



Sollemnitas Sancti Francisci 2014

Litteræ Ministri et Definitorii Generalis OFM

LET US LIVE AS MISSIONARY DISCIPLES OF CHRIST

So as to be brothers and minors

My dearest brothers,
the Lord give you His peace!

The solemnity of our seraphic father offers us once again the opportunity to send each one of you our fraternal greeting, along with the hope that by celebrating the memory of Saint Francis we will each be renewed in our witness to Gospel living

For us brothers in the general Definitorium this feast of St. Francis is the final opportunity we have to share with you some aspect of our service and some of the desires that encourage us.

A grateful memory

First of all we would like to thank the Lord for the path that we have walked in this six year period. The rediscovery of the *Grace of origins* in the previous six year period has led us to take up our service with the desire to *Start again from the Gospel*, which is our primary rule, in order to live its radical nature and offer it to contemporary men and women. This makes us even more authentic *Bearers of the gift of the Gospel*. Applying the evangelical demands to serious reform of life (*Moratorium*), the inevitable *restructuring* already in process in our Provinces and *interprovincial collaboration* have brought us to the desire of re-appropriating *our Franciscan identity*, as it is proposed by the *Rule* and *general Constitutions* and how each one of us has embraced it in our own religious profession. The *form of Gospel life* revealed by Francis now entrusted to us needs to be continually revitalized in our communities and incarnated in the Church and world today.

The Kairòs of the Lord

We find in the events of these days and in the witness of some persons many *kairòs* moments, *grace filled events*, that we cannot but welcome with gratitude, allowing them to challenge and stimulate us.

First of all, the Holy Father, by choosing the programmatic name of Francis, is proposing to the Church the lifestyle and message that were proper to

the Poor One of Assisi, which is to say constant referral to the Gospel, closeness, mercy, reconciliation, brotherhood, essentiality, simplicity of life, proximity to the poor, commitment to peace and care for creation. These and others are aspects that we should live above all and demonstrate to the Church and world

What's more, Pope Francis has desired to dedicate the year 2015 to consecrated life, proposing once again to religious men and women, the *joy of the Gospel* that constitutes the intrinsic beauty of consecrated life. The Pontiff invites us once again to revisit the profound center of our personal life, exhorting us to the "restlessness of the heart," that can only bring us to a renewed personal encounter with the Lord Jesus.

And then how can we forget the prophetic inheritance that was left to us by Br. Giacomo Bini, our former general Minister, who left us much too soon to go to the Father's house? We know full well just how much he was profoundly rooted in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and how often he exhorted us to become a "parable of God's Reign" with an existence that has been "conquered by God," by means of radicality and transparent signs, by the capacity to "speak to" the presence of God's Reign and to restore authentic credibility to our life project, to brotherly dialogue with others and openness to new horizons. These new horizons spur us on to allow ourselves to be led to the Lord and to leave behind diverse forms of "structures," be they mental, spiritual or material, so as to go throughout the world and live as missionaries, entering into the depth of the life of God's people, without being content to simply "stay" in our closed houses and communities.

A wealth to be brought to fruition in times of crisis

We would like to claim this treasure to nourish and enrich our preparatory journey to the next general Chapter. Attempting to listen to the requests of many brothers that were made through the survey of the state of the Order, to the invitations given us by Pope Francis and by other *kairòs* moments, we have chosen as the basic theme of our upcoming Chapter

the founding vocation that Francis has left for us in the name that he has given us, *Friars Minor*, which is to say the call to live to be brothers and minors in our day. But *how* can we really witness the “prophecy of our brotherhood?” *How* can we truly recover a lifestyle that is simple, essential, close to the poor, to the “minors” of today? *From where* should we and can we start again?

We brothers of the general Definitorium hope that the propaedeutic animation phase and the organization of the general Chapter be accompanied and motivated by a *spiritual preparation* capable of descending to the depths and of causing us to encounter the true Gospel foundation that inspires us and permits us to truly be brothers and minors among the people of our humanity

“Following the Teaching and Footprints of our Lord Jesus Christ”

This is our Rule and life. Consecrated life is “*a living memorial of Jesus’ way of living and acting* as the Incarnate Word in relation to the Father and in relation to the brethren” (VC 22) Francis burns with love for the Lord and wants to faithfully follow his footprints. He profoundly loves Christ, poor and crucified, and slowly is transformed into the object of his love, because as St. Augustin claims “each one is just like the love he has.” And God, according to St. Bonaventure “draws the beloved, not causing him to leave his place, but by making him conform to God’s self, in such a way that the lover is transformed into the beloved and the one who tries to know is conformed to he who is known.” In this way Francis of Assisi becomes “alter Christus” not through imitation and not even through a psychological identification, but through a creative process generated by love.

Just like St. Francis, we are called to be disciples and lovers of Christ. It is this being disciple-missionaries who love the same Lord that makes us brothers and minors. As disciples we are therefore placed on a path (a sequela) that intrinsically demands dynamism and that is realized slowly along the way. Such a movement on the one hand does not allow us to become comfortable while on the other hand disinherit us in order to restore us. The sequela (following) be it interior or exterior, calls us to deny ourselves so as to embrace the cross and walk after the Lord (Cf. Mk 8:34). In this, besides movement, there is weariness and the person becomes immersed in his/her totality of body and soul, of corporality and interiority. The journey of the sequela involves disinheritance

and demands the primacy of our love for God to which all other loves are subordinated. *The disciple-missionary can love no-one or nothing more than her/his Lord*, recognizing Him as “My God, my All!” In this way our missionary evangelization will be forever new, because it is transformed into an encounter with Christ, with love always new which becomes experience!

“The Lord gave me brothers”

In his *Testament*, Francis considers his own life an existence led and guided by the Lord. The experience of a concrete life is revealed by the will of God and the manner of following Him. Being merciful to the lepers, listening to the voice and Word, faith in the churches and priests, and the presence of brothers are very concrete reality in the life of Francis through which he has experiences the revelation of the Lord. Being with and for the brother-lepers, being merciful to them, swings open the door of an encounter with the Lord for Francis and the subsequent gift of brother-friars renders the revelation of God’s will comprehensible. As such in Francis’s experience, as in our own, the role of brothers is fundamental; it is the *way to the Lord* and the possibility of mercy. Brotherhood becomes “prophecy” for the world if at its center there is Christ, Jesus and if it nourishes itself with the daily encounter of the Lord. Therefore, brotherhood is a grace to be developed more than an obligation to be handled. And, if we want to give our contribution as instruments of peace in today’s world, we should first of all resolve the conflicts that surface in our communities so as to live as reconciled people. We reaffirm with conviction, as Br. Giacomo Bini did just prior to returning to the Father that “brotherhood is possible!”

“Minors and subject to all”

Besides being friars, Francis has willed that we be minors, because only the attitude of minority will allow us to follow the footprints of someone who with his example has pointed out and opened the true way, that of the passion and of the cross, that remains always a narrow path. *Minority is the condition of the sequela*. Minority is personal and communal at the same time, in as much as the Lord calls us and sends us forth as brothers. Francis had rightfully intuited that to be “minors and subject to all” (*RnB* 7:2), without anything of our own, is the only condition for truly constructing the brotherhood and for faithfully following the footprints of Jesus, even in that diffi-

cult, if not impossible love for our own enemies. This is in fact what we have been taught “by our Lord Jesus Christ, whose footprints we must follow” (*Rnb* 22:2; Cf. *2Lf* 13). Even though he was the Son of God he humbled and denigrated himself (cf. Phil 2:6-8). For us to be minors to everyone and subject to everyone means to place ourselves at the level of the lowest of society and to not receive recognition or privileges, nor to take them or ask for them, not even in the Church itself (Cf. *2Test* 25). Being minors is translated into becoming *companions for the journey* in simplicity and humility with those who are excluded, poor and marginalized and to share the lot of those who struggle daily in the toil and tribulation of life, paying attention to their cry. Being minors demands that we not appropriate anything to ourselves no roles, structures, places or service, but rather that we live as *pilgrims and strangers* (Cf. 1Pt 2:11) in this world, serving the Lord in poverty and humility (Cf. *Rb* 6:1-3) and *returning everything to the Lord*, from who all good comes, and to the brothers, especially our poor sisters and brothers, who are our almoners (cf. *Rnb* 17:17).

To be Gospel Transparency

Only “following the teaching and the footprints of our Lord Jesus Christ” (*Rnb* 1:1) renders us broth-

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Feast of the Solemnity of the Stigmata of St. Francis



ers and minors: there is no other way. The seraphic father St Francis was pure Gospel transparency and lived the primacy of God and the primacy of a life with mind, heart and body turned essentially to the Gospel. For this reason he is considered the poor one of Assisi and brother to all. If we, today, want to be true brothers and authentic minors we are called to move from appearances to the pure and simple efficacy of Gospel transparency.

Along the path we have come to understand that we are a “contemplative brotherhood in mission, in minority.” This quality of our charism contains a spirituality that is a “sign of the Reign begun with its fruits of reconciliation; a spirituality that above all announces with the witness of a liberated life reconciled to the evangelical passion of love; a life donated in the example of Christ and the witness of living together” (G. Bini).

Dearest brothers, we take up with grateful and available hearts Pope Francis’s call to the whole Church in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*: “Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the ideal of fraternal love” (101). We also take up the message that in Assisi, the Pope desired to give us directly: “Dear brothers, please care for minority.”

The Lord care for you, accompany you and give you the grace of always following in the footprints of His beloved Son and always desiring that which is pleasing to Him.

Your brothers of the general Definitorium:

Fr. Michael Anthony Perry, ofm (*Min. gen.*)

Fr. Julio César Bunader, ofm (*Vic. gen.*)

Fr. Vincenzo Brocanelli, ofm (*Def. gen.*)

Fr. Gabriel Mathias, ofm (*Def. gen.*)

Fr. Vicente-Emilio Felipe Tapia, ofm (*Def. gen.*)

Fr. Nestor Inácio Schwerz, ofm (*Def. gen.*)

Fr. Francis William Walter, ofm (*Def. gen.*)

Fr. Roger Marchal, ofm (*Def. gen.*)

Fr. Ernest Karol Siekierka, ofm (*Def. gen.*)

Fr. Nicodeme Kibuzehose, ofm (*Def. gen.*)

Fr. Aidan McGrath, ofm (*Seg. gen.*)