



Circular Letter of the Minister General

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PROGRAMMATIC LETTER

January 2007

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Roma, A.D. 2016

Sommario

1. Constitutions and General Statutes	5
2. With a missionary spirit.....	6
3. Initial and Ongoing Formation	6
4. Fraternal Economy	7
5. Our Identity as Fraternity.....	7
6. The application of the recent Plenary Councils of the Order.....	7
7. Justice, Peace and the integrity of creation	8
8. The meeting of new provincials.....	8
9. Meeting with the Conferences	8
10. Renovation of the International College	8
11. The renovation of the General Curia	9

PROGRAMMATIC LETTER

Prot. N. 00072/07

To all the Brothers of the Order

Respective residences

Dear Brothers,

We come to offer our fraternal greetings and to share with you the experience of our first months of service to the Order. Having celebrated the General Chapter at the beginning of September, and finding ourselves on a Definitory of which two thirds were new faces, has resulted in a little longer breaking-in period than anticipated. However, we do not wish to miss this opportunity to meet with you. After having met a number of times, we can finally communicate to you what we intend to promote during the sexennium just begun. What we propose to realise in the coming years is, first of all, that which emerged during the last General Chapter.

1. CONSTITUTIONS AND GENERAL STATUTES

The General Chapter decided to continue the work on our fundamental legislation and to express that in two texts: the Constitutions and the General Statutes. In fulfilling this task we have also been asked to enrich the text of the actual Constitutions with elements drawn from the Magisterium's recent teachings and from the journey that the Order has made in last two decades. We have reflected a great deal on this matter in the light of what has emerged from the work of the General Chapter and especially from the proposals approved by the Chapter itself, especially in view of a real involvement of the Friars of the Order. The revision of our fundamental legislation constitutes a privileged moment for a deeper appreciation of our charism.

We have decided to entrust this task to a Commission composed both of representatives of the entire Order and of experts. The Commission's Secretary will reside in Rome. We think to crown this work with an extraordinary General Chapter, probably in 2010.

We will come back to you shortly about this matter to better outline the work that we have been asked to undertake, the different phases in the development of the this work, and a methodology to bring it to completion in an adequate and effective way.

2. WITH A MISSIONARY SPIRIT

For some years, many Circumscriptions of the Order in Europe and America have seen a worrying reduction in the number of vocations. While the unification of Provinces, which is now unavoidable in some parts of the Northern Hemisphere, will lighten structures, it will not solve the problem. The presence of our charism in this part of the world is seriously compromised. The Order is an international fraternity. Therefore we believe it important, in the missionary spirit that has always characterised our Order, that the Provinces with a good number of vocations at this moment support those Provinces in difficulty. We are aware that the passage from one cultural context to another involves a number of difficulties. The challenge before us is great, but it is precisely in this arena that being a fraternity, the heart of our charism, must be concretely realised.

All that is done in the field of economic solidarity should be extended, with due caution, into the area of fraternal assistance, with the gift of brothers. We intend to intend to make this service available to the Order, particular through the use of the of the office of missionary animation.

3. INITIAL AND ONGOING FORMATION

The General Chapter of 2000 expressed the need to strengthen the General Office of Formation. It was reorganised and headquartered at our friary in Frascati. During the last General Chapter, as well, calls came from a number of quarters reinforcing the same request, and showed the need to give ever greater

attention to the area of formation. Therefore we have decided to establish an International Formation Council that will be aligned with the General Office of Formation and have a group of friars more directly engaged. The centre will continue to be at the Friary at Frascati. The make-up of the International Formation Council will allow an up-to-date perspective on what is happening in the field of formation, both initial and ongoing. The General Formation Office will continue to offer suitable means to strengthen the various formation programmes within our Order.

4. FRATERNAL ECONOMY

Discussion about the fraternal economy will continue to be one of the priorities of the present General Definitory. We are studying the text of an economic manual for the General Curia and the various houses dependent upon it. The projected decrease of funds available to the General Curia due to the progressive reduction in the number of friars in the Northern Hemisphere obliges us to look for and guarantee new forms of financing to keep the cultural institutions of the order viable: the Historical Institute, the College, the Institute of Franciscan Spirituality, the Central Library and the General Archives.

5. OUR IDENTITY AS FRATERNITY

Expressing itself along the same lines of earlier Chapters, the last General Chapter has invited us to continue to address to the Holy Father the request to be able to live according to our original charism, and to make this request together with the Franciscan Family. We will take our proposal to Conference of General Ministers of the First Franciscan Order and of the Third Order Regular to see how to proceed together. Likewise, the Order is called to foster within itself the growth of this fundamental dimension of its charism.

6. THE APPLICATION OF THE RECENT PLENARY COUNCILS OF THE ORDER

We intend to continue giving particular attention to the implementation of the recent Plenary Councils of the Order. We will do this, above all, by asking the Conferences and individual Circumscriptions to provide formative occasions for

a correct and transparent fraternal economy and the realisation of that fraternal communion marked by truly redeemed relationships. We intend to continue along the well-tried path of economic visitations.

7. JUSTICE, PEACE AND THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

At the General Chapter several friars voiced a concern that the Order seems to be turning in upon itself and forgetting its being in the world. To avoid this danger and to remain close to the people of our time – especially the poorest and most weary – we intend to continue to support our JPE Office. We will entrust to it the task of giving particular attention to the very prevalent phenomenon of migration, and to study appropriate ways to involve the Order. We then wish to identify the most urgent needs of our day and the ways to respond quickly to them.

8. THE MEETING OF NEW PROVINCIALS

In view of offering a fuller vision of the structure of the General Curia and the services it offers to newly elected Provincials, we will continue to invite them each year during the month of January. We are convinced that these meetings foster mutual understanding and the sense of belonging to the international fraternity.

9. MEETING WITH THE CONFERENCES

We intend to continue the meetings with the Conferences for the benefit of mutual understanding and to study with them how to animate the Order at the level of each Conference. We are convinced that these meetings will give important encouragement for all the friars of the Order.

10. RENOVATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL COLLEGE

The renovation of the International College is nearly complete. We are awaiting the formalisation of the land sale through receipt of the agreed amount. Then we

will be able to conclude the work and pay off the outstanding debts of the third stage of renovations. Only then will it be possible to begin the final stage so earnestly petitioned by many of the capitulars: the restoration of the College's Church.

11. THE RENOVATION OF THE GENERAL CURIA

During the Chapter some friars were in favour of the renovation of the General Curia. Without a doubt something needs to be done. The General Definitory will consider this matter at a later time.

Dear Brothers, the work surrounding the text of the Constitutions will be the focus of the animation of the Order during this sexennium. We know that we have a challenge and task ahead of us, but we fully trust in the help of the good God who will never fail to provide us with his Presence and his Spirit. We have begun our service confidently and in a spirit of fraternal sharing. We trust in being able to involve all of you, brothers, in this process of renewal.

With this wish, we greet you fraternally, wishing you Peace and Good.

Br Mauro Jöhri, OFMCap
General Minister and his Definitory

Rome, 25 January 2007

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