

Order of Friars Minor

PILGRIMS AND STRANGERS IN THIS WORLD

**Resource for Ongoing Formation
From Chapter IV of the OFM General Constitutions**

ROME 2008

PRESENTATION

During our celebration of the 8th Centenary of the Foundation of the Order, I am pleased to offer you this book of reflections on Chapter IV of the General Constitutions, entitled *Pilgrims and Strangers in the World* (1 Peter 2,11; 2R6,2). It has been reviewed and approved by the General Definitorium.

The same guidelines were employed to prepare this book as were used for the three previous books: *Our Franciscan Identity* (1993), *The Spirit of Prayer and Devotion* (1997), and *You Are All Brothers* (2004). Its main objective is to offer individual friars and fraternities material that will foster ongoing formation. With this in mind, I invite you to find the time and the means needed to make best use of these reflections.

The title of this book, *Pilgrims and Strangers in the World*, puts us in contact with the great themes of our spirituality. The book highlights those of minority, promotion of justice and peace, care for creation, appropriation of nothing for oneself, life among the poor, and faithful and devout work. These themes, inspired and sustained by the Gospel, help us establish a new relationship with God, with others and with things.

As *pilgrims and strangers* we are called to be signs of transcendence and of a fullness that is offered to us now and which is attained beyond the limits of time and space. It is a new world of relationships that does not necessarily stand in opposition or contradiction to the one in which we presently live. Rather, it is a world of meaning that begins with our current situation and comes to perfection in eternity. In this sense, as we will see, the images of *house* and *journey* will help us to harmonize the dimensions of immanence, transparency and transcendence which are part of the Kingdom of Heaven. The image

of *house* allows us to understand that our social, cultural and physical reality is already the appropriate space for fraternal encounter and living. A *house* must be built and cared for in such a way that it becomes a sign of universal fraternity, where all human beings have a place. The image of *journey* reminds us that our definitive goal lies beyond all cultural conditioning, beyond all legitimate and just differences. It is where the Lord walks with us and speaks with us in a special way, as he did with the disciples of Emmaus (cf. *The Lord Speaks To Us On The Way*, 5-6).

In this context, *to be minors* means abandoning every attitude and form of arrogance and every desire for power. We do this in order to be able to approach those who are different from us, freed from all prejudice and suspicion, and ready to receive them as dear brothers and friends. We are not called to be inferior, or infantile, or ingenuous in regard to the other, or to assume an attitude of servile passivity. Francis knew how to harmonize simplicity and knowledge, obedience and charity, poverty and humility (cf. SV 1-3).

Being in the cultural and religious world around us not as spectators, but as actors, demands that we be promoters of justice and peace, that we build human and fraternal relations, that we seek to resolve tensions and conflicts through dialogue and active non-violence, and that we oppose all forms of torture and death, with special attention to the arms race. Our position in the world also leads us to care for creation. We are called to denounce the attitude that sees the world simply as merchandise to buy and sell, leading to exploitation without mercy. We must rather help to restore the symbolic-religious value of our world, so that humanity can rediscover the goodness, the wisdom and the beauty of God in creation.

As we enter into relationship with people and things, our spirituality opens us to expropriation, which allows us to develop the values of liberty, gratuity, generosity and solidarity. Otherwise, those who try to take possession of people or things, end up being possessed by them. In the world we live in, the condition of the poor should be our natural way of living. It is only by being with them that we are able to walk with them and be in solidarity with them as they struggle for relations that are more fraternal and conditions of life that are more human, as befits all children of God. Finally, being in this world of relationship with our fellow human beings and with the universe itself, we make a commitment to live by our labor, and to dedicate ourselves to our

work faithfully and devoutly, as admonished by Francis of Assisi. Such work, manual and intellectual, will allow us to support ourselves, to achieve personal and communal satisfaction, and to offer willing service to others.

I would like to conclude by offering my sincere thanks to all the friars who collaborated in the planning and realization of this volume, whether as coordinators, experts or translators. Special thanks to Vincenzo Brocanelli, Luis Cabrera, Vicente Felipe, David Flood, Johannes Freyer, Massimo Fusarelli, Javier Garrido, John Hardin, José Antonio Merino, Joe Rozansky, Bill Short, Nestor Schwerz and Cesare Vaiani. May God bless and repay you, brothers, for your valuable service to all the brothers of the Order.

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Feast of St. Mary of the Angels

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Sacred Scripture

Am	Amos
1 Cor	1 Corinthians
Dt	Deuteronomy
Eph	Ephesians
Ex	Exodus
Gn	Genesis
Heb	Hebrews
Is	Isaiah
Jer	Jeremiah
Jn	The Gospel according to John
Lev	Leviticus
Lk	The Gospel according to Luke
Mk	The Gospel according to Mark
Mt	The Gospel according to Matthew
1 Pt	1 Peter
Phil	Philippians
Ps	Psalms
Rm	Romans
Rv	Revelation
1 Thes	1 Thessalonians
2 Thes	2 Thessalonians

The Writings of St. Francis of Assisi

Adm	Admonitions
CtC	The Canticle of the Creatures
1LtCus	The First Letter to the Custodians
1LtF	The First Letter to the Faithful
2LtF	The Second Letter to the Faithful
LaudDei	The Praises of God
LaudHon	Exhortation to the Praise of God
PrOF	A Prayer Inspired by the Our Father
LR	Regula bullata (The Later Rule)
ER	Regula non bullata (The Earlier Rule)
SV	A Salutation of Virtues
Test	The Testament
TPJ	True and Perfect Joy

Biography of St. Francis of Assisi

AC	Assisi Compilation
1C	The Life of Saint Francis by Thomas of Celano
2C	The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul (Second Life by Thomas of Celano)
L3C	The Legend of the Three Companions
LF1	The Little Flowers of Saint Francis
LMj	The Major Legend by Bonaventure
1MP	The Mirror of Perfection, Smaller Version
2MP	The Mirror of Perfection, Larger Version

Documents of the Church

CA	<i>Centisimus Annus</i> , Encyclical of John Paul II, 1991
CCC	Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1992
GS	<i>Gaudium et Spes</i> , Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 1965
LE	<i>Laborem Exercens</i> , Encyclical of John Paul II, 1981
MM	<i>Mater et Magistra</i> , Encyclical of John XXIII, 1961
NMI	<i>Novo Millennio Ineunte</i> , Apostolic Letter of John Paul II, 2001
OA	<i>Octogesima Adveniens</i> , Apostolic Letter of Paul VI, 1971
PP	<i>Populorum Progressio</i> , Encyclical of Paul VI, 1967
RH	<i>Redemptor Hominis</i> , Encyclical of John Paul II, 1979
Scar	<i>Sacramentum Caritatis</i> , Apostolic Exhortation of Benedict XVI, 2007
SRS	<i>Sollicitudo Rei Socialis</i> , Encyclical of John Paul II, 1987
VC	<i>Vita Consecrata</i> , Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II, 1996

Other Acronyms

Bah	<i>The Gospel Challenges Us</i> , Message from the Plenary Council of Bahia, Brazil, 1983
GGCC	<i>General Constitutions of the Order of Friars Minor</i> , Rome 2004
FEGC	<i>To Fill the Earth with the Gospel of Christ</i> , The Minister General to the Friars Minor on Evangelization: From Tradition to Prophecy, Rome 1996.
LgP	<i>The Lord Give you Peace</i> , Final Document of General Chapter 2003
LSR	<i>The Lord Speaks With Us on the Road</i> , Final Document of Extraordinary General Chapter, 2006
OF	<i>Ongoing Formation in the Order of Friars Minor</i> , Rome 1995
RFF	<i>Ratio Formationis Franciscanae</i> , Rome 2003
RS	<i>Ratio Studiorum OFM</i> , Rome, 2001

INTRODUCTION

For the past 14 years, the General Definitorium has been publishing materials to help deepen the understanding and the practice of the General Constitutions of 1987¹. In 2006, the Definitorium decided to prepare a resource on Chapter IV of the Constitutions, the chapter dedicated to minority. It charged the Office of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation with coordination of this work, which was to be done in collaboration with the General Secretariats for Formation and Studies and for Evangelization.

The title of Chapter IV of the General Constitutions, “*Pilgrims and Strangers in this World*,” uses an expression from the *Regula Bullata* in which Francis asks the friars to live “*without anything of their own*” and to go with confidence to beg alms. The phrase “*Pilgrims and strangers*,” which Francis put in the Rule, is biblical and refers to the First Letter of Peter. The text (1Pt 2:11) calls to mind similar texts from the Letter to the Hebrews (Heb 11:13) and from Genesis (Gn 23:4), where Abraham is remembered as a *pilgrim in search of a land*. This biblical insight guides our interpretation of the corresponding text of the Rule: Francis cites the apostle Peter who prescribes the attitudes and behaviors of Christians who go among the pagans. In our case, it deals with friars who go among the people, or, even better, friars who **must** go among the people. To be authentically evangelical, they must imitate Jesus, going through the world as pilgrims and strangers, without belongings, without their own home, without economic security, working faithfully and with devotion, and begging alms.

Chapter IV is one of two chapters in the General Constitutions that deal with the life of the friars in relations *ad extra*, outside the Fraternity. The other chapter is the following one, which deals with Evangelization. *Pilgrims and Strangers in this World*, then, summarizes the

1 *Our Franciscan Identity. A Reading of the General Constitutions*, Rome 1993
The Spirit of Prayer and Devotion, Rome 1996
You Are All Brothers, Rome 2002

way of being friar and Fraternity in relation to people in general, to society and to the world. This attitude is modeled on that of Jesus in his day. It contributes to the coming of the Reign of God by encouraging friars to reject no one and to be close to all, especially those who are marginalized both socially and spiritually.

In the Rule, itinerancy and moving from place to place are expressions of minority and have direct reference to the life of Christ. The Constitutions reasserted the central place that Francis gave to our being “pilgrims and strangers,” with forms adapted to our time. In our day, as in the time of Francis, going through the world, seeking out people and being among them, continue to be expressions of a need for relationship and communion that compels from within those who announce the Gospel. For this reason, itinerancy and Franciscan insecurity are magnificent expressions of evangelical testimony to humility, poverty, peace and justice. The witness of a life lived in this way is eminently prophetic and evangelical.

The topics presented in this book are meant to develop important aspects of *Chapter IV of the General Constitutions*: to be lesser, promoters of justice and peace, custodians of creation, to have nothing of our own, to be poor among the poor, and to work with fidelity and devotion.

Each topic has the following structure:

The articles of the Constitutions that deal with each topic.

1. *A reflection on these articles*, provided by friars who are experts in Franciscan spirituality.
2. *Shared Experience*, offering concrete examples of fraternities from around the world that are living these aspects of our vocation in significant ways.
3. *Implementation*, which is a very important part of this process. The purpose of this resource is not just to deepen our knowledge of the General Constitutions but rather to help us live them better and more significantly in today’s Church and world. This section offers proposals for *personal formation and for fraternity meetings* (local chapters, retreats, workshops, meetings of the Franciscan family, etc.), and should serve for both ongoing and initial formation. They are based on the process: reflection-prayer-renewal of commitment-action for life and mission. It is very important to integrate all of these dimensions if we want

our formation to be a real *conversion* in the way of following Jesus and Francis.

- a. The method found in the brochure provided by the Order can be used for *Lectio Divina*. The reading of Scripture should not be absent in our Fraternities because hearing the Word of God and faith-sharing occupy a central place in the Christian life and in the Franciscan vocation.
 - b. The *Review of life* can be done in a local chapter or on retreat. A suggestion as to how this might be done is provided here:
 - The guardian or the person in charge of directing this topic indicates the section to be read a few days before the chapter.
 - The meeting begins with a suitable song or hymn and with the reading of a biblical text, a Franciscan text or a text from the social doctrine of the Church.
 - The friar in charge briefly introduces the topic, presenting the main points of the reflection and highlights of the experiences. The friars can then add their own reflections and share experiences that they have lived or are currently living.
 - The friars review how they are living this part of the Constitutions and make proposals for improvement, seeking to integrate these elements into their project of communal life.
 - The meeting ends with a prayer of thanksgiving for the good accomplished and with a final song.
 - c. So that our reflection and prayer are not sterile, each of the six topics provides “signs and gestures” that can be used in the Fraternity. It is important that these signs and gestures arise from the reading of the Word and from changes in the life of the fraternity. It is clear that the living of these values of our vocation will take shape in different ways in different socio-cultural and ecclesial contexts.
5. *For Further Reflection* - This section provides texts from the Word of God, Church documents, Franciscan sources, and the documents of the Order. They allow us to explore each topic more thoroughly. To work with the topics presented in these docu-

ments, especially the *Ratio Studiorum* and the *Ratio Formationis*, is to do ongoing formation, because they touch on fundamental aspects our form of life.

1

TO BE MINORS

GENERAL CONSTITUTIONS

Art. 64

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. 65

Conscious “that what a man is before God that he is and nothing more”, the friars are to acknowledge God as their supreme and only good; they are to strive to please him always in all things, and they are to be glad that they are thought of as worthless, simple and despicable.

Art. 66

§1 In order that they may follow more closely and express more clearly the self-emptying of the savior, 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.

§2 By their way of life, as a fraternity and as individuals, the friars are to behave in such a way that no one is kept from them, particularly those who usually are socially and spiritually neglected.

Art. 67

Constantly denying themselves and in an uninterrupted conversion to God, the friars are to display a prophetic image by the example of their lives, in order to refute “the false values” of our age.

I. FOR REFLECTION

Saint Francis gave a very precise name to those who decided to follow Christ: “I want this fraternity to be called the Order of Friars Minor”.¹ It is, therefore, a name that defines us. We are not Poor Friars, Humble Friars, Little Friars, but rather Friars Minor.

The General Constitutions recover *the Franciscan vocabulary* regarding *minority*. They make abundant use of our sources, the tradition of “our fathers” and of more contemporary reflections, particularly the General Chapters of Medellín and Madrid and the Plenary Council of Bahía. Words are not “neutral”. For example, it is not the same thing to say that a brother is Superior, Reverend, Prior or President, as it is to say that a brother is Minister, Servant, Friar or Minor. Behind the title there is an understanding of reality and of our relationship to it, with a resulting impact on the reality itself.

If the Constitutions of 1967 gave an indisputable primacy to *fraternity* in the life of the friars, and the current Constitutions are attempting to work out its consequences, then *minority* is the great contribution of the Constitutions of 1987. Both terms, *fraternity* and *minority*, refer to and affect one another. It is certain, too, that the term *minor* describes the model of *how* to be brothers and *how* to live and preach the Gospel. That is to say that, above all, minority stipulates a plan for living, a particular way of understanding and expressing our relation with God, with others and with creation, a way of placing ourselves at the service of the Church and the world.

1. Charismatic Inspiration

Our vocation as minors has its origin in the vocation story of Francis and his first brothers, and is later expressed in the Rule.

In fact, in Francis’ conversion, the experience of the saving grace of the Lord is inseparable from his encounter with the lepers. Francis and his followers were minors among the minors of society. For the sake of fidelity to the Lord, Francis chose to reject his “status” in order to live among those who were excluded and made himself one of them.

When he was given brothers, his lifestyle followed the path he re-

lates in the Testament.² The same Testament, however, reflects the personal tension that Francis lived: the yearning for the original sense of minority and the problems associated with the evolution of the fraternity. These were problems that tend to be constitutive of any religious order acquiring its own status within ecclesiastic institutions.

All in all, it appears in the Rule that the majority of the brothers really were minor both socially and ecclesiastically.³ Yet the early biographers reflect the dramatic development of the Order.⁴

Since Vatican II, the Fraternity has sought to rediscover its original charismatic inspiration. This is delineated in Chapter IV of the General Constitutions. Given the historical development of the Order, we recognize that the choice of minority, which is asked of us, is not easy. But we note with joy a convergence between the new socio-cultural conditions of today's world and the renewed sensitivity of the brothers regarding the vocation to minority.

2. Our Life Project

The articles of the Constitutions offer us a valuable synthesis for elaborating our personal, fraternal and provincial Life Project. Each article highlights a different aspect. Article 64, for example, reminds us that minority is at the core of our vocation: the following of Jesus, whose own *kénosis* is the reference point of our identity. In minority, we live the spirit and attitudes of the Gospel beatitudes and carry out our mission in the world.⁵

The other articles show the consequences of minority. They insist on choosing a form of life that makes us minor, including social insertion. This presence, which shares the life conditions of the poor, is a sign of the Kingdom and needs no further justification as a component of our mission.⁶

Fidelity to this vocation of minority also implies personal asceticism, especially in the sense of expropriation and the capacity for ongoing conversion. The fruit of this asceticism will be a sign of the new human-

2 Cf. *Test* 14-24.

3 Cf. *ER* 7,14; *LR* 3.

4 Cf. *AC* 58; 74; 106; *2C* 145-149.

5 Cf. *IR* 16 and parallels.

6 Cf. *GGCC* 65-66.

ity that God desires. We will often need to be counter-cultural signs, denouncing that which is opposed to the values of the Kingdom.⁷

In these articles we must appreciate, as a whole, the dynamism that integrates spiritual experience and praxis or life-option; fidelity to the charismatic origin of our vocation; a vision of the conditions of the poor in today's world; and the interrelationship of the various dimensions of minority, i.e., theological, Christological, social and missionary.

3. Dimensions of minority

If minority, for us Friars Minor, is a way of following the poor and humble Jesus, it must also include our relation to God the Father, our interpersonal relations, and our way of being among people. Given the breadth of this theme, we will highlight the four dimensions that seem most significant:

a. Minority and life with God

It is the contemplation of the mysteries of Christmas, the Passion and the Eucharist, that makes minority for Francis not something occasional, but a way of living shaped by a love that identifies with Jesus. It is also Francis' contemplation of the Father's mercy poured out upon him, a little one and a sinner.

It is not, therefore, a religious philosophy of being finite that makes him conscious of his minority, but the incredible self-giving of his Lord. His exclamation, "Why me?" became a heartfelt sigh. How can a Friar Minor pray if he does not find his truth is this self-emptying?

b. Minority and the Life of the Fraternity

Reading chapters 4-6 of the *Regula non bullata*, we understand the link that unites fraternity and minority.

- We are not brothers when one places himself above the others.
- Brotherly love is of the Spirit only when it is unselfish.
- The proof of unselfish love is fraternal obedience.
- Within the fraternity the lesser ones are to be privileged: the sick, the elderly...
- The least of all should be the one who is made "servant" of the

⁷ Cf. GGCC 67.

- brothers: the Minister Provincial, the Guardian...
- The definitive model is always Jesus, who lowered himself to the point of washing feet.

c. Style of daily life

Minority is an attitude that is only authentic when it regulates the entirety of life. For example:

- sharing of domestic chores.
- preferring certain types of work considered by society as “low-level”.
- poverty of material goods, not simply as personal austerity, but also as solidarity with the disadvantaged.
- putting what we receive as a gift from God at the disposal of others.

d. Minority and mission

- Inserted fraternities among the poor should not be considered exceptions.
- Evangelization should be directed especially toward the little ones and the simple.
- Commitment is needed to promote the dignity of the excluded.

4. Ideal and reality

Concerning our vocation to minority, what has already been said describes the gift and the horizon. It would be shortsighted, however, if we ignored the problems raised by the real life experience of people, the ways we are conditioned, structurally and collectively. The wisdom of maintaining the ideal while respecting the process that people and groups are living, is one of the most important challenges of our Franciscan life.

a. Psychological problems

Recognition and social approval are basic needs of all people. The call to minority presupposes:

- integrating these needs positively.
- developing inner freedom so as not to be dependent on these needs.

- a theological conversion that gives our life a foundation beyond self-fulfillment.
- the wisdom of the cross that convinces us to choose being last, after the example of Jesus.

This cannot be accomplished through will-power alone or the mere desire of identifying with an ideal.

b. Social-cultural problems

If we are realistic, we must recognize:

- that the majority of friars live middle-class lives.
- that our history and formation do not always help us to be minor like those whose lives we wish to share.
- that our institutional structures have needs that prevent identification with the world of the poor.

Do these constitute an impediment that makes our vocation to minority an illusion? Or, once again, do we find ourselves called to a personal and communal conversion that accepts these difficulties beforehand, respecting the process of individuals and groups, but maintaining a tension in striving toward the ideal?

c. Existential problem

Reflecting on the spiritual itinerary of Saint Francis, it appears that he had to learn minority according to the rhythm of the Lord's will, revealed to him in an unforeseeable manner.

In the first years of his new life, choosing to live in minority was a response to the call of the Lord and to Francis' own intimate desire. When he had to assume the responsibility of being Minister General and began to be well known, his early choices were now subject to new conditions. At the end of his life, upon finding himself in disagreement with some of his educated and influential followers, minority became more real than ever for Francis, though very different from that of the earliest form of life.

The Friar Minor, upon making profession of vows, opts for minority. It will be Providence, however, that will show him the way.

d. Spiritual problem

When dealing with a project of life that is unconditional in character, and even more so when dealing with following in the footsteps of

our Lord Jesus Christ,⁸ a disparity between first fervor and the quality of spiritual life needed to sustain the original choice is typical.

If the vocation to minority is not supported theologically, but based on an ideology, even though justified by the gospel, it will not take long before inconsistencies crop up in our life choices.

The vocation to minority that Chap. IV of the Constitutions asks of the Order is, on the other hand, so radical that we must admit that we are only at the beginning of carrying it out concretely.

II – SHARED EXPERIENCE

Minority suggests a dimension of relationship. The term ‘minor’, which Francis takes from the Gospel (cf. Mt 20,25-27; Lk 22,26), is a term of relationship: one is minor in relation to the other (LSR, 28). The one who is minor is the one who is made “lesser” before God; “lesser” alongside the other person that one encounters; “lesser” in the social context in which one lives. Minority is, therefore, “relative” to some other person, to some place and also to some mission. A person is “minor” in distinct ways in distinct contexts. It is different being “minor” in the social context of the marginalized or the middle class; in an academic setting, in a parish or a working-class context; in an established ecclesial context or in a Church still in its mission stage.

Minority is the Franciscan way of being and acting. It is the Franciscan way of following Christ and following the example of Saint Francis. It is the style that characterizes all Franciscan values (the spirit of prayer and devotion, fraternal communion, poverty, evangelization). Minority, consequently, asks to be “brought to new life” in different moments, places and conditions of life, each time assuming distinct tones and shades.

Minority further requires that the Friars make “preferential options,” choices of life style, of tasks, and of groups of people to be “preferred” over others.

In a Muslim context like that of Morocco, for example, minority can be lived as a matter of humble respect toward the people that receive us; positive acceptance of the other’s religion, which is different; pa-

8 Cf. *ER* 1; *LR* 1.

tience, even renunciation, in regard to seeing immediate results. Minority, however, does not mean being ingenuous or naïve, but simply making one's self lesser in order to be open to the voice of the Lord and of service to the people (see first experience below).

In an Italian context of immigration, minority becomes a lifestyle of the Fraternity, seeking and cultivating friendly relationships with others, sharing the difficulties and hopes of families that have been transplanted and are trying to build a new life (see second experience below).

In a multiethnic and multicultural neighborhood in a French city, an ordinary Franciscan Fraternity tries to live minority by being a presence in the neighborhood, sharing the ordinary life of the neighborhood, welcoming, sharing who they are and what they have. This is a Franciscan presence that wants "to give a witness that is visible and simple" (see third experience below).

These experiences (and each of us could add others), help us to understand minority as a very concrete dimension of our Franciscan life. It requires continual discernment and adaptation in order to live it authentically, each of us in our own time and place.

1. Minority among the Muslims

In the heart of the old Arab quarter of Meknes, Morocco, there is an after-school center for young Moroccans called Saint Anthony Center. On the front of the building, above the ancient doorway, can be found a stone crucifix. It is a vestige of the previous use of this locale as a church for immigrants. In the midst of this Muslim world, in the hearts of the Friars there resound the words of Saint Francis to those who go among the Saracens. Francis says: *"Let them not engage in disputes or arguments, but rather be subject to every human creature for God's sake and acknowledge that they are Christians. When they see that it pleases the Lord, then let them proclaim the Word of God"*.

To be minors in this Muslim world implies that, while professing ourselves Christians, we humbly submit to those who receive us and welcome us as spiritual guests. They are acting as our spiritual hosts. We must not submit like those who feel conquered, but with the conviction that respect for others is that which allows us to draw near to people, to mutual understanding.

The young students come and go under this simple sign of our faith. The stone cross becomes a silent witness of a relationship that grows daily. *The Lord came to serve and not to be served.* This is the way of the Lesser Brother as well, says Francis. The daily work of the brothers is a service that strengthens bonds with others, always searching for a sense of God-given equality.

Mustafa, Khadija, Mounir, Nadia, Mariam, Redouan and so many others are people who have grown up being nourished by their own faith. Their faith has developed with the life-blood that has circulated through countless generations. Even though the same God that we know provides this life-blood, their faith is different from ours. Minority is accepting this faith and the brother or sister who professes it. It is accepting his or her path as valid, although different from ours. Minority is accepting that this faith leads these brothers and sisters to the same God who is broken and shared each day in our little chapel.

Minority is not always being able to proclaim the Word of God as we are accustomed, out loud, with detailed explanations. Minority is waiting patiently for the right moment to proclaim this Word. Minority is, in the meantime, seeking to personify the Word by way of one's daily life, so that these young Muslims can easily read it.

In this way, opportunities begin to surface. We friars discover that minority is not being naïve but being lesser, becoming simple, always ready to show who this God is who dwells in us even if we are not always understood.

Days pass and the young Muslims continue to cross our threshold, convinced that we are not here to change their faith, but simply to serve them. By means of the daily contact of our lives, we learn from one another. Minority is accepting that we will not always see the immediate fruit of our efforts, but that one day another generation will savor this fruit. Is this not perhaps what Francis aspired to in his first encounter with the Saracens?

2. Fraternity of Prato in Italy

The small fraternity of “Mary, Mother of the Encounter” was located within a Rom (gypsy) camp on the outskirts of Florence from 2003 till 2006.

The brothers (varying in number from 2 to 4) are committed to live with this Rom community as “lesser brothers”, sharing the lack of life’s securities, relating with them and with all as ‘minors’. They are not carrying out any specific service, nor any particular ‘work’. They are just living an intensive life of communal and personal prayer, caring both for fraternal relationships as well as relationships with the Rom families.

The fraternity maintains a deliberately simple lifestyle (no car, television or computer; the dwelling is a trailer with an attached shack) and supports itself with paid work and whatever Providence supplies.

There is an excellent understanding and collaboration with the local pastor (a diocesan priest). The brothers participate daily in the Eucharist at the parish, and visit the elderly of the low-income neighborhood around the Rom camp.

Since November 2006, by decision of the provincial chapter, the fraternity was moved to the city of Prato, where more than 20% of the population is made up of immigrants. There is a notable Chinese community (more than 20,000 documented and many others not). There are also noteworthy groups of Eastern Europeans, Nigerians and Pakistanis.

Most of the Chinese live in industrial warehouses in overcrowded conditions. They work an inhuman schedule and many, most unfortunately, are submitted to a system of slavery.

In this setting the fraternity has chosen living quarters similar to those of the neighborhood people (a small storage building among the Chinese). They maintain the lifestyle described previously and in this way propose to keep a continuous and intense experience of communion with the poor Lord Jesus, witnessing to Him first by their lives, then by their words.

3. Living Minority in an ordinary Fraternity

Our Fraternity is located in a neighborhood of Villeurbanne, a city of 120,000 inhabitants attached to the city of Lyon in France. The Fraternity was opened in 1996 in a building that is about 100 years old, surrounded by newer buildings.

The Eastern zone of Lyon, where we live, developed in the 20th Century as a result of industrialization. Many families, which are now

completely integrated, arrived from Italy. So Villeurbanne is composed of both old and new inhabitants, low-income groups, and members of the middle class. The population is characterized by great social mobility. We would like to highlight the fact that if it were not for foreigners (Europeans, Africans, Asians, Latin Americans), Sunday Mass at the parish church would not be very well attended. The local market, which is set up three times during the week in the city square and main street is a place where you can find everything. The prices for fruit and vegetables can compete with any place, and the array of clothes makes it seem like the souks of the Maghreb.

Our house has been expanded and remodeled so as to provide us with a chapel and room for receiving people. One of the six friars in the community who is retired guarantees a regular presence at the house, while the other five work outside (we need to work to support ourselves!). Yet there would be so much to do right in the neighborhood: many people have questions, and they are lonely and suffer from lack of human warmth. They would like some spiritual light, to share a moment of prayer or silence with others! There could be so many moments of celebration, to encourage good relations among the different groups, to foster moments of inter-religious dialogue. People pass one another without meeting, without noticing how time is passing. We want to respond to these aspirations of the people.

How do we insert ourselves into the neighborhood? We welcome the people to our daily prayer, especially the Eucharist. We offer a bit of food to those who come asking. Some brothers are active in the life of the parish, working in the catechumenate, celebrating Eucharist on Wednesday evenings, Sunday “Parish Afternoons” (moments of encounter with varied activities), etc. Other brothers take part in the “neighborhood committee,” an association that deals with people’s problems and promotes meetings for residents of the neighborhood. Now, after a few years, we can hardly walk down the street without meeting someone we know and stopping to chat. We want to be present to the people, and welcoming toward all. We are not concerned so much with action or organization or efficiency, because we believe that our fraternity itself is a sign. To use an expression known to all friars minor: “the fraternity itself is evangelizing.”

The French Church has lived through very turbulent political times and Christians have been obliged to adapt. The brothers had to leave many historic friaries. Anticlericalism has reshaped the triumphalism

of the Church. Life in the friaries seemed distant from the life of the people. To come closer to them, the friars created small inserted communities as yeast in the dough. These experiences, by nature, were not meant to be permanent. And beyond the questions they have raised, they have helped the friars to give authentic witness to the presence of God in the midst of humanity. They have also helped to evangelize the friars themselves, forming them in an ever deeper minority. Things change quickly: a crisis of civilization is questioning us profoundly at present, as it manifests itself particularly as a mass disaffection with religion, a unprecedented drop in vocations, and the emergence of other religions and sects. We need to recognize the obvious: the same process is happening in neighboring countries as well, although not in such a drastic fashion. The church in France is unable to live this experience of expropriation even though, in one way, it is a stroke of luck! We naturally feel called to participate in the spirit of service and in the evangelical witness of the Church. Living our vocation in this context we do not see opening before us an ever more secularized life. On the contrary, we want to provide a witness that is both visible and simple. This is what we try to do at Villeurbanne.

III. IMPLEMENTATION

For Personal Formation

1. Each one can evaluate if and how he is living the directives of the Order:
 - a. “Each brother should consider himself an itinerant and be ready to let go of plans, activities, jobs and structures which no longer correspond to our vocation or to the demands of the Church and of modern people.” (*Priorities for the six years 1997-2003*, pg. 18)
 - b. As servants of all, at the service of all, peaceful and humble of heart, let the brothers avoid all types of fundamentalism and, at the same time, strive toward understanding, gratitude and acceptance of each other.” (*Priorities 2003-2009*, pg. 27)

2. Verify how each friar is living minority, for example, in the way we treat the poor, which social levels we prefer to frequent, what place the dimension of minority holds in each one’s “personal life plan” and how we introduce and develop minority in each of our lives and ministries.

For Fraternity Meetings

A. Prayerful Reading of the Word

In order to interiorize a Gospel spirit of service to those who are the “least,” and taking Jesus as our model, the fraternity might reflect prayerfully on the following Gospel passage: Mt 20:17-28.

B. Review of Life

It would be good if the fraternity could reflect on how to be lesser “here and now” in the context of a house chapter, or a retreat day, or study-day, possibly using the following process:

- A few days prior to the gathering the guardian or the meeting’s coordinator proposes that chapter 25 of the Gospel of Matthew be read individually.

- The meeting might begin with Paul's hymn in Philippians 2:5-11 referring to the abasement and exultation of Christ, or some other similar passage.
- Someone then reads one of the "Franciscan texts."
- Another friar can be asked to introduce the theme, recalling the principle points of the reflection and the experiences. The other brothers can then continue the reflection and can add experiences that they have lived or are currently living.
- Next, the Fraternity might see how it has received the directions of the Order:
 - a. "The provinces should find concrete and effective ways of sharing material goods and a life of solidarity with the most needy, so that we can share with the poor what we are and what we have." (Priorities for the six-year period 1997-2003, p. 18).
 - b. "Every fraternity should examine itself yearly regarding its faithfulness in its commitment to the life of minority, of poverty and of solidarity which it has taken on." (Priorities for the six-year period 1997-2003, p.18).
- It would be interesting if the fraternity were to reflect on how to retrieve or create in a practical way new expressions of minority, so as to offer meaningful witness in the place where it is living, asking itself, for example, how to be "lesser" in the local Church and in the exercise of their ministerial work, how to express minority in its "Fraternal Life Plan", and what "preferential option" it can create and live out.
- The meeting could end with a prayer of thanksgiving, which recognizes the gifts received from the Lord and with a prayer of acknowledgment in which each one shares that which he has received.

C. Signs or Gestures Expressing Minority

It is important that the signs or gestures which express the faithfulness of the fraternity to minority flow from the above-mentioned review of life and from an attentive reading of the Word. By way of example we offer two suggestions:

- Set aside a time for ongoing formation – in the fraternity and/or in the province – to “re-found” minority and to look for concrete ways of carrying it out.
- Begin an “inserted community” in the province.

D. A Prayer

O Saint Francis, stigmatized on La Verna,
 the world longs for you
 as an icon of Jesus crucified.
 It needs your heart, open for God and humanity,
 your bare and wounded feet,
 your pierced and pleading hands.
 It longs for your weak voice,
 strong with the power of the Gospel.
 O Francis, help the men and women of today
 to acknowledge the evil of sin
 and to seek cleansing from it in penance.
 Help them to free themselves
 from the very structures of sin
 which oppress society today.
 Arouse in the awareness of those who govern
 the urgent need for peace between nations and peoples.
 Pour into the young your zest for living;
 help them refuse the snares
 of the many cultures of death.
 To those who have been offended
 by wickedness of every kind,
 communicate your joy, O Francis,
 in learning to forgive.
 To all who are crucified by suffering,
 by hunger, by war,
 open once again
 the door of hope.
 Amen.

(John Paul II, *Prayer to Saint Francis*,
 La Verna, Chapel of the Stigmata, Sept. 17, 1993.)

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

From Scripture

1. "Then an argument broke out among them about which of them should be regarded as the greatest. He said to them, the kings of the Gentiles lord it over them and those in authority over them are addressed as 'Benefactors'; but among you it shall not be so. Rather, let the greatest among you be as the youngest, and the leader as the servant. For who is greater: the one seated at table or the one who serves? Is it not the one seated at table? I am among you as the one who serves" (Lk 22:24-27).
2. "So when he had washed their feet (and) put his garments back on and reclined at table again, he said to them: Do you realize what I have done for you? You call me 'teacher' and 'master,' and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do" (Jn 13: 12-15).
3. "Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name" (Phil 2:5-9).

From Church Documents

1. *Washing one another's feet shows a life of self-giving love.*
 "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. And during supper ... Jesus rose ... and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded" (Jn 13:1-2, 4-5). In the washing of feet Jesus reveals the depth of God's love for humanity: in Jesus, God places himself at the service of human beings! At the same time, he reveals the meaning of the Christian life and, even more, of the consecrated life, which is a *life of self-giving love*, of practical and generous service. In its commitment to following the Son of Man, who "came not to be served but to serve" (Mt 20:28), the consecrated life, at least in the best periods of its long history, has been characterized by this "washing of feet", that is, by service directed in particular to the poorest and neediest. If, on the one hand, the consecrated life contemplates the sublime mystery of the Word in the bosom of the Father (cf. Jn 1:1), on the other hand it follows the Word who became flesh (cf. Jn 1:14), lowering himself, humbling himself in order to serve others. Even today, those who

follow Christ on the path of the evangelical counsels intend to go where Christ went and to do what he did (VC 75).

2. *Making oneself small expresses Christian maturity.*

It seems that for contemporary culture, being an adult is identified with total freedom. An adult, for many men and women of today, is autonomous of others, is tied to no one and needs no one else to make do and to produce. Being adult is the reason for the disconnection with tradition and revelation. It expresses a desire to go beyond all norms and to make decisions based on reference to oneself alone.

The attitude found in the Gospel is different. To be an adult in Gospel thinking, or better, to be great, is not measured by one's autonomy and by the ability to produce. Rather, it is measured by *making oneself small* and becoming the *servant* of all: it is the smallest among you who is greatest, and the one who wants to be greatest among you should be your servant. In this double image of being small and being servant we find the very essence of Christian maturity. It is a total trust in God as Father, an absolute openness to God's Word and to the needs of our brothers and sisters. It is an attitude of thinking our lives incomplete without hearing a voice that tells us: "See now, I am sending you." It implies a total commitment with and for others, as a perfect expression of the love that comes from God.

In a society that seems to have accepted a minimalism in regard to life, the radicalism of the proposal of Jesus comes across as an attractive and enormous challenge. It demands that we take full responsibility for ourselves, and asks that we give ourselves totally to the Father and to our brothers and sisters. We are called to root our personal and communal existence in the inexhaustible richness of the Spirit, rather than in our limited and precarious human efforts (John Paul II, *Discourse to the XXXV General Assembly of the Italian Episcopal Conference*, 7, 14 May 1992).

3. *Franciscan Minority.*

Minority requires an open heart, and calls us to be generous, humble, gentle and simple. Jesus has proposed these attitudes, and Francis has lived them. They require complete denial of self and a total openness to God and to our brothers and sisters. Minority that is truly lived is an unarmed and disarming strength present in the spiritual dimension of the Church and the world. And even more! True minority frees the heart and opens it to fraternal love which becomes increasingly authentic. It expands outward and expresses itself in a wide array of typical behaviors. For example, it fosters a style that is characterized by attitudes of simplicity and sincerity, of spontaneity and concreteness, of humility and joy, of self-denial and openness, of closeness and service, in regard to all people and but especially to those who are the smallest and most needy (John Paul II, *Message to Italian Capuchins at their Chapter of Mats*, 29 October 2003).

From Franciscan Sources

1. *The Order of Friars Minor*

“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” (1C 38).

“...Blessed Francis bowed to the bishop (the cardinal of Ostia) and said: My Lord, my brothers are called ‘lesser’ precisely so they will not presume to become greater. They have been called this to teach them to stay down to earth, and to follow the footprints of Christ’s humility, which in the end will exalt them above others in the sight of the saints. If you want them to bear fruit in the church of God, keep them in the status in which they were called and hold them to it. Bring them back down to ground level even against their will. And so I beg you, Father, never allow them to rise to become prelates, otherwise they will just be prouder because they’re poorer, and treat the others arrogantly” (2C 148).

2. *To Contemplate and Imitate the Self-emptying of the Lord*

“Let no one be called prior, but let everyone in general be called a lesser brother. Let one wash the feet of the other” (ER 6,3)

“Let all the brothers strive to follow the humility and poverty of our Lord Jesus Christ ... they must rejoice when they live among people considered of little value and looked down upon, among the poor and powerless, the sick and lepers, and the beggars by the wayside. When it is necessary, they may go for alms. Let them not be ashamed and remember, moreover, that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the all powerful living God, set his face like flint and was not ashamed” (ER 9, 1-4).

3. *Minority in Mission*

“I counsel, admonish, and exhort my brothers in the Lord Jesus Christ 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. They should not ride horseback unless they are compelled by an obvious need or an infirmity” (LR 3, 10-12).

4. *The Spirit of Minority*

“A servant of God can be known to have the Spirit of the Lord in this way: if when the Lord performs some good 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” (Adm 12).

“And let no one be bound to obey another in anything in which a crime or sin would be committed. Instead, let the one to whom obedience has been entrusted and who is considered the greater be the lesser and the servant of the other brothers. And let him have and show mercy to each of his brothers as he would want them to do to him were he in a similar position” (2LtF, 41-43).

5. *Temptations Against Minority*

You who are Friars Minor, smile no longer, because only tears are now suitable. Your lives should correspond to your name. Minor is your name, let it also characterize your actions. Put up with hardship in good spirit. May patience overcome pride of mind. Truly, the heart punishes cowardice, and patience purifies that which is impure. If someone corrects you, consider that person your protector: he does not hate you, but hates the evil which you do. What do you think you are, dressed in this vile clothing, and using food and bed appropriate for pigs? You truly lose everything if your conduct contradicts what you say by using your habit. You are a mere shadow of a Friar Minor, a friar in name only and not deed (Br. Henry of Burford, in Thomas of Eccleston, *The Coming of the Friars Minor to England*, 37).

Ongoing Formation in the area of Minority

1. Minority determines our life as friars in both our relationship with God and within the fraternity or in relations with others. Ongoing and initial formation should form the friars and candidates so that “they go throughout the world in joy and gladness”, as servants subject to all, peaceful and humble of heart (RFF 77).
2. Francis aspired to observe the gospel perfectly: “the memory of the humility of the Incarnation and the charity of the Passion absorbed his mind so much that he was reluctant to think of anything else”.

His understanding of life was completely colored by the self-emptying of Jesus, humble, poor and crucified. As a result, Francis wanted to be little and to become ever more insignificant, and he wanted his brothers to be called, and genuinely to be, “minors”.

To be minor is to “arrive at being” progressively smaller and smaller, in conformity with the poor crucified Christ and in a progressive stripping of self, so as to restore all good to God, to whom it belongs.

Our specific vocation is to minority. But no one is ever definitively “minor”. We try to become such every day “through constant negation

of self and diligent conversion to God”, being “subject and submissive to everyone” and sharing the condition of life of the least well off, “remaining among them as minors”.

In order to make progress along the path of “becoming less and less”, a brother will need to have perseverance, interior peace and spiritual joy in maintaining always “the self-same longing for sanctity” (*Ongoing Formation in the Order of Friars Minor* 1995, 34).

2

PROMOTERS OF JUSTICE AND PEACE

GENERAL CONSTITUTIONS

Art. 68

§1 The friars are to live in this world as promoters of justice and as messengers and agents of peace, overcoming evil and doing good.

§2 The friars shall proclaim peace by word and cherish it so deep in their hearts that no one is stirred to anger or scandal, but rather that everyone is called back to peace, meekness and kindness through them.

Art. 69

§1 In protecting the rights of the oppressed, the friars are to renounce violent action and have recourse to means that are otherwise available even to the powerless.

§2 Conscious also of the terrible dangers that threaten the human race, the friars are to denounce in the strongest terms every kind of warlike action and the arms race as a very serious calamity for the world and a very great injury to the poor; they are to spare neither work nor sacrifice to build up God's kingdom of peace.

Art. 70

Freed of all fear by the poverty they have chosen and joyfully living in the hope that is based on the promise, while also promoting mutual acceptance and benevolence among men and women, the friars are to be instruments of the reconciliation that has been brought about by the cross of Jesus Christ.

I – FOR REFLECTION

Francis himself says in his Testament: “The Lord revealed to me that we should greet others with: ‘The Lord grant you peace.’”¹ All the important biographical sources on Francis’s life confirm that these are Francis’s very words. They tell how the brothers, from the very beginning, used this greeting in various forms.² The Assisi Compilation and the Mirror of Perfection, Larger Version, combine the revelation of the peace greeting with that of the Order’s name: *Minores*.³ Consequently, according to these sources, the conferral of a name and the greeting of peace identify the brothers gathering around Francis as a movement. With this in mind we can take as given that four elements put their mark on the way Francis and his brothers saw themselves: minority, a life of penance, living together as brothers, and the greeting of peace. Truly novel in the brotherhood of the early years is not only their minority but its special connection with the peace greeting. It gives rise to the peaceful and non-violent way in which the brothers moved about the world, avoiding all strife.⁴ From the very beginning the Franciscan calling included the pursuit of justice. The brothers announced and encouraged peace. By doing good they opposed the evil of wars, the many forms of exploitation and ostracism, destruction and oppression, wherever they encountered it.⁵ In today’s world, wracked by wars and terrorism, by widespread social injustice and hunger, we Friars Minor should speak up for peace in a way that demands action.

1. Gift of Reconciliation

Our mission of peace comes from the inner peace of our hearts. It bases itself on our experience of pardon, mercy, and generosity. The experience of pardon, mercy, and generosity, which has been given to us, has freed us and enabled us to act similarly. From the experi-

1 *Test* 23. On the question of peace, see H. Von der Bey, “Der Herr gebe Dir den Frieden”: Eine franziskanische Friedenstheologie, DCV, Werl, 1990.

2 Cf. *L3C* 26; *AC* 101; *LMj* III, 2; *IMP* 6; *2MP* 26.

3 *AC* 67; *2MP* 26; *IMP* 6.

4 Cf. *ER* 11 and 14; *LR* 3, 10-13.

5 Cf. *GGCC* Art. 68, § 1; cf. *2C* 108; *AC* 84; *LFI* XI.

ence we draw the strength to commit ourselves in a nonviolent and friendly way to the pursuit of more justice in antagonistic and burdened surroundings. To begin with we have to rid our own hearts of anger, hatred, jealousy and the usual biases and hateful stereotypes. We tend to favor such negative feelings and frequently let them dominate us because of disappointments and injuries we have suffered. We have to work through the causes of these negative feelings and so heal ourselves before we can forgive, and then encourage peace within ourselves and in the circumstances of our daily lives. Only then, once we have healed and liberated our hearts of anger and grudges towards our brothers and sisters, will we have within us the strength to do good.⁶ We have to experience reconciliation within our own hearts first.

Here we find the deep connection between contemplation and peaceful ways. Franciscan contemplation focuses on the God who has reconciled himself with this world in his Son. It is his will that the whole of creation be saved through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ announced and lived the love that sacrifices itself in order to bring God's salvation into this world and make all new. God's gift of salvation, freely bestowed, does not only free us from our own sins, but has in view the peace of a redeemed world and the justice of God's kingdom. In contemplation we see the salvation of God gradually unfolding and so are led, already in this world, into the following of Christ where we work for the peace and the justice of the kingdom of God.

The Franciscan greeting of "Peace and All Good" clearly connects peace with the salvation bestowed on us by God.⁷ Peace and God's gift of salvation come about through the contemplation and the prayer that leads to the day's activities. In that way contemplation and prayer connect closely with political and social action. Anyone who makes the connection between the sale of weapons, military development, resource exploitation, and the consequent impoverishment of whole populations can hardly content himself with a purely spiritual and disengaged piety in his friary. He has to heed the gospel's directives. He can do so by taking part in a demonstration, by public statements, or through actions of non-violent opposition. Again and again, however,

6 Cf. *GGCC* Art. 68, § 2.

7 In the German text, the expression is "Friede und Heil," Peace and Salvation. Behind the expression lies the Latin, *Pax et Bonum*, literally, Peace and Good.

he will express his protest in reaching out daily and in simple ways to those who suffer need and who knock on his door. His protest translates into concrete signs of love.

2. Active Peacemaking

We cannot be satisfied with alms and charitable assistance. We have to commit ourselves courageously to eliminate unjust structures in our own surroundings, countries and regions. For that reason we have to reach out in solidarity above all to the friars and people who live and endure in the troubled areas of the world. Only if we possess the Spirit of the Lord and his blessed influence will we be able to work in a way that abstains from any aggression and avoids all recourse to force.⁸ The Spirit of the Lord and his holy operation overcome evil and move us to love even our enemies. This love, embracing even the enemy, is not to be confused with passive forbearance and listless submission. On the contrary, the Spirit of the Lord drives us to commit ourselves actively but nonviolently in word and deed to engage evil wherever it raises its head. We do not wrestle with evil itself and spend our energies in the struggle. Rather, filled with Jesus' spirit, we leave the evil aside and by doing good and acting differently we get beyond what is wrong.⁹ In the process the Spirit sees to prophetic words and actions that help advance true peace and a justice based on reconciliation. Prophetic signs of this ilk readily disturb the routines of our daily lives and easily cause us to consider brothers with a prophetic bent as troublemakers in our ranks. It is they, however, who need our special support so that we might fulfill our task of bringing about peace.¹⁰

The Franciscan concept of peace does not concern itself with support for any sociopolitical or political-party interests. Rather, it is based on biblical peace that takes its cues from the life of the humble and patient Jesus Christ. We pursue peace and justice as men who walk in the company of the Lord, who came to serve and to give his life for humankind.¹¹ We readily understand that the refusal to apply force is not always easy, seeing that some unjust situations are simply outrageous

8 Cf. *ER* 10, 8-12.

9 Cf. *ER* 16, 10-20.

10 Cf. *IC* 24, where Thomas of Celano speaks about "pacific legationem."

11 Cf. *Mt.* 5: 9; *Adm* 13 and 15.

and readily provoke the instinctive reaction of counterforce. And yet true strength, a power that can put an end to a spiral of violence and discord, lies in a seemingly defenseless and unarmed love, ready to help. Force brought to bear on force may be able to restrain evil for a short time and punish the one who caused the evil. All the same, it never prepares the ground on which people can learn to live peacefully side by side, with regard and respect for one another. For that reason we Friars Minor take a stand of active non-violence alongside those people who cannot defend themselves.¹² In doing so we avoid turning to any means that will only provoke and stir up further injustice. Nor do we, with empty hands, simply give in to evil; rather, we engage in actions that witness to a new world, taking as our guide the human values of the future kingdom of God. And so we try to heal open wounds, see to it that truth gets heard and that a just order once more prevails. For there will be no lasting peace unless a process heals wounds of every sort, unless the truth enjoys open support, and unless the guilty accept responsibility for the injustice done. Then we have a peace built on reconciliation between all parties. Even when, as often occurs, we take the side of those who have suffered defeat because injustice was done and peace demands it, we Friars Minor still have the task of mediating actively between the parties in contention. Mediating peace, as happened again and again in the history of the Order, belongs to the noblest tasks of the Friars Minor. The role of mediator does not consign us to a neutrality that keeps us wholly outside the process. A mediator has to name and brand the injustice done and identify the causes of the discord. He is clearly party to the process.¹³ All the while he must open and show the guilty party a way out of the wrong done. One can only play such a role of mediation under the aegis of nonviolence.

We are led by our Franciscan tradition to denounce injustice and the causes of discord and strife. From there comes then our commitment to mediate peace and to reinstate a just order.¹⁴ We do not undertake such tasks as several among many others that make up our life as Franciscans. It belongs to the very way we understand our life as friars to side with the poor of our world, with the dispossessed and the victims

12 Cf. *GGCC* 69, § 1.

13 Cf. *GGCC* 69, § 2.

14 Cf. *LFI* XXI.

of war, and with those who are hungry. We speak up for them, as we try to mediate peace, hope, and a new future, as our contribution to bringing about a just world. Because a friar fixes his own life firmly in the life of Jesus, present in the suffering of people everywhere in the world, he ends up sharing in the life and the passion of Christ today. More and more people are driven into poverty by today's globalization. They lose their jobs and their dignity to multinational interests and profits. Whole populations are pushed aside and consigned to death because the wealth of their lands is exploited for a small number of well placed individuals. Many are killed because fundamentalist rage instigates wars in the name of God, stirs up hatred, and drives the whole world into an ever deeper crisis. When we survey the chaos, we friars cannot content ourselves with the piety of prayer for all these unfortunate people. From prayer we have to draw the force to do right by our vocation and, in the measure of our given possibilities, hasten to their help, for Christ is suffering in each of them. We cannot remain silent in the face of such desolation and do nothing as we look on, leaving the resolution of the troubles to God alone. God needs and seeks from us such action as matches the ways of his son Jesus. At this juncture our spirituality becomes political. Given our spiritual life, our contemplation, and our prayer, we are driven by the Spirit of the Lord in the truest sense of the word to take a stand. With reference to the Gospel we speak up for a justice that not only assures the unfortunate a bare survival, but a dignified life, free from all threat. We can help bring about peace only in the context of such justice. In that context no one loses and suffers oppression. Rather, all end up partners with the same rights and responsibilities. For peace is not the absence of conflict and war; it is the firm disposition to accept and welcome the other in his or her otherness and give him or her voice and living space in a common future.

Such an approach to life remains a challenge for us Friars Minor. Its actualization often ends in some form of subjection. Anyone who commits himself in this way to peace and justice lets down all defenses and becomes vulnerable himself. He risks a lot and some risk their lives. In that case one is truly led to take part in the suffering of Christ as narrated in Scripture. The end result of such commitment and suffering for the Gospel will be fruit a hundredfold in God's future kingdom.

3. Poverty and Simplicity: the Basis for Peace

In this connection the ways of simplicity and poverty turn into a prophetic sign of a new world, with a glimmer of the kingdom of God. The poverty and simplicity of the Franciscan way of life is in this context less a renunciation of wealth, possessions, and power. This way of walking in the footsteps of the poor and humble Christ is much more a form of freedom and independence, allowing us to act truly in this world as messengers of the Good News. There are many levels to poverty and simplicity as the basis of freedom. The poverty of doing without possessions frees us from the need to protect our property against others. Poverty as lacking status and refusing privileges frees us from the fear of losing a position, a title, or our prestige. We trust in God's word and not in material or spiritual possessions. The poverty and the simplicity of our way of living makes us as Friars Minor free of fear, seeing as we have nothing to lose. We have no worry about what we are and what we own.¹⁵ Because we do not have to fight for ourselves and our material or spiritual property, our Franciscan way of life unleashes our energies to stand up courageously for Gospel values in face of the powerful, those who rule, and all people. Poverty and a simple way of life allow us to avoid bad compromises to hold on to possessions and make room for that freedom and latitude of action by which we can esteem and welcome all people. In shaking us loose from fear of losing property, position, a good reputation, and the relationships of privilege, poverty gives us the room and the credibility to pursue reconciliation in the name of Jesus Christ, the crucified. The freedom allows us Friars Minor to challenge the conscience of people and to encourage them to change and reach out to others in mutual and benevolent acceptance. Without this relation to freedom and without such prophetic service to reconciliation, the poverty of which we speak remains a narrow-minded act of asceticism and fails to connect with real life.

Consequently, whenever we seek a more simple life style as an expression of Franciscan poverty, we have to ask ourselves how we can use the resulting freedom in the service of reconciliation. We can use such freedom for reconciliation by speaking up clearly and naming the true roots of discord and conflict. We can as well move to heal the

15 Cf. GGCC Art. 70.

open wounds of dissension. We are free and ready to extend forgiveness and mercy to the one who has done wrong. That means first of all that we get enemies to talk with one another and look at and discuss the evil done and together overcome the impasse. In service we bring prejudice and hasty condemnation under control. All the while we keep open the possibility of a common future in peace. We can face and handle such a demanding commitment to reconciliation, and all the energy it demands, because we have all received as much from God in the loving sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross.

II – SHARED EXPERIENCE

The experiences related in this section on justice and peace present three special contexts: one is an experience of ethnic conflict; the second is concerned with apartheid; and the last deals with social injustice against the “Landless,” a specific category of poor and excluded. These three realities show clear situations of injustice, cruel violence, and instances of “fracture”: social, within families, and between individuals. The friars who relate these experiences witness to the fact that peace is the fruit of reconciliation, pardon, justice and solidarity, and it is clear that the task is not easy, since each reality is very complex. To build peace and reconciliation, it is necessary to face the causes of conflict, the injustices perpetrated, and the responsibility of each of the parties involved. Wounds must be dealt with, and a process that is pedagogically sound and Gospel-based must be developed to help create new relationships between the parties. The process also demands a personal decision on the part of victims and executioners to move beyond the logic of revenge and violent solutions. Furthermore, we will see how the friars did not act alone, but in collaboration with other organizations and people of good will, including those concerned with building a new social order.

The friars were faithful to our charism, to the example of Francis and his first companions, and to the inheritance of our Franciscan tradition. The fact that the greeting of peace was a revelation of the Lord to Francis, encourages us to be witnesses and messengers of peace, as well as peace builders. To announce peace with our life and our preaching, to hail others with the greeting of peace, to intervene in

concrete situations of conflict in order to bring about peace and reconciliation, have all been characteristics of the Franciscan movement since its beginning. This inheritance has been preserved and renewed in the tradition of our Order.

It is difficult to find any situation nowadays without some conflict, injustice or violence, or some sort of social rupture among social classes, ethnic groups, families or individuals. In creative fidelity to our vocation and mission, wherever we find ourselves, we can and ought to continue being witnesses, heralds and agents of peace, reconciliation and justice.

1. Reconciliation in Rwanda

The genocide that occurred in Rwanda in 1994 claimed more than one million victims. Among them were my father, my brother, a good number of relatives, and many friends and neighbors. Our houses and possessions were completely destroyed. I had already entered the friars, and thus I left the country together with other friars in the middle of the genocide. I was not very peaceful, since I knew that my father and brother were dead.

In July of 1995, a year after the genocide, I returned to Rwanda to experience the drama of the situation. It was very difficult for me. I arrived at the place where we had lived and saw only bare ground, under which I might be able to find the well that my father had dug. When I first arrived, the people of the village did not want to approach me, because they feared that I had come back with the military for vengeance (it was a time of vengeance). I needed to meet them, talk to them, assure them that I was not seeking revenge, but that I did want to meet the killers. Some of them were already in prison, others had disappeared. I asked for permission to visit them in prison. Some were old "friends." Although some did not recognize their crimes, I told them that they had committed a great sin, that they needed conversion and reconciliation, first with God and then with the survivors. I told them that for my part, I wanted to forgive them. Later I prepared a funeral Mass worthy of my father, during which I said that I forgave all those who had mistreated my family.

But there were warnings that feelings of hate and vengeance were reappearing on all sides, even in our Christian community. One of the

solutions we found was to create small associations where the different ethnic groups might come together and speak openly. In this way, we began an association of women who had become widows due to the genocide, along with women whose husbands were in prison under suspicion of having taken part in the massacres. At first the meetings were difficult; but little by little we were able to find ways to continue on the path to pardon and reconciliation.

In the communities of our Franciscan family there were also cases so grave that at times people of different ethnic groups were not able to live together. Because of this we had to arrange meetings where each member was invited to speak about the experience of the genocide, and about the things that were difficult to accept, and we were finally able to live together. Furthermore, we established an annual meeting which ends with a march for peace and reconciliation. We invite all Christians to participate. Since 2004, the government has established popular tribunals that function in each area, where all are invited to tell what they know about the genocide. This process has caused great fear and seems to have halted the process of reconciliation. We need to find an appropriate manner to overcome this crisis.

2. Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa

The period from 1984 until the lifting of the ban on liberation movements and then to the first democratic elections (including the time after the elections) was characterized by mistrust, hatred, terrible violence, brutalities and massacres. They were fostered by the oppressive government of the former executive state President P.W. Botha.

The government, before it finally gave in to the pressures brought to bear by the international community, by the Churches and by the masses of unfranchised poor, launched a massive campaign against all its political enemies. It employed its security forces and promoted black on black violence under the pretext of ethnic self determination. Suspicion and mistrust intensified even among the oppressed, as the government used the principle of "Divide and Rule".

Indeed, this was a period of massive protests, bloodshed, death by tire-necklacing and vicious massacres. Even the dogs could not bark in the townships for fear of the security forces. Yet the anger and the spirit of martyrdom and patriotism was building up. This was meant

to discredit any thought of black government taking over and to show that blacks are enemies even to themselves.

A new political situation unfolded: the ban on the ANC was lifted, various negotiations were undertaken, and there arose the idea of a government of National unity under the leadership of Mr. Nelson Mandela. It was imperative that a paradigm shift occur, and even that a new political vocabulary should emerge. In this context the question was raised: how could the oppressed and the oppressor sit and rule around the same table? To this end, The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was born.

It was a very slow and painstaking process. Useless gymnastics to some but a necessary therapeutic exercise to others. It provided a platform for victims to come face to face with their victimizers. For some, this process offered an opportunity to start closing the book on painful experiences of the past as they listened to the fate of their loved ones, and found out how and where they were buried. For others, TRC was just a mockery of the African people's experiences in that the real masterminds of the atrocities, harassments and massacres in the townships never appeared before the commission. Some of them, like P.W. Botha and Dr. Woultter Basson, defied the commission till their last breath, seeing it as a selling out of their own people.

The Churches, including the Franciscans, encouraged the people to go through this healing process provided by the TRC. Many support groups emerged both within and outside the Church. The air was filled with the vocabulary of "acknowledgement of the past and a new beginning for all".

Many Churches around the country became beacons of hope and icons of compassion, understanding, forgiveness and reconciliation for all the different racial groups of South Africa. Regina Mundi Catholic church in Soweto which is served by the Oblates, St Francis Xavier in Evaton, Nyolohelo and Emmanuel Catholic Church which are served by the Franciscans in the Vaal Triangle, opened their doors as they always did during the apartheid years for realization of this healing process. There were and still are many other areas of justice, peace and reconciliation in which the Friars were involved that are not mentioned here. These are only mentioned because Soweto and the Vaal Triangle were the hottest spots in the country.

The main attitude proposed by the Churches, with the Franciscans in the forefront, was a spirit of reconciliation which offered a fresh

start for all. The Church, as well as the Franciscans, was challenged to re-examine its dedication and vocation to work for the community and to be evangelized by the poor.

This period witnessed the development of the “South African Black Priests Solidarity movement” which encouraged reconciliation within the Church’s walls: between the Bishops and their Priests, between white and black priests and among black priests themselves.

Against this background, the Friars realized that they needed a Truth and Reconciliation process of their own. The best venue would be none other than La Verna, a retreat house near Johannesburg, and a very significant and historical place for all the friars.

Just as the TRC process of creative, positive confrontation and story-telling was for the country as a whole, so it was with the friars as well. There were and still are many areas that need to be explored with truth and reconciliation in South Africa. In a television interview, the former minister of Safety and Security, Mr. Adriaan Vlok said that the TRC was just the first chapter of reconciliation. Indeed this is a very slow and painful path toward healing and reconciliation, but it must be trodden because some people feel that it never stops raining on their side of the road.

Finally, to be able to embrace today’s lepers in more concrete ways, we need to acknowledge our past so as to forgive and move forward. Indeed, the words of St Francis in his peace prayer sum it up very well: “O Lord grant that I may not so much seek to be understood as to understand.”

3. Searching for peace in the land conflicts of Brazil

Brazil is a rich nation with many poor people. One of the structural causes of the poverty and the huge discrepancy between the few rich (multimillionaires) and the many very poor is the concentration of the land in the hands of a few. With this situation, four million rural families exist on the margin of society, without land or with only a little land, surviving in inhuman conditions. Some of the rural population have moved to the large cities during the last few years, increasing the size of the slums, the unemployment rate and the violence.

Since 1950, the Catholic Church in Brazil – challenged by the Franciscan Bishop Inocencio Engelke – defended the need for agrarian reform. It

did this in fidelity to the Word of God and inspired by the social doctrine of the church. Today, through this option, the rural poor are encouraged to organize and fight for their right to land and to a dignified life.

In this ecclesial and social context, a group called Disciples of the Poverello of Assisi of Brazil feel challenged to share the life and the cause of the landless poor: helping them, in solidarity with them and sharing with them. Some friars are inserted in the social environment where the poor live, sharing their joy and hope, their sadness and pain. As Friars Minor, we participate in the fight of the rural poor for land and, once they are established, we stay there with them.

This form of presence and action is different from that usually practiced by friars in parishes, schools, social work, sanctuaries, pastoral work, and popular missions. Frequently, we find ourselves in situations of conflict in our work: the large landlords and the repressive organizations of the State take positions defending the large estates while the Social Movements of the Campesinos mobilize and demand their rights. We are at their side, the weakest, and therefore suffer the consequences: slander, threats, judicial processes, persecution, death threats, violent repression, lack of understanding. We try to face these situations with serenity, and are open to dialogue with the authorities to look for negotiated solutions. We assume a permanently pacifist attitude in order to give witness to the search for nonviolent solutions. We always affirm our evangelical and Franciscan option to be alongside the poor. We understand that they are victims of history and that we need to be at their side.

In these circumstances, some of us have been jailed, attacked and threatened with death. In some unavoidable conflicts we were treated like the people, in an equally violent manner. Our options are not always understood, even among our own brothers. Political connotations are given to our attitudes, which are not well accepted in many religious environments. We have tried to live with these reactions while explaining our attitudes and our fundamental motives and, above all, seeking to understand more than to be understood.

In the course of our insertion, we have participated in protests, pilgrimages, land occupations, public pressure and hunger strikes. If the organized poor are placed under judicial order, we stand in solidarity with them. We participate in the moments of great sacrifice. At decisive moments, we place our condition of being friars at the service of this just cause of the people.

Many of us live as itinerants in the settlements and camps. We celebrate, pray, administer the sacraments, form faith communities and train pastoral agents for evangelization. We console the afflicted and share their successes and joys. We also cooperate in the formation of leaders, and support projects that improve the social and economic conditions of the small farmers, especially encouraging work in cooperatives.

We have a special concern for the children and teenagers, and work to promote education as much as possible. Many times we have accompanied teenagers who are poised between the possibility of a dignified and productive life and one absorbed in criminality, violence and drug trafficking.

In the last few years, we have paid special attention to issues of the environment and to ecological education. In our houses of insertion, we have tried to give good example, recuperating and preserving biodiversity, saving natural (organic) seeds, saving water, practicing reforestation and developing a love of nature. Our principle motivation is Franciscan mysticism which is based on:

- The love of mother earth and her favorite children: the rural poor, the indigenous, the *quilombos* (descendants of escaped black slaves), the fisherfolk;
- Solidarity with the poor, inspired by Francis's love for the lepers;
- A spirituality that sees the crucified Lord in the crucified of today and sees an offense committed against human dignity as an offense against the image of God.
- The unending search for the integrity of creation and promotion of peace, not as an absence of conflict but rather as the overcoming of conflict by providing better conditions for human living.
- Missionary insertion. This means sharing the precarious life conditions of the people. It is also a willingness to be itinerant, that is, to periodically change our location and dwelling, as a concrete way of accompanying the landless in their "displacement" and in their forced changes of place.

We have been beset by temptation. Many times we have felt the pain of humiliation, anger and indignation. We feel the weight of the offenses and of the injustices. We struggle within ourselves so that anger does not become hatred. We try to practice one of the most dif-

ficult commandments of Jesus: to love one's enemies.

Other times, we are tempted to believe that we are better than others, that we are the authentic and consistent ones, that we can judge those who criticize us and condemn those who do not understand us. We fight this temptation, recognizing that we are fragile instruments in the hands of God, full of contradictions and daily inconsistencies.

Another temptation is that of doing things "for the people" or doing them "through the people," not allowing them to be the subjects of their own history and architects of their own dignity. We can fall into paternalism, nourishing the dependency of the people on us and our ideas, actions and projects. We try to combat this temptation, reinforcing our faith in the capacity and the strength of unity. We try to get beyond the tendency of the "I," present in everyone, and work to build human relations of equality.

We also look to evaluate our life together: with criticism and self-criticism; with fraternal and communal correction; with evaluative assemblies together with the people, confronting our lives with the Word of God and with the fundamental elements of the primitive Franciscan Movement lived by Francis of Assisi and his first companions.

We can testify to having experienced many sincere and authentic joys, standing among the poor and the weak, the abandoned, the scorned ones and those found on the margins of life.

III – IMPLEMENTATION

For Personal Formation

- a. Call to mind all your experiences of contact with the poor and with situations of injustice and conflict; what meaning have they had in your personal life and formation? At the same time, reflect on your commitment to peace, justice and reconciliation; what is its impact on your preaching of the Gospel in both word and example?
- b. Spend significant time meditating on the biblical and Franciscan texts found just below in the section *For Further Reflection*. Use them to nurture a consciousness of our call and sending as friars minor to witness to and promote peace, justice and reconciliation.
- c. Taking into account the orientation of the documents of the Order and of the Church in regard to our commitment to peace, justice and reconciliation, what is the response of your local community? Your province? Your local Church? What concrete and realizable proposals have they elaborated?

For Fraternity Meetings

The community can choose to reflect on these themes in a series of house chapters, or can also do so during a day of retreat or study. The following outline can be adapted for house chapters or for a full day of reflection.

A. Faith Sharing based on Matthew 5, 1-11

- Choose a method for faith sharing (possibly the one provided by the Order).
- At the moment of response to the Word of God, besides personal prayer, participants can proclaim together Psalm 85 (84).
- At the end of the faith sharing, the group can listen to the suggestions of the Plenary Council of Bahia (cf. the fifth Franciscan text found below in the section *For Further Reflection*). Based on this reading, they can decide which concrete gestures or actions might be chosen to help the fraternity further its witness, its proclamation and its work for peace, justice and reconciliation.

B. Review of Life

1. The guardian, or the facilitator of the meeting, invites the friars to read this chapter some days before the meeting.
2. The meeting can begin with an appropriate song and a prayer.
3. One of the Franciscan texts from the section *For Further Reflection* can be read.
4. One of the brothers, previously designated by the guardian, can quickly introduce the theme, highlighting the basic elements from the reflection and from the experiences. The brothers can enrich the reflection with other experiences that they have lived or are currently living.
5. Consider together the social reality in which the community lives. What are the situations of conflict, rupture and violence that exist between individuals, within families, between social groups, between religious groups, in the culture in general? What injustices exist? What are the causes of these situations? How do they play themselves out?
6. How does the Fraternity promote peace, justice and reconciliation *ad intra*?
7. How does the Fraternity promote peace, justice and reconciliation in its social context? How is this dimension present in its work of evangelization?
8. Are there other local organizations that work for peace, justice and reconciliation? How does the Fraternity collaborate with them?
9. Both within the Fraternity and outside of it, what is being done to promote ongoing formation and education for peace, justice and reconciliation?
10. End the meeting with a prayer of thanksgiving for the day's blessings and with a closing song.

C. Signs or gestures in favor of Justice and Peace

It is important that signs and gestures arise from the faith sharing and review of life of the community. Some suggestions to consider are offered here.

- Program an annual Day for Peace with the local Church community, the local parish, and other organizations present in the

region. It can be preceded by a triduum of prayer and fasting, or meetings for common reflection. Look to involve the youth, schools, social organizations and other Churches or religions. Plan an ecumenical or inter-religious gathering. Promote a sharing of experiences regarding peace, justice and reconciliation. End the day with some sort of concrete commitment.

- The Fraternity can become involved in a concrete situation of injustice, violence or marginalization of people, families or social or ethnic groups. Establish and maintain contact with those involved; get to know the situation of the people and help discern an evangelical and pastoral way of acting. Encourage participation of the local Church community, and others who might be able to collaborate in this effort.
- Look for an appropriate methodology, based on Franciscan spirituality, to face internal conflicts in the Fraternity, and in the places where the friars live and work. There surely exist written materials in all languages to help with this task.

D. A Prayer

Lord, God of peace, you have created humankind in your goodness to know your glory. We bless you and give you thanks because you have sent us Jesus, your most beloved Son, and have made Him through the mystery of Easter the architect of all salvation, the fountain of all peace and the bond of all fraternity.

We give you thanks for the desires, the efforts and the accomplishments that your Spirit of peace has fostered in our time. They help to change hate to love, mistrust to understanding, and indifference to solidarity. Open our spirits and our hearts even further to the concrete needs of our brothers and sisters, so that we might always be promoters of peace.

Remember, Father of mercy, those who are in pain, those who suffer and die for the birth of a world that is more fraternal. May your Kingdom of justice, peace and love come to people of every race and language. May the earth be filled with your glory. Amen.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

From Scripture

1. “Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased, Upon whom I have put my spirit; he shall bring forth justice to the nations, not crying out, not shouting, not making his voice heard in the street. A bruised reed he shall not break, and a smoldering wick he shall not quench, until he establishes justice on the earth; the coastlands will wait for his teaching. Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spreads out the earth with its crops, Who gives breath to its people and spirit to those who walk on it: I, the Lord, have called you for the victory of justice, I have grasped you by the hand; I formed you, and set you as a covenant of the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out prisoners from confinement, and from the dungeon, those who live in darkness” (*Is* 42:1-7).

2. When he saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him.
 He began to teach them, saying:
 Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
 Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.
 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.
 Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
 for they will be satisfied.
 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.
 Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.
 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
 Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness,
 for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
 Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you
 and utter every kind of evil against you (falsely) because of me.
 I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and
 Pharisees, you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven (*Mt* 5:1-11, 20).

From Church Documents

1. “Peace is not merely the absence of war; nor can it be reduced solely to the maintenance of a balance of power between enemies; nor is it brought about by dictatorship. Instead, it is rightly and appropriately called an enterprise of justice. Peace results from that order structured into human society by its divine Founder, and actualized by men as they thirst after ever greater justice. The common good of humanity finds its ultimate meaning in the eternal law. But since the concrete demands of this common good are constantly changing as time goes on, peace is never attained once and

for all, but must be built up ceaselessly. Moreover, since the human will is unsteady and wounded by sin, the achievement of peace requires a constant mastering of passions and the vigilance of lawful authority.

But this is not enough. This peace on earth cannot be obtained unless personal well-being is safeguarded and men freely and trustingly share with one another the riches of their inner spirits and their talents. A firm determination to respect other men and peoples and their dignity, as well as the studied practice of brotherhood are absolutely necessary for the establishment of peace. Hence peace is likewise the fruit of love, which goes beyond what justice can provide.

That earthly peace which arises from love of neighbor symbolizes and results from the peace of Christ which radiates from God the Father. For by the cross the incarnate Son, the prince of peace reconciled all men with God. By thus restoring all men to the unity of one people and one body, He slew hatred in His own flesh; and, after being lifted on high by His resurrection, He poured forth the spirit of love into the hearts of men.

For this reason, all Christians are urgently summoned to do in love what the truth requires, and to join with all true peacemakers in pleading for peace and bringing it about.

Motivated by this same spirit, we cannot fail to praise those who renounce the use of violence in the vindication of their rights and who resort to methods of defense which are otherwise available to weaker parties too, provided this can be done without injury to the rights and duties of others or of the community itself" (GS 78).

2. "The union with Christ brought about by the Eucharist also brings a newness to our social relations: this sacramental 'mysticism' is social in character. Indeed, union with Christ is also union with all those to whom he gives himself. I cannot possess Christ just for myself; I can belong to him only in union with all those who have become, or who will become, his own. The relationship between the eucharistic mystery and social commitment must be made explicit. The Eucharist is the sacrament of communion between brothers and sisters who allow themselves to be reconciled in Christ, who made of Jews and pagans one people, tearing down the wall of hostility which divided them (cf. *Eph* 2:14). Only this constant impulse towards reconciliation enables us to partake worthily of the Body and Blood of Christ (cf. *Mt* 5:23-24). In the memorial of his sacrifice, the Lord strengthens our fraternal communion and, in a particular way, urges those in conflict to hasten their reconciliation by opening themselves to dialogue and a commitment to justice. Certainly, the restoration of justice, reconciliation and forgiveness are the conditions for building true peace. The recognition of this fact leads to a determination to transform unjust structures and to restore respect for the dignity of all men and women, created in God's image and likeness. Through the concrete fulfillment of this responsibility, the Eucharist becomes in life what it signifies in its celebration. As I have had occasion to say, it is not the proper task of the Church to engage in the

political work of bringing about the most just society possible; nonetheless she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the struggle for justice. The Church “has to play her part through rational argument and she has to reawaken the spiritual energy without which justice, which always demands sacrifice, cannot prevail and prosper”.

In discussing the social responsibility of all Christians, the Synod Fathers noted that the sacrifice of Christ is a mystery of liberation that constantly and insistently challenges us. I therefore urge all the faithful to be true promoters of peace and justice: All who partake of the Eucharist must commit themselves to peacemaking in our world scarred by violence and war, and today in particular, by terrorism, economic corruption and sexual exploitation. All these problems give rise in turn to others no less troubling and disheartening. We know that there can be no superficial solutions to these issues. Precisely because of the mystery we celebrate, we must denounce situations contrary to human dignity, since Christ shed his blood for all, and at the same time affirm the inestimable value of each individual person” (*Scar 89*).

3. “For his daring and prophetic initiative John Paul II desired to choose the evocative setting of this town of Assisi, known across the world *on account of St Francis*.

In fact, the “Poverello” embodied in an exemplary way the Beatitude proclaimed by Jesus in the Gospel: Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God (Mt 5: 9). The witness Francis bore in his time makes him a natural reference point today for people who are fostering the ideal of peace, respect for nature and dialogue between people, religions and cultures. It is important, however, to recall, if one does not want to betray his message, that *it was Christ’s radical decision that provided him with a key to understanding the brotherhood to which all people are called, and in which inanimate creatures - from “brother sun” to “sister moon” - also in a certain way participate.*

I would therefore like to recall that the *eighth centenary of the conversion of St Francis* coincides with this 20th anniversary of John Paul II’s Prayer Meeting for Peace. The two commemorations shed light upon each other. In the words addressed to him by the Crucifix of San Damiano: “Francis, go, repair my house”; in his choice of radical poverty; in the kiss of the leper that expresses his new capacity to see and love Christ in his suffering brethren; in all these events he began that human and Christian adventure which continues to fascinate so many people in our day and to make this town the destination of countless pilgrims (Benedict XVI, *Message on the Occasion of the 20th Anniversary of the Inter-religious Meeting of Prayer for Peace*, 2 September, 2006).

From Franciscan Sources

1. “The Lord revealed a greeting to me that we should say: ‘May the Lord give you peace’” (*Test* 23).
2. “I council, admonish and exhort my brothers in the Lord Jesus Christ 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. They should not ride horseback unless they are compelled by obvious need or an infirmity. Into what whatever house they enter, let them first say: Peace be to this house! According to the holy Gospel, let them eat whatever food is set before them” (*LR* 3, 10-14).
3. “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Those people are truly peacemakers who, regardless of what they suffer in this world, preserve peace of spirit and body out of love of our Lord Jesus Christ” (*Adm* 15).
4. Other references to Franciscan sources: *LR* 14; *2C* 108 (Peace at Arezzo); *LFl* 21 (Francis and the Wolf); *AC* 84 (Peace in Assisi between the Bishop and the Mayor).
5. Being peacemakers is a vital part of our Franciscan life and our evangelization of the world. The Plenary Council, therefore, calls friars:
 1. To pray to be men at peace with God and all peoples, to make prayer and fasting part of our efforts for peace, to support movements which seek peace in our society, to be personally involved in such movements.
 2. To support non-violent efforts for peace, to offer support to conscientious objectors to war- especially nuclear war- to stand by those imprisoned for their convictions and efforts on behalf of justice and peace.
 3. To develop a pedagogy of peace especially for the youth of our schools and seminaries.
 4. To find ways to eliminate injustices among ourselves and, in spite of our differences, to live in peace together in our friaries as witnesses of the peace of Christ.
 5. To involve friars full time for justice and peace where possible and support those friars already engaged in this work in Justice and Peace offices of the Order and Provinces.
 6. To be a voice for the rights of the unborn, but also for those born but without hope of a future.
 7. To condemn loudly and clearly the arms race and all nuclear weapons which have already been produced (*Bah* 38).

6. Peace is generated above all in prayer. Through contemplation, humankind lovingly searches for the face of the Creator, and discovers God's goodness and original plan. This plan joins the human family in a harmonious unity. Upset by sin, it has been restored by Christ through the sacrifice of himself. From that moment, the love of Christ has driven us, in our own turn, to give ourselves for the sake of our brothers and sisters. Constant meditation on these truths transformed Francis deeply and made him a "messenger of good news" for others. In the same way, Clare was a woman of prayer par excellence, united to God in contemplation and praise; she often enlightened Francis and his followers in their mission to the world.

But prayer generates peace in another way as well. It is only through prayer that one can create the interior conditions which allow the human heart to open itself to others. It is in prayer that humanity recognizes its limitations, its need for help, its capacity for error. But it is also here that it recognizes itself as a child of God and, as such, capable of good. And, being capable of good, it recognizes men and women as brothers and sisters. Belief in the possibility of building the good, even in adverse circumstances, is rooted in this certainty, as is the operative desire to concretize such intentions. It is for this reason that the Holy Father composed the profession of faith used at the end of the prayer in Assisi by saying that prayer nourishes the faith and the operative love of humankind.

Finally, in prayer humankind discovers its true blessings. Individualized possession of riches and defense of one's own privileges will surely divide humanity. On the other hand, spiritual goods do not diminish if they are shared, and therefore there is no need to defend them with arms. It is only in light of this realization, personally understood, that each of us will be able to become instruments of peace (Ministers General of the Franciscan Family, *The Spirit of Assisi*, April 16, 1987).

7. Equally, in a world which is crucified by violence, wars, radical fundamentalism, discords and divisions, we realize the urgency of Francis's invitation to be, more and more, workers for peace and instruments of reconciliation. Let us begin with those with whom we live and serve: the fraternity, the local and national community. In an ongoing spirit of discernment and guided by Gospel criteria, let us strive to work with the various local movements promoting peace, and with national and international organizations so as to promote peace among peoples of all ethnic groups, races, cultures and religions (*FEGC* 163).
8. Through itinerancy we penetrate into critical places, where our society is experiencing profound imbalances and tensions: the frontiers between the different religions (Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism), the division between rich and poor, the powerful and the weak, slaves and freemen, men and women, in order to give witness to peace and justice. We wish to be, together with so many men and women that dream of a new world, architects of a *culture of hope and peace*. As Friars Minor, we wish to open

up spaces and construct new relationships exalting the common human dignity, born of God our Creator and brought to its perfection in Christ our Redeemer. We find ourselves on a journey marked by a “crucified humanity” (*LgP* 33).

9. Faithful to the condition of minors, the Friars should be bearers of peace, through their life rather than by word, in whatever place they may find themselves. They should encourage reconciliation between people and respect for creation, denouncing every kind of violence, injustice and deceit. The Friars should not spare any effort in being, through their lives, a sign of a new humanity that walks towards freedom and peace (*OFM Prioritates 2003-2009*, Proposal 8, p. 27).
10. Other articles of the General Constitutions deal with the same theme in the context of evangelization and mission: 93,1; 96,2; 97,2; 98,2; 99.

Ongoing Formation in the area of Justice and Peace

1. The experience of the fatherhood of God and of brotherhood with Christ leads the Friars Minor to make themselves the brothers of every person and of every creature in a spirit of minority, simplicity, joy and solidarity (*RFF* 21).
2. The Friars Minor follow the example of St. Francis, who was led by God among the lepers, by choosing the life and condition of the poor, identifying with them, serving the oppressed, the afflicted and the sick and by letting themselves be evangelized by them (*RFF* 25).
3. The Friars Minor, as heralds of peace, carry peace in their hearts and offer it to others and are prepared to denounce vigorously all that is contrary to human dignity and Christian values (*RFF* 35).

3

CARETAKERS OF CREATION

GENERAL CONSTITUTIONS

Art. 71

Following closely in the footsteps of Saint Francis, the friars are to maintain a reverent attitude towards nature, threatened from all sides today, in such a way that they may restore it completely to its condition of brother and to its role of usefulness to all mankind for the glory of God the Creator.

I – FOR REFLECTION

1. The serious current problem.

In the course of history the human species has profoundly altered the ecosystems of planet earth. Certain of these changes have now become irreversible, as in the case of deforestation, the “denaturalizing” of food, industrialization, urbanization, the development of applied technology, enormous demographic growth, automation, and the irrational exploitation of natural resources. Together these changes have caused profound destabilization of certain ecosystems.

The destruction of the environment, which continues unabated through the current world economy and dominant technologies, is placing the future survival of humanity in serious danger. Scientists repeatedly demonstrate that the burning of carbon fossil fuels, and the contamination of the land, water and air through chemical fertilizers and contaminants, will lead to the destruction of both flora and fauna, to unexpected climate change, and to a state that threatens human life itself.

Advanced industrial society has ruptured the organic equilibrium of the earth and is on the path toward universal ecological death—unless a solution is implemented. Already the terrible word “terricide” has

begun to circulate in specialized areas. The reasons for concern about the deterioration of the environment can be summarized as follows: the contamination of mountains, rivers, seas, and forests; the disappearance of so many species of plant and animal life; the “denaturalizing” of food; dangers associated with the build-up of armaments (chemical and biological weapons, weapons of mass destruction); depletion of natural resources; global warming; and biotechnical risks (genetic manipulation and mutations that create plagues).

2. Causes of the deterioration of the environment

It is not a matter of being alarmists; rather, simply one of recognizing those crises or ills that threaten both our natural and social environments. But the alarming effects of the deterioration of the environment have deep and complex causes that must be confronted if a solution is to be found for these most unsettling problems.

The causes that converge and are complicit in the great deterioration of sister “mother Earth” are many. They include cultural, economic, technical and political aspects. It is known that large capital, and the politics that support it, encourages earnings beyond the laws of reason or justice.

It is essential to bear in mind that in modern times the workings of the economy have been transformed into the object of a specific and independent discipline. Together with capitalism, it has acquired an enormous complexity that substantially transcends traditional concepts related to the administration of individual assets. With capitalism, the economy is transformed into a system whose logic is no longer in harmony with the idea of nature as the dwelling place of the human person; quite the contrary, the economy is transformed into a source of exploitation and profit.

Precisely this de-linking of the economic element from the norms of other social systems, such as the family, social groups and economically disadvantaged sectors, has given rise to an independent economic “logic” apart from economic reason. This is one of the characteristics of the industrial revolution and a real cause of the ecological crisis.

Both capitalist economy as well as socialist economy depend on, and are driven by, a common, all-encompassing concept and motor: industrialism. Neither the current capitalist nor the current socialist economy will be capable of halting the destruction of the environment—as demanded by ethics, human rights and rational thinking—unless they

adopt the idea of a social-ecological market economy with respect to the just use and distribution of natural resources.

If nature is sick, so too is society. The tragic effect of the exploitation of nature by the dominant economies is manifested in the fact that some 80% of humanity lives in areas of poverty in the South; one billion persons live in a state of absolute poverty; some 3 billion lack adequate nutrition; 60 million die annually from hunger; and 14 million youth under 15 years of age die annually from illnesses stemming from hunger. In the face of this deadly problem, solidarity among human beings is practically non-existent. As reported by the UN, the majority of rich nations earmark less than 0.7% of their GNP for aid to the most needy countries.

The causes that have produced the North-South division are similar to those that lead to the exploitation of nature. And if, on the one hand, the rich nations exploit nature through a consumer life-style that depletes natural resources and produces an amount of waste that nature cannot absorb; then, on the other hand, the poor nations are practically forced to exploit their resources to ease their poverty.

We need to promote a planetary ecology, joining together the natural, technical, political, economic, and cultural components in one integrated system. Nature is our shared dwelling-place, the common house of all. Social agents must not be hostile toward nature; rather, they must join with nature, respecting and acting favorably toward her natural resources. The relationship between nature, humanity, society, technology, politics and economy must be regulated by the principles of subsidiarity, justice and the defense of the values and common resources of sister-mother-earth.

The destruction of nature and the unstoppable conversion of the Earth into a desert are also the effect, and a reflection, of a great ethical crisis of values: an anthropological, moral, cultural and religious crisis. At the heart of this crisis lies a major human question covered over by personal and group ambitions, national selfishness, corporate greed, sectarian colonialism and imperialist economics.

It is true enough that the human spirit is gifted with an unlimited drive to transcend whatever limits present themselves. But for precisely this reason we need ethical, social, religious and anthropological guidelines. All science must be guided by conscience so that it may place its rationality, through technology, at the service of all. How rightly declared H. Bergson that technology "awaits a soul dimension, and engineering demands a mysticism."

3. Ecology and Christianity

The environmental crisis also questions religion. Science and technology once again confront religion. For a long time religion was accused of being lax with regard to its responsibilities toward the earth, and of being unfaithful to the imperatives of nature. It turns out that those same groups that formerly attacked religion for its indifference to the earth are now attacking religion for its excessive attachment to the earth. In their estimation, by putting into practice the biblical mandate to *subdue the earth*, religion has caused many ecological disasters.

Judeo-Christian religion thus stands accused of being responsible for the environmental crisis. But such a charge is refuted by both the Old and the New Testaments, which proclaim the natural world as the loving creation of God. This is made perfectly clear in the profession of faith in the first chapter of Genesis, as well as in the prophets and wisdom literature. Biblical teaching offers a theology of creation in which the relation between humanity and nature is understood from the perspective of Creator-creature.

The human person is a created being, as are nature and all its creatures. Not only are men and women good, but so too are all created beings and all ecosystems. Earth and all that it contains do not belong to humanity but to God. Men and women are its stewards.

“Subdue the earth” does not give free-reign to exploit and destroy the environment; rather it is the divine command for men and women to humanize nature by relating to nature joyfully and fruitfully. Psalm 104, among others, is a moving song of grateful recognition to the Creator of the beauty and splendor of created beings.

The New Testament presents nature as a great divine gift. St. Paul, in his letter to the Romans (8:20-21), highlights the intimate relation—for better or worse—between humanity and nature. Creation and redemption are profoundly linked because it is the same God who creates and re-creates all. For St. Paul, the salvation of humanity and of the universe are part of the same divine plan, realized in Christ, who has assumed a body like ours and has risen. All created reality of the cosmos is present in his risen body.

The Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (par. 34) addresses this: “For man, created to God’s image, received a mandate to subject to himself the earth and all that it contains, and to govern the world with justice and holiness; a mandate to relate himself and the totality of things to Him who was to be acknowledged as the Lord and Creator of all. Thus, by the subjection of all things to man, the name of God would be wonderful in all the earth.”

Therefore, the unbridled exploitation of nature, or its willed destruction, by humanity is contrary to the plan of the God of the Bible.

For this reason, the World Council of Churches has gathered on many occasions in order to respond to these challenges, defending and proclaiming the responsibility of Christians to protect the integrity of creation.

4. Franciscanism and ecology

The General Constitutions express an explicit concern on the part of the Order for the care of creation. Article 71 states it clearly: "Following closely in the footsteps of Saint Francis, the friars are to maintain a reverent attitude towards nature, threatened from all sides today, in such a way that they may restore it completely to its condition of brother and to its role of usefulness to all mankind for the glory of God the Creator." Although this text is very brief, it describes an essential attitude when dealing with sister-mother nature. It invites us to have "a sense of reverence" that manifests itself in concrete behavior toward the environment.

This "sense of reverence" precludes our remaining indifferent in the face of natural disasters, and demands an active commitment to responsible action in response to enormous environmental problems. All Franciscans should have a clear awareness and strong determination to defend the wonderful divine work of creation. To make nature "sister and useful" is a new imperative that demands creativity in order to bring concrete solutions to the environmental situation. Both information and adequate operative procedures will be required to address the crisis.

Franciscanism is certainly a distinct way of seeing and relating to God, but it is also a concrete and specific way of being in the world and of relating to all creatures. It takes the form of a universal brotherhood where the relationship to all things, including plants and animals, is personalized. We can therefore speak of a "Franciscan humanism" which entails participation in the world with an ethic of responsibility. It points toward a peace that is operative not only in social and interpersonal relationships, but in the natural world as well, thus giving peace a more universal expression.

1. *Francis of Assisi* befriended and was in tune with nature not only for theological reasons, but also due to his natural inclination and his warm, instinctive friendliness. In his *Canticle of Brother Sun* he sings to the Most High through all creatures, since they are all expressions of the love of God. Francis, despite his deep affection for

all beings, does not remain attached to them, but rather ascends to their Author and Creator. He knew not only how to see, but also how to celebrate and participate in the marvelous setting of nature, entering into deep, vital and affective relationships with all creatures.

2. *Bonaventurian thought*, with regard to nature and natural beings, demands humane behavior and an existential attitude of *respect, communion and confraternity* with all of creation, based on and grounded in an ontology of love. The human person is a mediation between nature and spirit, a microcosm where matter and spirit are harmonized in a perfect yet unfinished synthesis. The human person cannot dominate or manipulate creation; rather, he presides over it. Humanity and nature harmonize in the same theological, cosmological and existential project.
3. For *John Duns Scotus*, the entire world must be seen and interpreted in the light of a universal Christocentrism. If a Pauline-inspired, cosmic Christocentrism were revived, all earthly realities would be perceived from an optic full of meaning and message. Thus the contamination of nature, the exploitation of lands for purely selfish speculation, the squandering of natural resources, uncontrolled and irrational consumerism, as well as all those forms of aggression against nature or apart from nature are an attack upon the divine plan of creation and a provocation of disorder in the world with unforeseeable consequences that will inevitably affect the human person.

Both Franciscan spirituality and as its philosophical-theological thought can offer valid operative premises for a relational anthropology and an ethics of simplicity, moderation and frugality in response to the profound environmental crisis. A Franciscan approach does not simply seek to know and interpret reality, but to take action as well. In the first place, life must be esteemed as a sacrament, and all that exists must be seen as gift. This demands respect for natural resources and moderate use of them. The Franciscan vision leads to simple enjoyment of the small things of everyday life. It invites us to avoid excess and to eliminate wasteful ways as an uncivil form of living.

If current consumerism has been converted into a way of life and into an unquenchable thirst for devouring everything: objects, persons, values, books, time, ideas, images and crazes, then achieving an asceticism of life, as a wise form of freedom and responsibility, is an urgent necessity. Austerity and frugality thereby become not only a concrete way of

living out some dimensions of the vow of poverty, but also ecological virtues and a form of solidarity.

The renouncing of possessions, as lived by St. Francis, is not presented in a bitter or aggressive way, but rather with humility and joy: *“Lady, holy Poverty, may the Lord protect you with your sister, holy Humility.”* (SV, 2). Voluntary detachment from possessions, simplicity of lifestyle, and joy for the gift of life are attitudes of respect for creation and a model of living together. Franciscan asceticism is the consequence of perfect joy. Whoever is joyful, celebrates. The one who celebrates, shares. Whoever shares does justice toward the Creator and is courteous toward all creation.

II – SHARED EXPERIENCE

In the writings of Francis the “Canticle of the Creatures” holds a significant position. Francis’s love for God and for all God’s creatures is taken as a given in his first biographies. Francis’s companions said “We have been able to appreciate how he found in almost all creatures a reason for intimate joy, which he expressed exteriorly; how he showed them affection and contemplated lovingly upon them as though his spirit were not on earth but in heaven” (AC 88).

As has been repeated in many places, Francis, in his own way of being in the world, does not stand over things, possessing or dominating them. Rather, he stands together with them and with the rest of people to form part of a whole. He treats them as brothers and sisters, for all things have come from the same hands of God the Father. But if he can reverence, respect, be brother to and see in all creatures the love of God, it is because he lives in radical poverty, in non-appropriation. Poverty frees one, in favor of love, from all desire to possess anything, and it allows for fraternity.

The attitude of respect, communion and fraternity with all natural beings forms part of our tradition and our spirituality. It is recognized by our General Constitutions (cf. Art. 1,2) and by others as a Franciscan characteristic.

The challenge for us Franciscans, however, is how to live this spirituality today in the face of the great ecological crisis in which we are enveloped. We face the challenge of how to translate this spirituality into an ethic, into a style of life that humanizes and restores, and even into political action that attacks the root causes of environmental degradation. That is to say, how do Franciscans, in a concrete and practical way, show “a reverent attitude towards nature, threatened from all sides today, in such a way that

they may restore it completely to its condition of brother and to its role of usefulness to all mankind for the glory of God the Creator” (GGCC 71).

Certainly this spirituality demands an ecological education on our part. This will allow us to critique all forms of exploitation, production and consumption that drain nature, as demonstrated in the experiences that follow this reflection. In wealthy countries especially, this spirituality leads us to sustainable and joint ways of life and consumption, as exemplified by the approach of the Franciscan Renewal Center of Saint Barbara Province (United States). It asks us to promote ecological education and to work for the organization of a society and economy formed according to the measure of the integrity of the human person and of all people. It calls us to work for a society and economy that do not revolve around mere economic interest or consumption, as we can see in the experience of our brothers in Indonesia and the Amazon. We also notice in these experiences that ecological concern leads us to work for relationships of equality among nations and continents, relationships that empower each culture to respect diversity.

1. Environmental Assessment Prov. of St. Barbara (USA)

The Franciscan Renewal Center (FRC) at Scottsdale, Arizona is one of six major retreat centers of the Province of Saint Barbara. The FRC is unique among these centers in that it is the only one situated in a desert environment. As part of our ministry to ‘care for creation’, a conscious effort was made to name and identify the ways we are impacting the physical and biological environment of the retreat center. In 2004 our newly built St. Clare Blessed Sacrament Chapel received an Environmental Excellence award for landscaping and energy efficiency. With this assessment process, we then set some goals for improving the environmental impact over an 8-year period: 1) landscaping; 2) electricity use; 3) recycling; 4) insulation of windows.

Landscaping Changes:

A pre-existing orchard was re-landscaped into ‘The Healing Garden’ that uses Permaculture (organic approach) design. To restrict the growth of grasses and weeds a specially designed carpet was installed below the soil surface. In addition, two compost bins were built and are managed and supervised by staff and volunteers. Extra mulching and other soil

coverings were installed to reduce water loss from evaporation. The garden is re-planted each fall and spring with a variety of herbs and vegetables. The theme of spiritual 'healing' is reiterated with various explanatory signs in this garden.

Besides this garden, native desert-tolerant shrubs, cacti and trees have been planted throughout the property over the past 8 years replacing high-water-use plants. By the latest count we have planted 26 trees, 78 shrubs and 179 cacti. Many trees were strategically planted on the south and southwest sides of buildings to absorb intense sunlight and thus reduce the intense summer heat load on these buildings.

Native desert flowers are planted throughout the property and bloom each spring without any applied water – the typical desert environment. Over 102,000 square feet of lawn that had been planted in grasses, has been replaced with xeri-scape (desert adapted) vegetation. A very large lawn area has been allowed to go dormant most of the year except for festivals and has alone saved over 120,000 gallons in unneeded irrigation.

Energy Use:

To reduce the energy costs of air-conditioning and cooling, higher energy efficiency rated air conditioning units were installed in meeting areas and bedrooms. Five new skylights were added to various conference rooms, to replace over-head lighting fixtures. To further reduce the consumption of electricity, fluorescent bulbs replaced the incandescent lights throughout the campus.

Recycling:

We have been able to gain revenues from our paper and aluminum recycling of close to US\$6,000 per year. To serve the neighboring community we host 5 larger paper containers and 2 larger can containers where community neighbors are invited to drop off recycled materials. The recycled paper is added to combined recycling containers from every office and conference room within the retreat center.

Window insulation:

Double-paned windows were added to the worship area. Re-foaming of all flat roof buildings resulted in greater insulation from the intense heat load of the summers. We replaced water heaters and a furnace with ones of increased energy efficiency. All windows and doors on the property received new screening with the highest quality sheeting avail-

able to reduce sun glare and heat. Window shades were added on the south side of the administration building to permit an immediate reduction in heat load.

2. Eco-pastoral service in Indonesia

In the beginning was a concern

Franciscan Ecopastoral service began its activities in 2000 in Flores, Indonesia. It is an integral part of the JPIC Commission of the Province of St. Michael Archangel, functioning as its division of ecology. Its main concern is to empower the farmers and to upgrade their skills and capacity in cultivating their lands so as to enhance production, which will in turn help to improve their economic situation. In helping the farmers, the Ecopastoral team promotes use of organic fertilizer to replace inorganic fertilizers, which have been promoted by the Indonesian government since the 1970s. Instead of increasing agricultural production, inorganic fertilizers have endangered the quality of the soil and spoiled the ecosystem because of their use of pesticide and other chemical elements.

Eco-pastoral promotes use of these organic fertilizers and empowers the farmers themselves to produce them. It allows farmers to help themselves while creatively using the materials around them as raw material for organic fertilizers.

Besides organic agricultural, Ecopastoral has also promoted programs for forest and water conservation. Forest and water are integral to agriculture. Ecopastoral has therefore encouraged their farmer-groups to conserve and to protect forest and water resources by preparing seeds of several local trees which are helpful in protecting the water. Activities have been extended to include the area schools. The Ecopastoral team trains groups of students and helps them to cultivate gardens around their schools in an organic way. Students are also taught to produce organic fertilizers.

The JPIC Commission of St. Michael Archangel Province in Indonesia is responsible for this service. Fr. Mike Peruche OFM started the Ecopastoral service in Flores, and was replaced in October 2006 by Fr. Ignatius Widiyaryoso. The eco-pastoral team has been supported by the FMM Province in Indonesia, and Sr. Yohana FMM is a member of the team.

Data on empowered groups:

- 20 groups of farmers with about 300 farmers.

- 11 junior and senior high schools in Manggarai regency, Flores.
- 33 elementary schools.

Activities at the Eco-Pastoral Center:

- Ecopastoral center is located in Pagal, Flores, where the friars have a friary and postulant house.
- There are 18 staff members, 4 women and 14 men.
- They run the program (administration and information for all groups).
- Ecopastoral staff cultivates wet land for growing rice and dry land for growing vegetables.
- Cattle-breeding is done for profit, but primarily to get raw material for organic fertilizers. The service has machines which multiply the production of organic fertilizers.
- Preparation of seeds of some local trees for forest conservation and water resources.

Animation and education programs

- To upgrade the practical knowledge and skills of the staff.
- Workshops for school teachers and students to promote organic agriculture and ecology in the curriculum in Manggarai regency. The local government has studied this curriculum and will now promote it as an integral part of the school program.
- To learn and foster the local cultural wisdom, in accordance with the Franciscan spirit on ecology. The Ecopastoral team is welcomed by local people because of their concern for local cultural wisdom.
- To empower some local parishes, especially the youth, to conserve forest and water resources.
- To promote concern for gender issues and for disabled people.
- To introduce the spirituality of St. Francis (the patron of ecology) to the people and students.
- To animate the farmers, through spiritual and pastoral services, showing that Christian faith urges them to care for nature.

Networking

- Ecopastoral works in collaboration with some other non-governmental groups, such as local NGOs and VSO (Voluntary Service Organization). VSO offers a volunteer for the Ecopastoral staff.
- With the local government on programs for forest and water conservation.
- With the department of education to promote the use of orga-

nic agriculture curriculums for the schools (elementary to senior high schools).

- With the local Church, especially some parish priests who are interested in ecology and organic agriculture.
- With religious congregations.
- With the department of Industry which offer some machines for the Ecopastoral service.

3. The presence of the Friars Minor in the Amazon

Among indigenous peoples

The first stage of the history of the presence of the Friars Minor among the indigenous peoples of Munduruku began in 1910. At that time German friars arrived from the Saxony Province and from Santo Antonio Province in Brazil. They remained until the middle of the 1940's when, because of the Second World War, the German friars were expelled from Brazil. A second stage began in the second half of the 1940's, with the arrival of friars from Sacred Heart of Jesus Province in the United States of America. Their arrival offered continuity to the Franciscan presence among the Mundukuru. The third stage began in 1990, with creation of the Custody of São Benedito da Amazônia.

In 1999, the Indigenous Peoples of the Resistance of Santarem organized themselves to strengthen the fight for their ethnic identity and for defense of their territory. In 2000, the Munduruku, together with the Indigenous Peoples of the Resistance, participated in the Indigenous March and in the Indigenous Conference of Corona Vermelha, Bahía, on the occasion of the celebration of 500 years of Black, Indigenous and Popular Resistance.

In 2001, the Friars Minor opened a new house in the city of Jacareacanga, in order to help the indigenous tribes that lived in the area of the Tropas, Kabitutu, Kadiriri, Tapajós, Teles, Pires, Anipiri and Kaburuá rivers. In that same year, an evaluation process of Franciscan missionary presence among the Munduruku began, and the custody freed up three friars to join the Itinerant Fraternity of Solidarity. During 2002 and 2003 the FrancisClarian Missionary Alliance was born as a result of the evaluation of the ninety years of Franciscan presence. Since July 2003, Br. Amarildo has been responsible for the *Coordinación Colegiada del CIMI norte II*, the sector for forming indigenous leaders and missionar-

ies from CIMI (the Indigenous Missionary Council) who work directly with the indigenous peoples of the states of Pará and Amapá.

With the promulgation of the 1988 Constitution, Articles 231-232, the indigenous peoples won the hereditary, original, registered and indispensable rights (which are also non-transferable and inalienable) over their land. After 19 years of promulgation, however, the necessary demarcation of indigenous lands has not been completed by the federal government. The completion of the demarcation had a deadline of five years from the promulgation of the law. Finally, in 2005 the Munduruku obtained their land, which was confirmed by President Lula. Today the greatest challenge is the economic survival of thousands of Munduruku families, due to a great shortage of food and enormous demographic growth. We work in the areas of self-sustenance, political formation, sacramental and liturgical formation, and catechetical and biblical formation. Moreover, we have signed agreements of collaboration with the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God, with CIMI and with the Munduruku, as strong allies in the defense of the rights of the indigenous peoples.

Respect for nature and harmonious living with plants, animals and indigenous people strongly recall the characteristics of Franciscan spirituality shown by indigenous people, who are teachers and experts in the art of living well together. Nature is, at the same time, sister and mother, creating intimate, respectful and familial relationships with itself.

Among rural working men and women

The presence of the friars minor among these people goes back to the beginning of the 1950's, with courses on biblical and catechetical formation, known then as "Good News," and today called "Catechetical Week." From this educational process and from the combination of faith with life on the road by the Church in the Diocese of Santarém, the organizations of the Unions of Workers and Rural Workers were born in Santarém, Belterra, Aveiro, Rurópolis, Itaituba, Alenquer, Monte Alegre, Prainha and Almeirim, and especially the Christian communities in the rural environment.

Two virtues mark the presence of the friars among leaders and catechists: joy and simplicity. A very positive, affectionate and caring relationship exists not only with the leaders, but also with the families that participate in the life of the community. Speaking in Franciscan terms, manual labor as a form of self-sustenance and the cultivation of land as

a form of survival for obtaining one's needs from the womb of mother earth to feed her children are signs of a spirituality that is maternal and tender with the sacred soil of the Amazon. On the other hand, the Amazon is noticeably assaulted by the voracious agro-business market with its "green gold," leaving a trail of destruction and misery for the native population. The great multinational mining companies are another example of aggression against this holy womb. The excavation of large craters within the forests is a great violence to the indigenous people at Sierra dos Carajás. These craters, however, do not compare to the size of the hole that they leave in the stomachs of the black refugees, the *quilombolas* (Porto Trombetas, Oriximiná), and those who live on the riverbanks, the fishermen and the agricultural workers. We also note serious violence in the recent plundering of Alcoa and Juriti, with no benefit whatsoever for the people. Ironically compared with the governmental program "Zero Hunger," the program implemented by the mining companies leaves behind "Zero Benefit."

Among the fishing communities, on the riverbanks.

Until the middle of the 1990's, the Friars Minor were engaged with the majority of the communities that lived on the riverbanks. They helped them to organize and to strengthen the fisher colonies of men and women in the fight to defend the lakes and rivers. One very important victory for these people is securing their right to Unemployment Insurance during times of drought, so that they can obtain the indispensable for survival of the families that depend directly on fishing for their sustenance.

The preservation of the rivers and lakes and the fight against predatory fishing practices (like use of drag-nets), are ways of defending the natural environment. The laws and norms made in assemblies and by agreements among the fishing families themselves, are a sign of mature ecological consciousness. More important, these laws are alternatives to the aggression planned and carried out by the Brazilian government for the construction of hydroelectric plants in the Amazon. The government has acted in complete disregard of the scientific studies concerning the Amazon, an act already denounced by the news media of the entire world. The water and the jungle produce oxygen for the atmosphere. It is not by pure chance that the Amazon is called the "lungs of the earth." Our presence and support, especially in the work of raising ecological consciousness and of harmonious living with all creatures, helps to support commitment to the covenant between the Creator and all creatures.

III - IMPLEMENTATION

For Personal Formation

Think about the many different forms of environmental destruction: air pollution, water pollution, deforestation, climate change, water shortages, loss of biological diversity, etc... How do you feel about it? Reflect on your own attitudes, and on what you might do to promote the common good.

Reflect on the Catholic Social Teaching indicated both above and below. What might you do to raise awareness regarding care for creation? What attitudes and concrete behaviors can you suggest, both at the personal and at the community level?

One of the proposals of the 2003 General Chapter says:

“The General Chapter requests that, during the six-year period 2003-2009 and with the help of the Office of JPIC, all the Entities of the Order should: *a.* examine our style of life and its impact on creation, take on more responsible behavior with regard to the environment and defend the justice of the environment; *b.* promote a non-violent but active style of life and pay particular attention to the resolution of conflicts; *c.* pay special attention to refugees, migrants, ethnic minorities, landless people and fugitives. (LgP, Proposal 39a.)”

Each one of us can ask how we have acted on this proposal. Do we have greater concern for the consequences of our lifestyle on the environment? Have we educated ourselves about the most important ecological problems and their causes? Have we moved beyond solidarity and adopted a simpler lifestyle for ecological reasons?

For Fraternity Meetings

A. Faith Sharing: Rm 8: 18-25

Two readings that can help our fraternity to enter into this reflection are Francis' Canticle of Creation and Psalm 104.

B. Review of Life

Plan a house chapter or a day of recollection where the fraternity can reflect on its attitudes toward creation. Do we respect the world around us? Do we care for creation? How can we better live this aspect of Franciscan spirituality?

One possible way to do this:

1. The guardian, or the person responsible for facilitating the discussion, encourages the brothers to read this chapter a few days before the meeting.
2. Begin the meeting begin by reading or singing the Cantic of Creation.
3. The brother in charge briefly introduces the theme, highlighting the most important aspects to be covered. The other brothers contribute their thoughts, including experiences they have had or are currently having in this area.
4. Reflect on what the fraternity has done to respond to Proposal 39a of the 2003 General Chapter (printed above).
5. Dialogue about how the brothers are impacting the environment through their use of electricity, automobiles, heat and air conditioning, water, garbage, paper, recyclables, genetically modified foods and/or “fair trade” goods, and make a concrete decision on how to improve their environmental practices.
6. End the meeting with a prayer of thanksgiving for the day’s blessings, and with a closing song.

C. Signs or Gestures Expressing Care for Creation

The concrete acts or signs that the fraternity decides on must come from our attentive listening to the Word of God as revealed through the Bible, the Magisterium, our charism and our socio-political/ economic reality.

Here are some possible actions:

1. The fraternity organizes a day of prayer and reflection in the countryside, which includes a meditative walk through the woods or by a lake, so as to see, hear, touch, smell, and appreciate God’s goodness. The brothers share in common prayer what they experienced during the walk.
2. The fraternity celebrates Earth Day (April 22) or World Environment Day (June 5) by organizing, with lay partners, a conference on a Franciscan response to environmental problems, including a prayer vigil on the theme.
3. The fraternity, desiring to show reverence for creation and a commitment to a simple lifestyle and thriftiness, reflects on how it can live out concretely in daily life the six “R’s”:

- *Re-think* our lifestyle, putting priority on basic needs before niceties
- *Re-structure* our economic system, to emphasize the satisfaction of the basic needs of all people on the planet
- *Reduce* as much as possible our consumption of resources
- *Re-use* materials to extend their useful lifespan
- *Recycle* products once their useful life is over, so they may be reincorporated into the manufacture of new products
- *Redistribute* resources in an equitable way, in line with the planet's capacity to satisfy our needs.

We are aware that in light of the huge problems of our planet Earth, these suggestions might appear to be mere band-aids. However, we cannot forget that our Savior came to us in swaddling clothes and was laid in a manger (Lk 2:6), and that the conversion of our founder took place in the simple act of embracing a leper.

D. A Prayer

The Canticle of the Creatures

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,
 especially Sir Brother Sun,
 Who is the day through whom You give us light.
 And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor;
 and bears a likeness of You, Most High One.

Praised be You, my Lord,
 through Sister Moon and the stars,
 In heaven You formed them
 clear and precious and beautiful.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind,
and through the air, cloudy and serene,
and every kind of weather,
through whom You give sustenance to Your creatures.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water,
who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
through whom You light the night,
and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.

Praised be You my Lord through our Sister Mother Earth,
who sustains and governs us,
and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs.

Praised be You, my Lord,
through those who give pardon for Your love,
and bear infirmity and tribulation.
Blessed are those who endure in peace,
for by You, Most High, they shall be crowned.

Praised be You, my Lord,
through our Sister Bodily Death,
from whom no one living can escape.
Woe to those who die in mortal sin.
Blessed are those whom death will find in Your most holy will,
for the second death shall do them no harm.

Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks
and serve Him with great humility.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

From Scripture

1. “God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them (...). God also said: “See, I give you every seed-bearing plant all over the earth and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit on it to be your food; and to all the animals of the land, all the birds of the air, and all the living creatures that crawl on the ground, I give all the green plants for food.” And so it happened. God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good (*Gn* 1:27, 29-31a).
 “Then the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and he placed there the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the Lord God made various trees grow that were delightful to look at and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and bad. [...] The Lord God then took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it” (*Gn* 2:8-9, 15).
2. “For creation awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children of God; for creation was made subject to futility, not of its own accord but because of the one who subjected it, in hope that creation itself would be set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now; and not only that, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, we also groan within ourselves as we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies” (*Rm* 8: 19-23).
3. “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. I also saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Behold, God’s dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will always be with them (as their God). He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, (for) the old order has passed away. The one who sat on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new” (*Rv* 21:1-5a).

From Church Documents

1. “The man of today seems ever to be under threat from what he produces, that is to say from the result of the work of his hands and, even more so, of the work of his intellect and the tendencies of his will.
 [...]”

This state of menace for man from what he produces shows itself in various directions and various degrees of intensity. We seem to be incre-

asingly aware of the fact that the exploitation of the earth, the planet on which we are living, demands rational and honest planning. At the same time, exploitation of the earth not only for industrial but also for military purposes and the uncontrolled development of technology outside the framework of a long-range authentically humanistic plan often bring with them a threat to man's natural environment, alienate him in his relations with nature and remove him from nature. Man often seems to see no other meaning in his natural environment than what serves for immediate use and consumption. Yet it was the Creator's will that man should communicate with nature as an intelligent and noble "master" and "guardian", and not as a heedless "exploiter" and "destroyer".

The development of technology and the development of contemporary civilization, which is marked by the ascendancy of technology, demand a proportional development of morals and ethics. For the present, this last development seems unfortunately to be always left behind. Accordingly, in spite of the marvel of this progress, in which it is difficult not to see also authentic signs of man's greatness, signs that in their creative seeds were revealed to us in the pages of the Book of Genesis, as early as where it describes man's creation, this progress cannot fail to give rise to disquiet on many counts. The first reason for disquiet concerns the essential and fundamental question: Does this progress, which has man for its author and promoter, make human life on earth "more human" in every aspect of that life? Does it make it more "worthy of man"? There can be no doubt that in various aspects it does. But the question keeps coming back with regard to what is most essential -whether in the context of this progress man, as man, is becoming truly better, that is to say more mature spiritually, more aware of the dignity of his humanity, more responsible, more open to others, especially the neediest and the weakest, and readier to give and to aid all" (*RH* 15).

2. Among the innumerable ways that God provides for humankind to search for truth, the path of Saint Francis is perhaps the most richly suggestive of all. He surely attracts many people with his original and captivating experience, and Franciscans should keep that in mind as they present themselves to the men and women of today.
[...]

Franciscanism has much to say to contemporary society, especially in industrialized countries. They are trapped by consumerism and pay little attention to the suffering of millions of creatures who die due to hunger. It has much to say to those who arm themselves for war rather than promote peace, and to those who pollute nature rather than care for it. These people almost make the earth into an enemy, the earth for which Francis sang praise. Because of this, you as Franciscans are called to provide an answer to the people of today, offering them a sound vision and teaching them the correct use of things. You need to help them form consciences characterized by an enlightened and balanced attitude. Such an incisive presence on your part will do much to foster peace and the progress of

humankind, and to recover our authentic Christian values. As sons of the saint of evangelical poverty, of the man of peace, of the friend of nature, you are best equipped to transmit the message of Francis to the men and women of today, a message that is always current because of its power to renew consciences and society (John Paul II, *Discourse to the General Chapter of the Conventual Franciscans*, 1989).

3. "It must also be said that the proper ecological balance will not be found without directly addressing the structural forms of poverty that exist throughout the world. Rural poverty and unjust land distribution in many countries, for example, have led to subsistence farming and to the exhaustion of the soil. Once their land yields no more, many farmers move on to clear new land, thus accelerating uncontrolled deforestation, or they settle in urban centers which lack the infrastructure to receive them. Likewise, some heavily indebted countries are destroying their natural heritage, at the price of irreparable ecological imbalances, in order to develop new products for export. In the face of such situations it would be wrong to assign responsibility to the poor alone for the negative environmental consequences of their actions. Rather, the poor, to whom the earth is entrusted no less than to others, must be enabled to find a way out of their poverty. This will require a courageous reform of structures, as well as new ways of relating among peoples and States.
[...]

Modern society will find no solution to the ecological problem unless it takes a serious look at its life style. In many parts of the world society is given to instant gratification and consumerism while remaining indifferent to the damage which these cause. As I have already stated, the seriousness of the ecological issue lays bare the depth of man's moral crisis. If an appreciation of the value of the human person and of human life is lacking, we will also lose interest in others and in the earth itself. Simplicity, moderation and discipline, as well as a spirit of sacrifice, must become a part of everyday life, lest all suffer the negative consequences of the careless habits of a few.

An education in ecological responsibility is urgent: responsibility for oneself, for others, and for the earth. This education cannot be rooted in mere sentiment or empty wishes. Its purpose cannot be ideological or political. It must not be based on a rejection of the modern world or a vague desire to return to some "paradise lost". Instead, a true education in responsibility entails a genuine conversion in ways of thought and behavior. Churches and religious bodies, non-governmental and governmental organizations, indeed all members of society, have a precise role to play in such education" (John Paul II, *Message for the XXIII World Day of Peace*, 1990, 11, 13).

4. "Finally, to develop a profound eucharistic spirituality that is also capable of significantly affecting the fabric of society, the Christian people, in giving thanks to God through the Eucharist, should be conscious that

they do so in the name of all creation, aspiring to the sanctification of the world and working intensely to that end. The Eucharist itself powerfully illuminates human history and the whole cosmos. In this sacramental perspective we learn, day by day, that every ecclesial event is a kind of sign by which God makes himself known and challenges us. The eucharistic form of life can thus help foster a real change in the way we approach history and the world. The liturgy itself teaches us this, when, during the presentation of the gifts, the priest raises to God a prayer of blessing and petition over the bread and wine, “fruit of the earth,” “fruit of the vine” and “work of human hands.” With these words, the rite not only includes in our offering to God all human efforts and activity, but also leads us to see the world as God’s creation, which brings forth everything we need for our sustenance. The world is not something indifferent, raw material to be utilized simply as we see fit. Rather, it is part of God’s good plan, in which all of us are called to be sons and daughters in the one Son of God, Jesus Christ (cf. *Eph* 1:4-12). The justified concern about threats to the environment present in so many parts of the world is reinforced by Christian hope, which commits us to working responsibly for the protection of creation. The relationship between the Eucharist and the cosmos helps us to see the unity of God’s plan and to grasp the profound relationship between creation and the “new creation” inaugurated in the resurrection of Christ, the new Adam. Even now we take part in that new creation by virtue of our Baptism (cf. *Col* 2:12ff.). Our Christian life, nourished by the Eucharist, gives us a glimpse of that new world – new heavens and a new earth – where the new Jerusalem comes down from heaven, from God, ‘prepared as a bride adorned for her husband’” (*Scar* 92).

From Franciscan Sources

1. “This happy traveler, hurrying to leave the world as the exile of pilgrimage, was helped, and not just a little, by what is in the world. Toward the princes of darkness, he certainly used it as a battle. Toward God, however, he used it as the clearest mirror of goodness. In art he praises the Artist; whatever he discovers in creatures he guides to the Creator. He rejoices in all the works of the Lord’s hands, and through their delightful display he gazes on their life-giving reason and cause. In beautiful things he discerns Beauty Itself; all good things cry out to him: “the One who made us is the Best”. Following the footprints imprinted on creatures, he follows his Beloved everywhere; out of them all he makes for himself a ladder by which he might reach the Throne. He embraces all things with an intensity of unheard devotion, speaking to them about the Lord and exhorting them to praise Him. He spares lanterns, lamps, and candles unwilling to use his hand to put out their brightness which is a sign of the eternal light. He walked reverently over rocks, out of respect for Him who is called the Rock. When he came to the verse “you have set me high upon the rock,” in order to express it more respectfully, he would say: “You have set me high under the feet of the Rock.” When the

brothers are cutting wood he forbids them to cut down the whole tree, so that it might have hope of sprouting again. He commands the gardener to leave the edges of the garden undisturbed, so that in their season the green of herbs and the beauty of flowers may proclaim the beautiful Father of all. He even orders that within the garden a smaller garden should be set aside for aromatic and flowering herbs so that those who see them may recall the memory of eternal savor. He picks up little worms from the road so they will not be trampled underfoot. That the bees not perish of hunger in the icy winter, he commands that the honey and the finest wine should be set out for them. He calls all animals by a fraternal name, although, among all kinds of beasts, he especially loves the meek. Who is capable of describing all of this? Truly, that fountain-like goodness, which will be all in all, already shone clearly in all for this saint" (2C 165).

2. "Aroused by everything to divine love, he rejoiced in all the works of the Lord's hands and through their delightful display he rose into their life-giving reason and cause. In beautiful things he contemplated beauty itself and through the footprints impressed in things he followed his beloved everywhere, out of them all making for himself a ladder through which he could climb up to lay hold of him who is utterly desirable.

With an intensity of unheard devotion he savored in each and every creature- as in so many rivulets- that fontal Goodness, and discerned an almost celestial choir in the chords of power and activity given to them by God, and, like the prophet David, he sweetly encouraged them to praise the Lord" (*LMj* 9,1).

3. Other References: *1C* 77, 79, 81; *AC* 88.
4. Beyond the difficulties that afflict individual sectors of human life and activity, there is an overarching problem that urgently demands collaboration without limit. It is our relationship to the environment. In this area we can see how humanity has produced damage that is at times irreparable. At the same time, many voices are calling for a reversal of this tendency and for efforts to save the earth from the consequences of pollution and the dangers of the use of nuclear energy. At the moment, however, we lack well-elaborated and clear motivation to sustain these choices. We must contribute, then, to an understanding of the relationship between humankind and nature, according to the plan of God which was rediscovered and proclaimed by Francis. We are called to use the earth, but not to appropriate it; called to respect the earth and not to exploit it. The logic of industrial power should give way to a concern for the quality of life, a growing demand on the part of the people. We must therefore overcome any culpable indifference on our part. And it is not only opportune, but necessary, that we collaborate with the large organizations that already defend the environment (Ministers General of the Franciscan Family, *The Spirit of Assisi*, April 16, 1987).

Ongoing Formation in the area of Care for Creation

1. The strong experience of God as Father and the Highest Good characterized the life of St. Francis. It led him to an attitude of gratitude and praise toward the Creator for His wonders and made him a brother to all people and creatures (*RFF* 37).
2. All the Friars and candidates should be formed to preach peace and justice through their deeds and to overcome evil by doing good. And they should show feelings of respect for Creation in so far as it is a sign of the Creator, inducing others to be constructors of peace and to safeguard creation (*RFF* 86).

This formation wishes to propose a Franciscan theology that responds to the challenges of our time:

A theology of Creation that nourishes the praise of the Creator, teaches men respect for created things and brings the light of faith to bear on the ecological problems of our time (*RFF* 227).

3. While man is tempted to make an instrument of creation, the Friar Minor, following the example of St. Francis, finds it instead to be a motive for praise, in an attitude of reverence and even of submission. This attitude offers him a totally singular perspective in his approach to and study of creation (*RS* 49).

The Order encourages the friars to dedicate themselves to the exact, natural and environmental sciences, in order to recuperate “the All in all”, to admire the rays of splendor and goodness of God present in his creatures, to favor “a fraternal relationship” with them, to contribute to the quality of life and to protect the balance of creation” (*RS* 50).

4

THEY SHALL NOT ACQUIRE ANYTHING AS THEIR OWN

GENERAL CONSTITUTIONS

Art. 72

§1 As pilgrims and strangers in this world, having given up personal property, the friars are to acquire neither house nor place nor any other things for themselves, in accordance with the Rule. Therefore they are to dedicate themselves and everything they use for their life and work to the service of the Church and the world in poverty and humility.

§2 The buildings that are constructed for the friars and everything which the friars buy for themselves or which they use are to be in keeping with poverty according to the circumstances of places and times.

§3 Goods that are given for the use of the friars are to be shared for the benefit of the poor in accordance with what the particular Statutes legitimately prescribe.

Art. 73

The ownership of buildings and goods that the friars need for their lives and work is to remain in reality under the control of those whom the Friars serve - benefactors, Church or the Holy See.

Art. 74

§1 If a candidate for the Order has property, he is to dispose of it before temporary profession in such a way that, while he retains ownership for himself, he consigns the administration, usufruct and use of these goods during the time of his temporary vows to whomever he pleases, but not to the Order. This must be done by way of a valid document.

§2 To change these dispositions for a just reason, and to take any action concerning this property, the permission of the Minister Provincial is required in accordance with the particular Statutes.

Art. 75

§1 By virtue of the vow of poverty, in accordance with the Rule, each friar who is about to make solemn profession must, before that profession, renounce in writing the ownership of all that he actually possesses or will possess through necessary inheritance. This act of renunciation will come into force on the day of profession. The property is to be assigned to a person or persons of his choice, but preferably in favor of the poor. It is not lawful for him to keep back anything for himself in any way.

§2 No friar, for any motive, should dare to induce a friar about to be professed to leave anything to him or to the Order.

§3 The particular Statutes shall indicate what is to be done so that a renunciation of property before solemn profession will have force in civil law from the day of profession.

I – FOR REFLECTION

The text cited above, from Article 72 of the General Constitutions, forms the basis of the following reflection. The theme of Article 72 is the renunciation of property. It sums up Francis' own preferential option and that of the whole history of the Order until our own time. It speaks of personal renunciation of ownership, but refers to communal renunciation as well, which also forms part of our life. The second paragraph insists on the concrete, material dimension of the theme when it speaks of buildings and of "the things that the brothers acquire or use."

After affirming this general principle of renunciation of property, Article 72 admits, nonetheless, that the brothers may make use of things "for their life and work." This use of things is justified if developed "in poverty and humility, at the service of the Church and of the world." Service to the Church and the world justifies, then, the use of goods and, at the same time, indicates their true significance: they are not for us, but principally for those we serve.

Consider what Francis says in his *Testament*: *Let the brothers be careful not to receive in any way churches or poor dwellings or anything else built for them unless they are according to the holy poverty we have promised in the Rule. As pilgrims and strangers, let them always be guests there.*¹

1 Test 24

So Francis himself, at the end of his life, justifies receiving and using material goods (churches, poor dwellings, etc.) but only if they respect the criteria of “conforming to holy poverty which we promise in the Rule.” The second paragraph of Article 72 is a faithful echo of these words of Francis.

1. Principles which form this attitude

In Franciscan language this option for poverty is expressed in the phrase “with nothing of one’s own.” The Rule uses this expression to point to the evangelical life, and our profession formula expressly states that each brother take a vow to live “in obedience, with nothing of one’s own, and in chastity.” Let us reflect briefly on the principles which serve as the foundation for this choice to “live with nothing of one’s own.”²

a. All good things come from God

A life *with nothing of one’s own* derives from the conviction that all things come from God and that, therefore, nothing belongs to oneself. Scripture reminds us that “the earth is God’s,” and since all things come from God, no one can consider anything as one’s own personal property.³ This conviction was expressed often by Francis who affirmed several times that only God is “all good, every good, the true and supreme good, who alone is good,”⁴ and that to Him all things belong, because it is He “to Whom all good belongs.”⁵ Francis, speaking of goodness, refers as much to spiritual goods as to material. Spiritual goods are our natural gifts, our talents, and the things that we know how to do well. We cannot attribute to ourselves any particular merit, rather we recognize that whatever might be considered a gift or talent comes from God. Material goods – the things we use and the things that are at our disposal – are not our property because, since they come from God, they belong in the full and radical sense to Him alone. Goods are held only in stewardship; hence no one is able to claim ownership.

Francis remained very aware of how easy it would be for someone to fool oneself on this point and believe that one might actually pos-

2 LR 1,1

3 Cf. Lev 25, 23; Ex 9, 29; Dt 10, 14; Ps 24, 1; 47, 8; Is 66, 1

4 ER 23,9; cf. also 2LtF 62; Adm 7,4; 8,3; 12,2

5 ER 17, 18

sess something. For this reason he put the brothers on watch against this trap: “And you have nothing in this world or in that to come. And you think that you will possess this world’s vanities for a long time, but you are deceived... And every talent, ability, knowledge, and wisdom they think they have will be taken away from them.”⁶

This position is upheld within the Franciscan theological tradition. Duns Scotus, in contrast to Thomas Aquinas, held that the right to property did not exist in the state of innocence, neither by natural law nor by divine law. Only after the fall did it become necessary to distinguish between what is mine and what is yours.⁷ Private property appeared, then, only in a second moment, as a necessary consequence of sin. It might even be seen as the means through which greater evils could be avoided, evils which, due to the absence of the right to property, would adversely affect the weakest (it is held that the right to private property protects the weak from the being overpowered by the strong). This doctrine, insisting on the universal destination of goods and on a social contract regulating private property, would undoubtedly have a strong impact. Such a doctrine is also clearly in line with the most recent social teaching of the Church.

Moreover, the conviction that all goods come from God clarifies the vow of living with nothing of one’s own. Instead of viewing this vow as simply an aesthetic virtue it is now to be seen as a way to live out the truth. The Franciscan who renounces possessions should not feel heroic, as if following through with some exceptional and virtuous action. Rather, to renounce possessions is to recognize humbly the truth of things because, in reality, only God is the true owner of all goods. All we can do is to be mindful of this truth. As often happens, and in this case as well, humility is simply truth.

b. The poor in relation with others

Francis of Assisi is considered by all to be an expert on poverty. It is important, therefore, to note that in his writings he insists above all on uniting poverty to relations with one’s neighbor. An individual would judge his or her own level of poverty not by taking inventory of material possessions, but rather by attempting to understand how he or she lives in relation to others.

6 *1LtF* 13-16.

7 Cf. John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio*, IV, distinction 15, quaestio 2, n. 3-9.

Admonition 14 comments on the beatitude “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Francis connects this Gospel affirmation not with material poverty but with one’s relations with others. He says that “There are many who, while insisting on prayers and obligations, inflict many abstinences and punishments on their bodies. But they are immediately offended and disturbed about a single word which seems to be harmful to their bodies or about something which might be taken away from them. These people are not poor in spirit.” The true test of poverty is one’s relation with one’s neighbor. How does one react when insulted, or has something taken, even if it is something insignificant?

Admonition 11 runs along a similar vein: “That servant of God who does not become angry or disturbed at anyone lives correctly without anything of his own.”⁸ Francis helps us understand what it means to live without anything of one’s own, by giving us the example of someone who “does not become angry or disturbed at anything.” Once again, the poverty of one who lives without anything of his own is united to a patient and peaceful relation with one’s neighbor. Anger and disturbance, which are two attitudes against which Francis often kept guard, manifest a profound spirit of appropriation in that anger and disturbance are derived by externals.⁹ Anger reveals that I believe myself to be the master of my brother or sister, and that I am angry because he or she is not behaving as I would like.

The Admonitions discussed above are just two examples. There are a number of other writings of Francis which emphasize that living with nothing of one’s own does not refer simply to material goods, but to the idea of relating to one’s neighbor as well.¹⁰

This way of understanding poverty is closely linked to minority, which is discussed in another section of this document. This approach to poverty is countercultural in that it offers an alternative to the mentality of conquest and success at all cost which is prevalent in our culture.

c. Restitution

For Francis, poverty is linked with, and is an act of, restitution. Several episodes of his life are significant in this regard, referred to in

8 *Adm* 11, 3.

9 *Adm* 11,2-3; 27,2; *ER* 5,7; 10,4; *LR* 7,3; *2LtF* 44;

10 Cf. *Adm* 5, 5-8; 7; 8, 3; *ER* 14; 17, 4.

the first biographies.¹¹ For Francis to give a mantle to the poor is nothing other than restitution, understood as justice. He confesses that he would have felt like a thief if he had not returned this article of clothing to the one poorer than he. In his own writings Francis often invites us to “return them to the most high Lord to whom all good belongs,”¹² and to give thanks to the Lord.¹³ The act of thanksgiving and praise is part of the restitution.

For us as lesser brothers, restitution is a good keystone to keep in mind as we engage in assistance to the poor and the needy. Work with the poor is not something which puts us on a higher plane than our brothers and sisters, and which we undertake so that we might feel good about ourselves. Instead, these are actions which restore the goods that come from God back to the chosen representatives of God – the poor. As previously, here too the restitution of goods is not a virtuous action but rather has to do with living out the truth. If all good comes from God, then to Him and to our brothers and sisters it must be returned. It is a matter of justice rather than charity.

When considering large-scale proposals it is also appropriate to think in terms of restitution. Consider, for example, international debt forgiveness for the southern hemisphere which was much discussed in preparation for the Jubilee year of 2000. The tendency may have been to view this as a charitable act. However, it is less an act of charity and more a matter of restitution to post-colonial countries. Restitution can therefore be very useful in interpreting relations among countries.

The work that we undertake in favor of the poor also reflects the concept of restitution. We often receive money from benefactors in order that we in turn might assist those in need. We thereby return this money to the poor through our activities. In these cases as well it is simply a matter of restitution.

2. Our material poverty

This is a difficult and delicate topic, as material poverty does not, as a rule, accurately describe the way in which we live our daily lives.

11 Cf. *2C* 87; 92.

12 Cf. *Adm* 7, 4; 11, 4; 18, 2; 28, 1; *ER* 17, 17.

13 Cf. *1LtCus* 7; *2LtF* 61; *ER* 17, 18.

This is true not only in the wealthy West, where it is plainly evident, but also in other countries, where the status of the friars is normally higher than that of the poor.

A discussion on this topic can easily lead to either platitudes or denunciations. We need to avoid these poles and admit that our poverty is always a little anomalous. For us friars, as for Francis, we never have to confront a totally precarious situation or a lack of security. We, like Francis, have the security (including economic) that comes from the brotherhood. We know that we can count on the brothers. This gives us a security for the future that the poor do not ordinarily have. It assuredly is not something we can relinquish, for to do so would be to relinquish the fraternity, and in our life the value of the fraternity is perhaps more important than poverty. Moreover, we have to recognize that we often possess the education and cultural formation that constitute great richness, although perhaps not in a material sense.

In addition, in current terminology, and within our lives as brothers, the word *poverty* (which we probably cannot renounce, for all the importance that it has had in our history) does not indicate an absolute absence of goods, but rather, a responsible and justifiable use of things – an *aesthetic of what is a sufficiency*, as opposed to the prevailing culture of consumerism. Secondly, it can suggest a possible route toward greater poverty. If we desire to be poorer, including in a material sense, we begin by sharing the goods we use with the poor of our time. We will then see that sharing is a good route toward making us poorer. This sharing grows out of the idea of restitution referred to previously and reclaims solidarity with the poor, toward a true response to our Franciscan tradition which has always put us on guard against the risk of accumulation. We do not want to accumulate goods or money or any other resource, but, rather, share them with the brothers and thereby restore them to God. On the other hand, we need to remember that Francis opted for the poor more than for poverty. Whereas a discussion of poverty in the abstract ends up as a dead-end street, to speak of the poor and of sharing their lives leads us back to the concrete and to the central intuition of Francis.

The way all of this is lived out can be verified (or perhaps not?) by the reports that our brother treasurers present to us in Chapter, in the choices that we make with regard to the goods that we receive, in the choice of financial institutions with which we do business, and in so many other concrete dimensions of our life.

II - SHARED EXPERIENCE

When we become persons *sine proprio* we are conscious that “nothing belongs to us, everything is a good received by us and destined to be shared and given back” (LSR, 19). With this “understanding of gift,” which the Extraordinary General Chapter of 2006 has boldly evoked, a new and dynamic reflection on living with nothing of one’s own is possible.

Rather than a simple question of being without things, which at any rate remain gifts of God to be shared in solidarity with all creatures, we must understand the expression *sine proprio* in light of the concept of freedom. It contemplates freedom from the basic human condition of a meddlesome and high-handed ego which desires to take possession of all things.

As such, *sine proprio* refers to those gifts that are received in a life lived in relation to others. In this sense, the maturation of the disciple who follows the poor and crucified Jesus consists of growing to be “poor in spirit,” recognizing that all things are gifts that must be restored. It is true that “we, images of the Creator, recognize ourselves as recipients of this gift of God. We are not the owners of our life, but rather we receive it constantly as a gift from the Most High. We have the capacity to give and to give ourselves gratuitously to others through a movement which is similar to the constant self-giving of God” (LSR, 22).

Within this vista of new relationships – with God, with oneself, with others, with things – we are able to hear the experience of our brother friars who live immersed among peoples and diverse cultures, including those of other faiths. The silent presence of the brothers both in Libya and Turkey testifies, particularly among the Muslims, to the strength of charity that is done in service to the very least: this is a listening filled with reverence, a non-violent presence. Similarly, sharing life with the Orthodox allows us to understand and meet the other who is different from us, obliging us to rid ourselves of prejudices and defenses.

If we stay locked in our own comfort zones it will be difficult for us to understand and live *sine proprio*. The poor “who are our teachers” (GGCC, 91, 93) show us the way. The evangelical and fully committed presence of our brothers with the marginalized of Columbia suggests the concrete possibility of learning from the poor and of expressing our promise to live with nothing of our own in a new way.

In the same way, though in a completely different context, the presence of brothers among the Turkish immigrants in Germany offers a model for eliminating barriers and breaking down the new walls raised in the Western world. It encourages us to overcome the distrust and fear that arise even among “good” Christians toward those who are different.

These experiences point out that we rediscover *sine proprio* only in new relationships with ourselves, with others and in brotherhood. Only then is poverty a sign of hope and charity that alerts us to look ahead and to be open to uncharted horizons of communion.

1. Fraternity with the displaced of Colombia

Sincelejo is a Colombian city on the Caribbean Coast with approximately 350,000 inhabitants. Of these, 64,000 are refugees from the internal war that plagues the country. The belts of misery that surround this small city lack the most basic public utilities. There is no drinking water, resulting in dramatic health problems, especially of the skin and stomach. The electric grids are illegal and there is no telephone system.

The Friars Minor of the Province of Saint Paul the Apostle have established a fraternity in the midst of these communities. It is comprised of four brothers and is called San Damiano. The brothers are committed to honoring the name of their fraternity by constantly remembering the words of Jesus to Brother Francis: “Repair my Church which is falling into ruins”.

In their reflective reading of this passage of hagiography, the brothers hear the voice of the Lord saying to them again today: “Brothers, repair my Church which is falling into ruins; repair the social fabric torn by violence; repair the life-projects interrupted by violence; repair the popular organizations destroyed by violence; repair the organization that yesterday united the small farmers before all this violence began; repair the confidence of the people.”

The brothers know that these repairs cannot be accomplished except with the help of the social sciences and by establishment of an extremely supportive micro economy. They also know that these tools will not work without the power of the Spirit of God that inspired the lives of Clare and Francis. This is the Spirit which Saint Thomas More described in his famous work, *Utopia*.

For this reason, a group of secular Franciscans, inspired by Francis and Clare, have formed the Saint Thomas More Foundation which is dedicated to this task of this reconstruction. Francis and Clare understood their work not as a new construction, but rather as a project of renovation built on the apostolic foundation already laid by Jesus. The lay men and women of Saint Thomas More, along with the brothers of San Damiano, know that they are re-building upon the firm foundation of the culture of a people whose roots and wisdom have been established over time. These roots include the ancestral traditions of the indigenous Zenu culture; of the Afro-Colombians who have lived in this area since colonial Spanish times; of the Mestizos; and of the Sambos, offspring of indigenous, Spanish, Africans and Mestizos.

In this place, justice and peace are reborn and kiss anew as in the psalm. One cannot build justice on foundations of impunity and one cannot build peace while justice is hidden. To achieve this justice and peace, truth in the light of the Spirit must flourish in order to expose the cruelty of the killers. This action will revive peace, a peace symbolized by the rainbow. This rainbow is also the marvelous symbol of diversity and respect. Once again the victims are prepared to raise their sights to see on the horizon the birth of a new Utopia of peace with dignity from the very heart of the people, the heart of solidarity, the heart where the people's tenderness lives.

The brothers of the fraternity of San Damiano and the laymen and laywomen of the Franciscan Foundation of Saint Thomas More continue to walk hand in hand with this segment of the Colombian people, victims of violence and strangers in their own country.

2. Apostolic Vicariate of Bengasi, Libya

The Apostolic Vicariate of Bengasi, where I have been for almost ten years, extends from Ras Lanuf, on the Gulf of Sidra, to the city of Tobruk, 120 kms (75 miles) from the border with Egypt. It is almost 800 kms (500 miles) long.

The region is called Cirenaica, and Bengasi is its principal city, the Seat of the Apostolic Vicariate and the center of all its pastoral activity. In Bengasi, one also finds the convent of the Franciscan fraternity along with a small church that today is the cathedral of the bishop. The convent is rightly called: "the priests' house," because from time to time priests from other congregations live there along with the secular

priests. After the revolution of September 1, 1969, we have no other places that can serve as convents for the Friars Minor. The local authorities had confiscated all places of worship, including the cathedral of the bishop, along with his residence, and all the convents of the friars and sisters. There were times when the Church was identified with the Italian colony.

Today we truly live “*sine proprio*,” since the bishop, (like the brothers and the priests) does not have a residence of his own. He lives in a small apartment situated above the garage at the priests’ house. For practical and economic reasons, he lives as a brother. He participates in the prayer life, the Liturgy of the Hours and the meals of the community. In regard to pastoral activity, he shares space and place with the Franciscan/priest fraternity.

We need to highlight the fact that the small church-cathedral and the adjoining priests’ house do not belong to the vicariate or to the Order. They have only been lent to us “*ad usum*” by the authorities after the Islamic-Christian Congress of 1976. They are the property of the Libyan Government.

We, the bishop, priests and brothers, feel truly and effectively “*sine proprio*,” because not only are we conscious that we are “strangers,” that is to say, without citizenship in this country, but we also know that this complex where we live and work could one day be “re-confiscated” by the local authorities.

So we live our life and mission day-to-day, confident in the Lord’s providence, and trying to move forward in peace with the authorities. We give witness to both the presence of Christ and the charity of the Church.

3. Franciscan Fraternity among the Turks and Kurds in Cologne

In Köln (Cologne) there is a Franciscan fraternity of five friars in Vingst, a poor part of the city. Many migrants from Sicily and Turkey live in this sector. The friars live in an apartment in a house of the Parish where three other families also live. Since 1994 we are involved in work with the Turkish youth in this part of Cologne. Every Thursday and Friday (and sometimes Saturday and Sunday) about forty young Turks meet with one of the friars. There are four other leaders, former members of the group. We play soccer or other games, organize com-

puter work, try to do homework for school or preparation for exams. We sometimes cook something for the group and share the evening meal. If someone has problems with the police or in court, we try to help them resolve the issues. The members of the group are all Muslims, so we respect Muslim feasts and customs. Sometimes we speak about religion, especially Islam and Christianity. Every year we organize one trip to a town in Germany, and another to a different European country. We have visited Berlin and Hamburg several times, and have also been to Amsterdam, Paris and Rome. We usually travel with about fifteen young Turkish boys and girls. These trips have been a good experience, and the days spent together help participants to grow closer. We seek to experience the culture and the history of the places we visit. There is respect and mutual understanding among us, Muslims and Christians.

Many refugees live in this part of Cologne, and most come from Turkey. A lot of them are of Kurdish origin. The fraternity has good contact with some of these people, sharing life with them and helping care for their needs. Three Kurdish refugees and one Tunisian, who had no legal status within Germany, have lived with the friars for years. There is a campaign for those without legal status in Cologne; it has been organized by the churches and other progressive people. This campaign is called “No human being is illegal,” and the friars take part in it giving shelter to some refugees. They share daily life, living together in an apartment. The friars helped some Muslim students from Morocco to find apartments. One of them lived with the friars for some weeks. His brother married a Christian woman from Vingst, whom he met in the friars’ youth group. The friars helped organize the wedding, and participated in the ceremony.

Various Muslim religious organizations are headquartered in Cologne. Many Muslims from Turkey, Bosnia, Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia live there. The friars have promoted Christian–Muslim dialogue since 1982, and have organized meetings and peace prayers with both the Muslims and the Jewish community. In 1996 and 2006 they organized peace celebrations for Muslims, Christians and Jews commemorating the anniversary of the Pope’s prayer for peace in Assisi on October 27, 1986. These prayers took place in the *Domforum*, a Catholic meeting center near the Cathedral of Cologne. The atmosphere was good between the groups, and helped to bring people together.

III – IMPLEMENTATION

For Personal Formation

1. Each friar can reflect on these orientations of the Order:
 - a. The friars ought to share, within their possibilities, in the life, story and hope of the poor and marginalized, so that the friars might be evangelized by them. The friars ought to be promoters of justice, and heralds and builders of peace and reconciliation, through their life and their word. Thus they can become prophetic signs that denounce without fear all that destroys the dignity of humanity and of creation (*Priorities for 1997-2003*, p. 8).
 - b. We contemplate Christ our only Lord, we love Him and listen to His Word in the measure that we listen to, love and are in solidarity with the poor. The love of Christ spurs us to go out to meet the poor, to walk with them without staff, haversack, bread, money, or spare tunic. The love of Christ leads us to the “lepers” of our times, to the poor, and calls us to be poor among them, servants of all and submissive to all, peaceful and humble of heart. The love of Christ persuades us to be real minors and to live “with nothing of our own” (*OFM Prioritates 2003-2009*, p. 25-26).
2. Encourage a careful evaluation of how the spirit of “restitution” is being lived in the community. Possible reflection questions might be: Am I willing to leave my present ministry? Transfer to a different friar community? Relinquish the projects I am working on? What is my relationship to money and possessions? Is our standard of living like that of the least in the society where we live? Are we capable of sharing what we possess? What position does poverty take in our “personal life project” and what role does it occupy in our mission?

For Fraternity Meetings

A. Faith Sharing: Mt 6:25-34

- In order to integrate the evangelical spirit of service to the least among us, the community can share a prayerful reading of this Gospel passage, keeping in mind as well

the context of the passage: confidence in Divine Providence as the fruit of a faithful prayer life (*Mt* 6, 7-15: the Our Father); fasting (*Mt* 6, 16-17: sobriety of life); being non-judgmental (*Mt* 7:1-5: mercy).

- Reflect on this passage from Saint Francis, who helps us to transform the words we hear and speak into prayer: “But, in the holy love which is God, I beg all my brothers, both the ministers and the others, after overcoming every impediment and putting aside every care and anxiety, to serve, love, honor and adore the Lord God with a clean heart and a pure mind in whatever way they are best able to do so, for that is what He wants above all else “ (*ER XXII*, 26).

B. Review of Life

The community can choose to reflect on these themes in a house chapter or during a day of retreat or study. The following outline can be adapted for either possibility, allowing the friars to reflect on how they live *sine proprio* in the “here and now”.

1. A few days before the house chapter, the guardian or the chapter coordinator proposes an individual reading of the theme.
2. The chapter can be initiated with a communal reading of *Mt* 6, 25-34 and Chapter VI of the Second Rule.
3. The friar in charge can do a brief introduction to the theme, highlighting the main points of the reflection and of the experiences presented at the beginning of this section. The other brothers can enrich the reflection by sharing experiences that they have lived or that they are currently living. Some possible reflection questions:
 - a. “A God who is poor”: is this an image of God that should be changed? What is striking about this image? What things do we resist considering?
 - b. How can we come into contact with the poverty that exists in the world around us?
 - c. Consider and describe various encounters with the poor, with situations of poverty.

4. Consider the following mandates of the Order. How does the Fraternity understand them? How has it responded concretely to them?
 - a. All life projects, both provincial and fraternal, will determine what quantities of money the province and the local fraternities should use to show their solidarity with those most needy. Our leadership must make whatever decisions are necessary so that our houses are disposed toward the needs of the people, taking into account any essential legal precautions.
 - b. As itinerants, the friars should be willing to abandon ideas, projects, activities, positions and structures that are not in line with our vocation and mission as lesser brothers (*Priorities for the six-year period 2003-2009*, 3, Proposal #7).
 - c. For the one who follows the poor Jesus, poverty is born of hope. Poverty is the capacity to love things, to love the reality around us. The one who is truly poor restores dignity to things and recognizes them as gift, as mystery and as sign. Things exist in order to be recognized, welcomed, enjoyed, promoted, shared and returned. In this way, we can again reflect upon and deepen our sense of the radical nature of faith and of the vow to live "*sine proprio*."
5. End the meeting with a prayer of thanksgiving for the day's blessing and with a closing song.

C. Signs or Gestures for Living "*sine proprio*"

The Friar community can consider:

1. In what concrete ways, old or new, it might live *sine proprio* .
2. How to value the use and accumulation of goods: in daily living; in regard to property; in the private or communal use of cars and other technology.
3. How it might return to a certain simplicity in its manner of dress, of eating, of lifestyle, in considering the future location of houses. How to live so as not to humiliate the poor. To consider our position at middle class level.

D. A Prayer

Where there is charity and wisdom,
there is neither fear nor ignorance.
Where there is patience and humility,
there is neither anger nor disturbance.
Where there is poverty with happiness,
there is neither greed nor avarice.
Where there is stillness and meditation,
there is neither uneasiness nor wandering.
Where there is fear of God who guards the door,
there the enemy does not have place to enter.
Where there is mercy and discretion,
there is neither superfluity nor hardening of heart.
(Adm 27)

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

From Scripture

1. He replied and said to him, "Teacher, all of these I have observed from my youth." Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him, "You are lacking in one thing. Go, sell what you have, and give to (the) poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." At that statement his face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions. Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" The disciples were amazed at his words. So Jesus again said to them in reply, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to pass through (the) eye of (a) needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." They were exceedingly astonished and said among themselves, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "For human beings it is impossible, but not for God. All things are possible for God." Peter began to say to him, "We have given up everything and followed you." Jesus said, "Amen, I say to you, there is no one who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the sake of the gospel who will not receive a hundred times more now in this present age: houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and eternal life in the age to come. But many that are first will be last, and (the) last will be first" (*Mk 10: 20-31*).
2. Then he (Jesus) said to all, "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. What profit is there for one to gain the whole world yet lose or forfeit himself?" (*Lk 9:23-25*).

From Church Documents1. *Count on Love.*

"Beginning with intra-ecclesial communion, charity of its nature opens out into a service that is universal; it inspires in us a *commitment to practical and concrete love for every human being*. This too is an aspect which must clearly mark the Christian life, the Church's whole activity and her pastoral planning. The century and the millennium now beginning will need to see, and hopefully with still greater clarity, to what length of dedication the Christian community can go in charity towards the poorest. If we have truly started out anew from the contemplation of Christ, we must learn to see him especially in the faces of those with whom he himself wished to be identified: "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me" (*Mt 25:35-37*). This Gospel text is not a simple invitation to charity: it

is a page of Christology which sheds a ray of light on the mystery of Christ. By these words, no less than by the orthodoxy of her doctrine, the Church measures her fidelity as the Bride of Christ.

Certainly we need to remember that no one can be excluded from our love, since “through his Incarnation the Son of God has united himself in some fashion with every person”. Yet, as the unequivocal words of the Gospel remind us, there is a special presence of Christ in the poor, and this requires the Church to make a preferential option for them. This option is a testimony to the nature of God’s love, to his providence and mercy; and in some way history is still filled with the seeds of the Kingdom of God which Jesus himself sowed during his earthly life whenever he responded to those who came to him with their spiritual and material needs.

In our own time, there are so many needs which demand a compassionate response from Christians. Our world is entering the new millennium burdened by the contradictions of an economic, cultural and technological progress which offers immense possibilities to a fortunate few, while leaving millions of others not only on the margins of progress but in living conditions far below the minimum demanded by human dignity. How can it be that even today there are still people dying of hunger? Condemned to illiteracy? Lacking the most basic medical care? Without a roof over their heads?

The scenario of poverty can extend indefinitely, if in addition to its traditional forms we think of its newer patterns. These latter often affect financially affluent sectors and groups which are nevertheless threatened by despair at the lack of meaning in their lives, by drug addiction, by fear of abandonment in old age or sickness, by marginalization or social discrimination. In this context Christians must learn to make their act of faith in Christ by discerning his voice in the cry for help that rises from this world of poverty. This means carrying on the tradition of charity which has expressed itself in so many different ways in the past two millennia, but which today calls for even greater resourcefulness. Now is the time for a new “creativity” in charity, not only by ensuring that help is effective but also by “getting close” to those who suffer, so that the hand that helps is seen not as a humiliating handout but as a sharing between brothers and sisters.

We must therefore ensure that in every Christian community the poor feel at home. Would not this approach be the greatest and most effective presentation of the good news of the Kingdom? Without this form of evangelization through charity and without the witness of Christian poverty the proclamation of the Gospel, which is itself the prime form of charity, risks being misunderstood or submerged by the ocean of words which daily engulfs us in today’s society of mass communications. The charity of *works* ensures an unmistakable efficacy to the charity of *words*” (NMI 49-50).

2. Measure Yourself According to the Vision of Christ.

“The Church knows that if we are to promote development in its fullness, our own “gaze” upon mankind has to be measured against that of

Christ. In fact, it is quite impossible to separate the response to people's material and social needs from the fulfillment of the profound desires of their hearts. This has to be emphasized all the more in today's rapidly changing world, in which our responsibility towards the poor emerges with ever greater clarity and urgency. My venerable Predecessor, Pope Paul VI, accurately described the scandal of underdevelopment as an outrage against humanity. In this sense, in the *Encyclical Populorum Progressio*, he denounced "the lack of material necessities for those who are without the minimum essential for life, the moral deficiencies of those who are mutilated by selfishness" and "oppressive social structures, whether due to the abuses of ownership or to the abuses of power, to the exploitation of workers or to unjust transactions". As the antidote to such evil, Paul VI suggested not only "increased esteem for the dignity of others, the turning towards the spirit of poverty, cooperation for the common good, the will and desire for peace", but also "the acknowledgement by man of supreme values, and of God, their source and their finality". In this vein, the Pope went on to propose that, finally and above all, there is "faith, a gift of God accepted by the good will of man, and unity in the charity of Christ". Thus, the "gaze" of Christ upon the crowd impels us to affirm the true content of this "complete humanism" that, according to Paul VI, consists in the "fully-rounded development of the whole man and of all men". For this reason, the primary contribution that the Church offers to the development of mankind and peoples does not consist merely in material means or technical solutions. Rather, it involves the proclamation of the truth of Christ, Who educates consciences and teaches the authentic dignity of the person and of work; it means the promotion of a culture that truly responds to all the questions of humanity. In the face of the terrible challenge of poverty afflicting so much of the world's population, indifference and self-centered isolation stand in stark contrast to the "gaze" of Christ (Benedict XVI, *Message for Lent 2006*).

3. *Franciscan Poverty.*

Franciscanism is alive and flourishing. We are the first to be delighted with this. And to the pressing questions regarding the reason for such vitality and for the Franciscan connection to the spiritual and social conditions of our times, the usual response from within your family, and among many of your followers in the area of culture and many admirers in the area of Christian life, is the actuality of Francis. And of all the arguments offered for this reasoning, the one that is strangely strongest is that of his poverty, a characteristic of the Poverello and of all those who wish to follow him sincerely. Yes, Francis is "actual" because he is a prophet of poverty. You need to tell us why this is the case. You need to show the men and women of today, who seem to be dizzy with anxiety over their economic affairs, how poverty of spirit, taught in the Gospel, is truly liberation of the spirit. How poverty of spirit makes us available for the more important realities. How it is a demand on us to be concerned with the real goal of our lives,

love, the love of God and of neighbor. How it educates us to respect and to achievement (is work not the achievement of economic well-being? And did Francis not make friars humble and dedicated workers?). Poverty of spirit should also educate us to the careful use and very honest and pure administration of wealth, which can be dangerous, and to the sober enjoyment of the earthly realities around us which are signs of the Providence of God. Finally, you need to tell us how poverty can be the principle, the condition for social solidarity, which an egotistical concern for riches compromises or negates, as we can see in the great social issues of our time. (Paul VI, *Discourse to OFM General Chapter*, 22 June, 1967).

From Franciscan Sources

“As for the brothers who go, they can live spiritually among the Saracens and nonbelievers in two ways. One way is 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, in order that (unbelievers) may believe in almighty God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the creator of all, the Son, the Redeemer and Savior, and be baptized and become Christians because *no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and the Holy Spirit*” (ER 16, 5-7).

Ongoing Formation in the area of Poverty

1. Minority determines our life as Friars in both our relationship with God, and within the fraternity, or in relations with others. Ongoing and initial formation should form the Friars and candidates so that “they go throughout the world in joy and gladness”, as servants subject to all, gentle and humble of heart (RFF 77).
2. The value of Gospel poverty, living *without property*, is one of the essential elements of our spirituality and vocation. Formation- ongoing and initial- cannot be lacking in appreciation of the different aspects, in being careful to present what, for St. Francis, constituted “the portion that leads into the land of the living” in an objective, relevant and impassioned way (RFF 78).
3. Gospel poverty cannot be authentically understood outside a personal relationship with “the poor crucified Christ”. He makes Himself one of the least and of sinners, who wished to strip Himself in order to take on the condition of a slave. He comes down humbly into the midst of us each day in the Eucharist in order to join Himself to the poverty of each one, renewing us through His alliance. This experience alone will be capable of enabling in the Friars Minor that dynamism of joyful restitution of goods and freedom, of sharing in solidarity and friendship with the poor, which defines his Franciscan consecration (RFF 79).

5

POOR AMONG THE POOR

GENERAL CONSTITUTIONS

Art. 66

§1 In order that they may follow more closely and express more clearly the self-emptying of the Savior, 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.

§2 By their way of life, as a fraternity and as individuals, the friars are to behave in such a way that no one is kept from them, particularly those who usually are socially and spiritually neglected.

Art. 69

§1 In protecting the rights of the oppressed, the friars are to renounce violent action and have recourse to means that are otherwise available even to the powerless.

Art. 72

§3 Goods that are given for the use of the friars are to be shared for the benefit of the poor in accordance with what the particular Statutes legitimately prescribe.

Art. 78

§1 With the freedom the Rule grants them in choosing work, and with a view to times, regions and needs, the friars are to choose those activities in which their witness of Franciscan life will shine forth. In a particular way they are to seek the aspect of solidarity and service to the poor.

Art. 82

§1 All the friars are to use money in a way that befits the poor and with a strong sense of responsibility to the fraternity, “as is fitting for servants of God and followers of the most holy poverty.”

§3 The friars, especially the Ministers and Guardians, are to avoid carefully any kind of accumulation, bearing in mind the needs of the poor.

I – FOR REFLECTION**1. Solidarity with the Poor**

“Blessed Francis often said these words to the Brothers: “I have never been a thief, that is, in regard to alms, which are the inheritance of the poor. I always took less than I needed, so that other poor people would not be cheated of their share. To act otherwise would be theft.”¹ This *logion* or “saying” of Francis, considered genuine by scholars, expresses what could be called today a deep sense of solidarity with the poor. It was meant as a word of instruction for the brothers, in which Francis identified himself as one among “other poor people.” What was given to him (and, by extension, to the other brothers) had to be evaluated in light of what the “other poor” needed. In fact, their needs were given priority over his own needs. This was clearly presented as a matter of justice: to act otherwise would be “theft” of what belongs, by right of inheritance, to “other poor people.”

Constant attention to the resources available to the friars and their relationship to the situation of the poor is reflected in the *GGCC* Art. 72,3:

“Goods that are given for the use of the friars are to be shared for the benefit of the poor in accordance with what the particular Statutes legitimately prescribe”. This section of Chapter IV points us toward a view of the friars in a relationship of sharing: what has been given to the friars has been given *also* to the poor. Such an awareness of ourselves in the midst of the poor moves us one step closer toward that relationship which can be called “solidarity with the poor.” It also expresses, in a concrete and material way, our commitment to live *sine*

1 AC 15; cf. 2C 87; 2MP 12.

proprio, “without anything of our own,” always realizing that there are others whose needs must be considered along with, or even before our own needs. A further look at some of our founding texts can help to illustrate other dimensions of this way of living based on the Gospel.

An important description of the brothers in relationship to the poor can be found in Chapter IX of the *Earlier Rule*:

Alms are a legacy and a justice due to the poor that our Lord Jesus Christ acquired for us. The brothers who work at acquiring them will receive a great reward and enable those who give them to gain and acquire one; for all that people leave behind in the world will perish, but they will have a reward from the Lord for the charity and almsgiving they have done.²

The message is stated forcefully in terms with juridical implications. The Lord Jesus Christ has acquired an inheritance, a right or “justice” (*iustitia*), and has assigned this to his heirs, namely the poor. The argument is used in this context to encourage the brothers to overcome their embarrassment about asking for alms, but it opens to us a way of understanding the position of the *pauperes* in the mind of Francis and the early fraternity.

The brothers “go for alms” (*vadant pro elemosyniis*) to supply their own needs, and also to supply the needs of others in the “places” where they are staying and serving, which included the places for lepers and “almshouses” (*eleemosyniis*). The brothers are exercising the legal right (*iustitia*) to an inheritance which the poor hold as the heirs of Christ, a right they exercise on their own behalf and on behalf of the other poor.

The same Chapter IX of the *Earlier Rule* describes the kinds of persons who are included in the vocabulary of “the poor” in the 13th century. The brothers are to rejoice when they are living (*conversantur*) among:

- *viles*: those who are of little value (often associated with some handicap, physical or social)
- *despectas personas*: those who are looked down upon, of low standing;
- *pauperes*: related to the notion of “producing little;” not self-sufficient, in need
- *debiles*: the frail (*disabled, feeble, weak* in mind, character, authority, etc.)

2 ER IX, 8-10.

- *infirmos*: those who are not strong (*weak, feeble, infirm, sick*)
- *leprosos*: those with leprosy.
- *iuxta viam mendicantes*: those begging “along the way,” “by the side of the road” (usually because of some disability).³

This list of the different types of poor people includes those who share the condition of “Our Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the all powerful living God,” who was *pauper* and *hospes* (a visitor, guest, or foreigner) and “lived on alms, He, the Blessed Virgin and His disciples.”⁴ To be among the poor is to be in the company of the Lord Jesus and those who follow Him.

This articulated vocabulary of our origins calls for a similar, careful delineation of our own context. The generic term “poor” today, in many languages, connotes only an economic condition, lack of access to financial resources. And some of those considered “the poor” in the Middle Ages would not be described in that way today. A person today may have a physical handicap and not be in a precarious financial position. Those who carry the virus of Hansen’s disease (leprosy) have, in some places, access to medications that control the effects of the illness. A foreigner nowadays may have considerable social resources in the country of residence, or may be completely unprotected and vulnerable. Those who go on a pilgrimage today, especially to distant places, may have greater financial resources than many others.

All of this points to the need to understand our own reality so as to avoid simply repeating the actions of Francis, a kind of “Franciscan fundamentalism” that does not take into account the change in the reality of the poor from the 13th to the 21st century. If we are to be “in solidarity” with the poor of our context we, like Francis and the brothers who composed the Rule with him, need to describe concretely who these people are in our country or region. This demands the kind of careful articulation of our social reality that is reflected in the work of the brothers in Chapter IX of the *Earlier Rule*. Once we have become aware of who “the poor” are, with names and faces, we have taken the first step toward entering that reality called “solidarity.”

Who are the poor today? In some places they are immigrants, frequently without legal status; refugees who have fled their homes in the

3 *ER IX*: 2.

4 *ER IX*: 4-5.

face of conflict; those who are forced to work for unfair wages without legal protection of their rights. In many areas of the world the poor are women without full access to the social protection and status accorded to men. Who are the poor in the place where we are living our Franciscan life today? Answering that question is an important first step toward solidarity with them (cf. *GGCC* Art. 96,1).

2. “Evangelical Perfection” and Solidarity

One of the Gospel texts preserved in the Rule over the many years of its development is the well-known counsel of Jesus to the rich young man: “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell everything you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come, follow me.”⁵

This action, carried out by Francis, and by Bernard of Quintavalle, Peter Catanii, Clare and many others, had two effects: it placed Francis and his companions, by their own free choice, in the company of the poor; and at the same time it distributed their wealth to the poor. According to the logic of the *logion* mentioned above, it was a step toward reestablishing the rights of the poor to their inheritance, their *iustitia*.

Over the centuries, especially in the controversies over poverty in the Order, the focus on these rights became dimmed as the poverty of the friars was seen as an end in itself. The logic of “selling and giving to the poor” was replaced by an asceticism of “giving up material things” for the sake of self-denial. The focus had shifted from “the needs of the poor” to the “sanctification of the self.” The founding intuition, preserved in the text of the Rule, had lost much of its reference to the surrounding world of the poor.

The reforming movements of the Order (Observants, Reformed, Capuchins, Recollects and others) often measured themselves by the criterion of the poverty of the friars, but they did not always express a corresponding concern for the social condition of poverty in the places where they lived. Admirable exceptions, like the preaching of Bernardino of Siena against unjust rates of interest on loans, the establishment of the *monti di pietà* as sources of low-interest loans for the poor, and similar initiatives, stand out within the history of the Order. In

⁵ Mt 19:21; Lk 18:22.

many cases, however, the relationship of the friars to the poor was one of charitable assistance, to meet the important needs of day-to-day existence, without a deeper level of involvement in the society as seen from the “point of view” of the poor, that perspective required by the term “solidarity” (cf. *GGCC* Art. 97,2). While an important and necessary part of our relationship with the poor, charitable assistance by itself does not completely fulfill our mandate to recognize the *iustitia* and inheritance of the poor won for them by Christ the Lord: something more is needed.

3. The Poor: Always with Us?

In part, the attitude of the friars, like that of many in the Church, was shaped by a certain understanding of the Scriptures, and one problematic text in particular. In the Gospel of Matthew (26: 6-13), Jesus is described as dining at the home of Simon the Leper. During the meal a woman anoints him with perfumed oil, and the disciples object, saying this was a waste: the oil could be sold and the proceeds given to the poor. Jesus says to them: “The poor you will always have with you; but you will not always have me.”⁶

This text has frequently served as a justification for passivity in regard to the poor, as if their presence is simply to be presumed. Yet the words of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew echo those of Deuteronomy: “The needy will never be lacking in the land; that is why I command you to open your hand to your poor and needy kinsman in your country.”⁷ The context is that of forgiving debts in the celebration of the Jubilee every seven years. That practice of the Jubilee is meant to move the community toward a permanent state described a few verses earlier: “Since the Lord, your God, will bless you abundantly in the land he will give you to occupy as your heritage, there should be no one of you in need.”⁸

The words of Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel indicate his anointing as an *extraordinary* action, (“she did it to prepare me for burial”) while the *ordinary* focus of the disciples’ attention is the needs of the poor, abun-

6 Mt 26:11 (par. Mk 14:7; Jn 12:8)

7 Dt. 15:11.

8 Dt. 15:4–5a.

dantly described in the Gospel's preceding chapter ("whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.")⁹

Our General Constitutions (Art. 72,3) ask the friars to realize that what has been given to them is to be "shared for the benefit of the poor." Other passages in Chapter IV refer to a similar concern.¹⁰ This opens the way to participation in that form of social life in which *all* share in the heritage or inheritance given by God, in which "no one of you" will be in need while others enjoy abundance. That is, the words of Jesus about the poor need to be understood, not as approval of an unjust social system, but as a reference to a broader plan of God, as described in the Scriptures, in which no one is to be left without what is needed for a decent human life. "Go, sell, give to the poor:" these lapidary words of Jesus to the rich young man, words which resonated so deeply with the rich young Francis, invite those who "wish to be perfect" to enter upon a narrow and difficult way, but one which leads to more abundant life: a life *among, for* and *with* the poor (cf. GGCC Art. 66,1; 97,1; 97,2).

4. "Solidarity" in Documents of the Church and the Order

The term that has been used more and more frequently over the past forty years to describe this perspective on the reality of social and economic inequality is "solidarity with the poor." The Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops made this term widely known through its 1968 document, "The Poverty of the Church."¹¹ The term "solidarity" had been used earlier in a general way by John XXIII in 1961, and by Paul VI in 1967.¹² John Paul II defined it more sharply in 1991 as "one of the fundamental principles of the Christian view of

9 Mt 25: 40.

10 Art. 82,3: The friars, especially the Ministers and Guardians, are to avoid carefully any kind of accumulation, bearing in the mind the needs of the poor.

Art. 82,1: All the friars are to use money in a way that befits the poor and with a strong sense of responsibility to the fraternity, "as is fitting for servants of God and followers of the most holy poverty."

Art. 78,1: With the freedom the Rule grants them in choosing work, and with a view to times, regions and needs, the friars are to choose those activities in which their witness of Franciscan life will shine forth. In a particular way they are to seek the aspect of solidarity and service to the poor.

11 Document XIV: "*The Poverty of the Church*," no. 10.

12 John XXIII, *MM*, no. 23; Paul VI, *PP*, no. 48.

social and political organization,”¹³ developing a theme he had raised a few years before: When interdependence becomes recognized in this way, the correlative response as a moral and social attitude, as a “virtue,” is solidarity. This then is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.¹⁴

5. Solidarity and *cortesia*

More than passive acceptance of the *fact* of the poor, in our neighborhoods, at our friaries, in our churches, solidarity means actively welcoming the poor with the *cortesia* or courtliness usually reserved for persons of higher social rank. When practiced consistently, such courtesy makes the friars accessible to the poor, not threatening or distant, allowing for bonds of relationship, of mutual trust and confidence.¹⁵

But such solidarity also moves in a broader arena, that of social policy and institutions: unjust and discriminatory legislation, unfair labor practices, difficulty in access to health services, and the lack of legal protections for basic human rights. “Service to the poor” in this sense can mean both the provision of necessities (“direct service”) and other “services” that employees (the friars) would offer to an employer (the poor): advocating on behalf of their interests (cf. *GGCC* Art. 69,1; 97,2); enrolling others in support of their demands; using social networks open to the friars (ecclesial, governmental, commercial, academic) to promote an agenda favorable to the interests of the poor (cf. *GGCC* Art. 96,2).

To be “in solidarity with the poor” means to translate, in words and deeds that are understandable to our contemporaries, that very basic intuition at the heart of our Rule, that we have been called to “the

13 CA, 10.

14 SRS, 38.

15 Art. 66,2: By their way of life, as a fraternity and as individuals, the friars are to behave in such a way that no one is kept from them, particularly those who usually are socially and spiritually neglected.

perfection of the Holy Gospel,” a perfection which, far from isolating us from the poor of our times, requires of us a level of interdependence and mutual enrichment *with the poor* that introduces us to the preferred company of “Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Blessed Virgin and His disciples.”

II – SHARED EXPERIENCE

Catholic theology has always promoted the common good in its teaching on the organization of human society; its characteristic principle is that the goods of this world are originally meant for all. Private property is important, but is subject to a “social mortgage;” that is, it has an intrinsically social function based upon and justified by the principle of the universal destination of goods. More recently, in response to theories espousing extreme individualism or collectivism, the Church began to employ the term “solidarity.” It is used to highlight the notion of human beings as essentially social, and society itself as organic and cooperative, in the context of modern industrialized societies. In his writings, John Paul II called attention to the virtue of solidarity, noting that it is not just a vague feeling of compassion, but a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good.

In the General Constitutions of 1987, the Order has clearly opted to affirm this concept of solidarity. United with a concern to live the compassion and dedication of Francis for the poor and excluded of society in our own day, the *GGCC* repeatedly challenge the friars to be in “solidarity with the poor.” It is true in one sense that friars have always been concerned with the poor. However, modern society requires that concern be extended to other levels as well, in order to address the evils of structural sin and injustice that have become characteristic of our complex social organization. Beyond caring for the daily necessities of the poor and the excluded, we are called as well to read the signs of the times in such a way so as to advocate for the common good with effective and coordinated action. And the *GGCC* call us to go beyond a mere sharing of economic resources, challenging us to live among the poor (cf. Art. 66,1; 97,1), to protect their rights (cf. Art. 69,1), to use our resources to advocate their cause (cf. Art. 72,1; 72,3; 97,2), and to collaborate with organizations dedicated to establishing a society of justice (cf. Art. 96,2).

The experiences offered in this section present three different responses of the friars to conditions of exclusion and poverty. The friars in Thailand have taken on the challenge of one of the scourges of our times, HIV/AIDS. Not unlike the experience of Francis with the lepers, these friars have decided to open their hearts to some of the most excluded of our world and to find ways to address their material and spiritual needs. The friars in Brazil, responding to the needs of the poor and excluded of their region, have organized a series of programs to address the immediate needs of this population, and to influence public policy to enact just laws that will deal with the underlying structures that cause such misery and poverty. The friars of Italy, confronting the problems of structural poverty present in their country, and based on a reading of the signs of the times, opted to offer financial support, food, time and availability. All three experiences show how it is possible, with compassion and intelligence, to address concrete problems in a Franciscan way, while seeking the common good of all our brothers and sisters. Similar experiences are found throughout the Order, including a significant effort to feed the poor undertaken at our International University in Rome, the Antonianum.

1. Franciscan Foundation of Thailand: Saint Clare's Hospice

It has been a great privilege to work here at Saint Clare's Hospice in Thailand since the beginning of 2002. I and my fellow friars have been deeply touched by our daily contact with those who are dying of AIDS. I like to call these many experiences "drops," because they are like the billions of drops of water that make up the ocean, each of which is important to the completed whole. It is like the Gospel; if we live it with faith we can concretize the grace of God every moment of our lives.

The HIV/AIDS situation in Thailand is formidable. In this context we have come in the name of the Order of Friars Minor to proclaim the Gospel through our lives and ministry and through our Franciscan charism. We are also concerned about the "Implantatio Ordinis" here in Thailand. These tasks give meaning to our lives. We are instruments of God called to walk the same path as the Poverello of Assisi. Through his life as a poor man, he spoke to the downtrodden of his

day, especially to the abandoned ones like the lepers. Francis forgot himself as he fixed his gaze on the lepers, and was thus able to embrace the outcasts of the society of his time.

Saint Clare's Hospice is a place of peace, optimism, love and care. To work here, one needs to be able to forget self, to be willing to sacrifice self for the sake of others, especially for those dying of AIDS. We have had many experiences with those who have passed through the hospice, but I would like to talk about one that touched us deeply this past Christmas time.

In the beginning of 2006, we received Mr. Chatri into our hospice, and took responsibility for his care. He came from Watchira Hospital in Bangkok, and we welcomed him warmly. According to the charts, he showed symptoms of the final stages of his battle with AIDS. We did our best to care for him, accompanying him in his daily life, journeying with him, sympathizing with him. We were in solidarity with his drama, depression and weakness. He was not alone, and we crossed the ocean of hope together. For two months his eyes remained closed. Then the doctor prescribed anti-depressants, and we worked with Mr. Chatri to overcome his depression. Improvement came faster than we expected, and he began taking anti-retroviral drugs. Within a few months he was able to return home. After spending some time with his family in Chiangmai City, he entered the temple to become a Buddhist monk. This reminded me that when he was with us he used to say: "I am now a new person." And our mission continues with the other patients of Saint Clare's Hospice.

After the past few years spent in working with people dying of AIDS, I have realized that we care not only for the body, that we struggle not only against the virus. Rather, the challenge we offer to those who knock on our door is to change their lives, their behavior, their lifestyle. Today it is possible to help control the spread of HIV/AIDS through use of new medications and advanced technologies. But we invite those who come to us to go beyond, to heal old wounds and mend broken relationships from the past, to learn how to forgive, to welcome the action and grace of a merciful God in their lives. We encourage them to go beyond a concern for only bodily healing and to seek the spiritual healing of their wounded inner selves.

Most of our patients are Buddhists, and they have the opportunity to witness our love as Catholic Christians. We work to provide a new

heart, a new mentality, a new sense of how to care for people. It is a care based on love for them as human beings who possess dignity as children of God. We work with them to help rebuild their inner selves, that which Francis called the “inner Church.”

2. *Sefras*: evangelizing solidarity in Brazil

The invitation of Saint Francis to follow Jesus continues to resound in our hearts today. In responding, we can see clearly the value of solidarity. Francis understood in a special way that standing with the excluded is an evangelical imperative. He abandoned the security of the walls of Assisi and went to live with the “lepers” in order to care for life that had been degraded. He writes in his Testament: “and I showed mercy to them” (*Test.* 2). His attitude is not one of distress. It is one of *com-passion*—or rather, to be in the same passion, pain and suffering as the other person.

In order to infuse social action with Franciscan inspiration, for more than five years the Franciscan Province of the Immaculate Conception of Brazil has been committed to the *Franciscan Service of Solidarity (Sefras)*. Its mission is to promote attitudes and actions of solidarity with people who are impoverished and marginalized. It does this by helping them exercise their citizenship and their role in society, according to the Franciscan way of living and announcing the Gospel. The paradigmatic gesture of changing place and social status, which Francis himself practiced, directs all the work of *Sefras*.

In faithfulness to the vocation of the Friars Minor, Franciscan Service of Solidarity has set the goal of defending the person in his/her totality, by basing itself in human and ecological rights, from the perspective of Christian and Franciscan principles. We seek to overcome social inequality by bringing immediate attention to those who are excluded and by building public policies that ensure the rights of the people. In addition to being a place for the work of the friars, we understand the social projects to be excellent arenas for sharing material and spiritual goods with people who are impoverished.

With the intention of effective solidarity, *Sefras* seeks to contribute to the coming of the Kingdom of God through social endeavors. We understand social work as a special way of being church,

whether living out Franciscan spirituality in the projects, or through communion with the pastoral social projects of the local Church. By living ecumenism and engaging in inter-religious dialogue, we also seek to practice the recognition of diversity.

The current social reality, marked by the values of individualism and hedonism, demands an alternative proposal. Therefore, trying to be a prophetic voice for overcoming social exclusion, *Sefras* tries to base its actions on Franciscan and Christian values.

In the five Brazilian states where the Province of the Immaculate Conception of Brazil is present, there are currently 30 social projects distributed among twenty-four fraternities, with a total of more than 15,000 recipients. We have projects for diverse sectors of society, and will look at two as examples of our work: one for people who live on the street and one for socio-ecologists.

For work with the people that live on the street, we have, among others, the Franciscan Center for Social Reinsertion in San Francisco Friary in the center of Sao Paulo. In the practice of minority and option for the poor, the friars create for the people a spirit of welcome, listening and care. We are happy and content to find ourselves with them. In addition to offering a daily meal to the people, the Center offers diverse cultural and formational activities. In this way, we seek to collaborate in the social reinsertion of the people, in their development of professional skills and qualifications, and in the building up of their identity, positively reinforced with a recovered self-esteem.

In addition to this center, we have one hostel in San Paulo, which serves more than 400 people daily. Moreover, we have a project in the city of Pato Branco, in the state of Paraná, in which alcohol victims who live on the street engage in a recovery process on a farm by using a socio-pedagogical method and by farm work, which rebuilds their self-esteem.

The other dimension of our work is the socio-ecological aspect. In Vila Velha, Espírito Santo, we have *Ascavive* project, *Association of (Trash-Scavengers) Collectors of Vila Velha*; and in Sao Paulo we have *Recifran* project, *Franciscan Service of Support for Recycling*. These two projects act to collect recyclable materials. In addition to raising environmental consciousness through recycling, the two projects seek to offer incentive and help for the organization of the collectors. Consequently, they promote a recovered sense of citizenship, a higher qual-

ity of life, with conscious participation and increased family income (compared to the popular economy) and work in solidarity.

For these and other actions, *Sefras* counts on many people. In addition to the friars, we have volunteers, civil servants and other religious men and women who participate in the projects. We seek to invest ourselves not only in the technical and professional formation of the people but also in their spiritual formation within the Franciscan tradition. The foundational principles of our social solidarity action are justice and peace. We at *Sefras* consider the human person to be a sacred being, just as Saint Francis did 800 years ago. We believe in the utopian dream that a better world is possible.

3. Saint Anthony Center in Italy

From the very beginning of St. Anthony Friary in Milan in 1873, the friars have always tried to respond to the needy people who knock at their door

The dining-room for the poor and the charitable service center adjoining it are the fruit of this sensitivity toward those who are the least of our city, and the result of the work of many people who, together with the friars, have created this reality and continued to support it by their active involvement.

I cannot hide a certain embarrassment in adding our experience to this book on Chapter IV of the Constitutions of the Order, so demanding and important. Certainly we try to be a bit closer to the poor, but have not nearly reached that being “poor among the poor” that is demanded by our profession.

Yet, having said that, I can more calmly say something about our charitable service Center. I will start from the basic characteristics that distinguish it from other, similar initiatives.

The *Centro Sant'Antonio* was born from the attempt to create a charitable structure that would provide a place of welcome, listening and growth for friars, volunteers and the people who, in one way or another, make use of it. Our Center has deliberately remained one of limited dimensions and simple organization for many reasons. One reason is that it allows the friars who work there to engage actively in offering service alongside the volunteers in various activities and not simply to oversee operations in a purely managerial role. We are two

friars caring for the Center and this allows us to witness in a direct, daily way the evangelical and Franciscan style of fraternity, both in work and proclamation. The schedules of the Center are designed to be completely compatible with the other activities of the Fraternity, so that we can participate in prayer and other moments of community life.

Besides the dining room, which serves about a hundred people for lunch, since 1993 we also have a listening center and a wardrobe service, while we offer Italian language courses in the evening for foreigners.

The structure and activities are welcoming and of a scale proportionate to our real possibilities: we cannot do everything, we only do some things, but we try to do them with an eye to welcoming, listening and accompanying the people who turn to us, searching with them for a direction. When our services cannot meet their needs directly, we turn to resources available in the area, networking with other organizations and services in a constantly growing web of participation.

In our service, we try not to be merely a work of social welfare but, in the spirit of St. Francis, to make the other feel welcome, to build a relationship that does not cause any embarrassment, but offers a stimulus to him or her in making use of their own resources and abilities.

In order to avoid losing the character of our friary's charitable activity, which has always been carried out with simplicity and transparency, we have chosen to refuse big sponsors and contracts, preferring to do the little that is possible with the resources shared by generous individual donors, whether in money, food, time or availability. Many people have responded and continue to respond to the appeal of the friars to involve themselves personally, supporting these services offered to the "least ones." In this way a large volunteer group takes turns in offering varied services, having become the principal support and moving force of our Center.

To allow this powerful force to operate at its full potential, the volunteers receive appropriate tools for their growth, so that they remain aware of the importance their service can have, not only in regard to social maturity, but also in their growth as human beings and people of faith. This expresses our desire to avoid seeing the volunteers merely as distributors of services. According to our distinct spirit, we prefer to remain near them in their journey through personal encounters and opportunities for formation.

I have tried to describe the reality of our Center, trying to show the Franciscan spirit that animates it. I am aware that there is still a long road to travel so that this charitable initiative may fully correspond to the purpose for which it was intended.

I conclude with the words of St. Francis, “let us begin, brothers, to serve the Lord our God, for up until now we have done little.”

III - IMPLEMENTATION

For Personal Formation

To determine your level of solidarity with the poor, answer the following questions:

1. Do you have friends among the poor?
2. Who was the last poor person that significantly influenced your life? What was the effect?
3. How do you treat the poor who come to the door of your house?
4. Compared to time spent in keeping up with the news, what percentage of your time is dedicated to being aware of and studying the problems of the poor?
5. Do you understand and reflect on reality from the perspective of the poor?
6. When talking about sharing resources with the poor we generally consider communal money. Each of us, however, has money for personal use, for vacation, etc.. How much of this money do you share with the poor?
7. The poor are present in the places where we live. How much of your time do you spend with them?
8. Do you have any contact with and support the social organizations/movements of the poor?

For Fraternity Meetings

A. Faith Sharing

Gather the local community to hear and reflect on the Word of God (this should be done in small groups if the community is large). An essential component of the life of Jesus was his concern for and contact with the poor and excluded. Francis echoed this aspect of the ministry of Jesus in his own following of the Gospel. Begin with an appropriate song. Then listen attentively two or three times to Matthew 25: 31-46, pausing after each reading for quiet reflection. Share the fruit of this personal reflection with one another, paying special attention to the possibilities for expressing faith in action.

B. Review of Life:

1. A few days before the meeting, the guardian or person responsible invites the friars to read individually the section of this book dealing with solidarity.
2. The meeting might begin with a reading of Leviticus 19: 9-10, or another appropriate Scripture passage.
3. The brother responsible for the meeting can begin with a short summary of the theme and of the experiences. The other brothers can then continue the reflection, and can add experiences that they have lived or are currently living.
4. The community can discuss how it has received the articles of the GGCC that deal with solidarity, and what they have already done to implement them.
5. The community can consider new ways to implement the articles on solidarity. Consideration might also be given to the idea of “restitution,” raised in the context of the celebration of the 8th Centenary.
6. The meeting can end with a prayer of thanksgiving for all the graces received in the communal sharing, and with a final song.

Other possible fraternal meetings

- Choose a film that portrays poverty and its consequences. Provide opportunities for all members of the community to view the film. Schedule a meeting, or use part of a house chapter, to reflect on the message and the challenges of the film.
- Provide an opportunity for the friars to reflect on how they “read the signs of the times.” Find a skilled facilitator with ample experience concerning the issue to lead the session.

C. Signs or Gestures Expressing Solidarity with the Poor

Any concrete signs or gestures that the community might consider should be the fruit of reflection on the Word of God; the teaching of the Church; our Franciscan sources; and the social, political and economic reality in which we live.

Some possible examples are provided here:

1. Establish a twinning relationship with a sister entity in a poor section of the city, or in another part of the country, or in another country.
2. Consider the possibility of providing space for an organization that works with the poor, perhaps by making use of buildings that are standing idle.
3. Challenge the friars and lay community to adopt a local project that expresses solidarity with the poor, and develop a program to support the project.
4. Look for ways to support the formation/education of local people in disciplines that will help to address the issues that cause poverty in the community.

D. A Prayer

O God, Father of mercy,
give us the spirit of love,
the spirit of your Son.
Give us eyes to see
the needs and sufferings of our brothers and sisters;
fill us with the light of your Word
so that we might comfort the tired and the oppressed;
help us to be faithful
in service to the poor and the suffering.
May your Church be a living witness
to truth and liberty, to justice and peace,
so that all people might be open
to the hope for a new world.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

From Scripture

1. “You shall not molest or oppress an alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt. You shall not wrong any widow or orphan. If ever you wrong them and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry. My wrath will flare up, and I will kill you with the sword; then your own wives will be widows, and your children orphans. If you lend money to one of your poor neighbors among my people, you shall not act like an extortioner toward him by demanding interest from him. If you take your neighbor’s cloak as a pledge, you shall return it to him before sunset; for this cloak of his is the only covering he has for his body. What else has he to sleep in? If he cries out to me, I will hear him; for I am compassionate” (*Ex. 22: 20-26*).
2. “When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not be so thorough that you reap the field to the very edge, nor shall you glean the stray ears of grain. Likewise, you shall not pick your vineyard bare, nor gather up the grapes that have fallen. These things you shall leave for the poor and the alien. I, the Lord, am your God” (*Lev. 19:9-10*).
3. “Is this the manner of fasting I wish, of keeping a day of penance: that a man bow his head like a reed, and lie in sackcloth and ashes? Do you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord? This, rather, is the fasting that I wish: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; setting free the oppressed, breaking every yoke; sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless; clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own” (*Is. 58: 5-7*).
4. “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, escorted by all the angels of heaven, he will sit upon his royal throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him. Then he will separate them into two groups, as a shepherd separates sheep from goats. The sheep he will place on his right hand, the goats on his left. The king will say to those on his right: ‘Come. You have my Father’s blessing! Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me. I was ill and you comforted me, imprisoned and you came to visit me.’ Then the just will ask him: ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you or see you thirsty and give you drink? When did we welcome you away from home or clothe you in your nakedness? When did we visit you when you were ill or in prison?’ The king will answer them: ‘I assure you, as often as you did it for one of my least brothers, you did it for me’” (*Mt. 25: 31-40*).

5. “The community of believers were of one heart and one mind. None of them ever claimed anything as his own; rather, everything was held in common..... nor was there anyone needy among them, for all who owned property or houses sold them and donated the proceeds. They used to lay them at the feet of the apostles to be distributed to everyone according to his need” (*Acts*: 4, 32, 34-35).

From Church Documents

1. “Through the statement of the rights of man and the seeking for international agreements for the application of these rights, progress has been made towards inscribing these two aspirations in deeds and structures. Nevertheless various forms of discrimination continually reappear – ethnic, cultural, religious, political and so on. In fact, human rights are still too often disregarded, if not scoffed at, or else they receive only formal recognition. In many cases legislation does not keep up with real situations. Legislation is necessary, but it is not sufficient for setting up true relationships of justice and equality. In teaching us charity, the Gospel instructs us in the preferential respect due to the poor and the special situation they have in society: the more fortunate should renounce some of their rights so as to place their goods more generously at the service of others. If, beyond legal rules, there is really no deeper feeling of respect for and service to others, then even equality before the law can serve as an alibi for flagrant discrimination, continued exploitation and actual contempt. Without renewed education in solidarity, an overemphasis of equality can give rise to an individualism in which each one claims his own rights without wishing to be answerable for the common good” (*OA*, Apostolic Letter of Paul VI, 23).
2. “It is necessary to state once more the characteristic principle of Christian social doctrine: the goods of this world are originally meant for all. The right to private property is valid and necessary, but it does not nullify the value of this principle. Private property, in fact, is under a “social mortgage,” which means that it has an intrinsically social function, based upon and justified precisely by the principle of the universal destination of goods. Likewise, in this concern for the poor, one must not overlook that special form of poverty which consists in being deprived of fundamental human rights, in particular the right to religious freedom and also the right to freedom of economic initiative” (*SRS* 42).
3. “Rich nations have a grave moral responsibility toward those which are unable to ensure the means of their development by themselves or have been prevented from doing so by tragic historical events. It is a duty in solidarity and charity; it is also an obligation in justice if the prosperity of the rich nations has come from resources that have not been paid for fairly. Direct aid is an appropriate response to immediate, extraordinary

needs caused by natural catastrophes, epidemics, and the like. But it does not suffice to repair the grave damage resulting from destitution or to provide a lasting solution to a country's needs. It is also necessary to reform international economic and financial institutions so that they will better promote equitable relationships with less advanced countries. The efforts of poor countries working for growth and liberation must be supported. This doctrine must be applied especially in the area of agricultural labor. Peasants, especially in the Third World, form the overwhelming majority of the poor" (CCC, 2439, 2440).

4. The fight against poverty finds a strong motivation in the option or preferential love of the Church for the poor. In the whole of her social teaching the Church never tires of emphasizing certain fundamental principles of this teaching, first and foremost, the *universal destination of goods*. Constantly reaffirming the principle of *solidarity*, the Church's social doctrine demands action to promote the good of all and of each individual, because we are *all* really responsible for *all*. The principle of solidarity, even in the fight against poverty, must always be appropriately accompanied by that of *subsidiarity*, thanks to which it is possible to foster the spirit of initiative, the fundamental basis of all social and economic development in poor countries. The poor should be seen not as a problem, but as people who can become the principal builders of a new and more human future for everyone" (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 449, Libreria Editrice Vaticana).

From Franciscan Sources

1. "The Lord gave me, Brother Francis, thus to begin doing penance in this way: for when I was in sin, it seemed too bitter for me to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I showed mercy to them. And when I left them, what had seemed bitter to me was turned into sweetness of soul and body. And afterwards I delayed a little and left the world" (*Test.*, 1-3).
2. "Great was his (Francis') compassion towards the sick and great his concern for their needs. If lay people's piety sent him tonics he would give it to the others who were sick even though he had greater need for them. He had sympathy for all who were ill and when he could not alleviate their pain he offered words of compassion. He would eat on fast days so the weak would not be ashamed of eating, and he was not embarrassed to go through the city's public places to find some meat for a sick brother" (*1C*, 175).
3. "...and because affliction can enlighten spiritual awareness, the hand of the Lord was upon him, and a change of the right hand of the Most High, afflicting his body with prolonged illness in order to prepare his soul for

the anointing of the Holy Spirit. And when the strength of his body was restored, dressed as usual in his fine clothes, he met a knight who was of noble birth, but poor and badly clothed. Moved by a pious impulse of care for his poverty, he took off his own garments and clothed the man on the spot. At one and the same time he fulfilled the two-fold duty of piety by covering over the embarrassment of a noble knight and relieving the want of a poor human being” (*LMj*, 2).

4. “Today greed, racism, oppression and war divide peoples. But the seeds of hope, of new life, can be seen in groups which promote solidarity especially on the international level, and in movements which promote human rights, ecumenism, trade unions, unity among youth and practical sharing with people in developing countries. Such solidarity, sharing of life and work, is characteristic of a family, and this is what we humans are, all brothers and sisters, children of the same God in heaven. Jesus became our brother to unite all things in heaven and earth. He invites every person to become part of the family of God. To establish that family is the focus of our efforts. Francis modeled his life on Jesus and imitated him in treating all people and creatures as family. He saw those who come to follow him as a gift from the Lord, and the Lord himself revealed to Francis that they should live as brothers. When people saw the friars, they described them as men of God who showed an honest concern, a smiling face, mutual respect, gentleness and love. Their very lives gave witness to the Good News. They not only believed and proclaimed, but more importantly in their lives together and with the people they experienced the Gospel values of Jesus Christ. If we really desire to evangelize today, people must first see in us those same values that were obvious in the lives of the early friars. Our lifestyle as brotherhood can be an example to a world hungering for community and longing for a new and more humane society” (*Bah*, 19-23).

Ongoing Formation in the area of Solidarity with the Poor

1. To follow Christ, “who, for our sakes, made Himself poor in this world,” the friars divest themselves radically of themselves and everything else, and live as Minors “among the poor and the weak,” announcing the beatitudes to all with joy.” The Friar Minor progressively acquires the personal willingness to share “everything that he has,” in so far as he is a servant and subject to every human creature for the love of God, living a humble, hardworking, simple life (*RFF*, 10).
2. To conform themselves to our Lord Jesus Christ, “who humbled himself, making himself obedient unto death,” the Friars Minor hold minority as an essential element of their specific vocation and live it faithfully in poverty, humility and meekness among the least of people, without power or privilege. The Friar Minor discovers his own smallness and his total

dependence on God, the source of every good, and lives like a pilgrim and stranger, reconciled and peaceful, hospitable, a brother and subject of every creature (*RFF*, 22).

3. Solidarity with the least of people should be effectively experienced as a form of “restitution,” not only through active and responsible commitment in living the everyday – in work, study, positive availability to the services entrusted, fidelity to the commitments that involve sacrifice – but also through experiences of real sharing with the poor of our times, though active, prayerful, manifest, humble and joyful presence among them (*RFF*, 82).

6

THEY SHOULD DO THEIR WORK FAITHFULLY AND DEVOTEDLY

GENERAL CONSTITUTIONS

Art. 76

§1 Led by the spirit and example of St. Francis, the friars, like those who are truly poor, are to consider work and service a gift of God. For this reason they are to present themselves as little ones of whom no one is afraid, because they seek to serve and not to dominate.

§2 Recognizing that work is the ordinary and chief way of providing what is needed, each and every friar should serve and “should work faithfully and devotedly”, fleeing idleness which is “the enemy of the soul”.

Art. 77

§1 The friars are to strive to have the habit of working. They can exercise their own craft, “if it is not against the good of the soul and can be performed honestly”.

§2 The friars are to be attached to no specific work, as if it were their own, even if they have labored at it for a long time; they are always to be ready to give up places and undertakings and to take on new and necessary tasks.

Art. 78

§1 With the freedom the Rule grants them in choosing work, and with a view to times, regions and needs, the friars are to choose those activities in which their witness of Franciscan life will shine forth. In a particular way they are to seek the aspect of solidarity and service to the poor.

§2 The support of life must be neither the primary purpose nor the sole norm in choosing work. Indeed the friars are to be prepared to offer their service without remuneration.

Art. 79

§1 In selecting any work or service, account is to be taken of fraternal life, both at the local and provincial level from which no friar may exempt himself. Account is also to be taken of the talent of each friar in such a way that an activity may be taken on and carried out co-responsibly in fraternity, in accordance with dispositions of the particular Statues.

§2 As remuneration for their work the friars are to accept what is necessary, and they are to do this humbly. However, whatever they acquire by their personal labor, or on behalf of the Order, or whatever comes to them in any way through a person, grant or insurance is acquired by the fraternity.

Art. 80

§1 As far as possible the domestic work in our fraternities is to be done by all the friars themselves.

§2 When others work for the fraternity, the norms of civil law must be observed with justice.

Art. 81

When the fruits of their work and other means do not suffice for the support of the fraternity, the friars are to have recourse to the table of the Lord and they are to “go begging for alms with full trust”, in accordance with the norms of the Statutes.

Art. 82

§1 All the friars are to use money in a way that befits the poor and with a strong sense of responsibility to the fraternity, “as is fitting for servants of God and followers of the most holy poverty”.

§2 In the use of money the friars are to be wholly dependent on the Ministers and Guardians, not only as regards asking permissions, but also in presenting an accurate account of income and expenditures.

§3 The friars, especially the Ministers and Guardians, are to avoid carefully any kind of accumulation, bearing in mind the needs of the poor.

I – FOR REFLECTION

Historically human work has had diverse evaluations: theological, philosophical, political, economic, ethical etc.. This is not the time to recall all of them in detail nor even to give a summary of these varied systems. For us it is enough to recall the division between intellectual work (the liberal arts) and manual work which has existed in the Western world and neighboring areas. This division for a long time conditioned the social and economic structure; but thanks to the teaching on human rights and the development of science and technology, the distinction has been noticeably lessened, although the social sphere continues to value people according to the type of work that they do. If economic valuation is added to this, the social distinction becomes much greater. This is so because the difference between the rich and the poor is becoming more abysmal between the so-called first world and the third/fourth world, and within each of these societies as well. The situation is worse if one takes into account the growing unemployment and underemployment which force millions from the most diverse geographic and cultural regions to immigrate to other countries in search of a better life.

From the Christian point of view it is rather difficult to formulate a theology of work. In the Old Testament work is first presented as a dimension or attribute of human dignity (cf. *Gn.* 1, 31; 2,3), but after the sin in the garden work takes on a negative connotation of hardship (cf. *Gn.* 3, 16-19) and includes the possibility of being unjustly exploited by others (cf. *Am.* 5, 11-12; *Jer* 22, 13). In the New Testament Paul presents work as a means to avoid idleness and as a way to avoid being a burden on the community (*2 Thes* 3: 6-8). Jesus offers the best understanding of work, giving it its just value and encouraging people not to be prisoners of work (cf. *Lk* 9, 25). The Magisterium of the Church, both before Vatican II and after, offers a vision of work that is markedly spiritual, but does not contribute any more insightful elements. Work is seen as a means of asceticism and expiation. But Vatican II does establish new relationships between man and nature, and work is integrated into the creative and salvific project of God. According to this point of view man achieves self realization in the measure in which he declares his solidarity with others in a relationship of justice and love. John Paul II, in his Encyclical “*Laborem Exercens*”, developed a systematic doctrine, complete and coherent,

on the dignity of human work while respecting and valuing the variety of its expressions.

The early Franciscans did not offer a theory of work. Together with Francis they limited themselves to working as the poor did in those days. Work was meant to provide basic necessities; it was not meant to add to the wealth or glory of Assisi, as was proposed in the Communal Letter of 1210. They were aware that work was a grace from God and that it put them in contact with the poorest and most marginalized of their time.

At the present time we do not have a systematic theory of work. Nevertheless, it is necessary to formulate such a theory. If we do not, we run the risk of supporting a society which turns work into a means of exploitation, or makes it a mere commodity, rather than a means of liberation and realization of human aspirations. A Franciscan theory of work would place us close to the interests of the workers who wish to better the conditions of their lives.

1. Work in the Writings of Francis

As some of the sources tell us, especially the Early Rule 7, and the Later Rule 5, that the brothers were very clear about the place of work in their lives: inside and outside the house; the kind of work; the crafts that they knew; the manner of working: with constancy, humility and modesty; and *the purpose of work*: to be able to obtain the necessities of life. All of this presupposes that the brothers had the necessary tools to perform their work (ER 7,9). However, besides dealing with the kind of work, place of work, and its objective, Francis highlighted values that should accompany work, including minority, humility and non-ownership. This permitted the brothers to live and share with the poorest, and is the reason why Francis asked the brothers not to exercise the position of foreman, or chancellor or other works which denote a position of authority. He warned them even more strictly to avoid services which create “scandal or harm to the soul.” (ER 7, 1-2).

Among the works that the brothers performed the following were noteworthy: crafts, day laborers and care of the sick. The arrival of clerical brothers in the Fraternity led to a diversification of work. Some dedicated themselves to preaching, others to spiritual direction, others to hearing confessions, etc..

Later, work took on a more mystical/ascetical significance. As a result the brothers put aside the notion of idleness as the enemy of the soul, and affirmed that work should be accomplished without losing “the spirit of prayer and devotion” (*LR* 5,2). Nevertheless Franciscan work was never motivated by a radical asceticism nor by an inordinate desire for gain.

Of interest is the relation between work and begging. According to the available texts, Francis saw paid labor as the first and principal source of sustenance for the brothers; only later does he speak of begging, to be practiced only when work did not bring in enough to live on (*ER* 7,8). This tension between work and begging has been the cause of great conflict and division in the Order. However, according to the mind of Francis, there should be no opposition between the two, only subordination of the second to the first.

Toward the end of his life, Francis again took up the theme of manual work in his Testament, 20-30. He recounted that he personally had worked and that he wished to continue working. He demanded that those of his brothers who did not know how to work should learn. The way in which the question of work was approached tells us that the Fraternity was going through an internal crisis in the year 1226, one that was surely caused by some of the intellectual brothers who were already well established socially, or by brothers who simply did not want to work. It was the moment to return to the service of the Lord as in the early days of the Fraternity. And so work, whatever it might be, is in this way established as a central and essential element of Franciscan spirituality.

2. Work in the General Constitutions

Chapter IV (cf. Art. 76-82) of the General Constitutions summarizes some of the preceding elements on work and adds other important aspects. It begins by recalling that being truly poor, and led by the spirit and example of St. Francis, the friars should consider work as a gift of God. Convinced of this they can engage in any work-related activity. They should not desire power or privilege, but have only the desire and commitment to serve all. Their attitude should make it possible for men and women to approach them without having the slightest reason to fear them (cf. *GGCC* 76, 1).

Work is also considered a task, so that the brothers should have the habit of work. This implies that the brothers make an effort to learn and perfect some skill, either manual or intellectual, suited to their particular abilities and the needs of the time and place in which they live. In this way work becomes “the ordinary and principal means” to acquire the necessities of life for each one of the brothers. They should engage in this activity with honesty, fidelity (coming from their faith) and devotion (with complete dedication), and without endangering the salvation of their souls (cf. *GGCC* 76,2; 77,1). The General Constitutions, along with the texts of the Rules already mentioned, offer *the table of the Lord* as one recourse that the brothers have but under the condition that “the fruit of their work and other means were not sufficient for the subsistence of the fraternity” (cf. *GGCC* 81).

At the same time, the General Constitutions emphasize that no work, even if engaged in for a long time, should be considered the exclusive property of the brothers. This allows the brothers to be open to the possibility of leaving work that has already been established, in order to begin new and necessary works. Surrender and detachment therefore mark the life of the brothers with an extraordinary dynamism that not only frees them from being prisoners of an existing work, but allows them to discover and adapt themselves to the new and changing circumstances of history. Thus there is no specific service (*diaconia*) which characterizes Franciscan spirituality, allowing it to adapt to any situation (cf. *GGCC* 77,2).

Keeping in mind the time, place and need, and also the freedom of the brothers to choose their work, it is important that they choose activities in which their “witness of Franciscan life will shine forth,” especially those which highlight “the aspect of solidarity and service to the poor” (*GGCC* 78,1). Thus even though work is the primary source of subsistence, the brothers should make themselves available to offer various services without remuneration. This is one of the consequences of the concept of work as a gift, in which the value of a gratuitous gift is the best expression of that very concept (*GGCC* 78, 2). Gratitude manifests itself in a very particular way in the domestic work that the brothers perform. However, in cases where the brothers depend on the services of people outside the Fraternity, the norms of civil law must be followed in justice (cf. *GGCC* 80, 1-2).

Fraternal life, both local and provincial, is one of the criteria that must be taken into account when choosing one or another work; at the

same time, the abilities of each individual should not be overlooked. This fraternal dimension of work helps the brothers to create and move forward in common projects, in which each one undertakes and accomplishes his work in collaboration with the others. Moreover, working in fraternity, as a team, helps foster the awareness of and commitment to the fact that whatever the brothers earn through personal labor, pension, grant or insurance, it is acquired by the fraternity. This touches upon the issue of economic openness which, without a doubt, enables the brothers to mature in relationships of freedom, trust and peacefulness.

Concerning whether the use of money should be permitted, the GGCC offer some very clear and precise orientations. The first criterion is the life of the poor. They are the basic reference point against which the brothers are to measure their style of life, especially the use of money. This constant reference to the poor allows neither the accumulation nor the wasting of goods. It is important to remember that it is precisely the poor, with some rare and notable exceptions, who contribute most to the support of the brothers.

The second principle governing the use of money is responsibility in solidarity with the Fraternity. This criterion should encourage us to revise the existing economic structures in such a way that all forms of discrimination are eliminated: between rich and poor brothers, and between rich and poor Fraternities whether within a single entity or between the entities of the whole Order. The use of money, then, demands an open accounting and an accurate and detailed financial report to the proper authorities (cf. *GGCC* 82, 1-3).

3. Some Considerations

From the preceding texts it can be seen that work, in so far as it is a grace, places us in a relationship with God, with our brothers, with other members of society, with nature and with ourselves. If we divest work of this relational dimension we destroy its value or we make it a mere instrument of domination, exploitation, and accumulation, as happens in societies where profit continues to be an absolute value. Furthermore this understanding of work helps us do away with the concept of work as a punishment or a wearisome burden that needs to be suffered to pay for some moral or legal fault that has been committed.

Work from the Franciscan perspective, therefore, besides being a way to provide the basic necessities of individuals and of the Fraternity, is also the most suitable way to develop and bring to fruition our diverse individual and fraternal talents. It is by means of work that individuals and groups experience growth and self realization. It is in work that freedom, intelligence, will, imagination, etc., come into play. In fact, through work Francis and his early companions discovered the meaning of their own lives and the purpose of the Franciscan movement, so much so that they made work a criterion for discernment, as we can see in their restoration of churches and their care for lepers.

Franciscan work, when it comes in contact with the poor, also becomes a service to society. It takes on a social dimension which is motivated and accompanied by various ethical and spiritual values, including distributive and retributive justice, equal opportunity, respect for individual initiative, solidarity with the weakest, the willingness to leave one's work for different and more needed service, fraternal collaboration, gratitude and generosity. Following this line of reasoning, Franciscan work is called upon to challenge the new social structures like globalization, both financial and social, which violate the dignity of people. It is called to correct unjust situations, to confront social inequities and to safeguard different cultures, respecting different models of economic and political development.

Our main task as Friars Minor is not to create or sustain sources of work. Nevertheless, we can contribute to the cause of workers by making our social and pastoral services available to them. We should do this without fostering other forms of dependence. It is up to workers to influence the labor laws of their countries, by means of their organizations. They must understand that work and economics should not be isolated from politics and other social concerns like health, education, communication and quality of life.

From a Franciscan point, all work, whether it be scientific, artistic, craftsmanship, managerial, industrial, or otherwise, puts us in a direct and intimate relationship with the Creator. Through the lens of the salvific work of Jesus, every work-related activity becomes an apt place to build a more fraternal world which serves as a privileged sign of the Reign of God among us.

Participation in the grace of work as a Franciscan today is therefore nothing less than sharing the dream of God and the dream of the

poorest among us, who are simply looking for a life in solidarity, one that is more human and more just. In this perspective, work allows the Friars Minor to live with dignity, to fulfill their aspirations both personally and as a fraternity, to help build a society that is more just, to accept responsibility for the natural world in which we live and, above all, to collaborate with the Lord of history in his mission of creation and redemption.

II – SHARED EXPERIENCE

The idea of work as a grace and as an ethical task, developed in the preceding section, springs from the awareness of our radical poverty, a reality which on the one hand helps us understand the fact that we have received all of our “material, psychological, moral and intellectual gifts” from God; and on the other demonstrates the great responsibility we have to develop these gifts in a uniform way (cf. GGCC 127, 2).

As the General Constitutions clearly point out, all work, be it intellectual, artistic, technical, domestic, pastoral, administrative, social or fraternal, is inseparable from the great ideals of our spirituality. Among those ideals “the spirit of prayer and devotion” stands out with all of its force and dynamism, and gives meaning and direction to everything that we do; the ideal of “fraternity,” as a clear and irreplaceable criterion for choosing and carrying out any activity; the ideal of “minority and humility” which rules out any sort of domination; the ideal of “freedom” which helps us to move from old places and ministries in order to undertake new endeavors; the ideal of “gratuitousness” which stands in opposition to any thought of enrichment or hoarding; the ideal of “solidarity” with the poorest of the poor which makes us more sensitive to their needs; the ideal of “justice” toward workers which precludes in our lives all types of exploitation; and the ideal of “honesty”, both in our manner of working as well as in our fraternal use of money.

This collection of values makes Franciscan work not only the “ordinary and principal source of sustenance” for the brothers, but also the normal way for them to develop their abilities. It is also a gratuitous service provided especially to the poor, in solidarity with them, so as to create a world that is more human and fraternal, a sign of the presence of the Kingdom of Heaven in our midst.

Below there are three experiences of the grace to work. The first presents the domestic work done by the brothers in Vietnam. The second deals with the solidarity work with the poor carried out by the brothers in Valladolid, Spain. The third is the experience of a fraternity involved in education in Mar del Plata, Argentina. All three experiences see work as way to live with dignity, to continue the process of formation, to serve the poorest and to announce the Kingdom of Heaven through daily life.

1. Experiences of “the grace to work” from Vietnam

In Vietnam we have received the grace to work, and see it as a means of subsistence, formation and evangelization. Among various experiences we only present that of the novitiate house at Du Sinh, in the Dalat Diocese in the highlands of south central Vietnam. Saint Bonaventure Fraternity consists of two entities: the conventual community with five priests, one deacon and three solemnly professed lay friars; and the novitiate with a variable number of novices (from eight to twelve each year). Both share a common prayer life, liturgical celebrations, meals and recreation.

The community is in charge of a local parish and has other apostolic activities like providing spiritual assistance to the Secular Franciscans, and to religious men and women by preaching and hearing confessions. The community supports the novitiate both spiritually and materially. Since 1990 the community manages a flower farm called “The Franciscan Flower Farm” with an area of 14,000 m² and a well-equipped laboratory where many kinds of flower seedlings of superior quality are produced. They are highly appreciated by the local people. The friars create jobs for 56 workers, among whom 46 are women. Among the ten men there are three friars. The guardian of the friary is also the juridical managing director, but a lay friar is the real organizer and direct manager of the farm. We are trying to implement the social teaching of the Church concerning the value of labor and the dignity and rights of the workers. While producing seedlings and growing flowers for sale, we try to sow and cultivate the Franciscan spirit through the presence of a group of Secular Franciscans and of Friars Minor. From time to time a friar gives a conference to all the workers on Saint Francis’ life and spirit. The income of the farm is sufficient

to achieve the following goals: 1) not only to pay the salaries of the workers, but to provide welfare services for them as well; 2) to cover 60% of the subsistence needs of the friars and novices (the remaining 40% is covered by Mass stipends); 3) to contribute to the Formation and Evangelization Funds of the province (40% of the total profit) and also to the Evangelization Fund of the Diocese (10% of the total profit). Questions related to the Flower Farm are discussed in local house chapters.

The life of the novices consists of three main activities: *Prayer, Study and Manual Labor*. They work in the morning (from 8:30 to 11:00). They cultivate European flowers and Vietnamese orchids for sale (on an area of 1,000 m²) and vegetables for the kitchen. They cook for the community and provide for the upkeep of the house. On Sundays they do some social and apostolic work (visiting the sick and the poor). Five aspirants work halftime on the Flower Farm. This income covers their personal expenses and finances their studies.

The postulants of the Maximilian Kolbe Friary at Binh Gia in the Ba-Ria Diocese have a similar life. They cultivate coffee trees and pepper plants on an area of 2 hectares. The friars and the postulants are economically self-sufficient. Two other friaries are also developing strongly “the grace to work”: Our Lady of the Angels Friary at Culao-Gieng in the Long Xuyen Diocese in the Mekong-Delta has fishponds, cows and paddy fields. Saint Joseph the Worker Friary at Song Be in the Phu Cuong Diocese is exploiting a rubber and fruit tree plantation of 30 hectares.

Our Province is extremely pleased with these experiences in a country where 75% of the population live from agriculture.

2. Working in solidarity with the poor in Aranzazu, Spain

This is an experience of a small community in the Franciscan Province of Our Lady of Aranzazu, located in the East Zone on the outskirts of the city of Valladolid, Spain, in a neighborhood called “Pajarillos”. It is a settlement built to accommodate workers arriving in the city during the years of industrialization in the 1960’s and 1970’s. This neighborhood was one of the principal centers of drug trafficking in the city and region for a long time, with the constant presence of drug addicts.

The small fraternity occupies a house in the neighborhood since 1995. There are four brothers in the fraternity. Two have lived there since the beginning, and others have come and gone. We have always sought to work with existing associations and groups on behalf of the neighborhood, above all in conjunction with the residents' association. We have not initiated our own projects, and have tried as much as possible to create relationships of equals.

Our life revolves around four pillars: the centrality of the experience of God; fraternal life; minority; and the work of evangelization. We try to work from these four bases in an integrated way. Over the years we have done different sorts of work, depending on our capabilities and desires as well as on the needs and opportunities presented to us. The criteria we have employed are: communal discernment of the possibilities for work; maintain contact with people at risk; avoid undertaking our own ministries (schools, parishes, social work...); reject leadership positions; allow each brother to dedicate himself to what he feels most called to do (in this regard social work seems to predominate); combine contractual, paid work with volunteer work; use the money we receive in a spirit of solidarity (using what we need to live and putting the rest into a 'solidarity fund'); and combine social works with those that are more pastoral both locally (promoting youth groups, attention to individuals etc.) and in wider areas (several brothers are members of provincial committees and one is a provincial defensor.)

At this moment we are engaged in the following areas: one brother works on an ongoing basis with the Neighbors Association of the area. He cooperates with our neighbors helping to improve the lives of people living in the locality, problem solving, prevention, etc.. Even though he is the one who spends the most time and energy on this work, the entire fraternity is also engaged in these tasks. This same brother works with a network which reaches out to immigrants. This network emerged from different initiatives which religious congregations carry out in the city around the question of immigration (help with schooling, provisional housing, job and legal assistance, Spanish classes...). This brother's task is to see that the different programs function harmoniously. Another brother helps out each morning as a volunteer lawyer for the same network. In the afternoons he works for pay in a Red Cross program which gives help through electronics to older people. A third brother carries on social assistance work in two

neighborhoods of Valladolid. He is on a half-day contract with Caritas and works with families, many of whom are gypsies. He is also part of the leadership team for the Peace Center of Aranzazu. The fourth brother gives retreats, spiritual exercises and similar courses.

This sort of work is very important for us. It is our source of income and it represents a particular way of being present in society; it makes possible special kinds of relationships, helps us develop our own gifts, and is a way of transforming reality and promoting God's Reign. In addition this work has been for us an opportunity to experience the burdens of injustice and conflict. All of this has demanded from us a greater understanding of the need to support each other and to strengthen our fraternal bonds. We have had to look carefully at the things that help to motivate us. Little by little we are learning to be a bit more like lesser brothers in our work, to accept that which comes from the work: at times gratification, at other times harshness. Our work in the end has become for us a "place for reaching out". We have walked with very broken people and this has touched us deeply, helping us to see the presence of God in these people, a God who mysteriously sustains these fractured lives and who looks on them with special care. We have felt like small and imperfect parts of God's great design.

3. Working in the field of education in Mar del Plata, Argentina

Our fraternity is made up of three brothers (40, 51 and 60 years of age). In addition to working in the parish, it serves two schools with a combined total of 2450 students. One of the schools, called "Fray M. Esquiú," is located in a middle-class neighborhood and the other, "San Miguel," is in an area populated by poor families. Our work is twofold: pastoral and administrative, and in both we enjoy the participation of the laity.

The Pastoral aspect

- The pastoral dimension of the work is shared by all three brothers. From time to time we go into the classrooms and engage the students in dialogue; we have formation groups with the staff; we participate in retreats, group activities, overnights, trips, experiences of solidarity, etc.. All of this is done within the framework of the Provincial Pastoral Plan which takes in the rea-

lities of the students, staff and parents. In both schools we have a coordinator of pastoral activities, who together with the friars works on the formation of catechists and the implementation of the Pastoral Plan.

- The schools join with the parish in many outreach activities (in addition to Sunday liturgical celebrations and other important feast days of the Church and the Order). Meals are prepared and taken to people who live in the street. Help is given to children in the poorer neighborhoods. A two-week winter vacation mission is organized in the indigenous communities (which are the most excluded in our society), involving all three friars as well as the parents, students and teachers, and complete with a pre-mission in one of the neighborhoods on the outskirts of the city. The costs are underwritten thanks to the efforts of participants, who get together to cook food and sell it to the families.
- Another important activity of our fraternity is organization of the “March For Children’s Rights.” It takes place each October 4th, spurred by the same students who demand their rights publicly and non-violently in the city. All the schools in the city are invited to this event, which highlights children’s rights through artistic work, gymnastics, billboards, music, etc..
- Both of our schools do these activities jointly, a situation that helps to integrate families from different social classes.

Administrative dimension

- Even though one of the brothers serves as legal expert, a task he shares with a layman, important decisions are made only after prior consultation with the whole fraternity. This would include issues like the hiring of personnel. The one exception to this norm has to do with the hiring of people for the top jobs; they are interviewed by a commission from the provincial schools made up of a friar and two lay people.
- We would like to highlight the fact that the work of the fraternity is designed to promote, in the general area of education, lay co-responsibility in the task of evangelization. In our task of announcing the Good News, we seek to give priority to those groups that are poorest and most defenseless (children, the elderly, the indigenous, street people).

- In our educational work we privilege certain values of our spirituality: fraternity (work with teams of friars and lay people); minority (in particular with the marginalized); co-responsibility; gratuitousness; and joy.

III - IMPLEMENTATION

For Personal Formation

Choose one of the various texts provided for meditation and apply it to your lived reality. You might answer the following questions:

- Does the work I currently do express my aspirations as a person and as a friar minor? What types of work identify most with my personality? In what areas could I best develop my abilities (physical, psychological, moral, and spiritual)?
- To avoid activism as an escape from myself, from God, and from others, how can I integrate the grace of working into my life plan along with other spiritual values: the spirit of prayer and devotion, fraternity, minority, a life of poverty, evangelization?
- How much time do I dedicate daily to work?
- What is the main goal of my daily work?
- When obedience calls me to change my work or to move, what is my attitude?

For Fraternity Meetings

These fraternal gatherings (local, regional or provincial) can take place in three steps: beginning with a prayerful reading of the Word, continuing with a reflection on our life, and concluding with an act, a sign and a prayer. Here are some suggestions:

A. Prayerful Reading of the Word

1. Meanwhile, the disciples urged him, “Rabbi, eat.” But he said to them, “I have food to eat of which you do not know.” So the disciples said to one another, “Could someone have brought him something to eat?” Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to finish his work” (*Jn 4:31-34*).
2. The man went and told the Jews that Jesus was the one who had made him well. Therefore, the Jews began to persecute Jesus because he did this on a Sabbath. But Jesus answered them, “My Father is at work until now, so I am at work.” (*Jn 5:15-17*).
3. As he passed by he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that the works of God might be made visible

through him. We have to do the works of the one who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (*Jn 9:1-5*).

B. Review of Life

1. The fraternity might choose to reflect on this theme of work in the context of a house chapter or day of recollection. A few days before the meeting, the guardian or the person responsible invites the friars to read individually the section of this book dealing with work.
2. The meeting can begin with prayer and a song, and continue with a reading of a passage from the Bible, or from a church or Franciscan document, or another reading of the moderator’s choosing.
3. The brother responsible for the meeting can begin with a short summary of the theme and of the experiences. The other brothers can then continue the reflection, adding experiences that they have lived or are currently living.
4. Fraternal dialogue:
 - What importance do we give to work in our daily life? How much time do we dedicate to it?
 - What values of Franciscan spirituality do we emphasize in the choosing and exercising of our personal and communal work?
 - What is the ultimate goal of our work? Subsistence? Personal or communal accomplishment? Service freely given? Formation? Evangelization? Etc..
 - In general, people in our society are valued for the type of work they do, and this is more evident when you add in inequitable salaries. How does this take place in our fraternities? How does the type of work affect relations between lay and clerical brothers? Have we gotten beyond the distinction between intellectual and manual labor as a form of social discrimination?
 - In various parts of the world, children and youth are forced to work from very young ages, often in inhuman, exploitative conditions. What are we doing to raise awareness of these realities and to help children and youth grow up with dignity?
 - One reason for immigration throughout the world is lack of work. What are we doing as a fraternity, not so much to create

sources of work, as to spiritually accompany those who leave their family, as well as those who stay at home?

- Conclusions and concrete steps to take. The meeting can end with a prayer and a final song.

C. Signs or Gestures in regard to Work

Each local fraternity should choose a sign or a gesture that helps show its commitment to work at home as well as with the poor. For example:

- Organize fraternal life in such a way that brothers participate in domestic tasks (cleaning, decorating...)
- Help to strengthen or create sources of work together with other local organizations.
- Promote awareness of and respect for the rights of workers, with the goal of eliminating all forms of exploitation, especially of children and youth.

D. A Prayer

Lord, together with the grace of working,
grant us these gifts:

A spirit of *prayer and devotion* to help us
collaborate more enthusiastically with your work of creation

A spirit of *fraternity*
to discern and realize together our call to service

A spirit of *minority and humility*
to overcome all forms of fear and domination

A spirit of *liberty* so as to not appropriate our works,
and to undertake new work

A spirit of *gratitude*
to extinguish all desire for accumulation of riches

A spirit of *solidarity*
to heighten our awareness and work together with the poor

A spirit of *justice* to abandon any form of exploitation

A spirit of *honesty*
to make use of our goods humbly and fraternally.

So that, Lord, through our work we may share
with the poor all the gifts we have received from you.

Amen.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

From Scripture

1. "When you give (to poor brothers and sisters), give freely and not with ill will; for the Lord, your God, will bless you for this in all your works and undertakings" (*Dt* 15:10).
2. "What your hands provide you will enjoy; you will be happy and prosper" (*Ps* 128:2).
3. "You recall, brothers, our toil and drudgery. Working night and day in order not to burden any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God" (*1 Thes* 2:9).
4. "Therefore, my beloved brothers, be firm, steadfast, always fully devoted to the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain" (*1 Cor* 15:58).
5. "I give thanks to my God at every remembrance of you, praying always with joy in my every prayer for all of you, because of your partnership for the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus" (*Phil* 1:3-6).
6. "In fact, when we were with you, we instructed you that if anyone was unwilling to work, neither should that one eat. We hear that some are conducting themselves among you in a disorderly way, by not keeping busy but minding the business of others" (*2 Thes* 3:10-11).

From Church Documents

1. "The Church is convinced that work is a fundamental dimension of man's existence on earth. She is confirmed in this conviction by considering the whole heritage of the many sciences devoted to man: anthropology, paleontology, history, sociology, psychology and so on; they all seem to bear witness to this reality in an irrefutable way. But the source of the Church's conviction is above all the revealed word of God, and therefore what is a conviction of the intellect is also a conviction of faith" (*LE* 4).
2. "In order to achieve social justice in the various parts of the world, in the various countries, and in the relationships between them, there is a need for ever new *movements of solidarity of the workers and with the workers*. This solidarity must be present whenever it is called for by the social degrading of the subject of work, by exploitation of the workers, and by the growing areas of poverty and even hunger" (*LE* 8).

3. "Toil is something that is universally known. It is familiar to those doing physical work, to agricultural workers, to those who work in mines, to steel workers, to those who work in builder's yards and in construction work, to scientists, to those who bear the burden of grave responsibility for decisions, to doctors and nurses, to women, and to all workers since work is a universal calling and is familiar to everyone" (*LE* 9).
4. Human work proceeds directly from persons created in the image of God and called to prolong the work of creation by subduing the earth, both with and for one another. Hence work is a duty: "If any one will not work, let him not eat. "Work honors the Creator's gifts and the talents received from him" (*CCC* 2427).
5. In work, the person exercises and fulfills in part the potential inscribed in his nature. The primordial value of labor stems from man himself, its author and its beneficiary. Work is for man, not man for work. Everyone should be able to draw from work the means of providing for his life and that of his family, and of serving the human community (*CCC* 2428).
6. *Access to employment* and to professions must be open to all without unjust discrimination: men and women, healthy and disabled, natives and immigrants. For its part society should, according to circumstances, help citizens find work and employment (*CCC* 2433).

From Franciscan Sources

1. "Those brothers to whom the Lord has given the grace of working may work faithfully and devotedly so that, while avoiding idleness, the enemy of the soul, they do not extinguish the Spirit of holy prayer and devotion to which all temporal things must contribute" (*ER* 5, 1-2)
2. "And I worked with my hands, and still desire to work; and I earnestly desire all brothers to give themselves to honest work. Let those who do not know how to work learn, not for the desire to receive wages, but for example and to avoid idleness. And when we are not paid for our work, let us have recourse to the table of the Lord, begging alms from door to door" (*Test*, 20-22).

Ongoing Formation in the area of Work

1. The Friars Minor witness before the world to the poor and humble Christ by living a life that is truly poor in its use of goods and they work "with fidelity and devotion", with joy and gratitude, knowing that everything is a gift from God.

The Friar Minor, like St. Francis, is willing to work with his own hands in order to build up the Kingdom of God, to support the fraternity and to share what he has with the poor and needy (*RFF* 24).

2. The Friars and candidates, besides, should form themselves to a *spirituality of communion* that promotes in them the capacity to:
 - live an effective sharing of the gifts that each one received from the Lord and to put all in common with brothers;
 - be in solidarity with “those that are in real necessity” and to “share what they have with the poor”;
 - educate themselves to the sense of manual and intellectual, assiduous and serious, work;
 - live *without property*, feeling themselves responsible for the house without appropriating it;
 - maintain transparency in the management of economic goods and to have real confidence in providence (*RFF* 81).
3. Professional formation aims at the acquisition, during the time of initial and ongoing formation, of such competence in a manual, technical, artistic or scientific field that would permit the Friars Minor to live his mission in exercising a qualified trade, profession or activity in society, the Church and the Order (*RFF* 229).

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