



CONFERENZA DEI MINISTRI GENERALI
DEL PRIMO ORDINE FRANCESCANO E DEL TOR

Dear brothers,
May the Lord give you peace!

In this letter we would like to inform you about a recent project which centres on the establishment of a new Pontifical Franciscan University in Rome.

This plan is the result of a process that we, the Ministers General of the First Order, have been involved in for some time. At a time of division and fragmentation in our world, we have been listening to the Spirit who invites us to witness to our common identity as sons of St. Francis, heirs of the Gospel life which he founded and experienced so deeply in his own life. Although our history as well as different emphases in our living out of the charism have divided us, we are conscious that the Order is born out of the inspiration of St. Francis, and so is one. We are called to live a unity in diversity in such a way as to be a credible sign of the presence and action in history of a God who is a Communion of Persons.

In rereading our past history, we cannot deny that divisions may have occurred because of our distinctive interpretations and practices. Nonetheless, in the light of the signs of the times that have been given to us, we also feel that our shared history is a source of great richness as regards diversity of understanding. In our common theological and spiritual reflection there also have been shared insights, such as our recognition of the primacy of love in God's self-revelation, and a spirituality of how God can be practically experienced.

The signs of the times in which we live also indicate that the energies which the Lord still gives us should not be scattered, but should instead impel us to work together collaboratively, conscious of our common sources of inspiration.

Another impulse in this regard is the exhortation of Pope Francis in Assisi on October 4th 2013, in which he urged us to be a sign of a common united Franciscan identity.

These are the principal reasons which moved us, on October 2nd last, to make a decision at our annual meeting in Assisi to work for the establishment of a single Pontifical Franciscan University in Rome. We believe that now is the time for a significant transformation of our presences in the academic world of Rome. Our strengths must not continue to be divided; instead, our common ministry and identity in the field of scholarship should bring about a pooling of resources.

Starting from our existing inheritance, and working together in a robust process characterized by fresh thinking, we wish to establish a centre which is capable of responding to developing needs in the areas of Church and University. If we combine our energies we can provide a more meaningful and effective service in academia.

We believe that a single Franciscan University project finds its place within the Church's evangelizing mission, which desires that “the very power of the Gospel should permeate thought patterns, standards of judgment, and norms of behaviour ” of human culture. (*Sapientia Christiana*, # 1).

As an expression of the academic unity of the Franciscan family, this project will be committed to an emphasis on the distinctive wisdom of the primacy of love in the Franciscan School. This will give new impetus to the *affective way*, which in our history has been explored through a variety of avenues.

Contemporary ecclesial reflection, prompted by questions and demands from people and their cultures, can illuminate this tradition of thought and experience. In this way it can act as a revitalized conceptual tool so as to express in contemporary language the beauty of the divine life dwelling within us by grace.

We have already been in communication with those who teach at our academic centres in Rome, and we will make use of their particularly valuable contributions in the journey ahead, in order to bring about this challenging and extraordinary project. We are also aware that this initiative, which is in line with the stated aims of the Congregation for Catholic Education in regard to Universities in Rome, has been very much welcomed at the highest levels of the Vatican.

We have therefore instructed our respective Secretariats of Formation and Studies to form a steering group which will devise an incremental process leading to the establishment of this new academic entity by Easter 2018. We ask your cooperation in promoting the growth and development of this green shoot of Franciscan vitality, which is also a symbol of a desire for the unity, reconciliation and creativity of which the world has so much need.

Your ministers and servants



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Minister General



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Rome, 29th November 2015, Feast of the All Saints of the Seraphic Order