

THE *PROPOSALS* OF PCO VII: PRESENTATION

Prot.N. 00420/04

To all the Brothers of the Order

Dear Brothers,

We are writing to present you with the results of the work of the Seventh Plenary Council of the Order, which met in Assisi from 1-27 March 2004 to reflect on our *Fraternal Life in Minority*.

Many of you were able to follow the Plenary Council via the Internet, and so you were aware of events in Assisi almost as soon as they happened. Not only that: through the Internet, many brothers were able to send us their own opinions and encouragement - and sometimes their criticisms – all of which we greatly appreciated.

In addition to enriching the participants and contributing to the growth of unity and cooperation in the Order, PCO VII produced 55 *Proposals* of its own on the allotted subject.

For the second time in this type of meeting the method of drafting *Proposals* was adopted. Conscious of the limitations of this approach, the Plenary Council, at the conclusion of its work, decided that the text of the *Proposals* should be subsequently revised and improved. Now this work too has been completed and the General Definitory, meeting from 21-26 June 2004, approved the definitive text of the *Proposals*. We are now sending this text to all the Fraternities, in accordance with the prescription of our Constitutions: “*It is appropriate that the General Minister, in his good judgement and with the consent of the Definitory, confirms the acts of the Plenary Council with his authority, and makes them known to the Order*”(123,6).

The brothers who worked on the text after the Plenary Council divided it into 7 sections, providing a title for each one. The titles are: *Foundations; Living Brotherhood in Minority; The Service of Authority; Itinerancy; Minority and Structures; Formation in Minority and Itinerancy. Our Minority in the Church. For a World of Justice and Peace*. Additionally, every one of the 55 *Proposals* has a title in the margin to make it easier to understand and interpret their contents, both individually and as a whole.

The importance of this Plenary Council for our life as Capuchin Lesser Brothers will be obvious from these titles alone. The PCO should lead us to reaffirm minority and itinerancy as an essential characteristic which we choose as our own, not just as individuals but as an institution (cf. *Proposals* 3,5,6,24,25,26...).

Aware that our vocation as lesser brothers is a ‘gift’, we wanted to start the entire discussion by indicating the sources from which it draws its inspiration and foundation, namely, the Most Holy Trinity; the foundational experience for Francis of meeting the crucified Christ of San Damiano and the leper; the attraction of God’s beauty and glory, manifested in Jesus; and finally, faith in Christ, the Lord of history (cf. *Proposals*, 1-6).

Since the way of minority and itinerancy “is not a natural one that is easily chosen”, we reaffirm – with *Proposal* 31 – the value of contemplation: “both fraternities and brothers need

ongoing formation in order to acquire a spirit of service and minority. It is essential to develop a contemplative attitude. One concrete means of developing this contemplative ability is the community exercise of silent prayer”.

Finally, dear brothers, we would like to remind you that PCO VII should be seen as completing the Sixth, because without minority and itinerancy, poverty lived in brotherhood would have little social impact. Its spirit would be missing.

Now it is up to all of us to reflect on these perhaps rather general teachings and experiences, to study them and apply them to the different cultural and social situations in which our fraternities belong and where each of us lives and exercises his ministry.

We offer this gift of God to the whole Church and to the world. It is the inheritance we have received from our Father Saint Francis, to whom we never cease to pray that he may help us to walk with *the Lord's most holy blessing* along the paths of brotherhood, lived in poverty, minority and itinerancy.

The General Minister and his Definitory,

Br. John Corriveau
Br. Aurelio Laita
Br. Joseph Nacua
Br. John Bednarik
Br. Vicente Carlos Kiaziku
Br. Jure Šarčević
Br. Manoel Delson Pereira da Cruz
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Rome, 24 June 2004

VII PLENARY COUNCIL OF THE ORDER
OUR FRATERNAL LIFE IN MINORITY
ASSISI 1-27 MARCH 2004

P R O P O S A L S

FOUNDATIONS

1. The Trinity is unique in that no person of the Trinity is ever superior to the others. Though this radical equality is not true of creaturely relationships, it is a model that teaches what it means to be made in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26) and offers a vision after which humans aspire for themselves.
 - a. Humility opens human hearts to this experience of Divine relationship. In his *Praises of God*, St. Francis proclaims: “You are humility!” (PrsG 4), because our Trinitarian God is relational by nature, i.e., a free communion of persons without domination or subordination. Because they are made in the likeness of God, humans slowly become a free communion of persons without domination or subordination, thus achieving true humility. Through the act of creation and baptism we become part of God’s familial relationship, i.e., we become God’s children (Jn 1:10-13). St. Bonaventure tells us that in the Incarnation, “God humbly bends down to lift the dust of our nature into unity with his own person” (St. Bonaventure: Sermon II on the Nativity of the Lord).
 - b. The Trinity is the foundational relationship which creates Church: “The universal church is seen to be a people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” (LG 4). “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home in them” (Jn 14:23). Zeal to keep the word of Jesus inspired Francis to make the Gospel the very foundation of fraternal life (*RnB* I 1; *RB* I 1). Established on fidelity to the Gospel, fraternal evangelical life draws us into the intimate relationship of the Trinity.
 - c. Francis embraced the plan of God for his creatures as a family of sisters and brothers: brother sun, sister moon, etc. (see *CtC*). He never referred to himself simply as “Francis” but always as “Brother Francis.” “Brother” revealed the relationship with every creature to which God called him. “Brother” also revealed his mission to heal relationships through submissive humility (see *CtC* 10-11, in relation to the other stanzas; *L3C* XIV, 58).

2. Minority came to birth in Francis of Assisi as amazement in the face of the love of God who, in order to free us from evil and to introduce us into the divine life, did not hesitate to become human, making himself obedient to death on a cross (Phil 2,6-11; *2LF*, 1). Thus he became *simple* and *subject to all*. Serving the Father’s will so that all creation could return to him, the Word did not consider his equality with God a thing to be grasped, but he united himself with humanity, in order to heal, reconcile and free the entire creation. (Mt 9, 13; 12,7; 2Cor 8,9; Gal 1,4; Ep 2, 6-9; Hb 10,10). This glorious kenosis of the Son of

**"You are
humility!"**

**Francis, the
disciple of Jesus,
was *simple* and
*subject to all***

God, which lives on in the sacrament of the Church and in the Eucharist (cf. *Adm* 1, 16-22) aroused in Francis an overwhelming desire to leave everything in order to follow Christ. Inwardly moved by God's compassion for us, and convinced that only in him is our salvation, he made himself lowly among the lowly ones, wandering the world as a pilgrim and stranger (*Rb* VI, 1; *Test* 24) to bear witness to all that Christ the Crucified One was risen (*LOrd* 8f). Inspired by the example of Francis, let us then commit ourselves to contemplate the mystery of our redemption, growing in faith, hope and charity, so that each day we may rediscover the genuine roots of our life and of our work in Church and society.

- a. For Francis, being "lowly and subject to all" was not the result of fear or psychological submission, nor a sign that he had given up his own free responsibility. Rather, he was attracted by the beauty and glory of God, manifested in Jesus. By setting out to follow Jesus on the path of minority and itinerancy, Francis showed the liberating force of the love of God, which redeems, heals wounds, consoles hearts and calls to freedom. We too, therefore, reaffirm minority and itinerancy as a liberating choice that opens us to welcome Christ's invitation: "If you wish to be first, be the least and servant of all". Identifying with the experience of Francis, let us go out to the "lepers" of our age and "show mercy to them".

As the poor Christ continues his journey of unity among creatures under the humble eucharistic forms of bread and wine (*Adm* 1, 17), so we, through the waters of baptism, become Christ (1Cor12: 12-13, 27), travelling on earth with the divine mission of healing, reconciling, liberating and redeeming (1Jn 2:17).

- b. "Oh marvellous humility! Oh amazing poverty!" (*LAg* 4). Such was Saint Clare's exclamation at the mystery of the Incarnation. Let us promote a spiritual dialogue with all Franciscan sisters, especially those of the Second Order, so that our mutual contacts may help us to grow to a more complete and balanced vision of minority and itinerancy.
- c. Like Mary, Francis knew that God looks upon the humility of his servants, exalts the humble and casts the mighty from their thrones (cf. *LMj* VI, 6). Let us therefore often look toward the "Virgin made Church" (*SalBVM*, 1) to learn from her the spirit of humility, so that we may faithfully persevere in our vocation and mission in the Church and for the world.

3. We Capuchin Lesser Brothers live in a diversified world where active forces have produced a history of injustice and enormous human suffering. Among these forces are economic, military and technological power.

No society where Capuchin brothers are present is absolutely free of sin and of the sinful structures generated and sustained by these powers. On the contrary, they are widespread on a global scale; they find their way into our lifestyle and condition our fraternal relationships.

On his journey of conversion, Francis discovered the foundation of minority in the crucified God-Man, the Christ of San Damiano, but by way of the leper. His encounter with this human being, abandoned and excluded by the society and system of his day, made Francis "leave the world" and change his social status and residence, moving out from the center to the periphery of Rivo Torto and Our Lady of the Angels (cf. *PCO* VI, 9). In other words, he became "minor". (cfr *Test*; VI *PCO*, 9)

Following the example of Francis, we wish to live our gospel life as lesser brothers, as pilgrims and strangers in this world. In doing this we do not ignore or downplay the greatness of the challenge posed by the complexity of the historical situation today. On the contrary, we trust in the grace and providence of God, who has always shown his mercy to his people. The service we propose

Lowly, like Francis

to offer to all creatures is to proclaim the good news of this God, who is not solitude, but Love, and as such, goes out of himself and calls men and women to enter into communion with himself. This leads us to:

- reaffirm our choice of minority as an essential characteristic of Capuchin Lesser Brothers, not just as individuals but also as an institution;
- joyfully accept the consequences of weakness, precariousness and vulnerability as we humbly serve in all our institutions and structures;
- gradually (i.e. by taking small steps) make a “significant” shift towards the periphery of today’s society, where we wish to pitch our tents among the lowly ones of today, as Jesus, Francis and the first Capuchins did in their day.

4. Poverty, minority and itinerancy, as well as being constituent elements of the following of Christ, bring Franciscan freedom. They are means to our end, i.e., to building the kingdom of God or, in Franciscan language, building brotherhood wherever and whenever we can. Fraternal-structured poverty, minority and itinerancy, according to the situation in each place, help Capuchins to free themselves from the effects of structural sin, inconsistent inner drives, manipulation by other power interests, lack of skills for crossing boundaries, and anachronistic traditions that enslave us, in order to build a viable fraternity in the 21st century.

Franciscan freedom

5. The strength to be itinerants, pilgrims and strangers in this world is found in faith in Christ the Lord of history, who will reveal himself fully at the end of time to judge everyone according to the law of love (cf. Mt 25, 31-46). This tension toward ultimate fulfilment does not make us outsiders in history but gives concrete direction to our life, frees us from the idolatry of immediate possession, from the narcissistic temptation to put on a show and to succeed, and to be attached to positions we have acquired. On the contrary, it impels us to recognize Christ and humbly serve him in our brothers and sisters, especially in the needy. Like Francis, who wished to call nothing in this world “his own”, let our hearts be ever more open to the unforeseeable providence of God, who is greater than all our plans. Let us give to all people witness of the joy that comes from placing all our hope in him, and show ourselves attentive to the needs of all.

Itinerancy inserts us into the history of salvation

6. Society in the time of Francis was marked by the struggle for social dominance, which unleashed strong violence. Francis too was influenced by this, but after his conversion he turned to the fringes of Assisi’s society, choosing to live among the lowly and marginalized. This led Francis to the deep intuition that human relationships had to mirror the Trinitarian love of free persons without privilege or priority and then to make courageous choices of minority, which redeemed and radically reconstituted his relationships: authority without power which dominates; service characterized by humility; extension of fraternal relationships to all creation; a life lived on the social periphery.

Our choices

Our world is characterized by domination and violence of many kinds: an unfair concentration of wealth, which causes a large number of migrants; arrogance; narcissistic preoccupation with self-fulfilment; self-serving powers that marginalize the poor and destroy the environment; relationships marked by domination and social stratification; ethnocentrism and religious intolerance; a culture which seeks change through violence.

Franciscan minority today demands courageous choices for a more fraternal world:

- The choice of a fraternal economy everywhere we live and serve (cf. PCO VI).
- Other-centered relationships.

- A culture of peace based on the confident choice of vulnerability.
- Leadership and pastoral action based on service and participation.
- An ethic of justice based on the fact that we are all brothers and sisters.
- A new commitment to dialogue in the spirit of Francis. (cf. *RnB* XVI, 5-6).

LIVING BROTHERHOOD IN MINORITY

7. a. “Inspired by God, Saint Francis began a form of gospel life which he called brotherhood, modelled on the life of Christ and his disciples” (*Const.* 83,5). He wanted his brotherhood to be called the Order of Lesser Brothers (cf. *1Cel* 38; FF 386), and changed its first description of “poor lowly ones” to “lesser brothers” (cf. FA: ED I, 594), so that the image of Christ, poor, humble and devoted to the service of all people, especially the poor, would shine more brightly in the Church and in the world (cf. *Const.* 8,2).

Living our choice of fraternal life in minority as a gift of God, we put forward for the whole Church and for the world a way of life that proclaims the essence of the gospel. We recognize in our life according to our fraternal and lesser identity the foundation of our entire apostolate and the primary form of gospel mission. It enables us to give an effective witness of complete communion in the diversity of charisms and ministries lived in our fraternities.

- b. Our Founder wanted none of his brothers to be called prior, but that all should be called lesser brothers, simply and without distinction. (cf. *RnB*, 6,3).

Minority describes and distinguishes our brotherhood. Therefore no brother in the Order is greater than another, but, as sharers in the same call to brotherhood, all are equal in dignity. Therefore “let us walk in truth and sincerity of heart, willingly serving one another in a spirit of charity and in mutual obedience” (*Const.* 167,1).

- c. Therefore the Plenary Council states and reaffirms that:

- the one profession of gospel brotherhood makes us all “lesser brothers” without any distinction;
- all circumscriptions, local fraternities and all the brothers should be encouraged to live the primacy of brotherhood in minority as the primary form of our apostolate;
- that in exercising any type of ministry at whatever level, the participation of all should be effectively promoted;
- it is necessary that in the different areas of the Order appointments and elections to the various offices be open to all the brothers, without any distinction or reservation (cf. *Const.* 84,5);
- every type of service in our houses must be appropriately shared by all the brothers, as a requirement arising out of their vocation;
- our initial formation, in all its stages, must be equal and identical for all the brothers in formation. The same opportunities for special formation must be guaranteed to all the brothers;
- all the brothers should be encouraged to keep in view the unity in diversity that characterizes our brotherhood;
- deeper reflection is needed at every level on our identity as an Institute in the Church, regardless of any clerical and/or lay connotation. (cf. *Letter of John Paul II to the General Minister*, 18.09.96. See AOFMCap. 112(1996) 565-566);
- the theory, or statement of principle, regarding the equality of all the brothers, needs to be lived in practice.

**Consequences of
our identity as
lowly itinerants**

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| 8. | Minority involves the recognition of a brother's gifts, the exercise of shared responsibility and the participation of all the brothers in enlivening the fraternity. Authority should be the dynamic that encourages the fraternity to draw up a common plan as a real instrument of growth in life and faith. The guardian should be the facilitator and custodian of this plan. Also, it should lead to each circumscription periodically drawing up its provincial life-plan. | Authority and animation |
| 9. | We should divest ourselves of any privilege that might arise from office, education received, presbyteral ministry or from any other service we render for the common good or for the benefit of the people of God. In the fraternity, where all have freely chosen to be lowly and to serve rather than be served, all should not only be called brothers without distinction but should really be so, by sharing in decisions concerning fraternal life, in access to means of transport, communications, etc. In addition, each brother should make his contribution to the ordinary maintenance of our houses without exempting himself from housework and other everyday fraternal services. However limited and symbolic this contribution might be in practice, it is nonetheless necessary and becomes a proof of real brotherhood and mutual service. | All play their part in the fraternity |
| 10. | As a fraternity of lesser brothers we should emphasize what unites, rather than what divides. Let us make a conscious effort to be inclusive of others, in order to help prevent ethnocentrism from taking root in our fraternities. Our ministries should also be characterized by a sincere acceptance of others, regardless of their individual characteristics or personal history. | Acceptance of others |
| 11. | The local chapter, frequently held, is an appropriate place to express our fraternal life in minority. In it, each brother listens humbly and intently to his brother, and all the brothers, in co-responsibility, dialogue, loving obedience and the lowly exercise of authority, search for ways to grow in the communion of the gospel. In order to improve the use of this instrument of fraternal life we invite the brothers to analyze regularly the power structures implicit in any community, for example: the influence of office, facility in speaking, imposition of one's opinion through obstructionism, etc. The chapter also fosters a spirit of itinerancy, in that it enables the brothers to assess how meaningful the presence of the local fraternity is and to open themselves to new horizons. | The local chapter |
| 12. | Team work is one facet of minority. It is a simple, daily exercise of horizontal authority. As a team, all feel that they are lesser brothers working in equality. This attitude should have an effect at all levels of the fraternity. | Teamwork |
| 13. | The Order is a worldwide brotherhood to which we belong through the Province and other circumscriptions. In order to overcome all forms of provincialism and ensure that we are able to move effectively in our globalized world, it is important for us to be open to the international horizon of our brotherhood. In particular, we are willingly open to all forms of inter-provincial collaboration, not only in the area of initial formation but also in ongoing formation and ministry. Indeed, collaboration between circumscriptions is not only required by shortage of personnel but is a value in itself, being a wider form of brotherhood and a concrete expression of minority and itinerancy.
Effective tools of collaboration are the establishment of inter-provincial fraternities and the exchange of personnel among the circumscriptions.
Similarly, appropriate, updated forms of minority and itinerancy can be found through inter-Franciscan collaborative ventures, first with the other brothers of the First Order and of the TOR, and with the Poor Clares and other Franciscan sisters and brothers. We should also gladly work together with the laity, especially with the brothers and sisters of the Secular Franciscan Order and | An international horizon |

Young Franciscans.

14. The Order has grown a great deal in showing a sense of solidarity in personnel. The Plenary Council recommends that this spirit be maintained, and that provincial and inter-provincial fraternities be established on the peripheries and boundaries, where the system generates large numbers of impoverished people, e.g. migrants, exiles, etc. **Solidarity of personnel**
15. In several circumscriptions of the Order the brothers are living a certain form of poverty caused by the increasing age of the brothers, the decline in vocations and a secularized environment that is indifferent or anti-clerical. We encourage the brothers to accept this situation and to live it in faith as a concrete expression of our choice to live in minority. Nevertheless, we invite them to draw up new projects adapted to their possibilities and to the pastoral situation in which they find themselves. To implement these projects they may have recourse to international solidarity for personnel. **Circumscriptions in difficulty**
16. Inspired by the teaching to proclaim the Good News even in the midst of trials and persecutions (cf. Mt 24:9), the Capuchin Order encourages our brothers in those countries where Christianity is a negligible minority to bear witness to the Gospel, like leaven in the dough (cf. Lk 13:21), through example and word in a spirit of minority akin to that of St Francis before the Sultan. Our brotherhood pledges to stand by and support our brothers, especially in those lands where the freedom of religion is at risk, religious intolerance is on the increase and religious fundamentalism is spreading rapidly. **Brothers in difficult situations**
17. To underscore our vocation as brothers and the ecclesial value of the religious life, perpetual professions should be celebrated with an appropriate dignity shown in simple gestures and a sober style, as is proper to the liturgy and to Franciscan poverty (cf. *Roman-Seraphic Rite of Religious Profession*, 75). The same applies to ordinations and other fraternity anniversaries. **Celebrating perpetual profession**

AUTHORITY AS SERVICE

18. The word of God enlightens and inspires the decision of a Capuchin brother who wishes to live in minority. From it he learns the need to abandon every form of dominant power (Mk 9, 33-37); RnB V,9) and the fact that service is the correct attitude for anyone who understands Jesus as servant (Lk 22, 24-27). In the same way, the gospel teaches him to identify with the excluded (Mt 25,31-46) and to share all good things with them (Rm 15,27). A good use of power is the “genuine sacrifice” characteristic of one who has had a profound experience of Jesus (cf. Rm 12,1). The modern social sciences make it clear that, because all social relationships are asymmetrical, it is impossible to live without exercising power. Jesus taught his followers not to “lord it over” one another as nonbelievers do (cf. Mt 20:25; Mk 10:42-45; Lk 22:24-27; 1 Pt 5:3). Francis wrote that the brothers should not exercise power or dominion (*RnB* V 12-15). **The authority willed by Jesus**
19. Francis, accepting his own vulnerability, was able to relate to every individual and creature. The Capuchin use of power emphasizes more the building up of relationships than the quick resolution of tasks and thus includes the following characteristics. It is:
- Non-exclusive/inclusive, i.e., everyone affected by decisions is included.
 - Participatory, i.e., all participants have a real say
 - Equal, i.e., final decisions equally respect the needs of all those affected.
- The Capuchin use of power**

- Marked by a willingness to dialogue with a view to reaching a possible consensus.
- Non-violent.

These characteristics can also be a model for others in the world to imitate.

20. Our Constitutions (156-157) identify four positive sources of authority within the world and our Order: (1) service to others; (2) the coherence between what one says and what one does; (3) attentive listening to others; and (4) the office of authority looking toward the common good. The *Constitutions* suggest a hierarchy in which authority from one's office is exercised last and only after the other sources have been exhausted.

Authority according to the Constitutions

21. Mindful of the *Admonitions* of St Francis, of the *Letter to a Minister* and the *Letter to Brother Leo*, we know that the exercise of fraternal ministries is a constant call to individuals and fraternities to grow in their free commitment to follow Christ. It is the task of fraternal ministry to foster the growth of personal responsibility in fraternal life, to promote and sustain unity and communion among the brothers, to recognize the gifts that exist among us, stimulating mutual, inclusive love for all those we encounter, and to sustain the brothers on their journey of conforming themselves to the poor and humble Christ.

Role of the fraternal ministry of authority

For this purpose, Ministers should use every means to promote the shared discernment of the will of God, coresponsibility, fraternal dialogue, joint planning, subsidiarity and solidarity. A basic, indispensable tool in this process must be, above all, the local chapter. In addition they should cultivate an attitude of listening to the brothers and gladly acknowledging the personal journey of each one, remembering the words that Francis used to describe fraternal ministries: *to visit, admonish and correct* (cf. *RbX*, 2)

Those who occupy positions of authority should be in all things ministers and servants of the brothers, without dominating in fraternal relationships and avoiding all partiality. Mindful of the words of St Francis (cf. *Adm* IV) they should, in a spirit of mutual service, not appropriate any office; they should, moreover, show in practice a healthy detachment from their own role, which will enable them to give disinterested service.

Therefore it is part of the spirit of minority for ministers to accept vulnerability in relationships. We further propose a review of all terms used to designate ministries, replacing those that are incompatible with the gospel way of life, with our ideal of minority and with the fraternal character of our Order.

22. No matter who we are or what position we hold, we all possess a particular type of power. It can assume a positive or life-giving, creative role and be at the service of people, or it can become corrupted, and in turn destructive in its application.

When power becomes overbearing

The domination and exploitation of others reveals itself and has consequences not only in a physical and tangible aspect, but also in the psychological or emotional dimensions of human life. It is here that the deeper wounds are felt and scars remain.

- Wilful acts of violence, debasing language, threats either spoken or implied, must never be part of the life of a lesser brother.
- Sexual exploitation or abuse of another person is a greater offence against Franciscan minority than against chastity.
- We passively participate in acts of violence and in degradation of others when we accept violence and explicit sex as forms of entertainment.

23. To safeguard our gospel form of life as “lesser brothers”, fraternities should exercise courageous self-criticism and humble discernment of any forms of power – e.g. political, religious and economic – that have found their way into

The hidden allurements of false power

our fraternities and manipulate the desires and interests of the brothers, distort their “face-to-face” relationships and lead them astray through privileges and honors, such as economic, fiscal and other benefits.

ITINERANCY, MINORITY AND STRUCTURES

24. Our true vocation is rooted in the following of Christ and his apostles, who renounced all claim to any place in order to proclaim the Kingdom of God freely and generously (cf. Mt 8:20; Lk 9:58). The immovability of some of our brothers radically compromises our vocation and mission in the Church and in the world.

**Forms
of
immovability**

The concept of immovability is not simply physical. Immovability can be more ingrained in habitual ways of thinking and judging, which often become obstacles to genuine conversion. These obstacles can include rigid theological thinking, an unchanging mindset, and theological fundamentalism, and can prevent people from encountering God ‘outside the camp’ (Ex 19:17; 33:7-11).

25. Francis was inspired by the itinerant life of Christ and his apostles and he followed their example. In fidelity to Francis let us express our itinerancy by choosing to give up positions of publicly acknowledged, assured power, and choose instead those that are more accessible to the ordinary and poorest people. We should discern and decide in fraternity about giving up those ministries that have become occasions of appropriation, advancement and self-promotion. Such a choice favors our life in fraternity and offers individual brothers the possibility of personal growth by enabling them to make new relationships and to assume new responsibilities.

**Itinerancy:
giving up
power and
position**

In this way we will share in the characteristic that Christ has given to His Church as a pilgrim people.

We wish to follow the sound tradition of the first Capuchins, who were nourished by faith, open to hope and always close to those who were needy and abandoned by others. We therefore propose, as a commitment to a new evangelization, to live alongside them, even if this means giving up structures that do not conform to our ideal.

26. Mindful of the fact that minority promotes more just and consistent relationships with the humble people of our times, all fraternities should commit themselves to a serious review of our lifestyle, aiming for a real solidarity, avoiding unnecessary waste and the exaggerated use of vehicles and other tools of modern technology. We should ask ourselves whether our possessions are essential for the mission that is ours in virtue of our charism.

**Reviewing our
lifestyle**

27. A clear awareness of the real situations and social contexts in which we live will move us to undertake a serious discernment regarding the minority of our structures. These will need to be simple, flexible and moderate in scale, far removed from power, money and influence. A lesser brother knows how to improvise.

**Reviewing our
structures**

- a. We should question the structures we own: churches, friaries, gardens and cultural goods. We should ask ourselves whether our use of them is in conformity with our vocation as lowly itinerants. If such goods are surplus to the needs of the fraternity or require excessive maintenance, we should study how to put them to good use for the benefit of the Church, the poor or society. Among possible solutions we should also consider temporary loans, sale, or donation, according to places and needs.

- b. To opt for small houses, with a suitable number of brothers settled in marginal areas and living on their own work, can be a practical way of implementing our lesser, itinerant brotherhood.
- c. Care should be taken, however, to protect goods which, because of their historical significance, are an important reminder of the identity of our Order.

FORMATION FOR MINORITY AND ITINERANCY

28. Candidates to our life, from pre-postulancy onwards, should be informed, guided and encouraged to understand and to live our lesser, itinerant brotherhood, with its distinguishing mark of fraternal equality.

Candidates and minority

29. Just as St Francis grew in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus through his encounter with the leper, so should initial formation provide experiences of real contact with the “lepers” of our age: the sick, the poor and every type of marginalized person, according to the places in which we are present.

Useful experiences in initial formation

As far as possible, some temporary experience of working for a living is useful, so that we are able to understand the ordinary people among whom we live.

In order to complete initial formation, periods of missionary experience are also useful. Periods of study and service in a circumscription other than one’s own, especially in poor ones, help a brother in initial formation to develop an attitude of itinerancy and an awareness of belonging to a worldwide Order.

Right from the beginning of initial formation the two possibilities of “brother” and “priest-brother” must be presented as both being necessary expressions of equal dignity in the one Franciscan-Capuchin charism. Conferences may prepare common programs for initial formation.

30. Minority and itinerancy are elements of the Franciscan vocation that always accompany our fraternal life. Therefore through ongoing formation we should be constantly deepening our grasp of these values, and, in addition to providing opportunities for educational updating, should promote concrete experiences of closeness to people and to the poor. It is therefore appropriate that each brother periodically renews his consecrated identity and his ministry, through experiences of service to the suffering, of life shared with the marginalized and of some pastoral ministry in a new field. These experiences can be had in other circumscriptions or in a mission.

Ongoing formation in minority and itinerancy

Ongoing formation also concerns itself with the Franciscan quality of our prayer. We pray as true lesser brothers when we are ready to share our prayer with the people, when we know how to adapt it to the circumstances, whether through cultural forms or presenting to God the joys and hopes, the sufferings and concerns of our contemporaries (cf. *GS* 1).

31. Since minority is not a natural way that is easily chosen, both fraternities and brothers need ongoing formation in order to acquire a spirit of service and minority. It is essential to develop an ability to view things contemplatively, especially through the community exercise of silent prayer.

Formation for contemplation in minority

The journey of the first Capuchins to the periphery was also a journey to contemplation and silence open to the world. The lesser brother is one who contemplates above all a God who humbles himself in the manger, on the cross and in the Eucharist, and who never loses sight of his brothers and sisters – especially the poorest ones – or of all creation.

The hermitage, which for the first Capuchins was always on the edges of the town, is not a place in which to avert one’s gaze, but to acquire a broader vision of reality, contemplated from the vantage point of God and the poor.

Therefore we wish to promote a type of Franciscan-Capuchin contemplation:

- following the tradition of Francis, focusing on the minority of God as the model and method of evangelization;
- arising out of real life and leading us to action (compassionate love and international compassion);
- a place where, instead of speaking, we listen to God in his Gospel and in the poor.

For this we should:

- promote ongoing formation to help us humbly recognize the need to relearn our own way of contemplation;
- encourage each Conference of the Order to create a space where the brothers can know, practice and love Franciscan prayer;
- discuss in local chapters our use of time and consider which activities could be dropped so that we have the necessary time for contemplative prayer;
- prefer to meditate on the mysteries of the Incarnation and the cross, in accordance with our tradition;
- ensure that eremitical experiences do not encourage a monastic lifestyle, but are a springboard for developing a contemplative perspective in the midst of the world.

32. Our fraternal life is the fundamental requirement in the process of all formation (cf. Const.23, 4-5). This delicate formation process is undermined when a double standard is perceived in relation to what has been taught or proposed, compared with what is found in the jurisdiction at large. Oftentimes this leads to viewing religious profession and ordination as steps or stages of personal advancement or privilege, rather than as deeper levels of commitment and greater generosity. We therefore stress the importance of consistency between what we profess to those in formation, and our lifestyle.

Doctrine and life must be consistent

33. For our options in the field of the social apostolate and for our presence among the poor, knowledge of the social teaching of the Church should be promoted in all our fraternities, including times of special formation (initial and ongoing).

Knowledge of the Church's social teaching

34. All circumscriptions should wholeheartedly commit themselves to implementing the *Proposals* presented by the VII PCO. Meetings should be planned for this purpose to raise the awareness of the brothers, as well as specific action in the fields of initial and ongoing formation.

PCO VII as a formation resource

OUR MINORITY IN THE CHURCH

35. "Since the People of God have been given many gifts to build up the Church (cf. 1Cor 14:26; Eph 4:7, 11-12), presbyters are called to exercise within the Church a ministry of unity without dominating people's faith and as servants of their joy (2Cor 1:24; 1Pt 5:3). The Eucharist, source and summit of our lives (LG 11; Const. 47,1) helps us as lesser ones to understand better this service of ordained ministry.

The priest: minister and servant in the Church

The Eucharist does not belong to any single individual but to Christ himself, in whose priesthood all the faithful participate actively. The priest acts in the name of Christ, the Head, during the assembly's Eucharist (LG 10, 28; PO 2; SC 33). The Gospel according to John presents this Christ as a head who bows low, washing the feet of others: "If I, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you must wash each other's feet"(13:14; cf. *RnB* VI 3; *Adm* IV 2), Further, the

example of Christ humbling himself as he comes into our hands during the Eucharist (*Adm* 1, 16-19; *LOrd* 26-29) should lead the ministers to humble themselves in service to the people. This Christ-like attitude should lead the brother priests in our Order of Lesser Brothers to be humble and lowly in their service at the altar of fraternal life.

36. “The Lord gave me brothers”, said Francis, referring to the origins of the fraternity. (cf. *Test* 16). Into this fraternity he welcomed all those who wanted to follow his ideal of minority – among them priests. Thus, Francis addresses “all the ministers, custodians and *humble priests* of the fraternity” (*LtOrd*,2). To these he offers concrete instructions on how to exercise the ordained ministry as lesser brothers. This applies also to all who are priests in the Order today. The priest-Franciscan lives his ministry by respecting above all the primacy of belonging to the fraternity (cf. *LtOrd*, 30-34). As a special minister of God’s mercy, he draws inspiration from the model Francis puts forward in his *Letter to a Minister* (*LtMin*, 1-21). He makes himself available for the needs of the Church, preferably for the more difficult and least honorable services, and he knows how to be close especially to the suffering, the marginalized, and those far away. Again, the lesser brother who is a priest takes care to see that the liturgy reflects both the simplicity of the Franciscan way and the grandeur of the mysteries that are celebrated, by his own conduct and through the signs and objects that make up the rite. (cf *1LtCl*). Finally, he demonstrates freedom with regard to money, knowing how to offer his ministry freely to everyone, as freely as he has received it (cf Mt 10,8-10).

Characteristics of the “lesser” priest

37. The mission of our Order must express the fraternal nature of our charism. Therefore, when choosing activities and services, circumscriptions should include ministries that do not require priestly ordination.

Brotherly service by those who are not priests

38. “As a lesser brother, Francis always sought to combine obedience to the gospel with obedience to the Church, the community of the baptized. His insight was to understand that the gospel was inspired and born in the Christian community (cf. *Circular Letter* 22, “The Courage to be Minors”). In this sense it was an earnest response to the invitation of the crucified: “Francis, go and repair my Church, which as you see is falling into ruin” (*LMj*,II). In the Testament of Siena he states: “Let them always be faithful and submissive to the prelates and to all the clerics of Holy Mother Church”. We recognize as an essential expression of our minority heartfelt, co-responsible obedience to the Church and her ministers. Indeed, we express our belonging to the Church in a tangible way when, inspired by the gospel, we make ourselves available to serve the entire People of God”. In this way let us remain sincerely available to serve the local and universal Church, working in harmony with its pastors (*Test* 8-10). We should give priority to ministries that are more in keeping with our vocation as minors, assuming pastoral commitments on the boundaries, especially ministries that are least sought after in the Church, where we can more easily manifest compassion and closeness to people, whether in out-of-town parishes, hospital chaplaincies and ministry to the sick or marginalized who suffer poverty in forms old and new. We should work in such a way that remuneration is not the only criterion for our choice of ministries, and that they are an expression of the whole fraternity.

In obedience to the Church, and in the least sought-after ministries

39. In its documents the Order has advised caution in taking on parishes. (cf. *Const.* 151,2). However, we find that, for many reasons, this is not happening, and this conditions our life of fraternity and itinerancy. We propose that our current

Ways of working with the diocesan Church

approach be reviewed, and that the service of evangelization and pastoral ministry should be undertaken more in the sense of collaboration with the local diocese, while always avoiding a sense of power and appropriation. In this perspective it is good that commitments such as parishes, diocesan services and other responsibilities that induce stability should only be taken on for a limited time, taking account of the circumstances.

40. Wherever we go to proclaim the gospel, to establish the Order and to help form the Church, we propose:
- to avoid all signs of power and social status in our way of living, evangelizing and giving assistance;
 - to avoid anything that could create inequality between the local brothers and those from other countries, who often come from richer regions, have easier access to financial resources and in consequence are held in higher esteem than the local brothers;
 - to work preferably with local methods and resources;
 - to promote the various projects in the name of the Capuchin fraternity, not in a personal capacity;
 - to follow the principles of a fraternal economy proposed by PCO VI regarding donations received for the mission.

Establishing the Church and the Order

In choosing new presences we favour local Churches that do not expect great pastoral or social structures from us, but rather Franciscan witness. We should also try to respond to the requests of local churches where there is not yet a Franciscan presence. For this, the collaboration of the brothers and sisters of the Franciscan Family can be extremely helpful.

41. Since Capuchins strive to be lesser, our Order does not seek the episcopacy or other high ecclesiastical offices for its members.

Ecclesiastical offices

FOR A WORLD OF JUSTICE AND PEACE

42. The power of the Holy Spirit stimulates genuine love in our hearts, which creates unity among all creatures, regardless of who or what each one is (cf. *LG* 7). As brothers of Francis, we ought to be bridge-builders and pathfinders, going beyond the barriers of caste, creed, religion and geographical boundaries, holding on to the thread of love while walking through the labyrinth of relationships. Our fraternities should be focal points of peace and reconciliation in our neighbourhoods.

Creating relationships

43. One specific feature of Francis’s minority was his ability to look beyond peoples’ woundedness, limitations and sins and see the presence of God in everyone. To show mercy to “lepers” is to recognize the mystery of God present in the suffering person; constantly to offer forgiveness to those who sin is to make a statement that the brother is greater than his sin. We too, with consistent evangelical witness, should not allow ourselves to be conditioned by evil and suffering, but in everything we should bring hope, promoting reconciliation and healing for those who suffer in body and spirit.

Seeing beyond people’s sin

44. The current situation of international conflict and the human condition marked by individual and social sin reveal a radical need for conversion, reconciliation and peace, which can only come from above. “He is our peace, making a single people out of the two” (Ep2, 14). It is part of our task as lesser brothers to actively foster reconciliation through suitable practical initiatives and to promote a culture of reconciliation. In this context it is certainly an expression

Fostering reconciliation

of minority to make ourselves available to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation.

45. Capuchin brothers believe in the beauty of minority. Like Francis, we believe that, despite the hardships involved in a life of minority and itinerancy, we always have reasons to reflect joy in the way we live. The experience of the gospel and fraternity life itself are reasons to be joyful in living our minority. With this motivation we try to bring joy to the often very harsh life of the poor (cf. *Const.* 100,1). Furthermore, many people notice our joy, which encourages them in their lives and can attract them to embrace our vocation. To be minor and to live joyfully is not only possible, it is an ever-present reality in our lives.

**The joy
of minority**

46. In Jesus, Francis was embraced as brother in a relationship which transformed what was bitter into “sweetness of soul and body” (*Test* 3). Francis committed himself to a new world of redeemed relationships. Capuchin brotherhood overcomes ethnic, linguistic and national divisions. Therefore, it is our specific vocation

**Redeemed
relationships**

- to seek reconciliation above all. (cf. CPO V, 86)
- to seek to achieve understanding and build empathy among parties in conflict.
- to allow each side to express its own experience within a conflict.
- to address the legitimate needs of all parties in a conflict.
- to live a model of solidarity among ourselves that ensures security for each brother and can also provide an example of solidarity for the world.
- to overcome ethnic, linguistic and national divisions through brotherhood.
- to be a voice among the voiceless.
- to consider the effects of proposed solutions on our sister, Mother Earth.
- to denounce unjust policies and practices.

47. When we go among those who do not share our faith we are called in the first place to be witnesses of Christ by our life, and secondly, following the recommendation of St Francis, to dialogue with others (cf. *RnB* XVI, 6-10) and not to proselytize or despise or wrongly interpret the beliefs of others. Consequently we wish to live among the poor without distinction of religion, to dialogue with cultures, religions and denominations and inculturate the gospel.

**Witness and
dialogue**

48. In a world of competition and strife, where self-sustaining financial, military and technological systems are increasingly marginalizing the poor, we commit ourselves as minors and itinerants to carry out a prophetic mission, expressing our solidarity with the poor and marginalized, walking alongside them to transform the world according to the gospel spirit of fraternity.

**Solidarity with the
little ones of our
times**

Our preaching of the Kingdom consists not only of verbal proclamation of the Word, but also of involvement in society for its transformation. Jesus said: “What you did to the least of my brothers and sisters, you did to me” (Mt 25, 40). As lesser brothers, being poor and having opted for the poor, we need to be more actively involved in the social and spiritual development of the poor and marginalized. Depending on the existential situation in various parts of the world, we should work to bring about a positive change and tangible improvement in their lives, using all the Franciscan means at our disposal.

This gives meaning to our solidarity with society's “little ones”, whose deprivation degrades their humanity to a point where their moral sense is often compromised.

The effect of this activity should be critically evaluated and objectively measured from time to time.

49. We believe that from a privileged position like ours it is difficult to understand the world of today, immersed in poverty of every kind. And so, to go out towards those forms of poverty can generate new life in the Order. This requires two things: a physical change of place which would lead us, as happened with the first Capuchins, to place our houses on the fringes of society, living in a simple, poor style. Also, it calls for a sociological change, which requires us to live there with the desire not only to welcome the poor but also to be welcomed by them. This “baptism of the poor”, which Francis received when he embraced the leper, leads us to live in the midst of poverty, walking alongside poor people and taking an active part in their liberation. For this purpose it is desirable that circumscriptions have at least one presence in areas of poverty, and that some of the brothers be able to participate directly in solidarity ventures with impoverished peoples.
50. The International Solidarity Fund is a way in which all jurisdictions should share their resources with circumscriptions that need help to build their own infrastructure and to assist in the social development of their local people. Our minority moves us to contribute to this effort in collaboration with others. Individual jurisdictions should work with other viable organizations and institutions that share our Gospel values in their locality to transform society and to provide direct assistance to poor people. *Franciscans International* at the United Nations is our premier organization with which all jurisdictions in the Order should cooperate. The Order should inform all its members about the work of *Franciscans International* at the United Nations.
51. Many jurisdictions have significant programs for social development/transformation and direct aid to poor people. These activities are laudable and consistent with our Capuchin charism. Because large amounts of money are often involved, they are also occasions of wielding great power which, like all uses of power, need to be critiqued within the Order. The following norms aim to ensure that the use of power in these situations is appropriate to Capuchins.
- Works of social development/transformation should aim to build the structures of a fraternal economy within society. Works of direct aid to poor people should aim to connect people in need with people of means in a fraternal economy.
 - The use of all money in the projects should be transparent.
 - Because these works often involve the exercise of great power, no brother should stay in a position of leadership or control for too long. To do otherwise risks abusing power and developing habits inconsistent with our life of minority. The norm of tenure for a brother in such a position might be similar to that of a provincial minister, i.e., no more than six consecutive years in leadership.
 - Assistance should not go from individual to individual, but always through the fraternity.
 - Preference should be given to those ministries where the brothers themselves directly serve the poor.
 - The brothers should clearly promote Gospel and Franciscan values within these ministries.
 - When social development and direct aid programs sponsored by the Order can be done better by other groups, they should be handed over to them.
52. We Capuchin brothers acknowledge our share of responsibility for the destruction of our planet (for example, the different forms of pollution and excessive exploitation of resources), since we actively contribute to the negative

A change of place

**International
Solidarity
Fund and
Franciscans
International**

**Managing
development
projects**

**Responsibility
for the
environment**

effects of this destructive system.

We invite the brothers, individually and collectively, to assess their conduct in the area of ecology. We also encourage them to take part in action by groups committed to the protection of the environment.

53. In order to combat consumerism, which feeds the dominant system and compromises our witness of minority and itinerancy, we agree:
- To use judiciously, and preferably avoid altogether, consumer goods that are signs of power, ostentation and self-enhancement.
 - To enter into partnership with advisory organizations and associations for ethical consumer awareness.
 - To collaborate with organizations that defend life, nature and biodiversity and that promote the rational and ecologically sustainable use of natural resources.

**Combating
consumerism**

54. In societies that are particularly marked by selfishness and violence, women and children are often forced to suffer the worst consequences. Therefore we should stand by them in practical ways, sustaining the “civilization of love” by upholding a culture of life against a culture of death.

**A civilization
of love**

We should as much as possible promote initiatives in support of defenceless children, rescuing them from violence and working with reliable international associations for their health and education.

We should promote equal rights for women and foster a culture of reciprocity that recognizes their equal dignity. In this way as lesser brothers we relate to women with equality and respect, listening to their claims and criticism, and building with them the new city of equality.

55. The Plenary Council insists on the need for each circumscription to have a functioning Justice and Peace Commission. In each Conference the work of *Franciscans International* should be made known and supported.

**JPE
Commissions**