Altissimu, onnipotente, bon Signore

Letter to the Order at the Beginning of the Sexennium 2024-2030

To All the Friars of the Order
To All the Capuchin Poor Clare Sisters

Prot. N. 00118/25

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. Thus begins, with these words, the *Canticle of Brother Sun*, also commonly called the *Canticle of the Creatures*: "Altissimu, onnipotente, bon Signore"! Francis, after the experience of La Verna and adorned with the signs of Christ's passion - the stigmata received there - is now in San Damiano, with very fragile health and almost completely blind. At a time when everything seems to be compromised and awaiting the definitive encounter with God, Saint Francis dictates this lauda, "*which has become one of the most beloved texts of Christian literature*"[1] and recognized by authoritative scholars as the beginning of Italian literature.

2. Coincidence would have it that the new sexennium begins with the year in which the eighth centenary of the composition of the Canticle occurs, a year solemnly inaugurated by the Franciscan Family last January 11, in San Damiano, Assisi. The coincidence cannot and should not go unnoticed, especially for those of us who desire again to 'begin again' each day, all the more so after the General Chapter, to walk the path the Lord wants to show us, with a soul full of gratitude for the many gifts he has bestowed upon us. The important anniversary becomes a reason for reflection and a happy spur for the journey ahead.

I. Francis was born and died praying

3. In the introduction to the *Lauds and Prayers* section of the Franciscan Sources, there is a noteworthy consideration. It is noted that, in chronological order, the first and the last among the *Writings of Francis* both belong to "*prayers and lauds: the first is the 'Prayer before the Crucifix' (c. 1206), the suffered invocation of a man in search of the light and the way of God; the last is the final verse of 'Our Sister Bodily Death' added by Francis to the Canticle and made to sing at the announcement that the definitive passing unto God was now imminent (autumn 1226).*" The conclusion drawn from this is especially interesting: "*Brother Francis 'writer' was born and died praying*"[2] .

4. I think it should be added, however, that it is not only the 'writer' Francis who is born and dies praying. Nor is it sufficient to say only that Francis is a praying person. According to the description of Thomas of Celano, in fact, Francis is a "*man made prayer*"![3] Why not start from his example, to take up the life and activities of individuals, fraternities, circumscriptions, and the Order? The General Councilors wanted to offer me some of their input in writing this letter. I am

[1] Fonti Francescane (Franciscan Sources), introduction to the *Canticle*, p. 178
[2] FF, introduction to *Lauds and Prayers*, p. 161
[3] Cf. *2 Cel* 95, FF 682

happy to be able to tell you that they, too, strongly express the conviction that each of us and the whole Order needs to return to focus on our relationship with the Most High, Almighty and Good Lord, and the vital need for intimate union with Him in prayer, so that the journey can resume with enthusiasm and true effectiveness.

5. Moreover, it is the Lord Jesus himself who shows us the way necessary to be children of the Father; before beginning his public ministry he is impelled by the Spirit into the desert for forty days;[4] during his public life he often withdraws alone at night to pray;[5] in the imminence of his passion he addresses to the Father the intense prayer for the disciples and future believers (the so-*called priestly prayer or prayer of unity*);[6] in the Garden of Olives he prays until he sweats blood;[7] and then that cry so loudly on the cross, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me*!"[8] Jesus' example is completely straightforward: it expresses the need for great intimacy with the Father, and how Jesus assiduously sought moments of intense intimacy with Him.

6. If Jesus himself shows us that it is vital to have an intimate and constant dialogue with his Father, how much more necessary prayer becomes for us, who want to embrace with truth the Rule and life of the Divine Master! We all understand this well, at least on the level of intellectual awareness. We all know that among the essential elements of the Capuchin charism, primacy belongs to the life of prayer and devotion, "to which all other temporal things must serve".[9]

7. It is good to recall what Bernardine of Asti already said in his circular letter of 1548 and how he summarized, in the language used at the beginning of our reform, the main nuclei of Capuchin spirituality, pointing to the primacy of prayer, the highest evangelical poverty and the apostolate as 'excess of love.' He exhorted the friars in this way: "*Siate molto solleciti all'humile e devota oratione, pregando cordialmente il Signore che ci doni et accresca e continui le sante virtù, e specialmente la santissima charità e povertà, le quali con l'oratione sono molto necessari e pretiosissimi ornamenti del vero frate minore, senza le quali non può alcun frate capuccino essere grato a Dio, né sperare di poter entrare alle perpetue nozze del divino e celeste sposo*".[10] ("*be very concerned about humble and devout prayer, begging the Lord from your hearts to bestow and increase and advance these holy virtues, especially most holy charity and poverty which, along with prayer, are most necessary and precious ornaments of the true lesser brother. Without them no Capuchin brother can be pleasing to God, or hope to enter the eternal marriage to the divine and heavenly spouse.*")

8. During this ensuing sexennium, every initiative and every choice will be directed at making the primacy of our life of prayer and devotion (as outlined in Chapter III of the Constitutions) flourish again with the vigor that it deserves, both at the personal and fraternal levels. In this regard, I

[4] Cf. Mt 4, 1-11; Mk 1, 13-14; Lk 4, 1-13
[5] Cf. among others: Lk. 6:12; 9:28-29; Mk. 1:35; 6:46; Mt. 6:46; Jn. 6:15
[6] Cf. Jn 17
[7] Cf. Mt 26:36-46; Mk 14:32-42; Lk 22:39-46; Jn 18:1
[8] Cf. Mk 15:34; Mt 27:46
[9] Capuchin Constitutions III, 45:7
[10] Cf. FC II, 833. Cf. Commentary by Br. Costanzo Cargnoni, *Punti luminosi della spiritualità cappuccina*, in *I Santi Cappuccini. Umili lavoratori nella vigna del Signore*, p. 7-22, Postulazione Generale OFMCap 2017. English trans. by Gary Devery, OFM Cap, from capdox.capuchin.org.au.

propose that everyone consider again the letter sent to us by Br. Mauro Jöhri on the Solemnity of St. Francis on October 4, 2016: *St. Francis of Assisi: a man transformed in prayer*.[11]

9. The letter offers us many very concrete stimuli, which can become important occasions for sincere dialogue and help us to live our relationship with the Lord with greater truth. I like here to quote just a few expressions from the final invitation: "*I conclude here, handing on this letter to each of you and to the fraternities of our Order. Let us challenge ourselves peacefully and truthfully, for what is at stake is precious: it is our relationship with Him who loves us and treats us with mercy. I will be very direct: Brother, it is a question of fidelity. Bring your body, your whole person, and your feelings before God every day and then you will be certain that God will take your 'here I am'—at times even a little weary and sleepy—and bring to fulfillment the good work He has begun in you. Let us quiet the discussions about prayer, but rather live and practice it!*"

10. Following the request of some capitulars, the Minister's report to the General Chapter was promptly posted on the Order's website so that all could know it and make it an object of reflection and animation. In No. 3 of the third chapter, the report offers some concise considerations regarding the life of prayer in the Order. It is a simple way of attempting to describe what we are living today, with the purpose of stimulating each other to learn to walk with the Lord, and as an attempt to readily correct ourselves where we find ourselves lacking.

11. I trust that each circumscription and each fraternity can further explore this theme and, adding their own contributions, undertake in concrete terms renewed, logical choices. May we be confirmed in our commitment by the following consideration: Francis knew that the brevity of time one gives to God has within it a subtle risk of estrangement from the intimacy of dialogue with the Father, and, on the other hand, one's vocation will never fail when he constantly lives the primacy of prayer.[12] Let us recall the admonition of Paul VI: "*Do not forget ... the witness of history: fidelity to prayer or its abandonment is the paradigm of the vitality or decadence of religious life.*"[13]

12. It seems useful to take up, also, the remark I made in reference to the fraternity: "*I believe the choice of fidelity (to prayer) should be confirmed and sustained. This should be done because of the care we must have for one another in the journey of following the Lord, which certainly becomes darker and more tiring if we do not pray faithfully together. We must also support each other in common prayer because of fraternal life, because the repeated absence of a brother is a continuous wound that is inflicted on the journey of the fraternity*." This is clearly not just a matter of external formalities to be lived together. We are reminded of this, understanding it in a broad sense, by the inscription carved in the wooden choir of the shrine of Fonte Colombo: "*Si cor non orat in vanum lingua laborat (If the heart does not pray, the tongue labors in vain)*."

II. Dominus dedit mihi fratres

13. The gift of brothers is one of the topics that brought color to all the reflections dwelled upon by the General Chapter, celebrated in Rome from August 25 to September 15, 2024. The motto already

[11] Analecta Ordinis 2016, vol. 132, pp. 277-282
[12] I thus make some of my own reflections that I find in O. Renzetti, *The Stigmata of St. Francis. For a Biblical, Spiritual and Pastoral Reading*, Ed. Cappuccine, Perugia 2024, pp. 45 and 59.
[13] Paul VI, *Evangelica Testificatio*, Apostolic Exhortation on the Evangelical Witness to Religious Life, 1971, No. 42.

indicated this; it is an explicit reference to the Testament, at the point where Francis describes the brothers as a gift from God. And our Constitutions emphasize that fraternity, together with minority are "*original features of the charism given to us by the Spirit*".[14] They add, moreover, that fraternity and minority inform both the contemplative and apostolic dimensions of our vocation. As if to say that our whole life takes shape and meaning to the extent that we commit ourselves to fully value fraternity and minority.

a. An Indispensable Gift

14. The request that emerged during the Chapter of thinking about a new meeting for lay brothers (already called for in my letter of last January) comes in handy here. It is a way of expressing all of our certain gratitude to the Lord for the gift of all brothers, with special regard, in this case, to the lay brothers. We want to reunite them after almost thirty years since the first meeting, to let them know that they are dear to us, to gather their life experiences in our common vocation and to learn also from them how we can authentically and fully embody our charism in today's ever-changing world.

15. The meeting also comes from the desire to confirm what qualifies us all, whether ordained brothers or not: first and foremost that we are consecrated persons, religious who have been called and have chosen a way of life; that we intend to belong to a fraternity as gifts given to one another by the providential fatherhood of God, all Capuchins belonging to the great fraternity of the Order.

16. What qualifies us as a whole is not first and foremost the call to Holy Orders, however exulted it may be. It has never been so throughout our history, and it is not so today. A similar sensitivity of St. Francis, as described in Celano's Second Life can help us a lot. He goes so far as to admonish his barber not to make his hair crown too wide because "*I want my simple brothers to have part in my head*." Francis felt that all were his brothers, indistinctly, and all were fully a part of his life; he meant this also in respect to the cutting of his hair, avoiding that the clerical crown be as wide as that of the doctors and prelates.[15]

17. We are, then, urged to recall and share some concerns that Br. Mauro Jöhri expressed so clearly a few years ago: "*I write with the awareness that there are whole areas of our Order where the presence of lay brothers is about to disappear or is not at all valued. This situation, if it does not undergo a radical change, will have pernicious consequences on the originality and integrity of our Capuchin Franciscan charism.*"[16] The reason is simple: St. Francis "*wanted the Order to be open equally to the poor and the illiterate, and not only to the rich and the wise. 'With God,' he said, 'there is no preference of persons,' and the Holy Spirit, the Order's general minister, rests on whomever he wills*."[17]

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[14] Const. 4:2
[15] Cf. 2Cel 193, FF 779
[16] M. Jöhri, *The Indispensable Gift of Lay Brothers for Our Order. Letter of the General Minister on the occasion of the fifth centenary of the birth of St. Felix of Cantalice and the third centenary of the birth of St. Felix of Nicosia*, in Analecta Ordinis 2015, vol. 131, p. 72.
[17] Cf. 2Cel 193, FF 779

18. It will be a cause of true fruitfulness for the whole Order, if the meeting of the lay brothers spurs on everyone to witness that religious consecration - alone! – is completely suitable to give full meaning to our existence. If we become more aware of this, the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the Capuchin Reform will remain not only a remembrance and celebration of an important anniversary, but will become a catalyst for a conversion of our mindset and our specific way of doing things, so that access to and formation in our life will be fostered for all those whom God calls to be brothers and minors with us. Let us ask the Lord that it will result for us in a renewed attention to the lay dimension, which constitutes a decisive face for the quality, authenticity and completeness of our identity in the Capuchin Franciscan charism.

b. Witness of Fraternal Life

19. The Lord gives us brothers, and we are called to treasure them particularly. It was, in fact, after the gift of his brothers that the Lord made it clear to Francis what he should do. For this reason, fraternity cannot be reduced to a simple coexistence among different persons governed only by some convention of life, even though all are called by God; it becomes much more: I like to describe it as the 'place' in which God shows us his will, both as regards the verification of the personal journey of following Him, and as regards the choices we make together, so that they correspond to the same divine will. But it is also the most important and effective 'place' and way, and one that speaks for itself, for the witness the Lord asks us to give to the world.

20. Fraternal life is not just a matter of politeness! Fraternal life - the recognition of brothers and sisters as a gift from God, and therefore to be kept near and dear, and as a gift 'through which we hear his voice' - is a gift and a commitment that involves our whole life. If properly received, the gift translates into many small and large daily choices and remains an ever-open construction site in which each of us is called to work day after day, facing hardships and setbacks without growing weary. In the construction site of fraternal life, some easily identifiable challenges present themselves today that we would like to address with clear direction.

21. The first concerns the establishment of effective fraternities. At a recent meeting of brothers from European Conferences there was a speech that made me think. The speaker said something like this: we are now moving toward the establishment of smaller and smaller fraternities, and we need to take note of this, imagining our future differently from the past. I don't know if this will really be the case; I believe, however, that we can't really be sure that this is the best option to welcome properly from God the gift of brothers, given unmistakably of our charism. That is, it does not seem that imagining ourselves only as small fraternities is a perspective of a virtuous life for our Order. Instead, it is surely more useful to imagine and work for a network of meaningful fraternities, rather than to think of numerous fraternities that are wanting in the depth and vitality of our charism.

22. In the areas where we are in strong decline, the constraints of history still have a strong influence; they keep us tied to so many places which in the past we were able to guarantee a significant presence, partly because the erection of fraternities with a small number of friars was not allowed. However, it cannot be assumed that our witness will be effective, maintaining at all costs so many places until our forces are exhausted, and perhaps asking for the help of brothers in collaboration to delay their closure for a little while. It is worth mentioning that even today what most fascinates the young people who still approach us is the witness of fraternal life. The goal we should pursue

therefore is to form consistent and viable fraternities according to our charism, possibly with well thought out initiatives for this purpose, also with reference to the help that comes from friars involved in collaborations.

23. In the areas where we are growing, another situation occurs, which is frequently characterized by the rush to take as many parishes as possible. By doing this, we sacrifice almost any consideration of the decisive need for the nature of our vocation, which is to be able to live the dynamic of fraternal life. While admitting possible exceptions, sometimes necessary, it simply bears acknowledgment that in the many places where only two brothers are assigned, there is actually very little that qualifies us. It is worthwhile to return to a critical reflection on these situations, and to reorient ourselves with decision and foresight in the direction of avoiding opening new houses if fraternal life is not first guaranteed in those already opened. Contrary choices appear too often dictated by the exercise of the ordained ministry, or by the financial return that one would like to be more secure, and less by the witness that the Lord asks us to give.

24. The logic of our vocation, on the other hand, is different: in an increasingly divided world, we are called by God to live as brothers and sisters and to witness that it is possible, despite our differences, limitations and even human contrasts, to live in communion, in search of the divine will, a prophetic proclamation of what awaits us all in the eternal kingdom. In this way, richness of diversity plays an important role: rather than a reason for division, it becomes an expression of God's inexhaustible richness, of which man is the image and the whole of creation an enlightening manifestation.

25. The constant witness of our long history, and even very recent affairs, confirm that a good fraternal life, together with closeness to and direct sharing with the conditions of God's people, never leaves us without the resources we need to live, far from it! The people, as they look at the fraternities in which life flows, mysteriously perceive that the Almighty Lord is at work, and this reserves for everyone the possibility for good relationships, perhaps not perfect, but certainly worthy, because redeemed. When this happens, God's people always reward us abundantly and with their support we can also contribute to the many needs of the Church and missions.

26. Particular attention will have to be given, throughout the Order, to the formation of our candidates. The establishment of consistent formation teams and fraternities in our places of formation, consistent with the indications of the *Ratio Formationis*, is - as always, but today perhaps even more so - an urgent need for the Order. Blessed, therefore, are the efforts being made in this regard almost everywhere, especially in places where there is collaborative formation, to impart the original aspect of our charism, which is fraternity. We have clear awareness that this value is meaningfully conveyed if we present models of effective fraternities in which the brothers are present and are a gift to all instead of minimally settling for intellectual impartments that are fragile and lack real life witness.[18]

27. It should be added - again, if necessary - that the choice of having individual candidates live long years of initial formation alone should be reconsidered. This is because such choices do not allow them to experience in daily life the demands of the vocation to fraternal life during the formation process, and, therefore, to arrive at a response that is as conscious as possible. In fact, we do them a grave wrong, depriving them also of the important contribution and help in discernment that comes

[18] Cf. *Ratio Formationis* Nos. 160-169

from the group dynamics of the candidates and the necessary interactions with the formation team. In this regard, the *Ratio Formationis* offers some very clear and rather precise indications which, even if they are not to be read and interpreted too rigidly, nevertheless clearly indicate the path that the Order has consciously chosen and that we all want to follow.[19]

III. Ut irent in mundum

28. As you know, the main insights of the Chapter assembly considered the themes of collaboration and mission. It was not possible to do without them, given the developments happening during our times, the rapid cultural changes, the variable spread of friars throughout the world, the new needs for evangelical proclamation, and our call to 'go forth' into this world of today, with profoundly different characteristics than in the past, trying to preserve ways of posturing ourselves as coherently as possible within the character of our charism.

29. Already in the previous sexennium there was a desire to explore these issues in a new Plenary Council of the Order. However, it was not possible because of the severe conditioning caused everywhere, including in our Order, by the years of the Covid pandemic. Now, however, the Chapter has mandated the Order's leadership to "*organize (...) a general meeting on the joint theme of 'Mission, Fraternal Collaboration and the St. Lawrence Fraternities.*' One really feels the need to explore together more and more deeply these themes, especially because I believe that the Lord is again calling us and asking us to listen to him. There is a need to carefully read and interpret the signs of our times, seeking courageous and forward-looking answers. In order to foster adequate preparation, involving each of us as much as possible, we believe that the favorable time for a new PCO is the year 2026.

30. It was comforting to see that the Pan-American meeting somehow reawakened in many friars the missionary yearning, the willingness to leave their own land and make their lives available to places where the cry of the poor is most heard, or our presence is most needed! This is a beautiful sign of vitality for us, who want to be faithful to the mandate received from Francis to go out into the world.

31. Missionary readiness has strongly motivated the Order in past centuries, both when so many of us placed ourselves at the disposal of *Propaganda Fide* for the demanding work of evangelization, and when we appropriately organized ourselves with the criterion of assigning each province a mission area. The exquisite generosity of the past has been abundantly rewarded: suffice it to recall that most of us came to know the Capuchins and felt the call to embrace this blessed life of ours precisely because of the missionaries' willingness to give of themselves.

32. There was a time when one went forth with the desire to proclaim the good news to those who did not yet know it. Today conditions are very different because the proclamation of the Gospel has reached most of the world. Today the missionary focus turns rather to reawakening faith in individuals and peoples who, although heirs to a long Christian tradition, have lost the salutary reference to the supreme good Lord in whom the Christian life needs to be sustained.

[19] Cr. *Ratio Formationis* No. 164

33. What kind of availability is required today? How do we take advantage, according to God, of the open generosity of the friars of the southern hemisphere to be sent to formerly Christian territories? How do we preserve our identity as lesser brothers, the real engine for offering qualified help to God's people and a guarantee for effective witness? Some contributions have already been offered at the Chapter, but they need further study.[20]

34. Healthy collaborations, especially in the area of formation, have long developed in the Order between neighboring circumscriptions or at the level of conferences. As is almost obvious, no endeavor or project is without its difficulties and crucial challenges, which must be addressed from time to time; this is also true of the collaborative initiatives carried out so far. However, there is no doubt that, in this area, the positive outcomes for the friars and the formandi undoubtedly outweigh the difficulties encountered. I recall some of them; it is a way that fosters openness and sharing, makes communion stronger, allows a greater knowledge of the richness of the Order in the variety of its expressions, languages and cultures, helps overcome the fear of mission, etc.

35. It is therefore everyone's task to continue with conviction and decision along the path of collaboration in the area of formation, pursuing the goal of realizing it for all the planned stages and not only for some, but also without fear of expanding it to other areas of our presences and activities. I believe, on the other hand, that the choices of some ministers to withdraw from collaborations in order to return to forms of closure under their own purviews (today quite narrow) or spheres of their own circumscriptions, do not correspond to the path that the Lord is making the Order take, and therefore are difficult to understand, and not truly useful or good for their own friars and for those in formation.

36. One way in which the Order is trying to live its charism is through the project of the Saint Lawrence of Brindisi Fraternities. In them we propose, in the light of the Gospel and our Constitutions, to live prayer, fraternal life and mission in an authentic and coherent way, as minors and the poor, with the important resource of interculturality. The General Chapter again reaffirmed the goodness of this project, committing the General Minister and his Council to support, expand and develop it. To properly respond to the Chapter's mandate, some Councilors are already committed to follow more closely the St. Lawrence fraternities, both in Europe and in the Americas. For those who feel called and want to try to be a part of it, the goal must be clear: to prioritize prayer life, fraternal life and mission in a closely interdependent manner.

37. There is another possibility of 'going around the world' that particularly challenges us: these are our presences in Algeria, Russia, Georgia, and requests to open houses in Tunisia and Uzbekistan. And we could also add Vietnam, China, South Sudan, or dream of a presence in Cambodia ... (there is room for everyone!) These are places where Christians are a small minority in political, religious and social contexts that are not always easy, and which certainly present some aspects of challenge and difficulty. However, they should 'warm' our hearts to generosity, because they seem to fully correspond to our vocation to go where no one wants to or where the cry of the poor is most insistent. We need brothers who accept the challenge, without fear of losing anything, because everything is gained when we leave something behind to listen to the inner motions of the Spirit and decide to correspond with them.

[20] The articulated reasoning proposed in Chapter V of the *Report* to the General Chapter may help.

38. In order to try to better coordinate all of this absolutely blessed dynamism of mission, of collaboration, of the St. Lawrence Fraternities, of other possibilities of 'going among the Saracens', the Chapter suggested that a capable body of friars be selected for promoting, accompanying and evaluating it, in coordination with the offices of the Curia and the leadership of the Order. The suggestion is a good one, because the field of work is undoubtedly large and for a long time there has been a need for thoughtful reflection that would help everyone to moderate in a better way and organize more effectively according to God the generous willingness, very well rooted in us, to go out into the world where the Lord calls.

IV. Next Steps of Animation

39. Along with what has already been anticipated – a meeting for lay brothers and the commitment of a new PCO – initiatives and incentives are on the horizon in the coming years that can become very important in our journey of commitment and growth. Here are some of them below.

40. We wish, first of all, to give special attention to the animation of the African conferences. Taking advantage in the best way possible of the very positive experience of the Pan American meeting of the last sexennium, we would like to try something similar for the African continent, aiming for the first months of 2027. Already some steps are being taken, with the goal of involving as much as possible all the friars of the two conferences.

41. The vast majority of African brothers are young, full of energy and good intentions, also capable of contributing in a very important way to the 'face' of the Order of tomorrow. We dare to think that it will be very fruitful for all, if we know how to pay attention to what the Spirit is doing with them and where it blows with renewing energy so that the gift of our charism in Africa can shine in all its beauty. We are all invited to accompany the work closely, because the developments of the Order in Africa will go on to affect the future character of the whole Order. It will, then, be especially important that we invoke light and help from above for the brothers on that continent.

42. In 2026 the Franciscan centennial years will come to a close with the commemorative Transitus of St. Francis. We will be able to turn our gaze more attentively back to the goal of glory, prepared for all by God, the breath of the soul of the man who laboriously traverses the 'valley of tears,' but does not remain overwhelmed by it, because he is sustained by the example of Jesus and his victory over death. If sustained by this gaze turned to eternal salvation, fraternal life can become a fruitful sign and a generator of life, an attractive witness to the beauty of Christian life, a chance to experience in the world true love, certain hope and the 'quality' of justice that comes from God. Then we too, with Francis, will come to praise the Lord in truth, even for 'Our Sister Bodily Death'.

43. 2028 will mark the 500th anniversary of the bull *Religionis zelus*, by which Pope Clement VII approved our Order. There is no doubt that we will have to try to give due prominence to this important anniversary. Some editorial initiatives have already been put into action: a new scholarly text of the Order's history is being prepared, to which we want to add a more popular-style booklet; we also want to bring to the fore and publish a study by Br. Felice Cangelosi who before his

unexpected death nearly completed a thorough research on the evolution of our Constitutions, starting from the beginning up to the 1968 edition.

44. Taking a cue from an initiative of the NAPCC Conference, we would like to commit all conferences to prepare some specific contributions; they should be spirited and perhaps accompanied by some videos, describing the values of our life as they are understood today, our history, the areas of service, pastoral care and witness that distinguish us. The material produced will be made available so that we can all make use of it for animation at the local, personal and fraternal level.

45. The goal is once again that the centenary does not remain just an anniversary but becomes an occasion to give new impetus to our daily journey of following the Lord, so that the flame of our charism may glow more brightly in our daily routines and activities and our lives be filled with gratitude, joy and praise. Perhaps we will also be able to promote some general initiative, organized for the whole Order; however, it should not be a substitute for the animation that should be done locally, aimed at involving all our manifestations at every level. This is because we should believe that good initiatives locally have greater positive effects. The spirit of initiative and originality is certainly not lacking among us: let us activate it properly!

Conclusion

46. I was very struck by the force with which the Holy Father spoke about fraternity when he addressed us during the audience he granted to the members of the General Chapter last August 31.[21] First of all, he started out by saying that "*no one, in God's plan, can consider himself an island*" and that "*one of you who takes care of his own uniqueness, but without transforming it into a gift to his brothers, has not yet begun to be a Capuchin!*"; and then he recommended to us, "*at the center be fraternity, of which I encourage you to make yourselves promoters in your formation houses, in the great Franciscan family, in the Church and in all the spheres in which you operate, even at the cost of renouncing, in favor of fraternity, projects and achievements of other kinds. Fraternity comes first. You are friars. 'But I am a priest!' Yes, yes, but after that. The important thing is the friar. You are priest, deacon, whatever, but friar: that is the basis.*" It is a great and consoling confirmation of our commitment to increase the fraternal dimension of our charism in all areas, and of wanting to start again from this aspect, to be Capuchins according to the heart of God and the precise call to follow him according to our form of life.

47. The Holy Father then dwelt on the theme of mission, reiterating here too how Francis' experience underscores that "*mission (...) is born in fraternity to promote fraternity*." He had therefore declined mission as a 'willingness' to let oneself be "*personally involved in the needs of one's brothers and say with humble courage, 'Here I am, send me!' (Is 18)*." The readiness to 'go where no one else wants to go' is "*a charismatic gift to be valued and increased. Try always to be like this: simple, free and available, ready to leave everything (cf. Mt 1:18) to be present where the Lord calls you ... with open hearts and arms*." "*This will be your poverty*," he adds.

48. I already had occasion to make an appeal. But the councilors asked me to do it again: whoever feels God's call to be poor, therefore available and called to the mission, wherever it may be, do not

[21] https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2024/august/documents/20240831-capitolo-cappuccini.html

hesitate to express your desire to your major superior and to your General Councilor, without delay. And if the suitability test is positive, leave without appraisal, with the blessing of obedience and with generosity; the Lord will take care of the hundredfold! We need to acquire so many actual names! The Order will benefit so greatly and will be so greatly refreshed.

49. Today, in the hearts of men and in the world the invocation for peace rises loudly, very loudly. Francis - the Holy Father reminds us again - "*has come to be the 'man of peace,' whom the whole world recognizes." "(...) from being forgiven, he became a bearer of forgiveness, from being loved, a dispenser of love, from being reconciled a promoter of reconciliation*." This is how Francis and the Pope ask us to be, and we too certainly desire it: brothers, humble and lesser, available to meet man in his needs and to sustain him in his yearning for acceptance and peace, because the Lord Jesus met us first. The brothers who are already generously 'in the field,' in difficult lands or war zones are a stimulus and example to us, and deserve a cordial thought of closeness, which also becomes a communion of prayer.

50. We have the grace of living the year of jubilee, whose title chosen for the Bull of Indiction is 'hope does not disappoint': "*Spes non confundit*" (Rom. 5:5). Jubilee is a great reason to start seeking the Lord again, to return to praying to him unceasingly, personally and communally, without growing weary. Jubilee is a blessing to be able to share fully the precious gift of brothers and sisters, with whom we learn to build redeemed relationships every day, according to God. With the Jubilee year, the Spirit urges us to go, with resolve and willingness, to meet the person in need.

51. Let us therefore set out with serene generosity, trusting in the gentle presence of the Lord Jesus, at our side today and always, until the end, and the caring vigilance of the Virgin Mother. Let us proclaim to all, with the witness of life rather than words, that to accept the Gospel of our Lord Jesus and to commit ourselves to following in His footsteps is to find true refreshment, to be happy and to cultivate peace of heart. Hope does not disappoint because - we can say this with St. Francis - we have intimately understood that God is indeed the Most High, the Almighty, and He is good, bent down over each of us, the Order and each of His creatures, loving as He is, and saving.

Rome, 06 March 2025

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