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Abbreviations

Cc (Year)	<i>Capuchin Constitutions</i> (Year)
CcA	<i>Constitutiones Ordinis Minorum Capuccinorum</i> Vol I: Constitutiones Antiquae
CcR	<i>Constitutiones Ordinis Minorum Capuccinorum</i> Vol II: Constitutiones Recentiores
CD	<i>The Contemplative Dimension of Religious Life</i> , SCRSI March 1980.
ET	<i>Evangelica Testificatio</i> , Paul VI 29 June 1969
MHOMC	Monumenta Historica Ordinis Minorum Capuccinorum Vol I-VII
PC	<i>Perfectae Caritatis</i> , Vat ²
PCO I	First Plenary Council of the Order
PCO II	Second Plenary Council of the Order
PCO IV	Fourth Plenary Council of the Order
SCRSI	Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes
Vat²	The Documents of the Second Vatican Council
VS	<i>Venite Seorsum</i> , SCRSI 15 August 1969

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A Capuchin Hermitage in the Province of Australia

A. PROPOSAL BACKGROUND

1. Introduction

The Provincial Assembly (October 1995) discussed future directions for the Order in Australia. It concluded with some proposals. One was *that a study be made about the feasibility of establishing a Provincial House of Prayer*. Consequently, the Provincial Council appointed a group of friars to do this: Brs. John Cooper, Paul Winter and Paul Hanbridge. This work began on February 4, 1996.

Our goals:

To say what "House of Prayer" is

To seek the opinion of the friars - a questionnaire was given to all the friars of the Province

To prepare a proposal to be circulated before the Provincial Chapter (November 1996).

2. Context of the Discussion

2.1 It is better that the friars have a clearer idea of the proposal before the Chapter so that the Chapter discussion may not become bogged down unnecessarily in definitions and misunderstandings. The Chapter should be a continuation and culmination of pre-Chapter discussions.

2.2 Neither the proposal nor this discussion paper are a criticism, accusation or disillusionment about the life of the friars in our province.

1.1. We hope these thoughts may promote discussion among the friars, especially in the local fraternities about the proposal and about the contemplative dimension of our life. At this stage we believe it necessary to keep the discussion distinct from other questions at issue in the Province – e.g. the closing of a house, provincial finances, and current areas of ministerial commitment. It needs to be evaluated according to its own merits. This discussion is not about the closure of a house, but whether there is any merit in having a friary where prayer and its related activities and consequences are the primary focus of the life of the friars.

2.3 This proposal is not unique to the Province of Australia. In fact, similar recommendations are found in recent Constitutions¹ and the Plenary Councils of the

¹ Houses for spiritual recollection, where the friars apply themselves for some time to a more intense life of prayer and evangelical penance, may be erected in each province or region. It will pertain to the provincial Chapter or the Conference of Major Superiors to pass judgment on the suitability of such houses, to erect them and make regulations for their management **Cc(1968)** n.42.

Houses of prayer may be set up in each province or region in which the friars may spend some time in interior prayer and gospel penance. It belongs to the Provincial Chapter or the Conference of Major Superiors to judge the advisability of these houses, establish them and make regulations for them **Cc(1974)** n.43.

Every fraternity should be a truly prayerful fraternity. In order to achieve this it is useful, in accordance with the manifold grace of God, to promote, either in provinces or regions, fraternities of recollection and contemplation, in which brothers may devote themselves for some time to the spirit and life of prayer, as God gives them the grace. These brothers, in communion with the provincial fraternity, should keep in mind what St. Francis wrote for those who desire to live religiously in hermitages. It is the responsibility of the provincial chapter or the conference of Major superiors to

Order.

2.4 The establishment of a hermitage fraternity would be to meet a need within the Order and within the Church. We will show that the proposal for a Capuchin Hermitage is authenticated by Franciscan and Capuchin tradition. In the following pages we will attempt to

outline that past tradition in order to ascertain some of the basic elements in Capuchin eremitical experience;

refer to current legislation of the Order ;

describe some responses in other Provinces.

3. Definition of Terms

3.1 Many different expressions are used in this kind of discussion: "House of Prayer", "Retreat House", "Fraternities of recollection and contemplation" and "Hermitages". In order to reduce ambiguity, these terms need to be defined.

3.2 House of Prayer This term is unsuitable because every friary should be a House of Prayer. In the Constitutions we read:

Every fraternity should be a truly prayerful fraternity. In order to achieve this it is useful, in accordance with the manifold grace of God, to promote, either in provinces or regions, fraternities of recollection and contemplation, in which brothers may devote themselves for some time to the spirit and life of prayer, as God gives them the grace.²

3.3 **Retreat House** Retreat Houses are established to serve those who come for prayer and reflection. The schedule, the prayer, in its various forms, the meals and the overall atmosphere are tailored to meet the needs of the retreatants. In contrast to a Retreat House the atmosphere and the structure of life in the hermitage is geared towards the contemplative life of the friars.

3.4 **Contemplative Fraternities** This term has been used at plenary councils of the Order.³ The second Plenary Council of the Order refers to **Fraternities of Recollection and Contemplation**.⁴ These terms are used for fraternities whose primary purpose and activity is prayer.

3.3 **Hermitage** In our proposal we would prefer the term "hermitage". However, some clarification needs to be made, because in the Franciscan and Capuchin charism, the experience of hermitage is different to the commonly accepted definition.

4. Hermitage in the Franciscan and Capuchin Tradition

4.1 The usual understanding of the eremitical life implies the life of a solitary (the anchoritic life).

The Church recognises the life of hermits and anchorites, in which Christ's faithful withdraw further from the world and devote their lives to the praise of God and the

judge the advisability of such fraternities and to provide for their administration. **Cc(1982) n.56** and **Cc(1990) n.56**.

The emphasis is ours in this paragraph, to highlight a reason our recent Constitutions offer for establishing a 'fraternity of recollection and contemplation'.

² Cc (1990) 56.1

³ **PCO I** n.39; **PCO IV** n. 37

⁴ **PCO II** n. 25; cf **Cc (1982)** and **Cc (1990)** n.56 in both.

salvation of the world through the silence of solitude and through constant prayer and penance.⁵

Without always professing the three evangelical counsels publicly, hermits devote their life to the praise of God and salvation of the world through a stricter separation from the world, the silence of solitude and assiduous prayer and penance.⁶

They manifest to everyone the interior aspect of the mystery of the Church, that is, personal intimacy with Christ. Hidden from the eyes of men, the life of the hermit is a silent preaching of the Lord, to whom he has surrendered his life simply because he is everything to him. Here is a particular call to find in the desert, in the thick of spiritual battle, the glory of the Crucified One.⁷

4.2 We find that the anchoritic life found expression with Francis and the first friars, and also in the early years of the Capuchin Reform. However, that form of life generally gave way to Francis' vision of Hermitage.

4.3 Francis was born at the conclusion of two centuries of monastic reform and development in Italy where eremiticism gained new vigour⁸. At the time of his reconstruction of San Damiano Francis dressed as a hermit⁹. Throughout his life, he sought places apart, even when travelling. The existence of hermitages among the friars at Francis' time is taken for granted. In the *Regula Non Bullata* friars live in hermitages or other places¹⁰.

Francis' "Rule for Hermitages"

Those who wish to live religiously in hermitages should be three brothers or four at most; two of these should be mothers and they may have two sons or at least one. The two who are mothers should follow the life of Martha, while the two sons should follow the life of Mary (cf. Lk 10:38-42) and they may have an enclosure in which each one may have his small cell in which he may pray and sleep.

And they should always say Compline of the day immediately after sundown; and they should be eager to keep silence, and to say their hours, and to rise for Matins; and let them seek *first* of all the kingdom of God and His *justice* (Mt 6:33). And let them say Prime at the proper time, and after Terce they may be free from silence, and they may speak and go to their mothers. And, whenever it pleases them, they can seek alms from them as little poor ones, for the love of God. And afterward they should say Sext and None and Vespers at the proper time.

And in the enclosure, where they live, they should not permit any person to enter, nor should they eat there. Those brothers who are the mothers should be eager to stay far from every person; and because of the obedience to their minister they should protect

⁵ Code of Canon Law 603.1

⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* n.920

⁷ *Catechism* n.921

⁸ St. Romuald of Ravenna (+1027) had established the Camaldolese, a congregation of hermits. One St. Peter Damian systematised a theology of the eremitical life. He became Cardinal of Ostia in 1057. Giorgio Penco, *Storia del Monachesimo in Italia* Vol I and *L'Eremitismo irregolare in Italia nei secoli XI-XII* *Benedictina* 34(1985)1, pp.201-221. Contemporary with Francis, monasticism experienced a local reform in Le Marche under St. Sylvester Guzzolini. Both Francis and the friars were familiar with monasticism in its coenobitic and anchoritic forms. Evidence of the close connection between the Franciscan movement and monasticism has been outlined in G. Penco, "Dal Medio Evo Monastico al movimento Francese. Istituzioni, Testi, Dottrine" in *Benedictina* 35(1988)2, p.509-541.

⁹ *Three Companions* c.7, n.21; c.8.n.28; *Fonti* [1420],[1427].

¹⁰ *Regula Non Bullata* c.7, v.13 in *Opuscula Sancti Francisci* pp.254; cf *Fragmenta* I, v.67, pp.171

their sons from everyone, so that no one can talk with them. And the sons should not talk with any person except with their mothers and with the minister and his custodian when it pleases them to visit with the blessing of the Lord God. The sons, however, should sometimes assume the role of the mothers, as from time to time it may seem good to them to exchange [roles]. They should strive to observe conscientiously and carefully all the things mentioned above.¹¹

4.4 Francis' view of the hermitage is preserved in his Rule for Hermitages¹². The usual concept of hermitage is the dwelling or location of the solitary hermit or anchorite, or loose association of hermits. In St. Francis' Rule for Hermitages the hermitage is fraternal, rather than absolutely anchoritic. The primary motivation for the friars is *to seek the Kingdom of God and his justice* through the life of contemplation in fraternity.

4.5 We also note Francis' exhortations to the Friars about the virtue of hospitality, even within the hermitages. He connects hospitality with poverty, for the friars themselves are *pilgrims and strangers* and ought appropriate no place or thing to themselves¹³. (This theme was adopted then by the Capuchin Constitutions.) Thus the contemplative life was the norm for the early Franciscan friars. The eremitical influence is constant in Franciscan history.¹⁴ Thomas Merton analysed the Franciscan eremitical experience and concluded that it is inseparable from Franciscan spirituality¹⁵.

4.6 In the Statutes of Albacina (1529) the friars called themselves The Friars Minor of the Eremitical Life¹⁶. They were also called the confraternity of Capuchin Hermits.¹⁷ One of the ideals of the first Capuchins was to live an eremitical life in the practice of contemplation¹⁸. At first this included the possibility of leading an anchoritic life. By

¹¹ From Regis Armstrong & Ignatius Brady (eds.) *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works*, pp.146-148.

¹² *Regula pro Eremitis* in *Opuscula* pp.296-298. For comments on Francis' and the Hermitage, cf Artemio Raymundo *Francis' Rule for Hermitages*; also Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action* p.276+. Merton situates Franciscan Eremiticism in the historical context of the development of non-monastic eremitical life which sprang up in Italy in the 10th and 11th centuries. Sometimes these hermits were itinerant preachers, for example, Peter the Hermit who preached the first Crusade. *op.cit.* pp.274-275. cf . Penco, G, "L'Eremitismo irregolare in Italia nei secoli XI-XII" *Benedictina* 34(1985)1, pp.201-221.

¹³ Caveant sibi fratres, ubicumque fuerint in eremis vel in aliis locis, quod nullum locum sibi approprient nec alicui defendant. Et quicumque ad eos venerit amicus vel adversarius, fur vel latro benigne recipiatur. *Regula Non Bullata* c.7, vv.13-14, in *Opuscula* pp. 254-255; cf *Fragmenta* I, 67-68, *op.cit.* pp 171-172. Fratres nihil sibi approprient nec domum nec locum nec aliquam rem. Et tanquam peregrini et advenae (cf 1 Petr 2:11) in hoc saeculo in paupertate et humilitate Domino famulantes vadant pro eleemosyna confidenter, nec oportet eos verecundari, quia Dominus pro nobis se fecit pauperem in hoc mundo (cfr. 2 Cor 8:9). *Regula Bullata* c.6, 1-3, *op.cit.* 231-232; cf *Rule of Saint Clare* c.8,1+

¹⁴ Francesco Jimenez, "Contemplative Franciscan Fraternities of the Present and Past" in *Estudios Franciscanos* 79 (1978) 318-331 as reproduced in *Provincial Bulletin: Irish Capuchin Province* "House of Prayer" edition June 1981, p.1; *Greyfriars Review* 3(1989), pp.69-78.

¹⁵ Jose Carlos Correa Pedroso, *Franciscan Contemplation*, A Reflection Guide for the 5th Plenary Council of the Order p.24. Merton, Thomas *Contemplation in a World of Action*. Chapter two of this book is *The Case for Eremitism*. Part Three of the Chapter deals with *Franciscan Eremitism*. He says: *The hermitage is the stronghold of the pure Franciscan spirit, the primitive ideal of the Holy Founder.* p.277.

¹⁶ cf Matthias a Salo, *Historia Capuccina* pars prima (MHOMC) Vol.6, p.158;(cf also Vol 7, p.58) *Le Prime Costituzioni dei Frati Minori Cappuccini* p.9. *Constitutiones Antiquae*, p.18.

¹⁷ Le prime Costituzioni *ibid.* p.9.

¹⁸ Matteo di Bascio, Raffaele and Luigi Fossombrone were regarded as apostates legally after the Bull *Cum nuper* [8 March 1526] issued at the request of their Provincial, John of Fano. The three

the time of the gathering at the *eremo* at Albacina, experience had revealed that the dangers of perpetual solitude overshadowed any benefits. While the anchoritic life endured in a modified form into the first Constitutions (1536), since it was desired by a good number of friars, Louis Fossombrone was left to encourage the others to live *in the ordinary solitude of the enclosure* as St. Francis proposed¹⁹. None the less, the friars still preferred to live in hermitages with several friars²⁰ in solitary (i.e. remote) and deserted places. The life of continual prayer is of the utmost importance in the earliest constitutions of the Order²¹. In fact, the friars saw contemplative prayer as the purpose of their religious life²².

4.7 The first Capuchin fraternities preferred hermitages²³ located at some distance from towns and cities in order to maintain silence and recollection. After the Statutes of Albacina²⁴, until recently, our Constitutions²⁵ stipulated that our places or houses be

sought absolution from the Apostolic Penitentiary, specifically Cardinal Lorenzo Pucci. His bull, *Ex parte vostra* (cf Criscuolo, *I Cappuccini* nn 134-138, pp 119-121) acknowledged the requests of the three. Among other things, they sought *to dwell and live their lives in some suitable place, isolated from men, leading the eremitical life*. His reply: *you may lead freely and licitly for ever the eremitical life* [possiate liberamente e licitamente condurre per sempre vita eremitica]. The Bull of Clement VII, *Religionis Zelus* [3 July 1528, Viterbo] gave them approval *to lead the eremitical life and to observe the Rule of blessed Francis in so far as human frailty allows* [MHOMC V, pp. 120-122; VII pp.48-51; Wadding, *Annales* XVI, n. XV, pp. 296-298; Criscuolo, nn.139-147; Cargnoni Vol.1 pp.61-69]. cf also MHOMC VII n.222,p.212

¹⁹ MHOMC II, n.198, pp.217-219; MHOMC VII n.185, p.175+

²⁰ *Statutes of Albacina* c.LXI MHOMC VII, p.71. In the first Chronicles of the Capuchin Reform, there are a number of Chapters which deal with the *Vita Anacorita*, cf MHOMC II, nn.194-199, pp.214-221; MHOMC V nn.44-45, pp.40-43; nn.24-25, pp.189-191. Apart from ubiquitous passing references, a number of passages specifically treat of *silence*, cf MHOMC IV nn.35-37, pp.34-36; n.13, pp.162-163; n.18, pp.185-186; MHOMC V, n.151 b), p.156. There is another treatise on *The Virtue of Prayer in the Capuchin Reform* in MHOMC V nn.271-296, pp.184-288.

²¹ *Le Prime Costituzioni*...no. 41,42,114. Contemplation was considered the goal or purpose of the Rule of St. Francis and the life of the Capuchin Friars-*Statutes of Albacina* Chapter VIII; also MHOMC II n.196, pp.215-216; MHOMC VII, pp.173-174

²² cf *Statutes of Albacina*, n.8, also MHOMC Vol.II, p.215; Vol.V, p.161; Vol. VII, pp.173-174. They based this view upon the Rule, Ch.5: *Fratres illi, quibus gratiam dedit Dominus laborandi, laborent fideliter et devote, ita quod, excluso otio animae inimico, sanctae orationis et devotionis spiritum non extinguant, cui debent cetera temporalia deservire*. cf. also Francis Letter to Anthony, v.2: *Placet mihi quod sacram theologiam legas fratribus, dummodo inter huius studium orationis et devotionis spiritum non extinguas, sicut in regula continetur*. Furthermore, in Francis *Regula Non Bullata*, chapter 17, v.5, it seems we find a classification - either of the friars *or* their activities, namely, - *praedicatores, oratores et laboratores*. Those friars who could, were exhorted to work. Those with the gift of preaching, and only after careful examination, received the faculty to do so. Not all friars were preachers nor felt inspired to go among the Saracens (Reg NB c.16; Reg B c.12). Not all could work with their hands. Yet all the friars were to pray, irrespective of their activities. Prayer was essential and permanent in the life of the fraternity.

The Franciscan charism embraces all these possibilities, recognising the diversity of graces or inspirations from the Lord. At any given time, some were dedicated mostly to prayer (as in the hermitages for example), while others had the charism of preaching or that of working. What was the nature of Francis' famous dilemma? Was it only a personal one? Or was his dilemma one of policy for the Order? *Legenda Maior* Ch.12, n.2; *Fioretti* Ch.16. Francis met this dilemma among other holy persons also, cf *I Celano* c.14, n.35; *Leg. Maior* c.14, n.2.

²³ Terms such as *heremo* and *romitorio* are often met in the chronicles of the Capuchin Reform.

²⁴ *... et che detti luoghi siano presi fuori delle città distanti per un miglio o poco manco...* (n.L, in MHOMC Vol 5, p.168)

²⁵ *So that seculars may benefit from us in the spiritual life and we from them in temporal things, it is ordained that our houses be built not too far from cities and populated areas; nor too close so that we*

neither too close nor too far from towns, villas or castles. Proximity to populated areas was necessary so that the *seculars* could make use of the friars in spiritual matters, and the seculars be useful to the friars in temporal things. Distance, and the preference²⁶ for solitary and deserted places was considered necessary so that the contemplative prayer life of the fraternity not suffer detriment because of too many visits from seculars.

4.8 While at first there was some explicit experience of the anchoritic life connected with these places²⁷, our discussion is not about the anchoritic life but about the life of the friars in hermitages, where silence is the faithful guardian of the spirit of prayer.

4.9 There has been a growing interest and awareness of the importance of contemplative prayer in the life of the friars in the Order since the call of Vatican II for religious to rediscover their roots. The Plenary Councils of the Order have spoken repeatedly of the need to create “contemplative fraternities” (PCO 1²⁸; PCO 4 no.37), “fraternities of recollection and contemplation” (PCO 2)²⁹ and the need to form all the

do not suffer detriment from many visits. None the less, preference was for solitary, lowly places far from city comforts. *Le Prime Costituzioni Dei Frati Minori Cappuccini* (i.e. 1536), page 186 n.49 (critical version), page 50, modern version n.77.

Et accio li seculari possino di noi servirsi ne le cose spirituale: & noi di loro ne le temporale; che li nostri i lochi non si pigliano molto lontano da le cita castelli & ville; ne ancho troppo proximi; accio per la troppo frequentia loro: non patiamo detrimento: basta che regolarmente siano distanti un miglio: & mezo o circa approximandoci sempre piu presto (a exemplo di sancti patri: & precipue del nostro) alli solitarii deserti che alle deliciose citade. Se e etiam determinato: che ne li nostri lochi sia (potendosi) una piccola stanzietta col camino per ricevere quando bisognasse: li peregrini & forestieri: si come ricerca la charita & patisse la nostra poverta. [Constitutiones Antiquae CcA 1536 pp 55-56]

See also *Constitutiones Antiquae CcA (1552)* pp 108-109; **CcA (1575)** p.175; **CcA (1608)** p.249; **CcA (1643)** p.597; **CcA (1628)** p.361. cf next footnote also.

²⁶ The requirement of distance remained explicit in the Capuchin Constitutions until those of 1925... *approximandoci sempre piu presto (a exemplo de sancti patri: & precipue del nostro) alli solitarii deserti che deliciose citade CcA (1536)* p.55; ... *accostandosi pero sempre piu presto ad essemplio di santi padri, & massime del nostro a solitarii deserti che alle deliciose citta CcA (1552)* pp.108-109; ... *amando di stare piu presto ad essemplio de' Santi Padri, & massime del nostro ne luoghi solitari, o deserti che alle deliciose città CcA (1575)* p.175; **CcA (1608)** p.249; **CcA (1638)** p.361; **CcA (1643)** p.597; ... *Et ut saeculares nobis uti valeant in rebus spiritualibus, nos vero eisdem vicissim in temporalibus, ordinamus, ut conventus nostri non accipiantur, qui sint a civitatibus, oppidis vel pagis valde remota, nec, si fieri potest, intra muros seu in medio locorum, ne per nimiam saecularium frequentiam detrimentum patiamur, amando potius ad exemplum sanctorum Patrum, praecipueque Patris nostri, habitare in locis solitariis et tranquillis, quam in amoenis civitatibus CcR (1896)* pp.507-508; ... *Ed acciocchè i secolari possano di noi servirsi nelle cose spirituali, e noi di loro nelle temporali, ordiniamo, che i nostri Luoghi non si piglino molto lontano dalle città, castelli o ville; nè anco troppo vicini, se non per gravi e giusti motivi, affinché per la loro troppo frequenza non patiamo detrimento. Basta che regolarmente sieno distanti un chilometro o circa, amando di stare più presto, ad esemplo de' Santi Padri e massime del nostro, ne' luoghi solitari e deserti che nelle deliciose città. CcR (1909)* n.96, p.91; **CcR (1925)** nn 100-101, p.397.

²⁷ *Statutes of Albacina* n.47, cf (**MHOMC**) Vol.5, p.167. *Constitutions of 1536* No.51 (No.79 in Catalana, F. et alii (eds), *Le Prime Costituzioni dei Frati Minori Cappuccini*, L'Italia Franciscana, Roma, 1982.) cf . Bernadinus a Colpetrazzo, *Historia Ordinis Fratrum Minorum Capuccinorum (1525-1593)*, Liber Tertius (**MHOMC**), Vol.4, pp.40-43, pp.189-191 “della vita anacoritica: (The love of solitude and the Advantages of solitude)”

²⁸ 39. Granted that, according to the Constitutions n.12, n.40 and n.155, the friars must always unite prayer and work and that they may go to a house of recollection set up according to the mind of n.42 of the Constitutions, the Plenary Council of the Order earnestly recommends further that there be contemplative fraternities where the friars may exclusively foster intimacy with the Lord for as long a time as seems necessary to them in the Lord.

²⁹ 25 Every fraternity ought to be, in reality, a praying fraternity. So that ever greater progress may

friars in Franciscan prayer (PCO 4)³⁰.

be made towards achieving this, it is useful to encourage the setting up of fraternities of recollection and contemplation, using sound principles. This has already been done in several Provinces in recent years, with a good deal of success (Religious Life in Hermitages; **Cc (1990)** n.42; **PCO** Quito IIB, 20)

³⁰ 37 Since the plenary Council of Taize[85], encouraging progress in deepening our life of prayer has been made in the Order and in the fraternities, even if some difficulties still remain, due to excessive emphasis on efficiency in work and to the flight from brotherhood on the part of individual friars. The establishment of contemplative fraternities has met with many obstacles[86].

We maintain that the Order has in the Taize Document a valuable aid for the spirit and life of prayer. For this reason only a few indications concerning formation in the spirit and life of prayer are given here, so that prayer can have the primacy it should rightly have according to the words and example of Saint Francis and to Capuchin tradition[87].

As a practical principle in formation to a life of prayer, it will often be necessary to reflect upon what is stated by the Taize Document: “The spirit of prayer that is truly a living one cannot help but inspire and vivify the actual life of the friars, and therefore it necessarily renews the wholesome traditional forms and creates suitable new ones.”

38. Prayer is a gift of God which, however, must be developed by searching, study and faithfulness [88].

The following guidelines may prove useful in the process of learning to pray more and more:

- Profound participation in the liturgy of the Church according to the course of the liturgical year makes us live the great mysteries of redemption [89].
- A progressive introduction to and practice of biblical prayer, especially the Psalms, imbues us with a great sense of God and salvation history [90].
- An introduction to the great experiences of God among various peoples and to the new and traditional forms of prayer can enrich our way of praying. Prayers which are highly valued in the various cultures merit special attention.
- Shared prayer with our brothers and the people makes us aware of their anxieties and joys in the presence of God.
- Regularity of prayer helps growth in the spirit of prayer itself, which needs continuity and fidelity if it is to develop [91].

39. There are various requirements of a general order for promoting the growth of fraternities and individuals in prayer.

The fraternity itself can play its part as a formative community in prayer if all the friars contribute by participating in prayer, by appropriate preparation for community functions, by creating a favourable climate for prayer. Traditional forms, e.g., night vigils, can then take on new meaning. In this context the problem of the time schedule must also be resolved, both as regards set times and more prolonged, special periods of prayer [92].

Qualified local formation personnel with experience of prayer are needed to instill spirit and life and promote creativity so that ritualism can be avoided.

40. Formation should aid Franciscan prayer [93] in such a way that prayer becomes more and more the expression of our whole way of being, our values, our essential individual and community existence, and the demands of our times [94].

Inner or mental prayer, personal and of an affective character, has always held first place in our traditional prayer; it has been the true centre of fraternal and apostolic life (Taize 20). It appears vitally important to renew this type of prayer, teach it to our friars and make it the core of our apostolate. This is particularly true in that today there exists a widespread desire for this kind of contemplative prayer, especially among the young [95].

The characteristics of Franciscan prayer as being biblical, emotional, contemplative and penitential

4.10 Capuchin contemplative fraternities are not a luxury but a necessity for the life of the Order (PCO V n.1,11).

Facing our prophetic and apostolic vocation, we experience the imperative summons to this contemplative dimension so characteristic of our Franciscan charism: living on intimate terms with God, and contemplating man in the image of the Son, we become apostles of Christ.³¹

We must foster houses of prayer and hermitages to nourish our contemplative life (Const. 56:1) and to help those who are setting out to find a form of contemplation adapted to various different conditions.³²

4.11 The eremitical life is a means not an end. Contemplative prayer, however, is an essential means. The end of the Christian life, including religious life, is communion with God. Communion with God is not determined by physical circumstances but is a moral union: a communion of heart, mind and will with Him and with one's neighbour.

4.12 This communion is realised in charity and obedience. Therefore, the contemplative community will find itself in an ongoing path to conversion. Friars who find it too difficult, for personal reasons, to live in fraternity or in obedience, or who do not want to, will find the contemplative fraternity an unbearable experience. The interior solitude necessary for contemplative prayer may be just as difficult. Growth in contemplative prayer and loving obedience are inseparably and mutually dependent.

4.13 The primacy of loving obedience is intimately related to the experience of the Franciscan hermitage. This is evident from the experience of St. Francis as well as the Capuchin friars past and present. For Francis the hermitage is a *fraternity* of 3 or 4 brothers. He describes their relationship as 'mothers and sons'. They remain obedient to one another and to the *custos*.

4.14 Loving obedience is more precious and essential than remaining apart in a hermitage³³. The experience of the early Capuchin friars reinforces this. They speak of the danger of attempting to live the contemplative life while outside of obedience to the superiors. It is better to remain subject to one's superior than to live in a hermitage. Only those friars who are expert in fraternal life were to be judged suitable for the solitary or anchoritic life. It would be easier to raise the dead than for an inexperienced friar to remain in solitude without falling³⁴. In fact, the Capuchin Reform

[96], indicate the directions in which formation should proceed: formation in listening to the word of God [97]; formation of the heart [98]; development of the capacity for awe before God's great works in the whole of creation and redemption [99]; interest in the mysteries of Christ's death and resurrection [100]; formation to discover God's presence and His will; formation to acquire a universal spirit that prays and lives as it shares in the joys and sorrows of its brothers [102].

This kind of formation will aid in finding the right solution of the prayer-activity dilemma and will contribute to ensuring that the spirit of prayer and devotion pervades the entire life of the friars [103].

A true and proper step-by-step teaching method in the spirit and life of prayer must respect differences in the cultural areas. The Conferences, in cooperation with the regional Franciscan centres, should prepare a suitable program.

³¹ n.1.

³² n.11.

³³ cf Francis' *Letter to a Minister* v.8

³⁴ cf . Bernadinus a Colpetrazzo, *Historia Ordinis Fratrum Minorum Capuccinorum (1525-1593)*, Liber Primus, chapter 36, p.214 n.194; pp.218-221 n.198-199 (**MHOMC**) Vol.2. Liber Secundus, pp.289-290, 404-405 (**MHOMC**) Vol.3. Liber Tertius, chapter 3, p.14 n.14.

We may note the caution born of ancient experience. For example, St Mark the Ascetic wrote to Nicholas the Solitary: It is dangerous to isolate oneself completely, relying on one's own judgement with no one else as witness; and it is equally dangerous to live with those who are inexperienced in spiritual warfare... Thus a man should try to live with those who possess spiritual knowledge, or at least consult with them continually...etc *Philokalia* Vol 1, p.158.

Similar caution is found in the West, for example, see Conference xviii of John Cassian (pp. 185-

witnessed a rapid shift away from anchoritic life (a hidden life perhaps encouraged partly by persecution) towards life in small communities.

4.15 Beyond our own need, the establishment of a hermitage would be a response to a growing need among men and women today. Many people find themselves within an unprecedented social context, especially those who live in urban settings. Often we feel increasingly alienated from ourselves, others and God within an ever deepening sense of anonymity and personal sense of powerlessness and insignificance. While we see many positive and rapid changes around us, we also note the development of certain dangers. Many experience a kind of domination by material things and by consumerism. To a hectic pace and complexity of life, and constant pressures and demands related to economic survival. The dignity of the person and value of human life sometimes seem subservient to the pragmatism of economic utopias. There can be a sense of a lack of control, of being overwhelmed by an overload of information and suffocating too vast to digest personally. Within an environment of secularisation there is a loss both of meaning in life and presence of God. At the same time there is a growing recognition of the human need for times of silence and the deepening of relationships. There is a real thirst for the recovery of the spiritual dimension of the person and life itself. The human heart still quests for the transcendent and the mystery of God, searching for permanent, real values.

4.16 These phenomena and their consequences are found not only in society and the Church but in the Order as well.

Interior dissipation, which seeks compensation in activism, seriously compromises, on the one hand the experience of God in prayer and in hearing the Word, and on the other hand spiritual dialogue with one's confreres.

Thus follows the inability "to be men of prayer", and still less to be experts who can initiate and accompany others in the way of prayer. Sometimes traditional methods are no longer regarded as suitable means for the needs of men today.

We are witnessing with joy the rise of many new forms which seek to respond to man's need for the Transcendent: oases and centres of spirituality, new forms of the eremitical life, the opening of the contemplative life to the laity. Many brothers are rediscovering the experience of contemplation as a vital need, as a spiritual dimension

191). The monastic rules of the West take up Cassian's words: the *Rule of the Master*, (RM) pp 105-106 in Cistercian Studies Series n.6, and the Rule of Saint Benedict summarises this in Chapter 1, verses 1-12, cf *The Rule of Saint Benedict in English* (RB), pp. 20-21.

Both Monastic Rules speak about the four kinds of monks. The second kind of monks are anchorites, who are no longer in the first fervour of conversion but by long probation in the monastery have learned, taught by association with many others, to fight against the devil; well equipped, they leave the ranks of the brethren for single combat in the desert (RM, p.105).

For RM and RB, *The third kind of monk is the worst*. [The fourth kind, the *gyrovagues* (RM 106, RB 21), don't really count as monks. RB repeats RM, omitting the last few verses.] The third kind are the *sarabaites*. (The origin of the word is uncertain, cf John Cassian, *Conferences* p.185+). RM says:

The third kind of monks, the Sarabaites, is the worst. I would do no better to call them still of the world, except that the tonsure of their religious intent prevents me from doing so. Untested, as gold in the furnace, by any Rule or by experience as a master, soft as lead, they still keep faith with the world and manifestly lie to God by their tonsure. Two or three together, or even alone, without a shepherd, enclosed not in the Lord's but in their own sheepfold, they have as the law the wilfulness of their own desires; whatever they think and decide, that they call holy, and what they do not want, that they consider forbidden. And while they want to have cells, chests and various things according to their own judgement, they are unaware that they are losing their own petty souls. Likewise there are those who, recently converted, in unrestrained fervour, think that the desert is a place of repose. Giving no thought to the devils lying in wait to harm them, untrained but confident, they go forth to single combat with him, doubtlessly only to fall victim to the jaws of the experienced wolf (RM, pp 105-106, VV 1-12).

Even Thomas of Celano rebuked the lax anchoritic friars whose only norm was for each to live according to his own whim (2 Celano c.136,n.179).

which nourishes activity and fraternity. Centres of Franciscan spirituality seek to harmonise the contemplative aspect with the active. This could be the prelude to a new contemplative springtime in the Order.³⁵

We must rediscover valid traditional forms of the contemplative way.³⁶

4.17 Authentic contemplative life will promote and express fraternal communion. It will promote the renewal of our religious life. Both contemplative life and fraternity will overflow into hospitality in a joyful self diffusion, willing to embrace all persons.

4.18 The Statutes of Albacina, which reflect the vision of Louis of Fossombrone³⁷ for the Order, do not seem to encourage the welcoming of visitors. However, the seculars and friars were mutually dependent, and the first chronicles of the Capuchin reform testify to a remarkable hospitality among the friars. The early Constitutions³⁸ allow built-in accommodation for the welcome of pilgrims and strangers, especially religious persons³⁹ according to the Rule⁴⁰. Hospitality has traditional precedent in the Capuchin charism. The apostolic effectiveness of the Capuchin hermitage will be realised in a large measure through some form of sharing in our life made open to others.

³⁵ **PCO V**, no.4.

³⁶ **PCO V**, no.10.

³⁷ *Le costituzioni che fecero in Alvacina si trovano sotto il nome di Fra Ludovico da Fossombrone, perchè con esse egli dispose la Congregazione Capuccina tutto il tempo che la governò, et puote essere che egli vi aggiungesse alcuna cosa, secondo che nel progresso vedeva esser bisogno.* Matthias a Salo presents this text as a heading to the *constitutions* of Albacina in his *Historia Capuccina* (Part I), **MHOMC**, Vol 5, pp. 158-171. (On the original text of these Constitutions or Statutes see **MHOMC** Vol 1, p.244, footnote 2; see also *Constitutiones Antiquae*, p.9-10,15.) Melchior de Pobladura's critical edition of the Statutes of Albacina is used in *Historia Capuccina* op.cit.. The facsimile of the statutes in *Constitutiones Antiquae* pp. 18-31, are a reproduction of the manuscript version of *Historia Capuccina*, Chapter 27, kept in the archives of the general curia. [Paulus a Foligno reproduces Matthias' version with some rennovation of spelling and grammar, as well as some interesting small additions and words changes. *Origo et Progressus Ordinis Fratrum Minorum Capuccinorum* **MHOMC** Vol 7, pp.58-73. Current Italian edition in Cargnoni Vol 1, p. 164-225; also Criscuolo nn.165-233, pp.140-16]

³⁸ **Cc** 1536,1552, and 1575

³⁹ **CcA (1536)**, in *Constitutiones Antiquae* pp. 55-56: *Se e etiam determinato:che ne li nostri lochi sia (potendosi) una piccola stanzietta col camino per ricevere quando bisognasse:li peregrini&forestieri; si come ricerca la charita&patisse la nostra poverta.* cf with the variation *quando bisignassi alcun peregrino,et viandante,come ricerca la charita,et quando patisce la poverta, si ordina oltra di questo, che se ne i lochi che si pigliaranno faranno vite, o arbori superflui non si taglino* op.cit. **CcA (1552)** p.109; with this variation: *alcun povero peregrino,&forastiero:come ricerca la carità,&secondo che pate la nostra povertà, massimamente persone religiose dedicate al servizio divino, CcA (1575)* p.175.

This reference to the virtue of hospitality is repeated throughout the many revisions of our Constitutions. For example: *Et per nutrire la charita mare dogni virtu:si ordina, che con ogni possibile humanita christiana si receva quelle persone:che verranno ne li nostri lochi: precipue li religiose come persone piu peculiamente deputate al divino obsequio:si come ci exhortava el nostro padre ne la sua prima regula CcA (1536)* p.59. *Et perche alcuni di quelli antichi patriarchi per la hospitalita meritorno albergar i santi angeli, si ordina che in ogni loco sia deputato uno il quale habbia diligente cura di ricevere in foresteri con ogni charita christiana,& ad esempio dell'humil figlio di Dio gli lavaranno i piedi convenendo a quello atto di charita tutti i frati CcA (1552)* p.100; **CcA (1575)** p.168; **CcA (1575)** p.195; **CcA (1608)** p.244; **CcA (1638)** p.353; **CcA (1643)** p.592; **CcR (1896)** p.498; **CcR (1909)** pp.82; **CcR (1925)** p.391 *Si ordina parimente che i nostri fratelli forastieri ne i lochi nostri siano da tutti frati raccolti con fraterna charita, quali come veri figlioli del padre celestiale CcA (1552)* p.129. Other ordinances were also instituted for the accommodation of visitors, e.g. the appointment of a guest master in each fraternity.

⁴⁰ Regula Bullata c.6, 1+

4.19 Hence, the PCO V concludes we need to foster Houses of Prayer and Hermitages to nourish our contemplative life and to help those who are setting out to find appropriate expressions of this kind of life.⁴¹

5. Preliminary Observations on essential elements of the Capuchin "eremitical" life

5.1 Capuchin Franciscan eremitical life is fraternal rather than anchoritic. The anchoritic life has had a place within the charism.

5.2 The contemplative life and hermitage houses are at the heart of Capuchin spirituality.

5.3 Contemplative communities play an integral part in the Life and Mission of the Church.

5.4 While secular society is searching for spiritual, there is also a growing recognition of the need within the Order and the Church to rediscover the contemplative dimension of the Christian life. There is a need for places where the life of contemplative prayer can be experienced, shared and fostered concretely. This need within the Order and the Church imposes an imperative upon us. That imperative has been restated within our recent and current Constitutions and the Plenary Councils of the Order.

Here we list the elements which appear essential for a Capuchin hermitage. Then we will consider them more fully in the following pages.

5.5 **Silence** – “the faithful guardian of the interior spirit” (Constitutions n.57).⁴²

5.6 **Solitude and Suitable Setting** - a solitary place. Contemplation is the journey to interior solitude. Exterior solitude supports and promotes this journey. For this reason the early Capuchin houses were kept apart from farms and towns. The place should be both suitable and beautiful - adequate for the purposes of the hermitage and within a natural environment that is conducive to contemplative prayer.

5.7 It should be a place of **hospitality** where friars and others may participate in the prayer life of the **fraternity**.

5.8 It will need **a regular observance - flexibility and balance** to establish the structural support for a sound rhythm of prayer and work. The fraternal life of prayer would focus on the Liturgy and include other elements such as both vocal and mental prayer in common as well as privately, *lectio divina*, etc. As has been the experience of the Capuchin hermitage in Herman, PA, we would envisage that the apostolic outreach of the hermitage would grow naturally out of the talents of the friars who make up the fraternity and their response to the genuine needs of the local church. Thus the balance between prayer and activity will be relative to the gifts of the individuals.⁴³ Therefore, the practical resolution and balance of the essential elements with the particular needs and talents of the friars in the hermitage can only be realised on site. The details of the resolution cannot be predicted in detail beforehand.

5.9 **Size** The fraternity should be small, yet no less than three or four friars. The place needs to be able to accommodate a small number of resident visitors. The hermitage need to be based on a **relatively permanent** lifestyle (3 or 4 yrs) for a stable core group of friars drawn to the contemplative life, the apostolate of prayer and making prayerful environment where others are welcome to participate.

5.10 It is the responsibility of the provincial chapter or the conference of Major superiors to judge the advisability of such fraternities and to provide for their administration⁴⁴. The hermitage would aim to become **financially self-supporting**.

5.11 **Province** The hermitage would be a place of temporary withdrawal for some

⁴¹ cf PCO V, no.11.

⁴² This expression about silence has been present in all the Constitutions of the Order since 1536.

⁴³ Lester Knoll, *Report on the Capuchin Hermitage: Province of St. Augustine*, pp.4-5.

⁴⁴ **Cc(1982)** n.56 and **Cc(1990)** n.56.

time (e.g. 2 weeks, month, 6 months) from a busy life for spiritual renewal or a place of retreat for prolonged prayer and solitude. The life of the hermitage would serve the province offering the possibility to all friars to deepen their prayer life.

A postscript

5.12 The Capuchin hermitage will balance our life, ministry and presence in Australia and provide an environment for the experience of prayer for men. It could also encourage the ongoing development of the contemplative life throughout our province. In order to provide this experience also for women it is worthwhile to consider the possibility of introducing the presence of the **Capuchin Poor Clares**.

B. ASPECTS OF CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE AND SETTING

6. The Contemplative Life in the Mission of the Church

In our discussion the **hermitage** is a Capuchin fraternity given primarily to contemplative prayer. How would a contemplative community play a part in evangelisation? What value does the life of a contemplative community have in the apostolic activity and mission of the Church?

Taking up *Perfectae Caritatis* (the Decree on the Renewal of Religious Life), on 15 August 1969 the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes offered an instruction on the Contemplative Life and the Enclosure of Nuns - *Venite Seorsum*⁴⁵. Later (March 1980) the *Plenaria* of the same Congregation spoke about the *Contemplative Dimension of Religious Life*. The second text was prompted by the emergence of many forms of prayer and new forms of contemplative life, as well as *the need to do away with the harmful dichotomy between interior life and activity in the personal and communal life of religious in reaction to a certain period of downgrading of prayer and recollection*⁴⁶. Both texts attempt to describe the place of contemplative religious in the mission of the Church. As we shall see, the SCRSI affirms that *bearing witness to the intimate life of the Church, (contemplative religious) are indispensable to the fullness of her presence*⁴⁷. Addressing contemplative religious⁴⁸ Paul VI states *the Church perceives in you the fullest expression of herself*.

The Church is indeed eager to act, yet at the same time she is no less devoted to contemplation, in such a way that in her the human is directed and subordinated to the divine, the visible likewise to the invisible, action to contemplation⁴⁹.

Describing contemplative religious life in *Venite Seorsum*, the SCRSI says

Withdrawal from the world for the sake of leading a more intense life of prayer in solitude is nothing other than a very particular way of living and expressing the Paschal Mystery of Christ, which is death ordained to resurrection⁵⁰

The document describes beautifully the primacy of the biblical themes of the exodus used by the Sacred Liturgy and the Fathers to penetrate and expound the mystery of Christ. Christ experiences solitude and also puts into effect the new exodus. The Christian life is a new exodus, and the contemplative experiences the solitude of Christ⁵¹.

The life of contemplative religious is joined to the life and mission of the Church

⁴⁵ Vat² pp.565-675

⁴⁶ **CD** pp 51-52

⁴⁷ **VS**, p. 665.

⁴⁸ Allocution 23.3.66. cf **VS** note 37, p.666; **CD** n.25,p.74

⁴⁹ *Sacrosanctum Concilium* n.2; **VS** p.660

⁵⁰ **VS** p.659; cf p.669; **VC** n.59,p.108; cf *Catechism* nn 2717-2718.

⁵¹ See **VS** note 8

because it participates in Christ's Passover, the paschal mystery, His redeeming passion, which is the beginning of every apostolate⁵².

The mission of the Church as a transforming leaven may be described as the proclamation of the gospel and the construction of the earthly city. *Yet with this mission the fullness of the mystery of the Church is not expressed*⁵³. Contemplative religious are not strangers⁵⁴. They are not peripheral to the mission and life of the Church but *legitimate and necessary*⁵⁵, and by no means excluded from *the apostolate of the word*⁵⁶.

The document *Venite Seorsum* outlines a number of ways in which contemplative religious participate in the life and mission of the Church.

i) Contemplatives give expression to the contemplative character of the Church by actually withdrawing into **solitude**...in order that through constant prayer and ready penance they give themselves to God alone⁵⁷. In fact, a certain degree of withdrawal from the world and some measure of contemplation must necessarily be present in every form of Christian life. In other words, those who retire to a cloistered life put into practice in a much more absolute and exemplary way an element essential to every Christian life⁵⁸.

ii) They are united with the rest of humanity *in a more profound sense in the heart of Christ*⁵⁹. Dedicated to contemplation alone they harbour in their hearts the sufferings and anguish of all men⁶⁰. Solitude is not separation⁶¹ from people and their concerns.

iii) It was in the desert or in mountain solitude that God revealed hidden truths to man⁶². How then can contemplatives be considered alien to humanity if in them humanity achieves its fulfilment?⁶³

iv) If they are in the heart of the world, still more are they in the heart of the Church⁶⁴. In Carmel, Thérèse of Lisieux had a great love for the missions and for missionaries. On account of this she is the patron of the Missions. She wrote:

If the Church was a body composed of different members, it couldn't lack the noblest of all; it must have a heart, and a heart burning with love. And I realised that this love alone was the true motive force which enabled the other members of the Church to act; if it ceased to function, the Apostles would forget to preach the gospel, the martyrs would refuse to shed their blood. Love, in fact, is the vocation which includes all others; it's a universe of its own, comprising all time and space - it's eternal⁶⁵.

Through their prayers, contemplatives sustain the missionary activity of the Church.

v) Contemplative religious life which aims at eliminating all that might divide the spirit against itself in any way enables them to achieve that fullness of their personalities

⁵² **VS** pp.665-666

⁵³ **VS** p.659

⁵⁴ cf *Lumen Gentium* n.46

⁵⁵ **VS** p.660

⁵⁶ **VS** p.669; cf Acts 6:2-4

⁵⁷ **PC** n.7; **VS** p.660

⁵⁸ cf *Lumen Gentium* n.41; **PC** n.5; **VS** p.661

⁵⁹ *Lumen Gentium* n.46; **VS** p.663

⁶⁰ **VS** p.664

⁶¹ cf Thomas Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation*

⁶² cf Genesis 32:25-31; Exodus 3; 24:1-8; 34:5-9; 1 Kings 19:8-12; Luke 2:7-9; Matthew 17:1-8, etc

⁶³ **VS** p.664

⁶⁴ **VS**, p.664

⁶⁵ *Catechism* n.826; **VS** note 34, p.665

whose hall mark is **unity**, and permits them to devote themselves more thoroughly to the quest for God their goal, to attend to Him more perfectly⁶⁶.

Thus they participate in the apostolate of the Word, by making present concretely before the scepticism of the world, not only the goal of faith but also the way, especially in *communio* or **fraternity**. For the cloister is the place of spiritual communion with God and with the brethren⁶⁷.

This witness will exercise a more forceful influence on men of our times to the degree that it is collective, or rather, social. It is not, in fact, the witness of the individual that attracts man of today, but the witness, fruit of a life led together with others, of a given community ..(whose) continuity and vigour confirms the validity of the contemplative community⁶⁸.

Those contemplative religious, bearing witness to the intimate life of the Church are indispensable to the fullness of her presence⁶⁹.

In these ways those entirely ordered towards contemplation enlarge the Church by their **hidden apostolic fruitfulness**⁷⁰. This way of life continues to draw many vocations, attracting people by the radical nature of a "spousal" existence dedicated totally to God in contemplation. As an expression of pure love which is worth more than any work, the contemplative life generates an extraordinary apostolic and missionary effectiveness⁷¹.

Finally, *the contemplative dimension is the real secret of renewal of religious life*⁷². This was the experience of the first Capuchins. They did not intend to begin a Reform. They wanted to pray.

7. Silence

Silence is for the sake of contemplation. Silence embraces solitude, recollection, withdrawal, retreat and stillness. In the Orthodox contemplative tradition, stillness is a fundamental aspect⁷³.

Contemplative prayer is silence, the "symbol of the world to come" or "silent love."
Words in this kind of prayer are not speeches; they are like kindling that feeds the fire of love. In this silence, unbearable to the "outer" man, the Father speaks to us of His Incarnate Word, who suffered, died, and rose; in this silence the Spirit of adoption

⁶⁶ **VS** p.662

⁶⁷ **VC** n.59,p.109

⁶⁸ **VS** pp.669-670

⁶⁹ *Ad Gentes* 18, John XXIII Allocution 20.9.60; **VS** p.665 note 33

⁷⁰ **PC** n.7; **ET** n.8,pp.17-18; cf **CD** n.26,p.75

⁷¹ **VC** n.59,p.109

⁷² **ET** n.30,p.78

⁷³ "Stillness (hesychia): from which are derived the words hesychasm and hesychast, used to denote the whole spiritual tradition represented in the *Philokalia*(cf Vol 1, pp.14-16) as well as the person who pursues the spiritual path it delineates: a state of inner tranquility or mental quietude and concentration which arises in conjunction with, and is deepened by, the practice of pure prayer and the guarding of heart and intellect. Not simply silence, but an attitude of listening to God and openness towards Him." (*Philokalia*, Vol. 1, p.365).

The notion was translated to the West. We would like to know how this tranquility may be acquired and kept. It is one thing for us to have silence laid upon us, to keep our mouths shut, to restrain all loose speech. But gentleness of heart must also be preserved by us. It can happen sometimes that when one restrains one's words one loses the peacefulness within - hence our belief that someone can only preserve the virtue of gentleness by living alone in a cell that is far away...True patience and humility can only be acquired and kept only when the innermost heart is humble. John Cassian *Conferences* n.xviii, nn.12-13, p.193

enables us to share in the prayer of Jesus⁷⁴.

The interior man is aware that times of silence are demanded by love of God. As a rule he needs a certain solitude so that he may hear God "speaking to his heart" (cf Hosea 2:16[14]). It must be stressed that a silence which is a mere absence of noise and words, in which the soul cannot renew its vigour, would obviously lack any spiritual value. It could even be harmful to fraternal charity, if at that moment it were essential to have contact with others. On the contrary, the search for intimacy with God involves the truly vital need of a **silence embracing the whole being**, both for those who must find God in the midst of noise and confusion and for contemplatives. Faith, hope and a love for God which is open to the gifts of the Spirit, and also a brotherly love which is open to the mystery of others, carry with them an imperative need for silence⁷⁵.

To achieve this, their (contemplatives') entire being has need of silence, and this requires zones of effective silence and a personal discipline to favour contact with God⁷⁶.

Thus silence is necessary as the faithful guardian of the interior spirit⁷⁷.

8. Solitude and Suitable Setting

The location of a hermitage should be practically suitable and both still and beautiful - adequate for the purposes of the hermitage and within a natural environment that is conducive to contemplative prayer. Traditionally, the Capuchin Order preferred solitary and deserted (unpopulated) places - not too far from and not too close to populated areas.

As with silence, there are two dimensions of solitude⁷⁸ - external or physical solitude, and the interior solitude of the heart. What do we mean by *heart*?⁷⁹

Where does prayer come from? Whether prayer is expressed in words or gestures, it is the whole man who prays. But in naming the source of prayer, Scripture speaks sometimes of the soul or spirit, but most often of the heart. According to the Scripture, it is the heart that prays. If our heart is far from God, the words of prayer are in vain.

The heart is the dwelling place where I am, where I live; according to the Semitic or Biblical expression, the heart is the place "to which I withdraw." The heart is our hidden centre, beyond the grasp of our reason and of others; only the Spirit of God can fathom the human heart and know it fully. The heart is the place of truth, where we choose life or death. It is the place of encounter, because as image of God we live in relation: it is the place of covenant.⁸⁰

The heart is the most intimate sanctuary of the person⁸¹, that private room where the

⁷⁴ *Catechism* 2717

⁷⁵ **ET** n.46, pp. 46-46

⁷⁶ **CD** n.14,p.65

⁷⁷ Capuchin Constitutions n.57. The Capuchin sources also speak of evangelical silence, i.e. control over the tongue (James 1:26), e.g. **MHOMC** I, n.96, p.265

⁷⁸ cf Merton, Thomas in *Contemplation in a World of Action* pp.251-264.

⁷⁹ "Heart (καρδία): not simply the physical organ but the spiritual centre of man's being, man as made in the image of God, his deepest and truest self, or the inner shrine, to be entered only through sacrifice and death, in which the mystery of the union between the divine and the human is consummated. 'I called with my whole heart, says the psalmist - that is, with my body, soul and spirit?' (John Klimakos, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* Step 28). *Heart* has thus an all embracing significance: *prayer of the heart* means prayer not just of the emotions and affections, but of the whole person, including the body." *Philokalia* Vol.1 pp.361-362. cf André Louf, *Teach us to Pray* pp.16-22

⁸⁰ *Catechism* nn 2562-2563

⁸¹ **CD** p.57

Father sees all that is done in secret⁸². The interior place of solitude is the knowledge of one's inmost heart⁸³ where the person is alone in His presence, sitting at His feet. Contemplation may also be described then as the regard of one's heart towards God, to gaze into the gaze of the One who contemplates us in our nothingness.

Exterior solitude and silence support those making that journey in prayer, where they come to participate in Jesus' solitude and new exodus or passover⁸⁴. According to Patristic tradition the contemplative life portrays the Prayer of Jesus in solitude or on the mountain top, which in turn prefigured the contemplative life⁸⁵.

Contemplative religious need to withdraw into solitude⁸⁶. The origin of the term *monachus* (monk) is the Greek word μονος (monos), which means one, or solitary⁸⁷. The word *monastery* comes from the same root. The monk is one who has sought out and withdrawn to solitude in order to pray. Thus the enclosure or cloister *brings to mind that space of the heart where every person is called to union with the Lord. Accepted as a gift and chosen as a free response of love, the cloister is the place of spiritual communion with God and with the brethren*⁸⁸. Celibacy, too, may be valued also as the enclosure of the heart.

The cloister or the **enclosure** is that desert or ερημος (eremos), the wilderness, the physical place of solitude where the heart may listen. The monk is one who seeks to return to himself, to enter the desert solitude of the heart where the Lord speaks⁸⁹. Such is the path to contemplation.

Solitude favours prayer, as recollection and silence render intimacy with God surer and easier⁹⁰.

Thus in silence and solitude resolute men are able to recollect themselves and, so to speak, to dwell within themselves as much as they please. Here one strives to acquire that eye by whose limpid glance the bridegroom is wounded with love, and in whose purity alone may God be seen⁹¹.

Thus physical solitude is a natural means to promote contemplative prayer.

The early years within the Capuchin Reform saw a shift from an almost anchoritic existence of perpetual solitude, to a preference for the ordinary solitude of the enclosure, under obedience. For this reason the Order expressly preferred hermitages, houses in solitary and deserted places. Fraternity and solitude are allies, not opponents⁹².

⁸² Matthew 6:6

⁸³ St. Catherine of Siena spoke of the need to remain in the *Cell of self-knowledge* in the Prologue to *Dialogue of Divine Providence*.

⁸⁴ **VS** pp.657-659; *Catechism* 2717-2718

⁸⁵ cf **VS** footnote 24, p.660

⁸⁶ **PC** 7; **VS** p.660; see also footnote 24, pp.661-662

⁸⁷ ἐρημία (heremia) means solitude, often combined with ἔσυχία (hesychia), cf "Silence" under previous heading, which is the still solitude favourable to union with God. ἐρημος (heremos) means desert or solitary, uninhabited place, also a metaphor of the spiritual life. ὁ ἐρημίτης (ho heremitos) or hermit, one who has withdrawn from people, who dwells in solitude. Via Latin we have the words hermitage (eremo) and hermit.

⁸⁸ **VC** n.59, p.109

⁸⁹ cf Deuteronomy 8:1-3; Matthew 4:3+; Hosea 2:16[14]. For an overview of the terms *eremus*, *desertum* and *solitudo* in monastic tradition, especially the Cistercians, cf Thomas Renna, *The Wilderness and the Cistercians*, *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, 30(1995)2, pp.179-189

⁹⁰ **VS** p.661

⁹¹ **VS** p. 663

⁹² cf Michael Casey, *The Dialectic of Solitude and Communion in Cistercian Communities*, *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 23(1984)4, pp.273-309. The author outlines the evolution of the concept

9. Fraternity and Hospitality

The contemplative community will be a place of **hospitality** where friars and others may participate in the prayer life of the fraternity. Hospitality is an extension of **fraternity**, the significant communal dimension of contemplative life and a sign which evokes faith.

There is a relationship between the contemplative community and the surrounding world. This relationship is both practical and apostolic. At the level of practical or temporal needs, the contemplative community is dependent upon the wider society. As the Capuchin Constitutions stated for centuries, speaking about the distance of Capuchin friaries from populated areas, the houses should not be too close nor too far *so that seculars may make use of us in spiritual things, and we of them in temporal things*. However, hospitality ought not be motivated by practical expedience. Fraternity and hospitality constitute an essential element in the life of the hermitage and in its *apostolate of the word* in the mission of the Church.

Fraternal relationships are a witness rendered to the Lord of your intimate communion with Him, so that He may grant you that **unifying purity of intention** which is so necessary for encountering Him in prayer itself. In this way you will contribute to the building up of the kingdom of God by the witness of your lives and with a hidden apostolic fruitfulness⁹³. Fraternal life or relationships are a matrix for contemplative prayer⁹⁴ and are part of that hidden apostolic fruitfulness. Also noteworthy is the description of the gift of fraternity as a unifying purity of intention.

Contemplative prayer is a communion in which the Holy Trinity conforms man, the image of God, to His likeness⁹⁵. This likeness is reflected in the individual person, but more so in a communion of persons, in *Koinonia* and *agape*, that is, *fraternitas*. That conformity is a conformity with the God of Love. The enclosure or *the cloister is the place of spiritual communion with God and with the brethren*⁹⁶.

In other words, the communion of persons is a fruit of contemplative life. That communion has two spontaneous and interconnected dimensions: fraternity and hospitality. In a contemplative community, hospitality is the visibility, the face, the outward extension of the fraternity⁹⁷. Joyful and generous hospitality is an expression of the natural fecundity of the fraternity, for good is diffusive of itself. Hospitality is the apostolic interface of the contemplative community which bears witness to the reality and presence of Him who is Love. Thus it evokes the response of faith in the one who comes to experience it.

This witness will exercise a more forceful influence on men of our times to the degree that it is collective, or rather, social. It is not, in fact, the witness of the individual that attracts men today, but the witness, fruit of a life led together with others, of a given community ... (whose) continuity and vigour confirms the validity of the contemplative community⁹⁸.

As we have already noted, in Capuchin history there was an early shift away from the anchoritic life towards *the ordinary solitude of the enclosure*. The anchoritic life was considered too dangerous. Fraternal life is a supportive environment for the contemplative prayer of its members, for at least three reasons:

of *solitude* in monastic thought. He argues that the current tension between solitude and community is unprecedented. The philosophical subjectivism of the sixteenth century has given rise to an excessive individualism in modern society, and a subjectivisation of religious experience which underestimates and understates the important role of community in spiritual growth.

⁹³ **ET** n.8, pp.17-18; cf **PC** n.7

⁹⁴ cf Matthew 18:19-20

⁹⁵ *Catechism* n.2713

⁹⁶ **VC**, n.59, p.109

⁹⁷ While there may be many good occasions for spiritual direction, courses in the spiritual life, etc, the primary witness of the hermitage is the fraternity born of communion with the Lord.

⁹⁸ **VS** pp. 669-670

- a) In fraternity, the shared burden of the practicalities of survival allows more time to pray and less distraction.
- b) Fraternity allows each friar to be subject to others, to be obedient. Obedience is a surer path for contemplation and conversion than living on one's own. Saint Francis confirms this in his letter to a Minister, *obedience is better than being in a hermitage*.
- c) The solitude necessary for contemplative prayer is interior solitude. The journey to contemplative prayer must involve our entry into interior solitude. This involves the grace of the unmasking of our pride and alienation. It is a paradox that fraternity makes a fundamental contribution to the gradual attainment of interior solitude - and hence a dynamic life of contemplative prayer. We may call that contribution the *mirror of fraternal correction*. By oneself, the self knowledge of interior solitude is radically difficult, but may be assured by the grace of mutual sincerity among the brothers in their common review of life. Alone, a person can easily fall into all kinds of sins, not the least of which is complacency and presumption where solitude decays into an anaesthetised condition where the spirit of prayer is lost in favour of a form of narcissism, a self admiring introversion and isolation.

While hospitality is an extension of fraternity, care will be needed that the fraternity doesn't suffer detriment. It will be necessary to maintain a balanced hospitality. The tension will not be between hospitality and fraternity, but hospitality and the prayer of the fraternity. The primary emphasis of the community always must remain upon prayer. Without authentic contemplative prayer there will be no authentic fraternity or disinterested hospitality.

If .. the houses to which you belong widely practice fraternal hospitality, it will be for you to regulate the frequency and mode of that hospitality, so that all unnecessary disturbance is avoided, and so that your guests are helped to attain close union with God⁹⁹.

10. Regular Observance

Regular observance is not for the sake of the uniformity of the community. Rather, a well structured life is essential for a contemplative fraternity. A sound, balanced and adaptable regular observance for a religious community is very difficult to achieve. When a particular expression of regular observance becomes an end in itself, regular observance then risks losing its perspective or meaning, and may even oppose balance. Regular observance is the servant of the fraternity, and not its dictator.

What is Regular Observance? Prior to 1968, regular observance received no small emphasis in the Capuchin Constitutions. Since that time, the emphasis has shifted towards *fraternity* and *pluriformity*. Originally regular observance was the habits and customs of the community in carrying out the ascetical stipulations of the Rule, though not without spirit. In our discussion, we would describe it (*awkwardly*) as the clearly identified essential elements of spirit and life and their proportionate realisation in the ascetic and practical life of the fraternity and its individual members. The shift away from Regular Observance in the 1960's was perhaps a shift away from a monoforum of monastic life which no longer could be realised in all the diverse situations of Capuchin houses throughout the world. Regular observance has not been abandoned, but rigid uniformity has been.

In other words, regular observance is that structural support for a sound, balanced rhythm of prayer, work and other elements of Capuchin Life in a particular situation. It is the practical organisation, or better still, incarnation of the life of the fraternity which promotes and safeguards its spirit and purpose. It is not a law by which to "perfect" oneself by compliance. While including environment, atmosphere, lifestyle and timetable, it is far more. It is the design of communal life, the *forma vitae*. It needs to be well conceived (balance) and open to appropriate change (flexibility), while embracing all that is essential in the life and needs of the contemplative community. It is the harmonious realisation and organisation of the essential elements of the contemplative fraternity in balance with the diverse individuality of its members.

Some components in the regular observance of a Capuchin Hermitage are part of the regular observance of most contemplative communities, for example, the primacy of

⁹⁹ ET n.35, p.39

the Word of God Contemplation is listening¹⁰⁰, to receive the Word of God like the Blessed Virgin Mary¹⁰¹; active participation in the Eucharist¹⁰²; the Sanctification of the day through the Liturgy of the Hours¹⁰³; the rediscovery of the Sacrament of Penance¹⁰⁴ and Spiritual Direction¹⁰⁵.

As the unifying act of all human movement towards God, the contemplative dimension is expressed by listening to and meditating on the Word of God; by participating in the divine life transmitted to us in the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist; by liturgical and personal prayer; by the constant desire for God and the search for His Will in events and people; by the conscious participation in His salvific mission; by self-giving to others for the coming of the Kingdom. There results, in the religious, an attitude of continuous and humble adoration of God's mysterious presence in people, events and things: an attitude which manifests the virtue of piety, an interior fount of peace and a person who brings peace to every sphere of life and apostolate¹⁰⁶.

The contemplative dimension is the real secret of renewal for every religious life. It vitally renews the following of Christ because it leads to an experiential knowledge of Him. This knowledge is needed for the authentic witness to him by those who have heard him, have seen him with their own eyes, have contemplated him and have touched him with their own hands (cf 1 Jn 1:1; Phil 3:8). The more open religious are to the contemplative dimension, the more attentive they will be to the demands of the kingdom, intensely developing their theological depth, because they will look on events with the eyes of faith. This will help them to discover the divine Will everywhere. Only those who live this contemplative dimension will be able to see the salvific plan of God in history and to accomplish it in an effective and balanced way. "Your houses should be especially centres of prayer, of recollection, of dialogue - personal and, above all, communitarian - with Him Who is, and must remain, the primary and principal Person with whom you converse in the busy round of your daily lives. If you succeed in cultivating this atmosphere of intense and loving union with God, you will be able to carry out, without traumatic tensions or dangerous aberrations, that renewal of life and discipline to which the Second Vatican Council has called you"¹⁰⁷.

Other elements need to be drawn into the delicate balance: the degree and type of work and activity, hospitality, paraliturgy, ongoing formation, *lectio divina*¹⁰⁸, local chapter, review of life, enclosure¹⁰⁹ and hospitality, mutual accountability, life of penance, poverty, etc. etc.

¹⁰⁰ cf *Catechism* n.2716

¹⁰¹ **CD** n.8 p.59; n.13, pp.63-64; **VS** pp.662, 665-666

¹⁰² **CD** n.9, p.60

¹⁰³ **CD** n.11, p.12

¹⁰⁴ **CD** n.10, p.61

¹⁰⁵ **CD** n.11, p.62

¹⁰⁶ **CD** n.1, p. 54

¹⁰⁷ **CD** n.30, pp.78-79, quoting Pope John Paul II, 24 November 1978

¹⁰⁸ cf . Sena, Lorenzo "Lectio divina"(A commentary on RB 48) *Inter Fratres* 43(1993), pp.55-72; André Louf, *Teach Us to Pray*; Michael Casey *The Undivided Heart* includes the article "Seven Principles of Lectio divina" first published in *Tjurunga (An Australian Benedictine Review)* 12(1976) pp.69-74, also reproduced in English and Italian in *Inter Fratres* 30(1980) pp.153-163. Also *The Art of Sacred Reading* Dove, Melbourne, 1995. Also see *Collectanea Cisterciensis* 32(1970) pp.217+.

¹⁰⁹ The monastic tradition of enclosure has been always strong and continuous. Enclosure has been lived very diversely, for both men and women, with diverse applications and modifications, including missionary monks and itinerant hermits. cf Eileen Hunt, *Enclosure (I) Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 21(1986)1, pp.51-63 and *Enclosure (II)*, ibid. 22(1987)2, pp.125-151. The author takes a broad look at some different expressions of enclosure in the history of monasticism. She gives particular emphasis to the evolution of the enclosure for women, the movement from consecrated chastity in private homes in early Christianity, towards greater withdrawal and seclusion by enclosure as well as common life. By enclosure we mean a defined space for silence and solitude. In the context of a Capuchin Hermitage, "enclosure" will need clear definition.

We would envisage that the apostolic outreach of the hermitage would grow naturally out of the talents of the friars who make up the fraternity and their response to the genuine needs of the local church. Thus the balance between prayer and activity will be relative to the gifts of the individuals, and other exigencies. A complete format of regular observance, that is, the detailed resolution and balance of the essential elements with the particular needs and talents of the friars in the hermitage, can only be fully realised on site. None the less, prudence may dictate that such a format of regular observance be examined and initiated by an assigned community before it takes up residence in the hermitage.

11. Some Contemporary Models¹¹⁰

11 Other Capuchin provinces already have experience in creating communities whose prime focus is prayer and contemplation. The following are descriptions of four such fraternities. Each is different and we are not proposing any one of them. Perhaps we can learn something from each.

11.1 An Italian Retreat Fraternity

It is situated in the Province of Apulia. Their starting point is that faithfulness to the Rule of St. Francis is indispensable for any effort of renewal. Their life is an attempt to be faithful to radical poverty, contemplation and fraternal charity.

Fidelity to a radical poverty. Many friars have lost confidence in the spiritual value of evangelical poverty. The fraternity accepts no remuneration for work. They rely on benefactors for food and clothing. They have renounced all forms of personal transport, no radio, TV, cameras etc.

Fidelity to contemplation. A solution to the problem of prayer is considered as a matter of life or death for the order.

Timetable: Night office, with ½ hour mental prayer. Morning Prayer. Prayer during the Day - each with ½ hr of silent meditation. Evening Prayer. Communal celebration of the Eucharist with the faithful.

Fidelity to fraternal charity. The fraternity uses two structural means for growth in charity: The weekly chapter - the occasion for interpersonal relationships, exchanging experiences and studying the problems of religious life. The weekly review of life - a time for truth and humility, for opening one's mind to the brothers, to acknowledge one's own faults.

11.2 The French Retreat Fraternity

This community in the Province of Province is located in the village of La Tour d'Aigues. It has been going since 1972.

The fundamental values and aims of their life are: The search for God and the life of prayer. Fraternal life as a testimony and aim of the above; Reflection in common upon Christian and Franciscan life; A simple, welcoming fraternity to others. To live from the fruits of their own labours or professional work.

Lifestyle: Primacy is given to liturgical prayer. Some time is spent living the eremitical life (anchoritic life?). Once a month the whole fraternity has a day of solitude, prayer and conferences.

Permanent formation and activities: There are five friars in the fraternity: three priests and two brothers who have done university studies. The fraternity is oriented to the spreading of the Franciscan message through publications, conferences and meeting with various groups.

¹¹⁰ cf Francesco Jiménez, "Past and Present Contemplative Franciscan Fraternities".

11.3 The Swiss Retreat Fraternity

This fraternity is located in the town of Arth surrounded by inspiring countryside.

The aim of the fraternity is expressed as: "The possibility of renewal in silence".

There are five members and they have renounced the external apostolate. Different forms of meditation are practiced with the help of oriental techniques and yoga. Young people come and live with them for periods of time (sometimes 2 or 3 yrs).

11.4 Capuchin Hermitage of the Province St. Augustine (Herman, P.A)

This place is called a "Hermitage" because of the over generalised use of the term "House of Prayer". "Hermitage" is the term Francis used.

The goal of this fraternity is: To establish an inter-provincial Capuchin-Franciscan House of Prayer in order to serve the provinces of St. Augustine and St. Conrad, as well as the Church within the territory of the Provinces, through a contemplative life-style directed toward the evangelical thrust of renewal in the Church and in the Order.

This is achieved through: A committed fraternity of at least 3 friars; Ongoing study of: The Rule and Testament of Francis, The Rule for Hermitages, The Constitutions; Intercessory prayer and the practice of penance; Providing a place for friars to come and pray; Conducting days of recollection, retreats, spiritual direction. Creative silence and solitude; Renewal programs, preaching, retreats, confessions, parish renewals etc.

The experience of the contemplative mode. This has called for the removal of 'elements of contemporary life' that hinder contemplation: Excessive activity, Lack of time for community and personal prayer, Media - especially TV, Pre-occupation with food and social activities. Through living the contemplative life, a keen sensitivity to the inner life has emerged. Each friar has a spiritual director.

Ministry The friars engage in preaching, spiritual direction, retreats, visiting the sick, regular Sunday supply in neighbouring parishes, and have helped start a new SFO fraternity. The friars engage in intercessory prayer and fasting for the renewal of the world. Most of their time is given to prayer and fasting. Other time is given to apostolic activity.

Finance The Hermitage is self-supporting through their ministries and benefactors. The life-style is simple: the friars do the cleaning and the cooking and the laundry etc. Money comes from mass stipends, Sunday help-outs, preaching engagements, spiritual direction, parish renewals, stipends for other services, rates for guests etc.

Fraternal Life There are regular house chapters (every 2 weeks) for practical reviewing of their life. The friars interact with the brothers from a nearby Capuchin house. Once a week the friars gather for prayer and a meal and a once a month recollection day for all the friars.

Contemplative Atmosphere - Keeping the Balance A pivotal question came up for the shape of the life: "Should laymen be permitted to spend several days in the hermitage for private or directed retreats?" The friars said 'yes' but they made a very interesting and important distinction between a 'hermitage' and a 'retreat house'. A 'retreat house' is set up and geared towards the retreatants rather than the friars who minister it. A 'hermitage' is geared towards the resident friars, and guests are welcomed into the life of these friars. The friars also decided that guests would only be received in small numbers in order to protect the eremitical atmosphere.

11.5 Francis Haven (Friars Minor)

This fraternity began in 1981 in Guildford, Victoria, a town half way between Bendigo and Ballarat. The property was given to the friars. The friars built a mud brick house to accommodate four so that others could come and take advantage of the setting and the solitude.

The *Horarium* of their life is simple. "We rise with the Angelus Bell at 6am; have Morning Prayer of the Church at 6:15am. Mass on week mornings is 8am. Breakfast is not a community gathering. During the morning there is time for personal prayer and

study with Midday Prayer at noon. There is freedom to come together for simple lunch or to have it privately. The afternoon is free, and we find ourselves most times engaged in work around the property, or other areas according to personal wishes. We have Evening Prayer at 6pm. The evening meal is taken together. After tea we have the Prayer of Readings followed by Night Prayer. We (each) have a week about for cooking, which produces some interesting results."

"Regarding outside work. We are asked for Sunday supplies by parishes when the PP is away on holidays. Having three priests we are able to assist on occasions. But we do keep an eye on this among ourselves." Each works according to his abilities.

"Regarding our financial support. We have been fortunate in a legacy. Also two of our number are receiving the pension. Money from supplies helps to meet our needs. We find too, that visitors are generous with food when they come. The Province this year has underwritten refurbishing and building, as they deemed this was now necessary for the good of the prayer ministry. So the Lord has been good to us in the matter of finance."

"The witness of the contemplative life is a constant reminder to the Province, the Diocese and those who come in contact with us of the necessity and value of prayer and contemplation in our lives. It is a constant reminder to our friars engaged in the active work of the apostolate, that the *spirit of prayer and devotion* should take priority. We hope too, like Moses on the mountain with hands upraised for those fighting on the plain below, we have influence on the Church and the world." [Notes furnished by Joachim O'Brien].

Guidelines for the House of Prayer Community at Francis Haven

Article One The house of prayer community is a way of Franciscan life approved and established by the Order and the Australian Province of the Holy Spirit. It is governed in the spirit of Saint Francis' Rule for Hermitages, by the General Constitutions (articles 29-31), by General Statutes (article 14) and by these Provincial guidelines.

Article Two The purpose of this community is to provide a Franciscan environment for living a life of prayer in brotherliness and poverty, 'witnessing to the contemplative life which has been in our Order from its beginning' (cf General Constitutions n.31). this is its unique role among the apostolates of the Province.

Article Three This environment includes the following elements:

- a) Silence and quiet during most of the day.
- b) Opportunities for solitude: in private rooms or designated areas.
- c) Simplicity of life in accommodation, meals, recreation and activity.
- d) Community celebration of the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours.

Article Four Members of the House of Prayer Community are:

- a) The core community: friars of Holy Spirit Province (or other Provinces) who volunteer and are appointed to live in the House of Prayer Community for at least one year. A trial period of at least one month is suggested prior to appointment.
- b) Retreatants
 - i. Friars who wish to spend time with the House of Prayer community to build up their spirit of prayer, and to renew themselves in Franciscan ideals, spirituality and practice (cf General Constitutions n.30).
 - ii. Other members of the Franciscan Family.
 - iii. If there are no applications from those mentioned in either I and ii, then others: lay, religious, clerical with the approval of the community and for short periods of time.

Article Five Norms for accepting retreatants.

- i. The retreatants at any one time ordinarily shall not exceed the number of the community.
- ii. In order to foster its basic goal, the House of Prayer community may set aside one or two months each year during which retreatants normally will not be accepted. This period of time is to be decided by the community at the beginning of each year.

iii. All friars residing in the House of Prayer Community are expected to participate in its programme.

Article Six Regular friary chapters are to be held to strengthen the bond of brotherhood among the friars and to deepen their understanding of the ministry of prayer.

Article Seven

a. The House of Prayer Community as such has no other apostolate than the apostolate of prayer.

b. With the approval of the community, members may engage in other apostolates but only in such a way that the purpose of the House of Prayer Community is not weakened or endangered.

c. New members of the community will not engage in any outside apostolates during their first six months of residence.

11.6 La Verna – Malta's Provincial House of Prayer at St. Martin's

Horarium:

6am: Morning prayer and 30 minutes meditation. Rosary meditated.

7:30 Breakfast. 9am Terce. 9:30-11:30 Manual work. 11:30 Sext. Noon lunch.

3pm None. Meditation (30 minutes). Office of readings. Rosary meditated. 4:15 Afternoon tea. Manual work. 6:30pm rosary meditated. Evening prayer. Mass (lay people participate). 8pm Dinner, recreation. 10pm night prayer.

Every Wednesday the Office of Readings is said at midnight. The Sunday Mass is celebrated at 11am (lay people may participate). During manual work cars can be used for apostolate, but not on a regular basis. During prayer times, people are welcome to pray with the friars. The lay people may use the chapel during manual work only. They have to provide their own food and priest. The Friars don't involve themselves with the groups, etc because it is not a retreat house. The house of Prayer is used only by the friars, diocesan priests and other religious. The uses 'La Verna' House of Prayer for their monthly recollection day. The friars are encouraged to spend some days in prayer and contemplation.

**Nisi Dominus aedificaverit domum
in vanum laborant qui aedificant eam.**

Psalm 127:1

C. PROPOSAL FOR A CAPUCHIN HERMITAGE IN AUSTRALIA TO BE PRESENTED TO THE PROVINCIAL CHAPTER IN NOVEMBER, 1996.

12. Proposal

A sign of the times?

The hermitage study proposal came from our last Provincial Assembly (Oct. 95). Looking into the matter, we realise that the question of rediscovering Capuchin eremitical life has found expression in many other provinces. The need to do so has been confirmed by the PCOs, and is now part of our Constitutions (n.56).

This movement is clearly discernible not only among the Capuchins, but throughout the Franciscan family. This movement is reflected by a growing bibliography on the subject. For example the OFM Constitutions state:

Each and every brother should desire earnestly that there be hermitages, places of

retreat and solitude, as witnesses to the contemplative life still flourishing in our Order. Ministers should give an obedience, with the Lord's blessing, to those brothers who are called to the contemplative life and reasonably ask permission for it, whether for a shorter or a longer period of time. The life of the brothers in those places can be governed either by the simple Rule that the Seraphic Father himself composed for hermitages, accommodated to particular conditions, or by norms drawn up according to the statutes. (art. 31)

It is obvious from the replies to the questionnaire on the Hermitage, that the same stirring of the Holy Spirit has occurred in the hearts of many of our own friars.

That the Provincial and Definitory appoint, if possible, a fraternity of four friars (ideally) whose primary focus of activity is contemplative prayer. That the Provincial and Definitory then take steps to accommodate that fraternity in its own suitable place as soon as practicable.

13 What are we voting for?

- 1) That the Provincial and Definitory appoint friars to constitute the hermitage fraternity.
- 2) Approval of the proposal by the Chapter gives the task to the Provincial and Definitory to establish a place for the Hermitage. The approval also acknowledges the right of the Provincial and Definitory to determine the time and place for the establishment of a suitable place or house for the hermitage. This does not preclude the consultation of the Province.
- 3) That the Provincial Definitory initiate a strategy of gradual implementation with the appointments at the beginning of the new triennium.
- 4) The Chapter vote for this proposal does not include a site.

14. Reasons, opinions and speculations against

Reasons, opinions and speculations against:

Paradoxically, all the considerations against the foundation of a hermitage were proposed by the Preparatory Committee before the return of the Questionnaire by the friars. The questionnaire replies had few contra considerations. No new considerations came to light from the replies.

- 1) Not enough friars, not enough money
- 2) Yes, but not appropriate at this moment because
 - a) It is only a private inspiration or preference of the few: a luxury for the province right now.
 - b) It is only peripheral to our charism.
 - c) It is peripheral, if not contradictory, to our current commitments and is inconsistent with the stated aims of our pastoral plan.
 - d) The statement of need is exaggerated.
 - e) It would involve an unjustifiable risk with no guarantee of success. It would not be easy to establish; it is not an easy life; we lack the experience and maturity necessary for these things.
 - f) It would cause scandal to people where houses have been closed.
 - g) Other priorities have precedence e.g. Vocations, other proposals?
- 3) Such a house will be unproductive, and create a financial burden on the other houses as well as the diminishing financial resources of the Province.
- 4) Given the friars' desire to grow in contemplative prayer, the Hermitage is not the

most apt solution. It is better to look for ways to make each house more contemplative.

Some responses to the negative considerations.

←Not enough friars. The concern expressed by the friars in their replies was not- Can we afford any friars at all for a new house? Rather, the concern expressed was this: Are there enough friars suitable and willing to be part of the core community for an extended period of time? There is a good number of suitable friars who are willing. The question is whether they are available.

← Not enough money. What sum is "enough"? Perhaps this argument has been expressed better in the later consideration: Such a house will be unproductive, and if so, create a financial burden on the other houses and the diminishing financial resources of the Province.

Like other contemplative communities, the hermitage would aim to become financially self-supportive eventually (at least partially) - by a simple and quasi subsistent life; the work of the friars according to the composition of the fraternity; the fraternity could also establish its own fund and network of benefactors.

A further negative consideration lists several observations indicating that the time for the Hermitage may not be right now. It is the *yes, but no* argument.

←*It is only a private inspiration or preference of the few: a luxury for the province right now.* A number of friars do feel attracted to the contemplative life. Perhaps they are inspired, if only privately. Some feel the desire for a more contemplative life is quite thwarted by the circumstances in which they find themselves. This contra consideration seems to perceive the specifically contemplative life as a luxury in itself. Perhaps friars interested in the hermitage life are thinking only of themselves (i.e. selfish) or are lazy, or can't cope with the pressures of modern apostolate. Perhaps the hermitage is just an attempt to escape from difficulties found elsewhere.

The perception that a specifically contemplative life is a "luxury" is not a rare one, even among naive supporters. Some may have the idea that contemplative communities are resorts of idleness, or green houses for idiosyncrasy.

However, healthy contemplative life anywhere cannot co-exist with idleness (cf. *ora et labora*). Contemplative communities are quite busy. In fact, the temptation to activism can be much stronger in a contemplative community. Contemplative community life has its own difficulties. The *two men in a boat syndrome* may reach new heights if it becomes *three or four men in a contemplative community*. For example, sincere communication is necessary to keep the details of life and the fraternity 'on task'. In such a community the challenges of community life cannot be skirted or avoided in favour of apostolic demands. Living with the mirror of fraternal correction and obedience and availability to others, the demands of the timetable, constitute only some of the difficulties. In the hermitage, more so than in any other kind of fraternity, the challenge of community life in general is that no difficulty can be ignored. The hermitage is not a holiday, nor an easy life.

Furthermore, our vote in favour of the contemplative fraternity and Hermitage, makes the project a Provincial one, and not simply the particular interest of a few. It would be an activity of the whole Province, in a certain sense. Each friar would be able to see it, as he does any other friary, as his own house. Indeed, the Constitutions place the advisability and administration of hermitages under the Provincial Chapter. (Such a stipulation may present some obscurities and difficulties).

← A specifically contemplative community is *peripheral to our charism*. This is untenable, as illustrated in the background paper.

←The establishment of a Hermitage is peripheral, if not contradictory, to our current commitments and therefore is inconsistent with the stated aims of our pastoral plan. It is not contradictory to the Capuchin Charism Statement, nor to the Pastoral Plan. If anything, it is a further clarification of it.

← *The statement of need is exaggerated.* It is difficult to imagine how one can exaggerate his need for what is absolutely essential by stating that he needs to pray. However, this comment is not about the need for prayer, but the need for a hermitage. In other words, to say that there is a critical need for environments which foster radical prayer - both for friars and other people- is an exaggeration. Why can't the

friars pray in the friaries, and the people pray in the Churches and in their homes? Perhaps this comment means that one needs to be careful not to project his personal needs in interpreting the needs of the general population. We have said that there is a growing need for such an experience of contemplative life both within the Order and within the Church. The subjective dimension of judgement coincides with the discernment of the Capuchin Order at the international level over the past twenty years. This discernment is also shared by Sacred Congregation for Secular and Religious Institutes. Thus, while the statement of need is very, very personal (and thus sometimes difficult to articulate), the need is perceived universally. We are fortunate if we see a more intense life of prayer as a personal need.

←The establishment of a fraternity in a hermitage would involve an unjustifiable risk with no guarantee of success. It would not be easy to establish; it is not an easy life; we lack the experience and maturity necessary for these things. Risk, yes. We can make no guarantee that a permanent hermitage for the Province is the will of God at this time. Hence the Background paper concludes with the quote from Psalm 127:1 *Nisi Dominus aedificaverit domum in vanum laborant qui aedificant eam* - If the Lord does not build the house, in vane do the builders labour.

Regrettably we do lack experience and maturity. Continuity with our contemplative tradition has been significantly disrupted, and not without consequences. Because we lack experience and maturity, it may be presumptuous or naive to say the Hermitage will be a "success". The contemplative community will experience real difficulties, tensions, crises and problems - perhaps more or less continuously. As said elsewhere, in this kind of community, these things cannot be put to one side in favour the continuous demand of apostolate for our attention. These difficulties are the precise means God allows for the contemplative fraternity to grow in maturity and experience and in prayer itself. It is essential that each of this fraternity seek the will of God in this venture, and not simply his own preferences or wishes - as good as these may be. The community will need to learn how to follow where the Lord leads them concretely. Necessarily this will all involve what seems to be compromise and contradiction with individual needs, likes, comfort, preferences, etc. The vow of poverty and obedience embrace personal risk and precariousness which are essential to conversion of heart and life.

The large element of risk makes obvious the need for caution, accountability and collaboration of the hermitage fraternity with the rest of the Province, especially the Provincial.

←*It would cause scandal to people where houses have been closed.* Possibly, but this is both subjective and unavoidable. Nor is the risk of upset an absolute obstacle. Rather, that depth of feeling may be re-directed as a positive influence. It can become an opportunity when such friends of the Order may be encouraged to participate in the further establishment of the Order in Australia. While some may be scandalised, others will be encouraged and perhaps even eager to help.

←*Other priorities have precedence e.g. Formation, Vocations, other proposals* The hermitage would be another provider for initial and ongoing formation within the Province. In regard to vocations, the establishment of a contemplative fraternity within a hermitage can do two things: a) present a more representative, balanced and appealing image of the Capuchin Charism to the young; b) and be a meeting place with those young people who are seeking depth in the spiritual life. The growing viability of some contemplative communities suggests that the experience of a hermitage fraternity itself can promote vocations.

←Given the friars' desire to grow in contemplative prayer, the Hermitage is not the most apt solution. *It is better to look for ways to make each house more contemplative.* The contemplative community itself can only be a help for other friars in their desire to deepen their life of prayer. Difficulties still remain in all our houses, as do opportunities to enhance the personal and communal aspects of contemplative prayer. There is an implicit and valid content in this comment - namely, that the hermitage will not solve the problem of how to improve the contemplative living of the friars in the very busy houses. It does not claim to do this. However, judging by the replies of the friars in the questionnaire, that real need must also be addressed too. Perhaps this comment implies: if the only reason for establishing a contemplative community is because some friars find it difficult to pray in the busy houses, that reason is not enough. Probably all would agree with the comment. However, the other reasons for a contemplative fraternity have been made abundantly clear. (They are

listed below). Nonetheless, we must acknowledge and reply to the experience of difficulty in busy houses which leads to significant frustration and discouragement.

15. Reasons, opinions and speculations in favour:

Two new considerations in favour came from the replies of the friars.

1. The eremitical life has always been part of the Capuchin charism from the beginning at least in writing. The eremitical life is at the heart of Capuchin spirituality.
2. Contemplative communities play an integral part in the life and mission of the Church. A Capuchin Hermitage would bear witness to the presence and validity of the contemplative life in the Church today.
3. It would promote the prayer life of the Province especially as a place of renewal and support for friars - where they can come and spend some time deepening their experience of contemplative life. That shared experience over time must have a beneficial influence on fraternal life in all our houses. In this way a Capuchin Hermitage will promote the renewal of our religious life as Capuchins. (I imagine the role both of the Guardian and the Local Chapter will come into clearer focus in a hermitage community.)
4. The history of the Franciscan Movement shows again and again that genuine renewal of the Order comes from animation of hermitages. In our present situation where we are basically forming (reforming the ministries of) our province the reflective dimension of a hermitage should prove invaluable to all the friars as a place and witness of serious conversion.
5. Such a fraternity will diversify and balance the witness of our life and ministry in Australia.
6. Secular society is searching for the spiritual dimension of life. Also there is a growing recognition of the need within the order and the Church to rediscover the contemplative dimension of Christian life. There is a need for places where the life of contemplative prayer can be experienced, shared and fostered concretely. These needs within society, the Church and the Order impose an imperative upon us. That imperative has been restated within our recent and current Constitutions and PCO's.
7. The existence of a Capuchin Hermitage will promote the relevance, credibility and appeal of our vocation.
8. The Capuchin Hermitage fraternity will help all our fraternities by their prayers.

16. Suitability of one our already existing houses: Can one of our present friaries accommodate a permanent hermitage?

For

1. Wynnum North:

This is a quiet friary, with few involvements in outside activities. Outbuildings suitable for a Hermitage would find space at the back of the property. Alternatively, the Guest House is already a self-contained building. Purchase of the house on the north side would safeguard privacy from that side, add to the value of the property, and give access to the foreshores and the mangrove walk.

2. Hawthorn has a self-contained building at the rear of the friary.

3. Plumpton:

Part of a wing could be refurbished to accommodate a Hermitage.

The basic advantage of using an existing house is the reduction in outlay, time and risk in establishing a Hermitage.

Against

1. Wynnum North:

It is too big. The soil is unsuitable for agriculture. The setting is unsuitable for a Hermitage but would be fine as a Retreat House. Neighbouring properties are zoned for industrial and urban development. (In fact, it may be unsuitable as a novitiate within the near future).

2. Hawthorn: too noisy and extremely crowded

3. Plumpton:

Too many other activities engage the premises. A separate fraternity within the fraternity would make life even more complex.

In General:

a. None of our present houses meet all the criteria of silence, solitude and suitable setting. Each of our present houses is either too noisy, too busy or surrounded by the crowd. They are all surrounded by dense urban development. Given the requirements for a Hermitage, the opinion of the Preparatory Committee is that none of our present friaries is suitable as a permanent site for a Capuchin Hermitage.

b. It may be necessary to plough new ground. Beginning in a new location will enable the Hermitage community to establish a new set of relationships with the possible apostolic demands made from without. It is more than difficult to change the character of lay expectations in our established houses.

c. A Hermitage community can still remain affiliated with another fraternity initially, *pro tempore*. However, it will aim to become an individual fraternity in its own rite as soon as availability of its own place or house makes this possible.

d. The Hermitage needs to be within the vicinity of a capital city such as Melbourne, Sydney or Brisbane, or other large regional city. The choice of a permanent site needs great care. Such a choice will take some time.

e. The Constitutions (n.56) stipulate that the administration and advisability of the Hermitage remains the responsibility of the Provincial Chapter. Nonetheless, the matters of ordinary administration would be delegated by the Chapter to the Provincial and Definitory in conjunction with the hermitage fraternity. (As happens in any other friary). Thus the Hermitage fraternity is to be accountable to the Provincial and Definitory.

17. Suggested stages of implementation

1. That a Hermitage core community, of four suitable friars ideally, be appointed immediately. At least one of the Hermitage committee should be part of the Hermitage fraternity to help in its establishment. While the hermitage community remains affiliated with another fraternity with which it resides, all the friars are subject to the local guardian. However one the hermitage fraternity should be appointed to act as guardian within the hermitage community. He is responsible to the hermitage friars, the local guardian and to the provincial. The host fraternity should respect the process, needs and quasi autonomy of the hermitage community. Once established independently, that is, in its own place, the Hermitage community needs to have its own Guardian.

2. That this fraternity be assigned temporarily to Plumpton or Wynnum North under supportive conditions pre-negotiated with the local fraternity. So that it may live as independently as possible in order to fulfil its tasks.

3. In this temporary arrangement the Hermitage fraternity will need to

a) develop its own *modus vivendi*, that is, its basic horarium and scheme of regular observance or *forma vitae*;

b) to define and plan for long and short term goals;

c) to establish contact with other contemplative communities in Australia and other such Capuchin fraternities overseas in order to learn from their experience;

d) to establish a hermitage fund and network of benefactors.

e) to begin to formulate and develop statues for the hermitage.

4. After a suitable period of time (e.g. Six months) begin the process of looking for a suitable site for a permanent Hermitage. The first months need to be dedicated to n.3.
5. To collaborate with the Provincial and Definitory.
6. To foster the awareness and participation of all the friars in the Province with the project by regular reports, by gaining their assistance in searching for a place and the possibility of short periods of hospitality once n.3 is satisfactorily clarified or established.
7. That an evaluation be presented to the next Provincial Chapter.