Animation Guidelines
of the General Definitory
for 2016 and 2017

Rome 2016
MOVING TO THE PERIPHERIES AS BROTHERS AND “LESSER ONES”

Animation Guidelines of the General Definitory for 2016 and 2017

Rome 2016
Dear Brothers,

May the Lord give you peace!

The recent General Chapter sought to bring about renewal and a fresh impetus to the witness of the Friars Minor in our vocation to be proclaimers of the Gospel: *Going to the Peripheries of today’s world, bringing the Joy of the Gospel*.

In addition, during his address to the Chapter members, Pope Francis emphasized that “it is important to recover the awareness of being bearers of mercy, reconciliation and peace. You will make this vocation and mission fruitful by being increasingly a congregation ‘going forth’.”

In issuing these Animation Guidelines, the General Definitory offers a resource to all of the friars of the Order. This booklet can be used for reflection and discussion, so that we may each be able to discern what it means for us today to go to the peripheries, and develop practical ways and means of evangelization, conversion, mercy, and loving care of our common home.

In the hope that these pages can be transformed into life plans and mission programs at every level of our Order, and so contribute to a process of renewal and growth in the Gospel journey of each fraternity and of every one of you, I wish you the Lord’s peace and every good!

Rome, January 25th, 2016
*Feast of the Conversion of the Apostle, St. Paul*

Br. Michael Perry, OFM
*General Minister*

Prot. 106241
INTRODUCTION

Dear Brothers, this brief document, entitled *Moving to the Peripheries as Brothers and 'Lesser Ones'*, is intended to give you a sense of the thinking and vision behind the government and animation of the Order during this sexennium.

In the first part we would like to share some reflections based on the final document produced by the General Chapter of 2015.

The second part deals with the broader context described by the theme we have chosen. Our plan for the sexennium envisages three successive two-year periods, and we would like to put before you guidelines for the first of those two-year periods - 2016 & 2017. Central to these guidelines is a focus on journeying in communion with whole Church, while also taking into account our particular charism.
Moving to the Peripheries as Brothers and “Lesser Ones”
MOVING TOWARDS THE PERIPHERIES AS BROTHERS AND LESSER ONES

Brothers and Lesser Ones in Our Time was the theme of the recent General Chapter, a theme that highlighted the core of our identity - Fraternity and Minority, lived out in the context of today’s world. During the Chapter we addressed the current reality of our Order, its strengths as well as its weaknesses.

In meeting with so many friars from all over the world we renewed our sense of gratitude to the Lord for the gift of fraternity; the Lord gave us brothers. We heard about all the good that God accomplishes through the witness, the words, and the work of the brothers. We also looked squarely at the difficulties and lack of coherence in the lives of the brothers. Facing these difficult realities, while also being aware of a renewed call to be Brothers and Lesser Ones, we felt a deep sense of possibility and hope. In the words of the Final Document, this hope will be fulfilled if we all renew our commitment to our Gospel way of life, truly becoming Brothers and Lesser Ones, going out to the places in our world where God’s joy and mercy are so desperately needed (Cf. n.33).

Pope Francis also invited us to go out when, on May 26th, 2015, he gave an audience to participants at the Chapter. He asked us to be “bearers of mercy, reconciliation and peace”, and he reminded us that this vocation and mission would be made fruitful by our “being increasingly a congregation ‘going forth’”.

The Final Document of the Chapter well expressed this call to go out toward the peripheries. There is a danger that, in dwelling on the “crises” of our world and of our Order, we could end up turning in on ourselves, as if we and our crises were the center of everything. It is against
Moving to the Peripheries as Brothers and “Lesser Ones”

this temptation to self-absorption that the recurring invitation to move towards the peripheries is addressed. The call returns in many different parts of the Document (Cf. nos. 12, 22-23, 32-33) At its conclusion, in a kind of summary, a proposal is made: “We must all make the choice – on the personal, local, and Provincial levels - to become truly Brothers and Lesser Ones, going out to the places in our world where God’s joy and mercy are so desperately needed” (no. 33).

The heart of our forma vitae

Going out to the peripheries has always been an essential element of our forma vitae. The Franciscan venture began when Francis heard the San Damiano Crucifix say to him, “Go, rebuild my house” (Cf. 2 Cel VI). His vocation was confirmed at the Portiuncula a few years later when Francis heard the text of the Gospel “in which Christ sends out his disciples to preach and gives them the Gospel form of life” (LM III, 1). Subsequently, Francis and his first companions were further confirmed in their conviction of being sent out to spread the Gospel after the example of the apostles when he opened the book of the Gospels three times (Cf. LM III, 3).

In addition, the fact that Francis and his first companions travelled to seek approval of their forma vitae from the Pope shows that they wanted to move outside of the limited confines of Assisi. The Legend of the Three Companions describes this event and says that Innocent III gave Francis “and his brothers permission to preach penance everywhere” (no. 51).

From its very beginnings, the fraternity of the Lesser Brothers would be a group in outward movement - towards lepers, beyond Assisi, outside Italy, and also going among the Saracens and other non-believers. In 1219 the first friars were sent out from the Portiuncula to non-Christian countries; Francis himself would go to the Holy Land.

Over the centuries the Order has responded to this original vocation with great generosity and creativity. Our varied contemporary efforts in the area of mission and evangelization are a continued response to the Lord's command, and demonstrate that “it is just beautiful to leave the small conventual cloister in order to walk through the great cloister of the world, so as to meet, to learn, to preach and first and foremost to be
present... to touch with unarmed and poor hands the flesh of the people who live in our cities, on the peripheries - people who are in search of meaning, in search of life. (ItN p. 7).

Towards the peripheries

By definition, and in contrast to the center, the periphery is an external area, or a marginal zone. The term periphery indicates a physical space or a district which is distant from the center. The concept is used to indicate a degree of distance from what is considered to be the central axis of reality, and can refer to an area in the physical sense as well as to the social, political or spiritual areas.

The Church’s call to go out towards the peripheries has its origin in Pentecost, when she received the gift of the Holy Spirit which impelled her to go to the ends of the earth in order to fulfill the command given by Jesus: “Go out to the whole world and preach the Gospel to every creature” (Mk. 16:15).

An authentic experience of God, in fact, puts us in movement because it is not possible to sense the infinite embrace of a God who, being love and only love, loves to the extent of folly, without feeling at the same time the urgent need to share this experience with others. (GenChap’09, 11)

This Spirit-given encounter with Christ becomes familiar to us as a freely given and joyful communion that liberates us from being closed in and isolated. Thus, we can go out and tell everyone about the authentic life, the happiness and the hope that we have experienced. It is not life’s dramatic events, nor the challenges which we see in society that urge us to do this, but the love we have received from the Father, through Jesus in the Holy Spirit.

This experience of God’s mercy in Jesus, then, leads us to move out of ourselves, to be less self-absorbed and more attentive to what is emerging in the world; “to be less anxious about our own future and more about the destiny of humanity; to concern [ourselves] not so much to adjust internal structures as to adapt to the times that are moving rapidly” (GenChap’09, 14). In this way, “the whole world” (Mk 16:15), indeed every human being, every need, becomes a periphery that draws us towards it, bringing the Gospel.
We recall the Holy Father’s appeal to all those in Consecrated Life: “A whole world awaits us ... I expect that each form of consecrated life will question what it is that God and people today are asking of them.” *(Letter to all Consecrated People on the occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life, 2, 2-5).*

It is clear that the Pope’s call has to do with our vocation to itinerancy; with welcoming and sharing our lives with people, especially with the poor; with our presence in unfamiliar, difficult, and risky areas; with closeness to the poor, the suffering, the excluded; with our particular concern for places on the margins and with new forms of evangelization and presence; with our availability to actively collaborate with the laity and with the Franciscan Family (cf. *ItN* pp. 30-31). It is true that “this has always been the very core of our Franciscan way of life” (GenChap’15, no. 32), but we must continue to seek out the most appropriate ways to be faithful in today’s world.
ANIMATION GUIDELINES FOR 2016 AND 2017

In order to respond to the Lord’s call to go out to the peripheries, we need to be aware of the day to day realities of our contemporary world, always asking ourselves what God and humanity are asking of us.

As Brothers and Lesser Ones moving towards the Peripheries, we wish to respond to social and ecclesial changes in a world that is in a constant dynamic of alteration, which requires of us to be flexible. With this in mind, as well as the demands of the Church and of what is happening within the Franciscan Family, we put before you two themes that underpin the animation of the Order during the first two years of this sexennium:

2016

BROTHERS AND LESSER ONES
MOVING TOWARDS ... 
MERCY AND PARDON

2017

BROTHERS AND LESSER ONES
MOVING TOWARDS ... 
JUSTICE, PEACE AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION
BROTHERS AND LESSER ONES
MOVING TOWARDS ... 
MERCY AND PARDON

“Be merciful as your Father is merciful”
(Lk 6:36)

The unifying theme for 2016 will be *Mercy*. This theme is linked to the celebration of the Jubilee of Mercy and of the Pardon of Assisi (the Portiuncula).
MERCY In the thought of St. Francis, mercy is firstly an attribute of God and secondly a necessary quality in our relationships with others.

The link between the two dimensions is essential, as the Pope points out:

“Jesus affirms that mercy is not only an action of the Father, it becomes a criterion for ascertaining who his true children are. In short, we are called to show mercy because mercy has first been shown to us.” (MV 9)
Mercy

In this year of mercy, we friars, as sons of the Church, proclaim mercy. The Holy Father has strongly challenged us in this regard:

“The Church is commissioned to announce the mercy of God, the beating heart of the Gospel, which in its own way must penetrate the heart and mind of every person. It is absolutely essential for the Church and for the credibility of her message that she herself live and testify to mercy. Her language and her gestures must transmit mercy, so as to touch the hearts of all people and inspire them once more to find the road that leads to the Father.” (MV 12)

Pope Francis spoke to the members of the General Chapter:

“Minority calls one to be and to feel small before God, entrusting himself totally to His infinite mercy. The prospect of mercy is incomprehensible for those who do not see themselves as “minor”, that is, small, needy and sinners before God. ….. it is important to recover the awareness of being bearers of mercy, reconciliation and peace. You have inherited authoritativeness among the People of God, through minority, through brotherhood, through meekness, through humility, through poverty. Please, preserve it! Don’t lose it! The people care for you, they love you.” (GenChap’15 pp. 33-35)

It is absolutely necessary for us to engage in an honest and concrete evaluation, at all levels, of the ways in which we live as bringers of the mercy of God, and as heralds of the Good News.

This will also mean, as we have read in the passage above, that we will need to assess whether or not we are ‘lesser ones’ in our attitudes.

The Year of Mercy will be meaningless if we have not asked for pardon from anyone, or have not pardoned anyone ourselves!
And if he were not to seek mercy, you should ask him if he wants mercy. And if he should sin thereafter a thousand times before your very eyes, love him more than me so that you may draw him back to the Lord. Always be merciful to brothers such as these. (*LTMin* 9-10)

As *useless servants* we must ask for pardon with humility and sincerity. Perhaps we should seek forgiveness from our confreres? From the lay people with whom we work, or for whom we have pastoral responsibility? From the bishops and clergy? From our Sister Mother Earth?

On the other hand, we must be generous in giving pardon, welcoming into our lives those who ask for our forgiveness, as St. Francis asks us, and as we pray every day in the Our Father: *forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.*

Ongoing Formation has a role in this field. During the year it would be desirable for every entity to organize workshops or seminars to promote pardon. Examples include: the Sacrament of Reconciliation (how it is celebrated in our parishes and churches); the manner in which our fraternities are (or are not) places of pardon and mercy; the study of Scriptural and Franciscan sources on reconciliation; the possibility of being involved in the “24 hours for the Lord” (*MV* 17) initiative, which will be held on the Friday and Saturday before the Fourth Sunday of Lent (March 4th and 5th, 2016) – this may be an opportunity to offer the use of our churches. In addition, the Pope calls our attention to the traditional *works of mercy*, to which we can commit ourselves with the creativity that is part of our charism.

- **Corporal** works of mercy: to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, heal the sick, visit the imprisoned, and bury the dead.

- **Spiritual** works of mercy: to counsel the doubtful, instruct the ignorant, admonish sinners, comfort the afflicted, forgive offences, bear patiently those who do us ill, and pray for the living and the dead.
Mutual Forgiveness

2016 is the 8th centenary of the Pardon of Assisi, during which the various Franciscan communities in Assisi will engage in a process involving penance, examination of conscience, and joyfully accepting mercy. Significant gestures of reciprocal goodwill may well result.

The Assisi initiative could possibly be modified and used by the world-wide Franciscan Family at local level – from Assisi to the whole world.

During the Year of Pardon, we have the opportunity of preparing for the 500th anniversary of the Papal Bull, *Ite vos*, which will be celebrated in the following year. We hope to embark on new ways of giving witness to the fraternal love shared by all the Franciscans of the First Order, and of demonstrating reconciliation between us.

A process of “purification of memories” will be proposed, with the aim of encouraging openness, in the friars and fraternities, to a new encounter with the Risen Lord who brings Salvation.\(^1\)

This is our wish for all the brothers, and for all those with whom we are in contact.

*May the Risen Lord bestow peace and forgiveness on all of us!*

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\(^1\) Cf. the document produced by the Franciscan Family of Assisi: “*Frati Francescani in Capitolo*, Itinerario per camminare insieme e crescere nella comune vocazione e missione francescana, n. 16.
2017

BROTHERS AND LESSER ONES MOVING TOWARDS ... JUSTICE, PEACE AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be satisfied”
(Matt 5:6)

During 2017 two important invitations to action will claim our attention. The first, Pope Francis’ Encyclical *Laudato si*, comes from the Church and the second comes from the Franciscan Family, which celebrates the fifth centenary of *Ite vos* – also called the *Bulla unionis*. 
Through universal reconciliation with every creature, SAINT FRANCIS in some way returned to the state of original innocence. (LS 66)
Journeying together … with the Church

Pope Francis’ Encyclical *Laudato si’*, is an opportunity for us to put before people our Franciscan heritage, as expressed in the *Canticle of Brother Sun*. It is from this perspective that we wish to be Lesser Brothers “going out” to embrace the peripheries of our world, with our hearts set on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation. Guided by the Encyclical, and by supplementary JPIC material, we are invited to make practical plans and choices so as to develop an approach to evangelization that is inspired by St. Francis, who is “the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically” (*LS* 10).

In this regard, the entities of the Order should ensure that an ecological plan for each local fraternity is developed and put into practice:

Each fraternity, in its project of life and mission, is to draw up an ecological program that is to promote concrete styles and choices of life that demonstrate a respect and care for creation (cf. the *Study Guide Care for Creation in the Daily Life of the Friars Minor*, published by the JPIC General Office in 2011). The Visitators General, in their service to the Entities, are to be careful to evaluate and foster this program. (*GenChap’15 Decision* 19).

We are in a particular historical, social, political and ecclesial situation that challenges us, as Christians and as *Brothers and Lesser Ones*, to be witnesses *in our time*. We are asked to be bearers of mercy, a mercy that has been received and is now to be shared with humanity and all of creation, in answer to the cherished invitation of the Second Vatican Council: “The joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted, are the joys and hopes, *Peace, justice and the preservation of creation are three absolutely interconnected themes… as part of the universe, all of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion which fills us with a sacred, affectionate and humble respect. (LS 92 & 89)*
the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts” (GS 1).

In a global context, where conflict and violence can often dominate, we encourage you to promote peace and non-violence in all of the situations in which the friars live and work. (cf. *GenChap’15*, nos. 12,14). The website of the Order has resources which can help in doing so (www.ofm.org).

To conclude, as a help towards the attainment of a more authentically poor and evangelical lifestyle, we invite you to make use of the suggestions contained in the handbook entitled *Franciscan Management of Finances* (Cf. *GenChap’15*, nos. 19,20).

FROM THE CANTICLE

Most High, all-powerful, good Lord,
Yours are the praises, the glory, and the honor, and all blessing,
To You alone, Most High, do they belong,
and no human is worthy to mention Your name.
Praised be You, my Lord, with all Your creatures…
Faith-based remembrance seeks the significance of the events that gave rise to Spirit-led choices; it celebrates the Spirit of the Lord and His holy operation, so as to bring about a renewal of our lives as Franciscans according to our common charism. Inspired by Our Holy Father Francis, it involves an undertaking to live in Franciscan holiness, being converted to Christ and to his Gospel, and sees our origins in the “fraternitas” of the Assisi penitents who wished to be identified as “lesser brothers” in relation to each other, as well as with all of creation (Plenary Assembly of the Franciscan Friars in Umbria, 2015).
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