means should be privileged in order to regularly evaluate our level of acceptance of strangers, our social openness, presence among the poor, Church insertion, commitment in favour of justice and the integrity of creation?

Those responsible for community, often preoccupied with the problems of animation, can neglect to nourish their own human and spiritual life. How can the new Friar ministers be helped to get into their functions? How can those that renew a mandate be taken into consideration? What kind of accompaniment and resources can be offered to those Friars that are leaving an office? How can co-participation in experiences be brought about? What kind of resources does ongoing formation put at the disposal of the ministers, guardians and vicars?

#### **4. The importance of witnesses**

All the elements for assessing the commitment of the ministers and servants converge in the importance of a living and true testimony. The only authority to which they can appeal is that of having passed through the stages of formation, of having carried out an apprenticeship to fraternal life and of having tried to respond to their vocation by discerning the will of the Lord for them and obeying it. What are of value are not the knowledge and accumulation of offices, but personal experience and the will to serve with love. Every testimony requires the truth of the person with his possibilities and limitations, talents and frailties, wounds and gifts. The basic criterion in self-animation and in that of the Friars is the quality of presence and of word. The *saying* and the *doing*, according to Francis, becomes everything.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

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### For personal reflection

1. Read the following texts:
  - *2Cel* 151. 186: The superior represents Christ.
  - *Adm* 3: On true obedience.
  - *Adm* 4: Let nobody appropriate the role of superior.
  - *Adm* 19: The humble prelate.
2. Ask yourself:
  - What is my attitude to: The Friars that have the “ministry” of authority? Fraternal collaboration? And systematic opposition? Why?
  - What concrete implications does “loving obedience” have in my life?
  - If I had to exercise the ministry of “authority” at this moment, how would I exercise it in relation to the brothers that the Lord has entrusted to me? How am I preparing myself on the formation level for such a “ministry”?

### For reflection in a group

1. Read the following texts:
  - *Rnb* 16: Discernment of the minister in order to send on mission.
  - *Rnb* 4 and 18: Responsibility of the ministers.
  - *LtM*: Discernment in the act and practice of mercy.
  - *LtCus*: Requirements in matters of the Eucharist, praise of God and preaching.
  - *1Cel* 104; *2Cel* 188: Fears, certainties and disappointments of Francis on this topic.

- *2Cel* 151; 214-215; *LP* 106; *MP* 46: Francis subject to the minister and guardian.
  - *LMj* 14, 4; *TC* 46; *AP* 37: The obedience that Francis expects from himself.
  - *LMj* 11, 11: A Friar refuses the authority of the vicar.
2. Ask yourselves:
- How does the provincial fraternity prepare the Friars to assume responsibility for animation on the local and provincial levels?
  - What criteria are followed in choosing them?
  - How do the Friars in both the Province and the fraternities help those that have direct responsibility in the exercise of the ministry of authority.





## IV

# FRATERNAL LIFE AND LOCAL CHAPTER

«All the friars are to have among themselves, to the highest degree, a family spirit and mutual friendship» (*GGCC* 39). This family spirit and mutual friendship that must be lived in the everyday existence of life in fraternity finds its privileged expression in the local chapter.

The local chapter is being recognised evermore as a valid instrument to express fraternal life and to grow in it: The Friars recognise themselves as needing each other and they open up responsibly to reciprocal help, conscious that the Franciscan life has its roots in fraternal concern.

### 1. The local chapter, an expression of fraternal life

The Franciscan sources teach us that the first Friars quickly felt the need to form life fraternities by gathering around St. Francis and maintaining a permanent contact among them. They shared their experiences when they returned from their apostolic journeys and they met annually in chapter to treat of how they could better observe the *Rule* and organise their apostolic activities (cf. *TC* 57-59).

The local chapter is the privileged place where the Friars can increase fraternal communion, since it is an instrument that helps the fraternity and each one of its members to understand and better live their vocation. In the local chapter the Friars can ex-

perience up to what point their life with God and the fraternity is impregnated with the Christian and Franciscan vocation and up to what point the Holy Spirit is acting in each one of them for the construction of the fraternity.

The local chapter is the place where each Friar is invited to make his specific charism fruitful to the benefit of the whole fraternity, to reveal his feelings, fears, preoccupations and difficulties as Francis would wish of his brothers (cf. *Rb* 6). It is important, therefore, to become aware of the responsibility that each Friar has for creating an ambience of trust by promoting the capacity for communication, solution of conflicts and the construction of fraternity (cf. *RFF* 64).

The realisation of the Franciscan charism needs structures. The local chapter, even when it is not the only way of expressing the charism, offers a privileged possibility for the Friars to come together for the purpose of nourishing fraternal solidarity in Christ, openness to the inspirations of the Spirit and the common search for the will of God.

Effectively, one of the many – and main – tasks that our *General Constitutions* attribute to the local chapter is, precisely, ongoing formation (cf. *GGCC* 137 §3). Although each one of the Friars has the final and decisive responsibility for occupying himself with his ongoing formation, the fraternity is the primary centre of this formation and it is incumbent on the chapters, of whatever class they be, to stimulate and plan ongoing formation and to grant it the necessary means.

The document *Ongoing Formation in the Order of Friars Minor*, no. 64, reminds us in this regard that the fraternity must try to elaborate, examine and revise, during the local chapter, a community life and ongoing formation project with concrete objectives and means that are worthwhile having present at all times.

## **2. Celebration of the local chapter**

Given the relevance of the local chapter in the life of every

fraternity, good preparation in order to achieve its ends is important.

## **A. Some proposals**

The success of the local chapter requires some prior conditions.

### *a. Spiritual openness*

The local chapter is an eminently “spiritual” event, given that the Friars come together in faith in the presence of God and they dispose themselves to listen to what the Spirit wants to communicate to them through themselves.

For Francis, God gives his Spirit to all the Friars, even to the most simple. For that reason, he often called them together to get advice from them (cf. *1Cel* 30; 39). Francis recognised the word of God in the word of each Friar, he therefore asked their advice in difficult or crucial moments for the fraternity and his personal life. This attitude invites us also to be open to the action of the Spirit.

### *b. Mutual respect and acceptance*

The local chapter presupposes the respect of the Friar, conscious that in our fraternities Friars, not only of different ages, but also of different races, cultural and theological formation or coming from different experiences of life, can live together. It is therefore necessary «to cultivate mutual respect by which we accept the slow journey of weaker members without stifling the growth of richer personalities» (*FLC* 40b).

The reality of each one of the fraternities must be taken into account. Each Friar that participates in the local chapter, including the youngest or least prepared, is a human person with his own dignity and must be appreciated as such. Each Friar is, in effect, a unique, original and unrepeatable human person with

his own wealth of gifts and talents that he must develop during the whole of his life.

*c. Disposed to mutual donation and acceptance*

Every human person needs the complementarity of others in order to develop and realise himself; nobody is self-sufficient. Our fraternity is a community of donation and acceptance. Everyone can learn from the other, grow with the other. Availability to others transforms the Friars into a gift and grace for each other.

«All must have at heart the welfare of their brothers and sisters, cultivating an evangelical ability to receive from others all that they might wish to give and to communicate, and all that they in fact communicate by their very existence» (FLC 33).

*d. Fraternal dialogue*

«In order to become brothers and sisters, it is necessary to know one another. To do this, it is rather important to communicate more extensively and more deeply» (FLC 29). «Communion originates precisely in sharing the Spirit's gifts, a sharing of faith and in faith, where the more we share those things which are central and vital, the more the fraternal bond grows in strength» (FLC 32).

The local chapter brings together people that, in response to a Divine Vocation, have chosen the same style of life. The deepest motivation for their communion of life does not reside in personal sympathies or in the similar ideas that they defend. What is fundamental in the local chapter is not the discussion of ideological or personal programmes, but the personal and community search for the will of God about the realisation of the common life project of following Christ after the example of St. Francis.

Therefore, the dialogue must favour a greater identification of the problems, knowing each other better and seeking together

the most suitable ways to solve the problems or difficulties that can be met in the process of growth of the fraternity.

## **B. Structural elements of the local chapter**

Immediate preparation of the chapter.

A good preparation of the chapter requires keeping some elements in mind:

- The date of the chapter must be known with sufficient anticipation.
- It is important to consult the Friars beforehand about the points to be dealt with and the topics that are to be studied.
- The theme should be communicated in writing a few days beforehand.
- All the necessary documents and aids should be made available.
- A suitable place that would help to create a fraternal atmosphere and adequate conditions for a fruitful dialogue should be provided.
- The minutes of the previous chapter and the decisions should be made available.

### *a. The start of the chapter*

Given that the chapter is an eminently “spiritual” event, it would be good for the Friars to become aware that they are gathered around the Word of God. They should ask themselves, personally and in community, what God wants to say in the concrete situation in which the fraternity lives at that moment. Therefore, immediately after an initial prayer asking for divine help in reaching fruitful, active and constructive collaboration from all the Friars, it would be good to have a short reading of the Word of God or from the Franciscan Sources in order to hear together what God wants.

*b. Review of previous chapters*

After the reading of the minutes of the previous chapter, there should be a response to the question: How have the decisions and suggestions of previous chapters been put into practice? Whoever had a specific job to do should inform the Friars about carrying out, or failure to carry out, the decisions and commitments made.

In order to have a pacific and tension free life together, it is very important that all the Friars be informed periodically about the events and affairs that concern the fraternity. In this way the bond with the fraternity and of the fraternity within itself becomes stronger and the spirit of fraternity and the sense of belonging to the same family are encouraged.

With regard to information, the guardian should inform the fraternity about the more important questions and activities. The bursar of the house should inform it about the income and expenditure and also about the projects carried out or about to be carried out. Also, the Friars that have specific tasks should inform the fraternity about them.

Dialogue about new questions and projects:

The topics of the chapter primarily depend on the local fraternity, on its concrete and present-day needs. It can sometimes happen that the Order or the Province would propose some topic for study. In any case, it is advisable that an order of topics be determined so that the different matters are dealt with in accordance with their importance. In general, new questions should not be accepted unless they are very urgent. The consent of the chapter members should be sought in order to deal with them.

But it must never be forgotten that fraternal life does not primarily consist of the construction and maintenance of buildings or in financial matters, nor does it consist of pastoral or apostolic activities. It is necessary that spiritual topics that concern fidelity to the personal and community life projects should have priority in the chapter, even when it is not always easy to do so.

*c. The conclusions of the chapter*

At the end of the chapter it would be good to make a brief synthesis of the topics dealt with and of the decisions made and also to mention the questions that were not considered.

The chapter should end with thanks being given to the Friars for their participation and collaboration, a concluding prayer and then a festive celebration, which could be a supper, fraternal recreation, etc.

### **3. The different roles in the local chapter**

*a. The guardian*

The pastoral task of the guardian in the local chapter is very important.

1. The guardian is the president of the chapter since he is the animator of the local fraternity and answerable for the fraternity to the Province. But this does not prevent him from delegating the function of coordinating the chapter, especially in big fraternities. When there is a moderator, the guardian can pay greater attention to the fraternal climate and to the spiritual dimension of the chapter while the moderator will be more attentive to the dynamic and objective procedure of the chapter.
2. As “pastoral” animator of his fraternity, the guardian should try to be a mediator between the different opinions or groups, acting as a “catalyst” in the search process of the Friars, without wishing to impose his personal opinion or interests.
3. At the time of deciding or voting, the guardian should be attentive to the chapter remaining within the limits of its competence. On the one hand, all the interests and objective and constructive criticisms should be openly manifested during the chapter and on the other hand, the chapter cannot pressurise the coordination of the fraternity.

*b. The moderator*

The task of the chapter moderator is of vital importance for the growth and deepening of the climate of mutual trust among all the Friars.

The moderator must be convinced that each Friar participant has something to give and to say to the fraternity.

He must act in a way that the Friars open up to sincere dialogue and are in condition to find their own path as a fraternity. He should be attentive, therefore, to the diversity of the Friars and should know how to allow all, without exception, to speak and to get all to express their point of view and observations.

*c. The secretary of the chapter*

The task of the secretary is to take note of the topics dealt with, of the opinions about which there is consensus in the fraternity and of the chapter decisions. He should draw up the corresponding minutes or acts at an opportune time and make them known to the Friars.



## SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

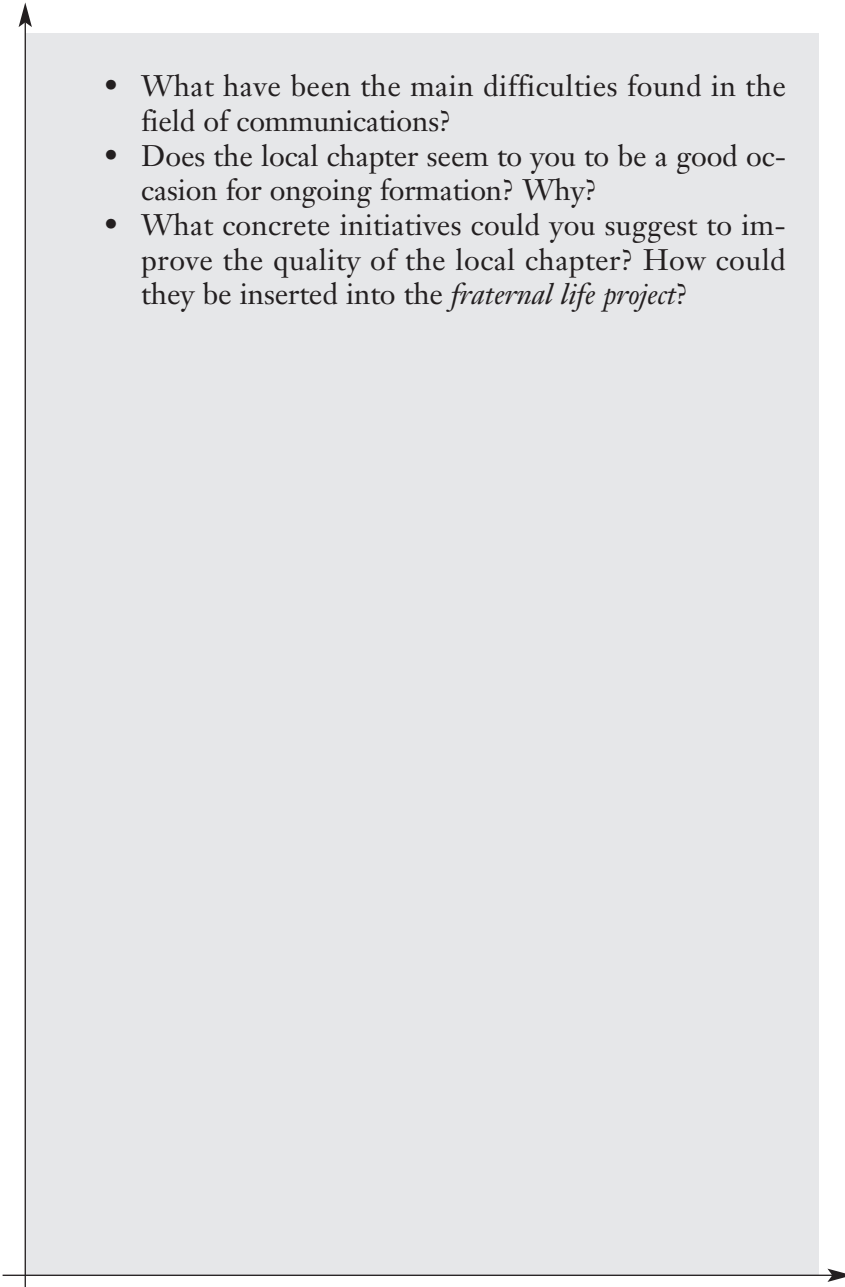
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### For personal reflection

1. Read *Adm 25*.
2. In the light of this text:
  - Reflect on the level of communication that I have with the Friars of my fraternity.
3. Ask yourself:
  - What do I communicate from my life – the being and doing – to the Friars of the fraternity?
  - What is my participation in the local chapter like?
  - How do I prepare for participation in the local chapter?
  - Am I capable of saying “with charity” to the Friar’s face what I say behind his back?
  - How do I view the aspect of communication in *my personal life project*?

### For reflection in a group

1. Read the following texts:
  - *ICel* 30. 39.
  - *FLC* 29. 32. 40.
2. Ask yourselves:
  - What is the frequency of celebrating the chapter in the fraternity? How is it celebrated? What dynamic is followed in its preparation and celebration?
  - Communication, not only of ideas, but especially of feelings, soul and heart, is a normal expression of a “community of life”. Are we mentally oriented for this new effort that is urged by society, psychology and the theology of the religious life? Do we believe it to be worthwhile?

- 
- What have been the main difficulties found in the field of communications?
  - Does the local chapter seem to you to be a good occasion for ongoing formation? Why?
  - What concrete initiatives could you suggest to improve the quality of the local chapter? How could they be inserted into the *fraternal life project*?

## V

# FRATERNAL LIFE AND ONGOING FORMATION

Perhaps we have never before been so aware as we are today of the rapid changes of life that are coming about in all environments. The changes in culture and social life, the changes in the world, evermore linked, close and “global”, and the changes in the Church (e.g., in the liturgy and theology) open up to us new paths and ideas. But, at the same time, they are also a weight since man has to adapt continually in order to follow life and the merciless advance of time. Our life as Friars Minor has also experienced great changes during recent years in both the way of focusing on it and in the way of updating its values. Our time is rapidly changing life situations and, if we do not wish to be left behind, we must insert ourselves into this flow. But to advance in this way requires a great personal and community effort in order to adapt constantly to the circumstances of life. This adaptation compromises each Friar and the entire local, provincial and including the worldwide fraternity in all areas of life. Bringing the Gospel to the world of today requires us to renew ourselves and to mature psychologically, professionally, religiously, theologically and spiritually. This effort at adaptation and maturation finds its specific framework in ongoing formation.

Our very vocation as followers of Jesus Christ after the manner of St. Francis asks us to mature personally and as fraternity in order to understand it ever better in the present-day context in which we are inserted.

The *GGCC* speak to us about ongoing formation as the way of uninterrupted development of gospel witness and of our vocational option in the school of Francis (cf. *GGCC* 135). This formation embraces all our life as individuals and as members of the local and provincial community (cf. *GGCC* 137). The *GGCC* indicate, as well, that our ongoing formation “is to be based on Franciscan spirituality” and, taking into account the integrity of the Friar Minor’s life, to promote its development in all its aspects: personal, spiritual, doctrinal, professional and ministerial (cf. *GGCC* 136).

In addition to our *General Constitutions*, which are a juridical-spiritual text, the document *Ongoing Formation in the Order of Friars Minor*, published by the Secretariat for Formation and Studies in 1995 after the Congress of Moderators for Ongoing Formation of the whole Order, celebrated in Assisi in October 1993, regulates, stimulates and encourages ongoing formation on all levels of our Order. The present article, which follows this document, expounds the content of ongoing formation by inviting all to reflect on the concrete possibilities of carrying it out in the context of each one.

## **1. Ongoing formation, a process of conversion**

### *a. Ongoing formation is a process (OF 8)*

Starting from the natural sciences, human life, including that of adults, is considered today as an existence in continuous growth, that is, in constant development during its different stages. The mode of living and acting, therefore, must unceasingly adapt to the rhythm of one’s life. This rhythm of the person must take into account the dependency that exists between the human changes and those of the Christian and Franciscan life, as well as the professional and ministerial situation of each Friar.

By taking into account this personal situation of the Friars, the fraternity offers to each one of them the suitable means to

help them live this dynamism of life and to overcome any difficulties and disturbances that all development or new step can bring. Facing up to the fact of always being in a process entails a continuous confrontation. And this situation, not always easy, must be assumed with maturity and, if possible, with the least possible damage.

An ongoing formation that helps us to assume the changes of life and to be capable of helping others to progress maturely in a human, Christian and Franciscan sense is therefore necessary. This process of maturation is not only a personal necessity of the individual Friar, but of the whole fraternity. The fraternity is formed by each and every one of its members and their living together has its own psychological, human and Christian laws. The fraternity, the ambience in which life is shared, must be, therefore, a place of ongoing formation in view of a new life together and a communion of life that are evermore perfect.

The objective of ongoing formation is the maturity of the person in all his dimensions (corporal, psychological, emotional, spiritual and intellectual) and the maturity of the fraternity in all its expressions of living together, of Franciscan vocation and missionary service. Ongoing formation, in this sense, is not an updating course but an attitude.

*b. A continuous conversion (OF 39)*

The starting point of the vocation of Francis was his conversion, which led him to live the Gospel with his brothers among the marginalised (cf. *Testament*). In the same way that conversion, the biblical *metanoia*, was the determining factor in the life of Francis, so also does it fulfil an important role in the realisation of every Franciscan vocation. The Franciscan life requires a continuous conversion of heart and life of every Friar and every fraternity in order to approach ever closer to the message of God in Jesus Christ. The Spirit of the Lord is necessary in order to understand what possibilities there are of putting the Gospel into practice in the context in which we actually live. The Fran-

ciscan life, in this sense, requires a process of conversion of us, a growth in our relationship with Christ that is transformed into *metanoia* (cf. *RFF* 57).

The 'yes' to the will of God and the total donation to the Lord is renewed in each stage of one's life through this process of conversion. The conversion of heart to the message of mercy of God forms part of Franciscan penance and again opens up the path to reconciliation through words and deeds.

The goal and objective of conversion, at which ongoing formation must aim, is to make oneself truly minor, to live one's personal vocation and to renew enthusiasm for the gospel life.

*c. The requirement of fidelity (OF 40 and 41)*

Ongoing formation arises from the need for fidelity. Fidelity to oneself, to one's own values and richness, needs continuous care in order for these, far from diminishing or being lost, to develop and adapt to the changes of life. On the other hand, fidelity to God requires commitment in order not to tire in the face of the challenges, disillusionment and failures of daily life. Finally, our vocation and mission ask of us the fidelity to constantly renew ourselves. What they ask of us is not stable fidelity in the maintenance of things external to the religious life, learned once and for all times, in that case we would be immobile stalactites. We are asked for a creative fidelity that knows how to face up to the new challenges of new times, that knows how to change our behaviour and our traditions in accordance with the truth of the Gospel, read in the concrete context of the situations that surround us. Fidelity in this sense implies flexibility. What must survive is the truth of our vocation, our human, Christian and Franciscan values. Our fidelity, therefore, must always be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Ongoing formation must help to discover evermore the basis of our Franciscan life and to develop our flexibility and capacity to live those values in the different stages and circumstances of our life. Ongoing formation helps us in this way to find a life that is fruitful and rich in hope.

Ongoing formation is a vital and necessary process for feeding and qualifying the Franciscan life and for avoiding spiritual indifference and tiredness. It is a question of the effort of every Friar to carry out his role in the fraternity, in the Church and in the world knowing how to understand and confront the challenges that can be presented to him. To achieve this, ongoing formation should favour the acquisition of the knowledge and competence that are needed.

The purpose of this fidelity, gained through ongoing formation, is to follow Jesus Christ as a real Friar Minor, after the example of Francis, and to live a radically gospel life.

## **2. Ongoing formation, a vital need in fraternity**

### *a. Ongoing formation and the fraternity (FP 48, 49, 51)*

A vocation is lived, concretely, in a fraternity where the climate of experiences is given. From the fraternal life angle, ongoing formation is not a technique, but the way that the Friars take care of each other. As a gift in co-responsibility, the fraternity as a whole is, in itself, a place of ongoing formation in so far as all are committed to living a common vocation together in it. Mutual education, reciprocal stimulation and attention to individual situations are, in themselves, expressions of ongoing formation. But, in addition to this human, Christian and Franciscan care for life in common, there is need for a sincere seeking in fraternity to deepen the knowledge and competence that our vocation and mission require of us. The vocation requires a community preparation in order to be capable of giving witness to fraternity through the very living together and manner of working. Both the internal life of the fraternity and its relationships with the exterior need preparation through ongoing formation.

*b. An open fraternity (OF 51-53)*

The fraternal life of the Friars Minor is open to dialogue with the Church and creation and it cultivates a special openness to the different components and branches of the Franciscan Family: Poor Clares, SFO and other Franciscan groups. But, by vocation, the fraternity particularly opens up to the poor and marginalised of all classes in the world and Church. This openness demands a spirit of hospitality, solidarity and charity in order to live with and for the People of God. It drives us into fraternal dialogue that also requires a certain preparation in: listening, sensitivity to the different situations of pain and suffering that exist in the world, respect for other cultures, esteem for the other as a person and gift from God and availability to help. Ongoing formation wishes, in this most ample field, to be a stimulus and to give the preparation necessary.

From this angle, ongoing formation can become a great stimulus to become evermore interested in the life of the local and worldwide Church, to insert oneself better into the world and into one's own culture and to proclaim with greater fidelity, opportunity and efficacy the Good News of the Word of God.



## SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

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### For personal reflection

1. Read the following texts:
  - *GGCC* 137, 1; *RFF* 40. 57.70; *OF* 8-46. 60. 61.
2. In the light of these texts:
  - Reflect on your understanding of ongoing formation and on your attitude towards this requirement.
3. Ask yourself:
  - How do I take on the commitment “to always begin again to serve the Lord God” in my concrete life of every day?
  - Can you say that the rhythm of life that you live every day is a truly formative process?
  - When have you last read a book on theology? With what frequency do you attend courses of theological and professional updating?
  - What means does your *personal life project* contemplate in order to respond to the demands of ongoing formation? Which should it contemplate? How will you put them into practice?

### For reflection in a group

1. Read the following texts:
  - *GGCC* 135-137; *RFF* 64; *OF* 62-71; *FEGC* III, 127-132; *VC* 67.71.
2. In the light of these texts:
  - Share in fraternity what everyone thinks about the need, the demands and the means of ongoing formation.

3. Ask yourselves:

- Does the fraternity live with a mentality of ongoing formation? How should this mentality be focused on in the Province so that initial formation is linked into ongoing formation, thus forming in the subject the disposition to allow himself to be formed during the whole of his life?
- Is the fraternity the privileged place and everyday life the main means of ongoing formation of the Friars? What changes should be made in fraternity life in order for it to be a truly formative process in reality?
- Does the fraternity have an ongoing formation project? How is ongoing formation looked on in *the fraternity life project*?

# VI

## THE FRATERNAL LIFE, PLACE OF COMMUNICATION AND DIALOGUE

### 1. Dialogue

Our fraternal life, nourished by reciprocity and benevolence, presupposes a triple openness: to oneself, to the world and to God. The greatest gift we could ever give to our contemporaries is, undoubtedly, that of fraternity. We try to construct it as a family environment, free from competition and violence, and in it everyone brings his actions and preoccupations to the other. In a certain sense, men, religious and lay, will always seek in us what belongs to them: to be treated as brothers, loved by God in Jesus Christ. And, among the most important experiences in order to enter into communion with them the need for justice and peace, the need for prayer and a spiritual dimension, the radical defence of their rights and solidarity in difficulty stand out.

For us the challenge of evangelisation consists of allowing ourselves to be constantly evangelised in the place and environment where we live. Each Friar and fraternity must open up to others in order to give testimony to the Kingdom. But everything begins in the first form of openness: the openness to and of oneself. This means beginning at one's own fundamental poverty, and even of one's apparent "uselessness" in order to make oneself disposed to the things of God and of others. Fraternal life is converted into the first sacrament of the encounter with God. It is inseparable from the world of the little ones and

the poor. It can be stated that, paraphrasing the mystical Angela of Foligno, we are dealing with “being pregnant with the world and with the realities of God”.

Before speaking of techniques and instruments adapted to behaviour and solidarity, we must begin from the urgency of a basic dialogue. Let each one start out from his interiority, from the secret room of the Gospel where God and the world are encountered. The great biblical commandment associates love of God, love of neighbour and love of oneself. A dialogue, a vital interrelationship flows between them. How can our fraternities be converted into openness to oneself, to the other and to God? How can a space for authentic dialogue be made out of interiority and fraternal relationships?

## **2. Inventing a word!**

It is necessary to find together some words that are a real expression of our living. It does not matter if they are clear or nebulous. Each attempt at clarification makes relationships grow. The most important is to have a reference point from which to start. What expression could we take a chance on together that is not simply information about facts or events? What do we need to say in order to really share life?

## **3. Learning to communicate**

The expression ‘fraternal’ goes beyond the structures within which the Friars have established to communicate. It embraces all the facets of communication. It presupposes an apprenticeship in reciprocal listening and expression, made up of that said and not said. Speak and listen. There are different ways of speaking and being silent (or of not speaking). From this there is derived a constant attention to verbal – and non-verbal – relationships, to silence, gestures, behaviour, etc. Fraternal communica-

tion is very much greater than verbal communication. How do we mutually educate each other in dialogue? How can we distinguish between shock and flight, consensus and disagreement, an ideological and a confidential conversation, laziness and enthusiasm, a place of conversion and a place of resistance? How can we definitively grasp the background and the broadness of what is being communicated? How can reciprocal evangelisation be made out of communication?

There is no other way except that of meeting each other in the concrete situation of co-participation, with its power and intensities. We must learn to communicate in words and silences in order to construct the way of expression of the fraternity.

#### **4. The fraternity is allowed to speak**

The task of fraternal animation is to make the soul and process of a group flourish. Every life community has its own theory about its values and its realisation. For us, Friars Minor, this means to establish together the references to tradition, the way of life and our way of updating it today. Our language reveals our vision of God, of others, of the gospel options and of social and Church solidarity. For example, in a group there is nothing more significant than to lay out the “plan of relationships” in order to verify the communication and the ties that one maintains with people, the Church, the type of ministry or of presence.

The fraternity has its own memory: historical coordinates, moments of crisis and of growth and references to the past. This memory, which is often defined during a three-year or six-year period, is inscribed in a greater memory on the provincial scale. Is it possible to go back over the past in order to understand the present and to be more active for the future in our fraternity? What is our capacity to refer to the essential points of Franciscan and religious life?

Day by day the fraternity constructs its project through the wealth and fragility of the people that form it. This project has

its own colours, accents, priorities and exclusions. Each fraternity has something vital to say in the interpretation and application of the Franciscan gospel project. A group that is content with legislation and prescriptions runs the risk of falling into the tepidity of which Scripture speaks. The fraternal expression that life asks us to venture is inscribed in a Franciscan secular language and in a Word of God that is even more vast. It is only here that something new can be extracted in order to make a common response to the life project that we have professed.

## **5. The practice: uniting head and heart**

All relationships lack balance if there is no harmony between intelligent and emotion. There must be complementarity between reason and passion in our relationships. Even taking into account the different psychological types of the same fraternal entity, we all have the responsibility to maintain a balance between the head and the heart. Ideas and values must not exclude the sentiments, but rather the contrary! The review of life should allow for a periodic evaluation of our communication in the bosom of the fraternity and with the world. All the Friars must be vigilant on this point. Practical life presents us with a series of questions that arise from meetings and exchanges of ideas:

- How is the good we mutually wish for each other measured? And our social sense?
- What capacities for adaptation and change do we have? What capacity to confront the unexpected? Up to what point do we know how to wait and have patience with each other? And together while going through a difficult moment?
- Does our dialogue give priority to the things that have to be done, postponing other matters?
- How can our sense of gratitude, of celebration and of mercy be measured?

- How can the Friars that have difficulty in speaking be made participants in the verbal dimension?
- How do the Friars call each other? What name is given to them? How do they correct each other? How do they joke? How do they express their mutual affection? Have they a sense of humour?
- How do they speak of others: of women, of strangers, of the people with whom they work or of those that they serve?
- Are there anti-feminist, sexist, racist or anti-clerical reactions among us?
- Are there any forms of violence or power among us or in our environment?
- How can the question of friendships (internal, mixed) be addressed?

## **6. The strength of the relationships**

Everything, then, can contribute to establishing significant bonds between us. Fraternal dialogue, united to an authentic practice, has the gift of strengthening relationships, taking care of each other and setting others to rights. The Friars are not chosen like friends are, but are received as a gift. It is important that the words that arise from fraternal relations should signify the essential of what we seek. In this sense, the Friars can become a sacrament of the encounter with God.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

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### For personal reflection

1. Read *Jn* 4, 4-43; *1Cor* 12, 7.
2. In the light of these texts:
  - Reflect on the way you share the gifts of the Spirit with others in order for them to become really everybody's and serve in the edification of all.
  - Become aware of the circumstances of your life that are obstacles to communicating in depth with others.
3. Ask yourself:
  - How much of my life do I communicate to others? How do I communicate it? Why do I communicate it? Up to what point am I committed in my communication? Where and with who is it made easier and where and with who is it more difficult? Why?
  - What am I hoping for through my communication? To please another, animate, so that he recognises me, so that what I say will be taken into consideration, etc.?
  - What difficulties do I meet at the time of communicating my vocational experience with the Friars? If I have any, why?
  - Do you feel called to strengthen some concrete aspect or to take some concrete measure to communicate more and better? Which?
  - How can these aspects and measures be worked out? How can they be inserted into the *personal life project*?



## For reflection in a group

1. Read the following texts:
  - *Rnb* 5-15: The way of behaving among ourselves and with others.
  - *2Cel* 155: How the Friars are reconciled.
  - *FLC* 29-34: Communicating in order to grow together.
2. In the light of these texts:
  - Reflect on what communication is and means.
  - Recall some moments of deep and positive communication in fraternity that are especially significant.
3. Ask yourselves:
  - What is the dominant climate in the fraternity? What is expected in a Franciscan fraternity is that there will be deep existential relationships. Are we conscious of what they presuppose? Are they present in the fraternity?
  - How do we assess communication in the fraternity? Is it something that preoccupies the members of the fraternity? How is communication going according to the perception of each Friar in the fraternity?
  - Communication of the faith is one of the main hinges for community cohesion. What is our communication of faith like? What instruments do we use for it? Which help us? Which have become simply routine and must be recreated?
  - Would it be possible to grow fraternally through communication and vocational discernment by the Friars among themselves?
  - What are the main problems that make communication in fraternity difficult?
  - How can fraternal communication be strengthened from the *fraternal life project*?



## VII

# COMMUNITY DISCERNMENT

### 1. A Franciscan style

In contrast to other procedures of discernment that tend towards the fulfilment of the will of God through decisions taken in its favour – e.g., the decision of Ignatius – the Franciscan tradition proposes to radicalise Christian life on the whole. *Admonition 12* speaks of a spirit, of a mentality rather than a concrete choice or of a step forward. «A servant of God can be known to have the Spirit of the Lord in this way: if, when the Lord performs some good thing through him, his flesh does not therefore exalt itself, because it is always opposed to every good. Instead he regards himself the more worthless and esteems himself less than all others». In this text it is a matter of converting one's mentality and behaviour rather than of making oneself secure in a precise decision. The sources draw up a spirituality and practice of discernment without indicating any methods. It is the same gospel project submitted to its radicality in the life of each one. The *Letter to Br. Leo* and the *Letter to a Minister* illustrate a discernment in which the freedom of conscience and the predominance of fraternal relations coincide.

To speak of Franciscan discernment in the sense of *Admonition 12* means to speak of a *recognition* of the action of the Lord and, therefore, of becoming aware and of reflecting. This recognition presupposes the *disposition* to His action. It means underlining the importance that the *practice of good* has in order to have the experience of the *divesting of oneself*. It means the verification

of the quality of the *humble presence* together with others in order to avoid exaltation and any feeling of pride that could accompany it. A paradox suddenly appears. It is impossible to evoke the will of God in our life without having a place for others. Reason and heart must coincide in the experience. The exercise of discernment can be fulfilled through a precise act, but it embraces much more: the authenticity of life and our capacity for continuous conversion.

## 2. Personal and community challenge

The root of the term *discern* reveals its function. It is a question of drawing a circle around one's reality in order to be able to grasp it well, accept it and, consequently, act on the basis of it. In this view, the entry into discernment is an act of obedience in the strong sense of interior listening. We put ourselves at the disposition of God before fulfilling his will ("sharpen the ear of the heart").

When we speak of discernment, personal investigation comes to mind first of all, the search for the will of God for our life. No Christian is dispensed from this exercise, in either the repetition of the everyday or on the great occasions. The same is true for the Friar Minor. Whether it is a question of the intention to improve prayer, to change work, to open up to the will of a superior or to go through a tough trial, there is always a single desire to identify, understand and love the situation that God gives us. Each one is measured by his effort to be truthful with himself and with God. Have we had the experience of a decisive personal discernment in our life? What did we learn? What elements helped us? What time was given to it? Was there a transformation in prayer? Was there the necessary distance in respect to one's own living? Was there a need to consult and share? How was the compiling of the signs? Was there recourse to a new form of accompaniment? Was there the will to decide and to carry out coherent gestures?

Many fraternal meetings are meetings of discernment, even though they may be given another name. In the meeting and matching of the differences that exist between us we can often discover a light of the Lord for our life. All can guarantee this experience. Each one of us, from the novice of one day to the old and wise, are called to verify if the Spirit of the Lord is acting in him and in the fraternity.

It is a matter, once again, not only of a procedure to make a decision, but also of *a global view that wishes to lead the fraternity to carry out the plan of God*. Every attempt at a review of life, every faithful exercise of reference to the sources, every comparison with the Word of God, every trusting dialogue with authority are occasions for identifying the will of God and of trying to understand if we are *inhabited by His Spirit*. Discerning together is an experience that demands a price in meetings, time, continuity, reciprocal listening and, necessarily, a putting into practice. Have we carried out discernment in fraternity? Have we found the same elements that occur in personal discernment in it? Up to what point are we aware of our mutual responsibility in the search for the will of God? How could we have community reflection in our meetings? Could we find a method, a project, a way of making reference to the sources that could be capable of favouring the progressive discovery of our sense of community? In other words, do we believe in the importance of discerning together or do we prefer to limit the experience to a private act? Do our communities need accompaniment in this area?

### **3. Discernment in the early fraternity**

Celano and Bonaventure present two key experiences of discernment that are worthwhile re-reading from both the spiritual angle and the practical life angle. In both accounts there is a serious preoccupation for the future and the dilemma of *whether to live among men or to go off to solitary places* is presented.

In *ICel* 35, the Friars are returning from Rome by way of Spoleto. They had received the verbal approval of their life project from the Pope. The text presents them as being full of the initial enthusiasm, “only divine consolation delighted them. It is a kind of novitiate for a poor and deprived life. Their dilemma is situated in a precise context: they want to “commit themselves to live sincerely in sanctity”. Francis, undisputed leader of the group, resolved the question of the fraternity in a prayer context. Although Celano puts the sanctity of Francis at the centre, it is clear that the discernment of the Friars arises from their new practice of divestment and from their desire to radicalise Christian perfection to that which they had committed themselves.

The event related in the *LMj* 12, 1-2 happened some twenty years later. Francis is presented, personally this time, with the same dilemma. Bonaventure explains that the anxious doubt had been greatly tormenting Francis for many days (cf. *LMj* 12, 1b). We know that the historical context of the dilemma was the crisis of the spirituals. Prayer spurs Francis to confide his doubt to the Friars. The narration by Bonaventure is implicitly praise of prayer and of its benefits. On the other hand, the fraternal dialogue does not resolve the doubt. Two spirituals, Sylvester and Clare, chosen by Francis, resolve the question. One and the other, who are people dedicated to prayer, clearly express themselves in favour of “going out to preach”. In this case also there is a process of progressive consultation and a context of prayer. Here also feelings accompany reason.

In the two cases, despite the divergence of the accounts, the question is vital, it is presented in a context of prayer and is examined in common. And, once the answer has been received, Francis and his companions immediately put it into practice. The conclusion is identical: *solitary prayer gives way to the evangelisation of people*. The moment of decision, no matter how instantaneous it may have been, is preceded by a stable practice and a long trial. The two episodes reveal the importance of submitting the interior and community life to the test of authenticity.

This is true whether in the initial enthusiasm or after many years of progress and experience. Fraternal life is always in movement, it can never be taken for granted.

The wisdom of these two accounts shows us, besides, how the questions of Francis and of the Friars are closely linked to what they live. Discernment takes place in and through life. The Spirit is working in it, acting through concrete unease, new attention, the desire to go further still. Every community needs fixed times to look at and to evaluate itself in the light of the *Spirit of the Lord*. Undoubtedly the main challenge to any community in discernment consists of achieving the necessary transparency, not only to read the situation, but to rectify it and to grow. On the other hand, the courage to put the truth discovered into practice must follow the reciprocal listening in search of the truth. The truth makes us free. Is it possible for us to learn something from past discernment? Can the completed discernment be celebrated?

#### 4. Signs and countersigns

What the writings of St. Francis enumerate on the personal plain could very well be transferred to the community level. The signs of the activity of the Spirit are measured by the *primacy of the sense of God* to whom we must attribute all.

Another sign is the *increase in charity*, even in a climate of opposition, of persecution or lack of reciprocity. Francis would speak of not abandoning the others in order to wander outside obedience. Another sign is *perseverance without losing peace*, that is to say, bearing with, facing up to whatever happens while maintaining peace. Then follows the attitudes of *humility* and *divesting of self*, which are expressed in mutual service and recognition of the other. What appears to be a loss of self or a giving up of one's will is transformed into a major *availability* to God and others in works. The sign is detachment from egoistic pretentiousness and the freeing of oneself from the "I", in so as far as it is

an obstacle to divine life. Finally, the adhesion to God and to others is prolonged in the *adhesion* to the Church, authority and the clergy, despite their sin.

In various parts of the *Admonitions* the countersigns, opposed to the signs, flourish: appropriating goods, prestige and one's will or activity. It is the temptation to distance oneself from the fraternity. Recourse to negative words, Francis called them "*idle and vain*", without activity or examples of life. The lack of perseverance and the loss of internal peace, the feelings of preoccupation, envy, anger, being easily scandalised are just other counter signs. We could include the hardening of one's position in the "I" at a cost to others or the disaffection with the Church and its representatives. These countersigns are a barometer to measure the absence of the Spirit of the Lord in the fraternal spirit. We are called to be vigilant over our way of living, of dialoguing, of burdening one another and of finding our place in the world. The famous dilemma of Celano and Bonaventure is now directed at us in both the secret of our heart and in the fraternity. Do we face up to the essential? What makes us live together? Are we capable of carrying out a dialogue about fundamental options? Have we a common practice of conversion? What is our fraternal memory of the Gospel like? How far are we willing to go in order to maintain the prophetic spirit in order to have the gospel life become contagious for the men and women with whom we meet?

Community discernment only has a meaning if it includes our intention to advance faithfully in the life option. The modalities, the methods and the practical development are derived from this primordial intention. Let us return to the confession of Francis in the *Testament*: The Lord gave him brothers. The Lord gives us brothers in order to make the Gospel actual and, among other things, to learn to discern the Gospel itself in our lives.



## SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

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### For personal reflection

1. Read the following texts:
  - *Acts* 2, 15ff.
  - *PrSD*; *Adm* 3, 12.
2. In the light of these texts:
  - Reflect on your attitudes to the vocation you received and the response you are called on to renew daily.
3. Ask yourself:
  - Do I believe in the capacity of my fraternity and of each one of its members to grow?
  - Are the elaboration and review of the *personal life project* moments of personal discernment?

### For reflection in a group

1. Read the following texts:
  - *Mt* 16, 4; *Acts* 15; *1Ts* 5, 21.
  - *GS* 4, 11; *VC* 37; *OT* III, 1-3; *FEGC* III, 3.
2. Ask yourselves:
  - Do I hold on to certain structures because I have always done that?
  - “If we would but dare”. What does this expression say to us? What concrete steps would this attitude demand? Are we disposed to it? Why?
  - Is the elaboration of the *fraternal life project* an occasion for real community discernment of what we are, of what we do and of how we do it?



## APPENDICES



# I

## THE LOCAL CHAPTER ACCORDING TO OUR LEGISLATION

The *GGCC* state that the local chapter, composed of all the solemnly professed Friars of each house, constitutes the fraternal government of the house (cf. arts 240 §1; 242). And the expression “fraternal government” must be underlined, because it wishes to highlight the participative and consultative role of the Friars in the organisation of fraternity life, in unity with the guardian.

The commitment of the local chapter is generically stated in the following manner:

- To assess, principally through dialogue, and choose with common criteria the initiatives that must be planned; to encourage harmony and the active and responsible participation of all; to examine and assess the commitments taken on by the fraternity or by each Friar and to deal with matters of great importance. (cf. *GGCC* 241).
- To duly organise the domestic life for the purpose of creating a true, real and intimate fraternity (cf. *GGCC* 46).
- To take care of the development of the work, evangelisation and pastoral care and to interestedly seek information about each of the activities in order to consolidate and encourage fraternal communion (cf. *GGSS* 34 §2).

From this commitment of the local chapter there arises a series of practical duties. In effect, the local chapter intervenes:

- a. *In so far as it is the authority of the fraternity:*
- to determine the time and other circumstances for the celebration of the Eucharist and community prayer (GGSS 8);
  - to determine the forms of penance, accommodated to the circumstances of times and places (GGSS 16);
  - to act in all the cases laid down in the Particular Statutes or Rules of Procedure (GGSS 233 §2).
- b. *As an organism that helps the guardian to fulfil his duties:*
- in the organisation of domestic life (GGCC 46);
  - in marking out the limits of the cloister (GGSS 23 §1);
  - in determining the amount of expenditure in certain cases (GGSS 243 §2);
  - in certain cases of the alienation of goods or the contraction of debts (GGSS 245).
  - in the determination of the activities that the Friars have to take on, taking into account the real needs of society, the Church, the Order and of each Friar (GGCC 112 §2);
  - in the animation and planning of ongoing formation (GGCC 137 §3).

## II

# THE ROLE AND AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY OF THE GUARDIAN AND OF THE LOCAL CHAPTER IN THE LEGISLATION OF THE ORDER

### 1. Introduction

The treatment of this topic arose from the need to go deeply into the understanding and carrying out of the role of guardians. It is sought, above all, to work with greater clarity that would allow certain uncertainties, confusions and ambiguities to be dispelled.

The presence of a certain malaise in this topic is due to some factors that have their origin in a unilateral understanding of certain basic values in the consecrated life:

*a. The importance of the person, understood as the principal subject responsible for his own growth, future and options. This primacy of the person, understood erroneously, has provoked:*

- on the one hand, difficulty in accepting the presence and activity of the guardian as an irreplaceable “means” in the very experience of the religious life;
- and, on the other hand, consideration of his intervention as an undue interference in the private sphere.

*b. The importance of corresponsibility and co-participation in community life, which understood falsely, produced:*

- on the one hand, difficulty in accepting decisions taken by the guardian alone;
- and on the other hand, the emptying out of the role of the guardian, generally reducing it to that of mere custodian of good external order.

c. *The importance of religious obedience that:*

- on the one hand, is often considered as a reduction in personal dignity, as an obstacle to self-determination;
- and on the other hand, is subordinated to objection by the individual conscience, where there often nestles egoism, blackmail or a persecution complex.

In this way, the authority of the guardian and the free initiative of each one are set against each other, the “consummated fact”, the almost total autonomy, the vindication of an “egalitarian democracy” that does away with the diversity of functions and obligations. All this leads to:

- on the one hand, a distorted consciousness of the authority of the guardian with its accompanying consequences;
- and on the other hand, a “renunciation of authority” on the part of the guardian, which is ruinous for fraternal life.

In this case an ever-greater need is felt to study deeply the theology and spirituality, within the Franciscan experience, of the relationships “authority and the religious sense of dependency”, “authority and corresponsibility” and “authority and obedience”.

In the light of this problem, the profound meaning of the norms relative to the topic in question, which the *General Constitutions* and the *General Statutes* present, will have to be understood.

The consideration of the topic has been divided into two parts, the role and domains or areas of responsibility of the guardian and the role and domains of the local chapter, by simply following the norms in a fairly systematic way.



## 2. Role and domains of the guardian

The role of the guardian is clearly determined in article 175 §3 of the *GGCC*: «The Guardian rules his Friary with ordinary authority». The meaning of these terms is evident: To rule means to orient, guide, order, rectify, decide; the house is a fraternity placed under his authority (cf. *GGCC* 232); the ordinary authority is the authoritative power attached to the office. A right-duty is linked to this role of the guardian: right = the requirement to rule; duty = the obligation to rule. This right-duty cannot be avoided by the guardian under pain of infidelity to his role and under pain of violation of a co-relative right-duty of the fraternity to be ruled by the guardian.

The clearest manifestation of this role is found in article 237 of the *GGCC*: «The principal responsibility of the Guardian is to foster the welfare of the fraternity and of the friars, to exercise watchful care over the religious life and discipline, to direct activities, to promote an active and responsible obedience among the friars in a spirit of true fraternity».

Obviously, the legislator is also careful to point out the style with which the guardian is called on to fulfil his role, and we find it in article 185 §1 of the *GGCC*: «... Guardians are to carry out their service of authority with humility; and docile to God's will in fulfilling their duty, they are to watch over the friars as children of God and they are to encourage their voluntary obedience with respect for the human person». The areas of responsibilities (domains) are derived from the role. They must be exercised – according to the legislator – in a double modality: «alone or with the local Chapter» (*GGCC* 175 §3).

### A. He alone

The domains or areas of responsibility of the guardian that are exercised by “him alone” can be concentrated into three nuclei: a) in respect to each Friar; b) in respect to the fraternity and c) in respect to subjects extraneous to the fraternity.

a. *Domains in respect to each Friar*

- Favouring the good of each Friar (*GGCC* 237).
- Diligently seeing to it that each Friar in the fraternity is provided with all that is necessary, according to the conditions of places, times and persons, in such a way that the superfluous is not permitted or the necessary is not denied (*GGSS* 19).
- Promoting an obedience that educates to responsibility and stimulates initiative by listening to the opinion of each Friar; including asking for it and encouraging it, but the authority to decide and order what must be done always remains his (*GGCC* 45 §2; 185 §1).
- Taking solicitous care of the weak, sick and old Friars, visiting them and providing for their personal needs, both spiritual and material; procuring fraternal assistance for them (*GGCC* 44; *GGSS* 28 §3).
- Watching over the Friars that, through agreements, are linked to certain offices outside the fraternity (*GGSS* 55 §2).
- Granting or denying permission for the use of money and asking for an account of the money that each one receives or spends (*GGCC* 8 §1; 82 §2).
- Authorising or denying recourse to benefactors, in the way that seems best (*GGSS* 32 §1).
- Granting or denying permission to be absent from the house (*GGSS* 219 §1).
- Granting or denying, in writing, permission to travel, in accordance with that established in the *PPSS*, indicating the time and place of the journey in the letters of obedience (*GGSS* 38; 41).
- Organising vacations that must be granted to the Friars in such a way that the duties of the fraternity are provided for and the purpose and spirit of our poverty are respected (*GGSS* 38).
- Making efforts to avoid evil, through prudent vigilance and fraternal admonitions and confirming those that are in difficulty in their goodness (*GGCC* 252 §1).

- Making sure that each Friar has a copy of the *Rule* and *Testament* of St. Francis, together with the *General Constitutions and Statutes* (GGSS 1 §1).
- b. *Domains in respect to the fraternity*
- Favouring the good of the fraternity (GGCC 237).
  - Making an effort to construct the fraternity “as a family united in Christ”, so that, above all else, God is sought and loved (GGCC 45 §1).
  - Encouraging mutual love in the fraternity, as a means to protect chastity with greater security (GGCC 9 §3).
  - Doing everything so that the ordinary life of the fraternity will give an impulse to ongoing formation (GGCC 137 §2).
  - Making suitable space available in order to have, even in common, spiritual reading, mainly of the Sacred Scriptures (GGSS 11 §1).
  - Arranging that, at opportune times, the *General Constitutions* are read in fraternity and that their meaning is studied through community meetings.
  - Making sure also that the documents issued by the General or Provincial Chapter for the better interpretation and adoption of the *Rule* are read (GGSS 2 §2).
  - Diligently taking care that the events of major importance that occur in the Order are known both within and outside the fraternity (GGCC 49).
  - Regulating the work done in the house, remembering that his main duty is to unite and maintain in fraternity those Friars assigned to different works (GGSS 34 §1).
  - Changing the limits of the cloister and even suppressing them in a given case or for a just cause (GGSS 23 §2).
  - Frequently visiting filial houses and, whenever possible, gathering the Friars together in order to encourage mutual charity (GGSS 223 §2).
  - Making sure that, on the occasion of a retreat or at another opportune time, a chapter of renovation is held, in which the Friars deal with those things that seem necessary and

useful for cultivating the religious life of the house and to increase fraternal charity (GGSS 10).

- Proposing the matters that are to be dealt with in the local chapter and communicating them to the fraternity beforehand (GGSS 234 §1).
- Convoing and presiding over the local chapter (GGCC 240 §1; GGSS 235).
- Presenting and submitting the account books of the economic administration to the local chapter for examination (GGSS 246).
- Diligently supervising the administration of all goods belonging to the house and taking care of the correct functioning of the administration of temporal goods (GGCC 250).
- Paying attention that the bursar carries out the administration of the goods under his direction and dependency (GGCC 246 §1).
- Attending to what was decided by the provincial chapter with regard to the alienation of goods and to debts (GGSS 221) and to that decided by the provincial definitory with regard to extraordinary expenditure (GGSS 243 §2).
- Attending to what is laid down by the GGSS with regard to the execution of works in the house (GGSS 243 §3).
- Being careful not to burden or allow the house to be burdened with onerous debts or economic obligations (GGSS 241).
- Carefully avoiding all kind of accumulation of monies (GGCC 82 §3).

c. *Domain in respect of subjects outside the fraternity*

- Sending in, annually, the report on the state of the fraternity to the Minister provincial (GGSS 187 §2).
- Presenting to the provincial chapter and the new guardian an inventory of the furniture of the house and of the sacred property of the Church, together with the register of income and expenditure, signed by the local chapter or discretorium (GGSS 246 §1).

- Giving spiritual aid to the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular as well as the Secular Institutes and Associations of apostolic life of Franciscan inspiration and encouraging collaboration in the works of evangelisation (*GGCC* 59).
- Giving fraternal and charitable aid to the Friars and Provinces that, through adverse circumstances, find themselves in a grave situation (*GGSS* 21 §2).
- Not losing sight of the needs of the poor (*GGCC* 82 §3).

## **B. With the local chapter**

The areas of responsibility of the guardian, exercised in the local chapter, are carried out in two distinct ways: with consent or with advice (*GGCC* 176; *GGSS* 234 §1, 211; *CIC* 119).

### *a. Domains with the consent of the local chapter*

- Duly organising the domestic life with the aim of creating a true, real and intimate fraternity (*GGCC* 46).
- Marking out the limits of the cloister in the tenor of the *PPSS* and with the approval of the Minister provincial (*GGSS* 23 §1).
- Making expenditure for which – in accordance with that determined by the provincial Definitory – he must request the consent of the local chapter (*GGSS* 243 §2).
- Alienating goods or contracting debts according to the dispositions of the provincial chapter (*GGSS* 245).

### *b. Domains with the advice of the local chapter*

- Determining the activities that the Friars must assume, taking account of the real needs of society, of the Church, of the Order and of each one of the Friars, preserving, however, the faculty of the ministers and guardians to decide and order those works that have to be chosen and to which Friars they are to be entrusted (*GGCC* 112 §2).
- Stimulating and planning ongoing formation, as well as al-

lotting the necessary means in accordance with the tenor of the Statutes (GGCC 137 §3).

- Permitting or denying the acceptance of an office or post outside the Order to a Friar (GGCC 180).

*N.B. Besides the consent or advice that the local chapter must give, account must always be taken of what is established in article 177 of the GGCC. «Even when consent or consultation is not prescribed by law, the Ministers and Guardians are to listen willingly to the friars in matters which concern the fraternity, and, though it is up to them to decide in such cases, they are not to act too easily against a consensus of the friars».*

To guarantee the faithful fulfilment of the role of the guardian and a rigorous execution of his obligations, our legislation formulates some requests and also provides for some penalties in the case of the non-fulfilment of his office.

## **C. Other matters**

### *A. Requests to the guardians:*

- He should not accept any posts that would impede him in the proper fulfilment of his office, nor should the ministers impose any (GGSS 227).
- He should plan ahead so that any prolonged absences, approved by the Minister provincial, would not cause prejudice or inconvenience to the Friars (GGSS 22 §1).
- In the case that he must go outside the area of jurisdiction of his fraternity, even if for a brief period, he should advise the person that, by right, has to stand in for him (GGSS 22 §2).

### *Main requests to the Friars:*

- They should, in close union with the guardian, make an effort to build fraternity “as a family united in Christ”, in which God is sought and loved above all else (GGCC 45 §1).

- They should willingly give their help to the guardian, who has been entrusted with a major office. They should express their opinions to him and put into practice his decisions in a spirit of faith and generosity of heart (*GGCC* 45 §3).
- They should submit their own will to that of the guardian «in all that they promised the Lord to observe» (*GGCC* 7 §1).

### *B. Penalties*

Look up articles 249-251 of the *GGSS* with regard to the penalties imposed on negligent guardians.

In addition, it is also provided for that the Friar that gravely insults his guardian or publicly despises his orders or conspires against his authority, should be punished with penalties in proportion to the gravity of the fault, not excluding, if the case so requires, the temporary unfitness for all posts and offices in the Order; and he should give corresponding satisfaction (*GGSS* 248 §2).

## **3. Role and domain of the local chapter**

Common law entrusts the institution of the local chapter to the discretionary power of an institute's own law (*CIC* 632). On their part, the *General Constitutions* state that the local chapter – exclusively made up of the solemnly professed Friars (*GGCC* 242) – constitutes the “fraternal” government of the house (*GGCC* 240 §1). The expression “fraternal government” is underlined, because it highlights the role of the local chapter that is not strictly “jurisdictional”, but is participative and consultative in the ordinary authority of the guardian (*CIC* 633). Therefore, in determining the ambience of his “authority”, proper law can never entrust to it any role that would supplant the ordinary authority of the guardian. The normative aspect of the *GGCC* and *GGSS* must be understood from this point of view.

The role of the local chapter is generically made explicit in the following way:

- Weighing up and promoting, mainly through dialogue, what has to be undertaken by common accord, encouraging harmony and the active and responsible cooperation of all, examining and assessing the works carried out by the fraternity or by each Friar and dealing with matters of major importance (*GGCC* 241).
- Organising domestic life in a proper manner with the aim of creating a true, real and intimate fraternity (*GGCC* 46).
- Dealing with questions referring to the development of work, evangelisation and pastoral care, especially enquiring with interest after each one's work in order to consolidate and encourage fraternal communion (*GGSS* 34 §2).

A series of obligations follow on from the role of the local chapter, in the execution of which it acts as the supreme authority of the house (rarely) or as an organism of participation – with deliberative or consultative vote – in the ordinary authority of the guardian (in almost all cases).

*a. As supreme authority, the local chapter intervenes:*

- in the determination of the time and other circumstances of the celebration of the Eucharist and other community prayers, whether it is a question of the Liturgy of the Hours or of the Word of God and other celebrations that conform to the nature of the Order (*GGSS* 8);
- in the determination of the forms of penance accommodated to the circumstances of times and places (*GGSS* 16);
- in all those cases determined by the Particular Statutes (*GGSS* 233 §2).

*b. As an organism of participation in the ordinary authority of the guardian and, therefore, of support in the fulfilment of his obligations, the local chapter intervenes in all those situations already pointed out in Appendix I, letter b.*



*N.B.: The GGSS entrust two other assignments, on the provincial level, to the local chapter:*

- to express its opinion on admissions to Orders (108 §2);
- to propose to the provincial definitory, at an opportune time, any matter that it considers worthy of study during the provincial chapter (160 §1).

#### **4. Conclusion**

In conclusion, it seems opportune to highlight some concluding remarks in favour of a correct and constructive exercise of the roles and obligations of the guardian and of the local chapter in the life of each fraternity.

a. First of all, the profound relationship – that is both distinguishing and complementary at the same time –, which exists between the role of the guardian and that of the local chapter must not be forgotten.

- The guardian is the individual subject of the ordinary and particular «potestas regiminis» (*CIC* 131 §§1-2) of the house. In contrast, the local chapter is normally an organism of participation and collaboration in the exercise of the «potestas regiminis» of the guardian (*CIC* 633; 129 §2). In effect, article 175 §3 of the *GGCC* states: «The Guardian rules his Friary with ordinary authority, alone or with the local Chapter, or respectively and in the cases specified by law, with the discretorium if there is one, in accordance with these Constitutions and the Statutes».
- If the guardian «rules his Friary with ordinary authority» (*GGCC* 175 §3), the local chapter «constitutes the fraternal government of a Friary» (*GGCC* 240 §1). Here we find the complementary aspect between the role of the guardian and the role of the local chapter (as an organ of government, collaboration or of consultation and help).

b. On the other hand, the guardian is asked to have “the courage to decide” within the field of his domain and to accept responsibility – even if onerous – for his decisions. Indecision and doubts are ruinous for the life of a fraternity.

c. The guardian is also requested to overcome the tendency to delegate what corresponds to him by right to the Minister provincial.

d. Finally, the guardian should never forget the Franciscan dimension of the charism of authority, understood as a fraternal service.

In this way, the gospel, Franciscan and juridical fidelity of the guardian to his role guarantees the spiritual and human growth of the fraternity that has been entrusted to him by the Lord.

# CONTENTS

Presentation .....	»	3
“You are all brothers” .....	»	5
Acronyms and abreviations .....	»	10

## First Part INTRODUCTION

### **I. Franciscan vocabulary of fraternal communion**

1. “You are all brothers” (Rnb 22, 33).....	»	15
2. The Lord gave me brothers (Test 14).....	»	17
3. The way of life (Rnb 8, 9) .....	»	18
4. Living in obedience (LtO 2) .....	»	20
5. Serving the Lord (cf. Rnb 9, 11) .....	»	21
6. Behaving spiritually (Rnb 16, 5) .....	»	22
7. Let everyone be called a lesser brother (Rnb 6, 3) .....	»	23
8. Let them be Catholics (Rnb 19, 1) .....	»	24
Suggestions for reflection .....	»	26

### **II. From community life to fraternal life in community**

1. Life in community before the II Vatican Council .....	»	30
2. Fraternal life after the II Vatican Council .....	»	31
Suggestions for reflection .....	»	34

### **III. Origin of the fraternity**

1. Meaning and significance of articles 38 and 40 of General Constitutions .....	»	37
2. The theological origin of the fraternity .....	»	39
3. The human origins of the fraternity .....	»	43
4. Consequences and difficulties of this vision .....	»	45
Suggestions for reflection .....	»	47

Second Part  
**THE FRANCISCAN FRATERNITY, GIFT AND TASK**

**I. Constructing the fraternity**

1. “Called to build fraternity” .....	» 53
2. In the light of the <i>General Constitutions</i> .....	» 54
3. A broad task .....	» 55
4. A task for all .....	» 56
5. Build, not destroy .....	» 56
6. Means for building fraternity .....	» 59
Suggestions for reflection .....	» 61

**II. Human reality in the fraternity**

1. Called to trinitarian maturity .....	» 65
2. Some signs of human maturity .....	» 67
3. Some difficulties .....	» 68
4. Some means for growth .....	» 69
Suggestions for reflection .....	» 74

**III. Equality and diversity**

1. The grace and gift of diversity .....	» 78
2. The grace and task of equality .....	» 79
3. Areas of equality and progress made .....	» 80
4. The secular temptation and the new temptations of inequality .....	» 82
5. Forming for equality in diversity .....	» 84
Suggestions for reflection .....	» 85

**IV. Familiarity among the friars** (cf. *Rb* 6, 7)

1. Making fraternal union grow.....	» 88
2. That which is asked of a life of fraternal communion .....	» 90
Suggestions for reflection .....	» 94

**V. Fraternal correction**

1. Our vocation to fraternity, between grace and sin.....	» 99
2. Friars and fraternities in growth .....	» 100
3. Vocational fidelity and fraternal correction .....	» 101
4. The “art” and ways of fraternal correction .....	» 102
Suggestions for reflection .....	» 106

## **VI. The “favourites” of the fraternity**

1. “... weak, old, sick and other Friars...” ..... » 109
  2. The “favourites” of the fraternity ..... » 111
  3. The truth of the fraternity: the “little ones” ..... » 113
  4. Fraternal attitudes ..... » 115
  5. But the “difficult cases remain” ..... » 117
- Suggestions for reflection ..... » 118

## **VII. Friars minor**

1. The identity expressed in the name ..... » 121
  2. Minors among ourselves ..... » 123
  3. Minors in respect to others ..... » 126
  4. The options of a fraternity of minors ..... » 127
- Suggestions for reflection ..... » 130

## **VIII. Evangelising fraternity**

1. One dimension of our life ..... » 134
  2. Allowing oneself to be evangelised ..... » 134
  3. A presence that radiates ..... » 136
  4. A fraternity that does not seek itself ..... » 136
  5. A creative fraternity ..... » 137
  6. A co-responsible and collaborative fraternity ..... » 138
  7. A fraternity within the Church and the Order ..... » 139
- Suggestions for reflection ..... » 141

### Third Part

## **ANIMATION OF THE FRANCISCAN FRATERNITY**

### **I. Fraternal life and the animation of the fraternity**

1. Animation, a necessity? ..... » 147
  2. Animation, an inconvenience! ..... » 149
  3. Animation, a duty! ..... » 150
  4. Choosing to animate the way of life together ..... » 151
- Suggestions for reflection ..... » 153

### **II. Fraternal life and co-responsibility**

1. Where does responsibility begin? ..... » 155
2. Up to what point is one responsible for the other? ..... » 156

3. Co-responsibility, a style of life .....	» 157
4. What behaviours make one responsible? .....	» 158
Suggestions for reflection .....	» 160

### **III. The ministers and guardians at the service of fraternal animation**

1. The service of washing the feet .....	» 161
2. The Franciscan way of exercising authority .....	» 162
3. Difficulties and challenges .....	» 163
4. The importance of witnesses .....	» 165
Suggestions for reflection .....	» 166

### **IV. Fraternal life and the local chapter**

1. The local chapter, an expression of fraternal life .....	» 169
2. Celebration of the local chapter .....	» 170
3. The different roles in the local chapter .....	» 175
Suggestions for reflection .....	» 177

### **V. Fraternal life and ongoing formation**

1. Ongoing formation, a process of conversion .....	» 180
2. Ongoing formation, a vital need in fraternity .....	» 183
Suggestions for reflection .....	» 185

### **VI. The fraternal life, place of communication and dialogue**

1. Dialogue .....	» 187
2. Inventing a word! .....	» 188
3. Learning to communicate .....	» 188
4. The fraternity is allowed to speak.....	» 189
5. The practice: uniting head and heart .....	» 190
6. The strength of the relationships .....	» 191
Suggestions for reflection .....	» 192

### **VII. Community discernment**

1. A Franciscan style .....	» 195
2. Personal and community challenge .....	» 196
3. Discernment in the early fraternity .....	» 197
4. Signs and countersigns .....	» 199
Suggestions for reflection .....	» 201

## APPENDICES

### I. The local chapter according to our legislation

### II. The role and areas of responsibility of the guardian and of the local chapter in the legislation or the Order

1. Introduction ..... » 207
2. Role and domains of the guardian ..... » 209
3. Role and domain of the local chapter ..... » 215
4. Conclusion ..... » 217

*Realizzazione a cura di*



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