

PRESENTATION

Rome, 4 October 1998
Solemnity of St. Francis

Prot. N. 00958/98

To all the Brothers of the Order

Dear Brothers,

We are pleased to present you with the conclusions agreed upon and drafted by the VI Plenary Council of the Order, held in Assisi from 7 September to 1 October, 1988, on the topic of *Living Poverty in Brotherhood*.

Two and a half years ago we announced to the Order our intention of holding a Plenary Council dealing with gospel poverty in its communal and institutional aspects. Throughout this time the Order, as a Fraternity, was involved in preparing for this important event, the venue for which was, significantly, Assisi. There, 31 Delegates of the Conferences, representing all five continents, met with the General Minister and his Definitory.

In publishing the results of the work at this time, we are sure you will find them a valuable resource. Together with the brotherhood experienced during the Plenary Council, they are an expression of the lively unity that exists between the fraternity of the Order as a whole and its central government. As the Constitutions suggest (cf. 123,1), they will serve to promote awareness of the mutual responsibility and cooperation of all the Brothers, and will foster the unity and communion of the Order in pluriformity. At the same time, we confirm these reflections of the Plenary Council, so that they lose none of their value as a guideline for the whole Order (cf. *Const.* 123,6).

On our part we have decided to study the text during the General Definitory meeting of January next. This will enable us to see which points can be put into effect immediately and which might need to be dealt with at the General Chapter. In any event, we intend to accept all that this Plenary Council has submitted to us in its reflections, and everything that can foster the process of renewal in the Order.

We would like to say a word about the choice of method that guided the Assembly in its work. As you can see from the text, the Plenary Council decided to adopt the method of *propositiones* or proposals, instead of drafting a document as previous Plenary Councils had done. The purpose of *propositiones* is not an in-depth development of a topic from a doctrinal point of view. Doctrinal elements are present, but their purpose is functional in view of a proposal, and this is above all intended for action. By using the method of *propositiones*, the participants were able to engage in an intense sharing and exchange of views. Further, it enabled them to recognize, value and welcome our rich cultural diversity. Not least, it guided our way towards a surprisingly broad consensus regarding the Brothers' varied and at times differing points of view.

Following the wishes of the Plenary Council, a small redactional committee revised the style and literary form of the text of the *propositiones*, keeping always to what the brethren had suggested. Following the majority opinion at the Plenary Council, we also considered it appropriate to insert titles. While these are not part of the substance of the text, they are an aid to understanding it.

Finally, since Major Superiors and Guardians have primary responsibility for the formation of the Brothers (cf. *Const.* 23, 6), we earnestly recommend that they make known and study these principles proposed by the Plenary Council for living our gospel poverty in brotherhood. At the same time, as far as they can and have the authority to do so, we ask them to ensure that they are applied in practice.

Brothers, may the Lord's Spirit inspire us all with a renewed love for our Lady holy Poverty, and by His holy operation help us to preserve it.

The General Minister and Definitory

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Br. Ermanno Ponzalli
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**VI PLENARY COUNCIL OF THE ORDER
LIVING POVERTY IN BROTHERHOOD
(ASSISI 1998)**

P R O P O S A L S

GOSPEL POVERTY AND MINORITY IN OUR TIMES

1. **The foundation and model of our gospel poverty** is Jesus, the Word of God, who "emptied Himself (*kenosis*), taking the form of a slave...even to accepting death, death on a cross" (*Phil 2,7*). Following in His footsteps, we have freely chosen poverty - poverty for the sake of the Kingdom, poverty that is free and joyful. It is not an end in itself but, like Christ's poverty, who "although He was rich, became poor to make us rich" (*2 Cor 8,9*; cf. *Const. 59,1*), its purpose is to make us available for God and for our brothers and sisters.

2. **St. Francis's fundamental intention** was to "observe the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (*Rb 1,1*). It was in the Incarnation and the Cross that he saw the pattern of his radical attitude, which was: "to keep nothing of himself for himself" (cf. *LOrd 29*). This means first of all recognizing that all the good that is in us and is accomplished through us is a gift of God, and that therefore we must return it to Him in praise and thanksgiving. The second component of this radical self-giving is more painful: we have to be "firmly convinced that we have nothing of our own except our vices and sins" (*Rnb 17,7*). To these Francis adds a third, equally demanding element: "We should be glad when we fall into various trials and suffer anguish of soul or body" (*Rnb 17,8*), and "boast of our humiliations and in taking up daily the holy Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (*Ad 5,8*).

3. For Francis, the gospel ideal of poverty involved choosing minority. To be "lowly" is a genuine manifestation of interior poverty, which in the Franciscan life-project also expresses itself externally, as humility of heart and lack of power (cf. *Admonitions 2,3; 3; 4; 6,4, etc.*), and as solidarity with the needy and the deprived.

Without minority, our poverty would have no meaning and would become a source of pride, just as without material poverty, interior poverty would be unreal.

Conversely, for Francis poverty and minority are not ends in themselves, but help us to put into practice "the highest gift" (cf. *1Cor 12,31*) which is **love**, expressed for people and for all creation in Franciscan brotherhood.

It was this life of gospel brotherhood, lived in poverty and minority, that drew people of every social condition to gather around Francis and made them responsive to the most needy in practical ways.

4. From Francis was born "an Order of Brothers" (cf. *1Cel 38*). Our whole spirituality and tradition has highlighted poverty, viewing it especially under the ascetical, individual aspect, without forgetting, obviously, the communal and fraternal dimensions (cf. especially *PCO I, 46-61; PCO IV 43-45; PCO V 29-40 & 55; Const. 59-74*). Nevertheless, the renewed sense of brotherhood, the world-wide spread of the Order and new problems in our society invite us to reconsider and deepen the meaning of our "gospel poverty in brotherhood" specifically from the communal, institutional and structural point of view.

5. Within the Franciscan movement the Capuchins have placed particular emphasis on **austere simplicity in their manner of living poverty and closeness to the people in practising minority** (preaching to the people, serving the sick and plague victims, questing...). These values, when they are lived in brotherhood, renewed and encultured, are a powerful witness to the gospel and a stimulus for the advancement of the weakest people.

6. Francis judged that greed and avarice disrupt relationships with God, just as ambition and competition damage the sense of brotherhood among people. In order to live the gospel ideal of love and brotherhood in its fulness, Francis and his first companions adopted a form of life that involved courageous choices of poverty for those times. Among these were the non-use of money, non-appropriation of goods and manual work as the ordinary means of support and help to others, and alms in case of manifest necessity.

In recent times, responding to changed circumstances, Paul VI (Declaration of March 4, 1970) abrogated all the pontifical declarations that had interpreted the practice of poverty in the Order for seven centuries, except those contained in canon law and the Constitutions. He thereby declared that Franciscans were no longer bound by the economic choices of Francis and his first companions.

However, we are still bound to be faithful to the profound intentions of St Francis. Therefore, we need to look for new ways of living out a number of options that are fundamental in Franciscanism, such as austerity of life and commitment in work; solidarity and mutual dependence; a life rooted in the experience of the people, particularly the poor; a correct use and administration of goods and property, and commitment to sustainable growth.

7. In the face of the globalized world economy, we Capuchin Friars Minor, who also feel its influence, humbly and faithfully reaffirm **the value of gospel poverty as a valid alternative for our times** according to Francis' original inspiration and the constituent elements of the Capuchin Franciscan tradition. Therefore we accept **gospel poverty** as the option we have made as a family, and commit ourselves to rethink it afresh. How, for example, are we to react to the influences of a globalized world? First of all, we need to be familiar with the mechanics of this new economic order, to understand it and appraise it critically, being particularly aware of the moral problems underlying the economy. Then, we must live and give witness to our gospel form of life, which, for all its weakness, wishes to counter the prevailing economic system by putting forward a more genuinely human way: with its values of simplicity, gratuitousness, the will to serve, respect for persons and for creation. We should remember that we are not alone in this endeavour; rather, we walk alongside countless men and women of good will who in different ways work for goodness, justice and peace.

8. So that we do not find ourselves unprepared in the face of the challenges of today's world, suitable courses should be arranged during the time of initial formation, to provide knowledge of economic and social realities and work experience (voluntary work, service to the poor, etc.), as called for also by PCO IV. (cf. 51). Ongoing formation should also make the study of this subject one of its main concerns.

BROTHERS AMONG THE POOR & PLURIFORMITY

9. With the whole Church we reaffirm our preferential option for the poor. This choice is not at the discretion of the individual Brother but challenges us as a fraternity, and must be visibly shown: by living with the poor in order to take on what is valid in their way of believing, loving and hoping; by serving them, preferably with our own hands; by sharing bread with them and defending their rights. Being poor with the poor and becoming their brothers is part and parcel of our Franciscan charism and of our tradition as "brothers of the people".

St. Francis says in his Testament that his conversion journey took a decisive turn when the Lord led him among lepers. It was then that he "left the world" and also changed his social condition and his residence, leaving the center for the periphery of Rivo Torto and Our Lady of the Angels. Our Constitutions and the Plenary Councils of Quito and Garibaldi encourage us to establish some of our fraternities among the poor: "Those Brothers who, in the particular circumstances of a region, live with the poor, sharing their lot and their aspirations, are worthy of

praise (Const. 60,6; cf. 12, 2-4; 100, 3; 104,1; PCO V, 25,1). We believe that solidarity with those on the edge of society is one of the prime responses against the injustice of our times.

10. We recognize that closeness to the culture of the poor enriches us from a human point of view and is a necessary hermeneutical tool with which to reach the heart of our Franciscan heritage. We therefore propose that every Province of the Order draft and implement plans to establish and monitor our humble presence among the poor. In this way, sharing their culture from within and being accepted as members of their society, we will be able to promote its integral development. Such plans should include careful selection of the insertion fraternities and the formation of the Brothers who are members. In addition, they must ensure the constant support of the circumscriptions, as well as ways of fraternally sharing the experiences.

11. **Francis** embodied gospel radicalness and, in his unmistakable style, stressed the fact that to live and proclaim the Gospel means *nudus nudum Christum sequi*.

For him the fundamental thing is surrender to God in total trust. Thus, he insists that his Brothers should go about the world without taking anything, like sheep among wolves, leaving it to their daily witness of life as lesser brothers, before anything else, to proclaim the gospel. For Francis, this way of being and living, powerless and totally defenseless, was not a method or condition of evangelization, but was already in itself a proclamation of the Gospel. Our **Capuchin** history encourages us to take up once more and bring up to date this direct form of gospel presence among people of all classes, with special preference for those who are simple and poor. Consequently, we must seek to implement models of evangelization that are less bound up with the power and security that derives from having many expensive resources. We should be more ready to learn from the poor and to place our trust in God alone.

12. This Plenary Council of the Order reaffirms that poverty, too, as an essential element of our life, must be lived in the light of what the Constitutions say about the unity and pluriformity of our Franciscan vocation. On the one hand, unity refers to brotherhood and to the principle that *because of the same vocation, the friars are all equal* (Const. 84,3). But situations differ, so that without sound **inculturation**, no true pluriformity or evangelization will ever be possible. Inculturation of poverty must go as far as our dwellings, buildings, lifestyle, the poor means we use in the apostolate, and our external appearance.

The principles that should guide inculturation in pluriformity are:

- * the fraternity's creative fidelity to the one Spirit living in the Order and speaking in the different Circumscriptions and in the signs of the times;
- * fraternal communion and obedience to the superiors, which guarantees the unity of our charism (Const. 5,5);
- * joyful acceptance that we are different, yet in communion;
- * readiness to share everything that belongs to us.

13. The Constitutional norm : **The minimum necessary, not the maximum allowed** (67,3) can only be meaningfully applied in the context of the societies in which our friars live. We therefore propose that the Brothers in each circumscription apply this norm to their own specific circumstances. With the introduction of budgetary controls and spending limits, the local communities and the provincial fraternity can limit their use of resources and give an appropriate example of moderation and even austerity.

SOURCES OF SUPPORT: WORK & QUESTING

14. **Work** contributes to the completion of creation, is beneficial to society, unifies the community and fulfils the person. Evangelical poverty, as a way of following Christ, restores the dignity of work

in a world where it has been reduced to a mere commodity. For us Franciscans, work is a form of solidarity among ourselves and with the people, and is a primary source of support.

We wish to highlight some aspects here: work should promote the value of the individual and meet the needs of the community; our Brothers should have equality of opportunity in training for their work; we should be critically aware of the forces operating within the world of work.

15. The Franciscan tradition has always seen work as a grace. Therefore, any work is permissible for a Brother, as long as it is honest and in keeping with our lowly state.(cf. *Test.* 20; *Rnb* 7,9; *IV PCO*, 49). We know that the reality of work is relative to the economic conditions in force in various periods of history and in different geographical contexts. Given such variety, we should value all kinds of work: apostolic, charitable, intellectual and manual. The Order has always valued the apostolate, understood both as a sacramental action and as evangelization in many forms. This is one type of work that must be given appropriate space and dignity. As well as this, we wish to underline the dignity and usefulness of manual work, the widespread need today for specialization in particular jobs, with equal opportunities and access for non-cleric and cleric Brothers alike. In order to keep alive in us the sense of gratuitous giving, each community should keep a proper balance between paid work, necessary for the support of the fraternity, and work done without payment. We must always be convinced that a Brother is not to be valued for the work he does or the money he earns. There should always be a communal sharing and discernment of the activities chosen by individuals (cf. *Const.* 76,2; 77,4). This will also help to avoid the danger that a Brother's work becomes his private property and makes him impossible to transfer, and insensitive to the needs of the local and provincial fraternity.

16. **Domestic work** is so important that whoever does not share in domestic work weakens the fraternity (cf. *IV PCO*, 19). The active collaboration of all the Brothers in the ordinary daily life of the fraternity - monitored in the local chapter - is useful for the growth of a sense of fraternity, equality and reciprocal dependence or assistance. Domestic work also makes us share in the lifestyle of ordinary people. It not only takes the form of manual work; in fact, in any community today, jobs can range from gardening to computing, and each Brother can make available his practical skills or intellectual abilities.

In some areas of the Order, **lay people** are employed to work in our houses because of the age, small numbers or the many commitments of the Brothers, especially when the houses are very big. This may be done as long as we act within the law, but we should be careful not to adopt such a solution automatically as a matter of course, or in a way that causes a "boss mentality" in ourselves.

17. We live in a fast-moving society, under pressure from commitments, deadlines, and modern communications media. Our fraternities do not escape these pressures, so that as well as avoiding idleness we need to avoid excessive **activism**, even in the apostolate. Confronted with this tendency, we must take care that our work does not eventually damage fraternal life by eliminating times for reflection, study, and interaction with our Brothers. Above all we must ensure that it does not compromise our "prayer and devotion" thereby unbalancing our life. The prevalence of activity may lead us to place too much trust in what we do and to put ourselves first, as if the Kingdom of God were not the work of the Holy Spirit, and as if listening, hospitality and silence before God meant nothing.

18. Work **outside the friary** or among outsiders, even of a non-religious nature, practised in our past and recent history, has in recent times taken a prominent form in the experience of "small fraternities" or "work fraternities". These ventures were motivated by a concern to be present or "incarnated" in the world of labour, especially as wage-earning working people. Today working conditions have changed: there is less work, and being a worker is no longer an advantage, as it sometimes was for "small fraternities". However, even today, the motives behind such fraternities can still justify the choice of being a paid worker, not necessarily in a factory, but in humble occupations that are burdensome and involve dependence. This is our way of sharing in the

conditions of life affecting so much of humankind, it is a gospel witness to others and is formative for us. The fraternity always retains its crucial role (*Const.* 77,3; 79,1-2) as the place where one lives and receives challenge and support.

19. The type of commitments we engage in and the professional status required in some jobs today give our Order greater stability in jobs and presences, but there is always the risk that this will lead to immobility. To avoid losing the sense of itinerancy, which makes us "pilgrims and strangers" in this world (cf. *Rnb* 6,2; *Test* 24), we should often calmly discuss this question, both in community and with the Superiors. We should evaluate from time to time our readiness to change assignments or to remain, basing decision on the good of the community and that of the People of God, toward whom we have responsibilities.

20. In the life of Francis and of his Brothers, right up to our own day, **the quest** has played an important role. It showed their dependence on the people among whom they lived and established closer relationships with them. Also, it has always provided a way of becoming part of the fabric of popular society, and an effective tool of evangelization. Today new forms of the quest have emerged (mission secretariats, foundations, pious unions, newsletters and calendars, etc). However, we still need to find new ways of direct personal contact with people, and to conduct a humble, almost door-to-door type of apostolate among all levels of society, poor and rich.

The values underlying questing need to be reinstated, namely trust in Divine Providence and a sense of dependence and reciprocity between us and the people. People give to us because we give to the poor, and in order to give alms, we must welcome alms.

As far as fund-raising is concerned, we propose that it be subject to authorization by the Provincial Minister and Definitory and carefully monitored by them. The purposes for which funds are raised must be clearly and publicly stated. A proper statement of accounts must be presented annually to the Provincial Minister and Definitory. No individual Brother may be given control over the destination of funds collected.

SOLIDARITY AND SHARING

21. **The sharing of gifts** among the various local churches is one of the essential dimensions of catholicity (*LG* 13). For St. Francis the sharing of goods goes beyond legal obligation and enters the realm of mutual love: "If a mother nourishes and loves her natural son (cf. *1 Thes* 2,7), how much more should one love and cherish his brother according to the spirit?" (*Rb* 6,8). *Sollicitudo rei socialis* defines the moral virtue of solidarity as "a firm and constant determination to be committed to the common good, that is, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all" (*SRS* 38). St. Francis adds weight to this definition of solidarity by proclaiming a brotherhood in which there is no shame in being dependent on one another (*Rnb* 9, 6-7). Indeed, Francis states clearly that dependence on others is a consequence of being created and redeemed, and is therefore a right (*Rnb* 9, 8). Furthermore, interdependence requires the theological gift of love, which enriches giver and receiver alike (*Rnb* 9, 9). Fraternal communion and interdependence should inspire and determine our structures of solidarity within the local, provincial and international fraternities, as well as our interaction with the world, particularly the world of the poor.

22. Solidarity is not primarily about giving things to others. It is mutual interdependence and brotherhood. The culture of solidarity creates new ways of understanding and living relationships with others. By going among the lepers, Francis changed his way of relating to them. To be in solidarity means taking care of each brother or sister, especially of those who are excluded from sharing in the benefits of society. Listening to the cry of the poor, we must work to ensure that global solidarity becomes a new social order.

23. In line with St. Francis' invitation to respect a friar's mother as one's own, concern for the Brothers' **family of origin** should be included among the different forms of solidarity directed outwards. One useful suggestion might be that the fraternity, not the individual, should decide such forms of solidarity. When discussing the matter, the community should also keep in mind the gospel invitation to transform ties of flesh and blood, enabling us fully to live as men who belong to the Capuchin fraternity and are welcoming to vulnerable, needy people.

24. In the past, **international solidarity within the Order** was efficiently based on Province-Mission relationships. The changes now under way in the Order call for a fundamental review, so that we may continue to live solidarity according to the spirit of St. Francis. With this in mind, we make the following proposals:

- a) Since our Order is a Brotherhood, solidarity flows from fraternity to fraternity, rather than from one individual to another.
- b) Since gospel poverty roots us in a particular culture and binds us to a given people, international solidarity should neither uproot nor compromise our cultural bonds.
- c) As a fraternity rooted in many cultures, we should seek equity rather than equality. Equity requires that each Province should have the capacity to respond to the needs of its Brothers and ministries in ways that are tailor-made to its own culture and people. We do not seek to establish one Capuchin lifestyle throughout the world. At the same time, Brothers in any part of the world must be freed from misery and enjoy acceptable living conditions.
- d) The principle of subsidiarity requires that no Province has the right to ask of another that which the labors of its own Brothers and the alms of its own people can provide.
- e) Franciscan solidarity goes beyond law and justice. It flows from the generosity of fraternal love.
- f) Effective solidarity requires transparency, both on the part of the giver and the receiver.
- g) The present structures for solidarity among the circumscriptions of the Order do not appear to reflect adequately the fact that we are brothers of the same family. Therefore, the next General Chapter should set up a new permanent structure for solidarity between the circumscriptions and the Conferences. It should be simple and practical, and should regulate relationships among themselves and with the whole Order, keeping in mind what the Constitutions say: "Goods not needed by a fraternity should be handed over either to the Major Superior for the needs of the jurisdiction, or to the poor, or for the development of peoples" (*Const.* 67,4). Even if a greater degree of centralization becomes necessary, it should continue to take account of historical fraternal relationships between circumscriptions.
- h) Since we are members of one family, Solidarity Commissions in our Order should include not only representatives of contributing Provinces but also of those that receive.

25. Our solidarity towards the least ones and the suffering is also well expressed in social and charitable works or structures. These must be administered according to law and, as far as possible, be run with the cooperation, at different levels, of competent lay staff trained in the values of solidarity. Our specific, privileged task remains that of enabling these enterprises at the human and spiritual level. (cf. *Const.* 71,9).

26. With filial gratitude Francis sang of the reconciliation of creation and of compassion for all creatures (cf. *Circular Letter*, 12). In this spirit the Brothers should be committed to **peace, justice and integrity of creation**, using the resources of "mother earth" sparingly, taking care of the least ones with a sense of fraternal responsibility (*V PCO*, 65), speaking out for those who have no voice and caring for future generations. They will express such choices not only by animating and participating critically in movements of solidarity and ecology but, even more, by living soberly, content with little, and not blindly enslaved by the consumer society.

27. Living in solidarity should promote a culture of sharing, caring and **walking together**. Inspired by such motives, the Brothers should continue to work for fraternal solidarity with all people of good will, particularly with the sisters of the Second Order and with the members of the Secular Franciscan Order. In addition, they should contribute to the growth of movements such as

Franciscan and ecclesial ecumenism, inter-religious and inter-racial dialogue, meetings between North and South, etc.

28. Franciscan solidarity is a broad reality. It includes responsibility for every person and respect for the integrity of all creation. We are brothers to all peoples and all creatures (*PCOV*, 28).

Worldwide solidarity is even more urgent today since the market forces of the global economy give a different and tragic meaning to the words of Jesus: "The one who has will be given more, but the one who has not will be deprived even of what he has" (*Mt 25,29*). Bearing in mind the example of Francis, who could not bear to see someone poorer than himself, we should commit ourselves to listening to people, particularly those who are excluded from sharing the benefits of the global economy.

PRINCIPLES OF FRATERNAL, TRANSPARENT ADMINISTRATION

29. Francis allowed recourse to extraordinary means for the obvious needs of the sick (*Rnb 8,3*) and of lepers (cf. *Rnb 8, 10*). Today we have other "manifest necessities" - which must always be carefully verified - requiring recourse to extraordinary means, such as financial reserves/investments. Therefore:

- financial reserves/investments should only cover those "obvious needs" that cannot be met by our work, alms or inter-provincial solidarity;
- the needs for which monies are invested should be strictly defined, and the yield from these investments should be used exclusively for those same needs;
- rather than defining the minimum investment required to establish a certain security, a Franciscan fraternity should determine a maximum for investments, consistent with our dependence on human and divine providence;
- investments, whether in real estate, money or other financial instruments, must be governed and critiqued by strict ethical norms. To this end, collaboration with other Christian and religious organizations working in particular regions can be a valuable and necessary resource;
- as an international Order, our fraternities exist in a wide range of economic and social conditions. These require pluriform responses. However, it might be appropriate to establish national or continental criteria to govern the question of financial reserves/ investments.

30. Fraternal life also requires **transparency** in local, provincial and general administration. Such transparency begins with the individual friar, continues in the local fraternity and finds its completion in the circumscription to which the fraternity belongs.

Transparency expresses and facilitates brotherhood and solidarity among all the constituent parts of the Order.

31. **Local chapters** are the ideal occasion for preparing the fraternity budget and monitoring how money is spent. Our administration of money is one of the ways in which brotherhood is expressed, and the local chapter is the proper place to examine whether it conforms to gospel values, minority, etc.

32. To achieve transparency in the various levels of administration, each **annual financial report** from the fraternity, the circumscription and the Order must include:

- a) A balance sheet.
- b) A statement of income and expenditure.
- c) An annual budget.

To enable budgets to be correctly drawn up, a well structured accounting system is essential.

33. The **local fraternity** can have only short-term capital investments (cash in bank). The capital at its disposal represents only what is necessary for the ordinary running of the community. The Major Superior and his council should establish the upper limit that each fraternity may manage (cf. *Const.* 67,4). For this purpose the circumscription should produce appropriate forms or models, and assess whether a centralized economic administration at provincial level is advisable.

34. Transparency is also necessary for **provincial bodies** with separate administrations: missions, pastoral activities, social works and various funds. The decision-making and supervisory body remains the Major Superior and his council. Superiors may entrust the financial administration to competent persons or other financially qualified bodies, whether religious or lay.

35. The administrative report of each Circumscription should show all financial investments, stating whether these are for the benefit of the province or for other works. With respect to the **balance sheet**, it should also include the commercial value of goods which do not contribute to the ordinary running of the circumscription (e.g. property, unused buildings, rented houses etc.).

36. Each circumscription, bearing in mind the principles of solidarity established by this Plenary Council and the provisions of our Constitutions (cf. 67,7; 73,1), and after consulting its own Conference, should determine, at the level of the definitory or of the chapter if necessary, what is required for its ordinary administration. It should decide the amount to be held in reserve/investments for internal extraordinary expenditure

(maintenance of properties, the sick, staff insurance, formation) and for external solidarity (missions, charitable giving).

37. With regard to **investments**, in addition to transparency we must observe ethical principles. With reference to *Const.* 66,3, we deem acceptable the forms of investment in use in civil society today. However, for us there are conditions to be observed. We should:

- a) Assess the positive and negative effects of each investment (ethical responsibility), doing everything possible to promote investments that are just.
- b) Avoid purely speculative investments.
- c) As far as possible, invest in one's own socio-economic area or in poorer countries.

In this context, it is important that each circumscription check its own practice against the guidelines of other circumscriptions and the financial laws and regulations of each country. Investments may not be under the control of an individual but must be approved by the Major Superiors. They may seek the advice of competent lay financial specialists who are knowledgeable about the gospel character of our Order.

38. With respect to **houses**, the guidelines given in the Constitutions and previous Plenary Councils are more than sufficient to provide solutions in particular cases (cf. *PCO*, 53). The Brothers are to live in this world as pilgrims and strangers. We therefore encourage them to re-examine whether their present dwellings make it sufficiently obvious that we are called to rely on divine providence. They should assess whether their residences are in proportion to the number of Brothers and to the work carried out there.

39. Our houses should be simple and welcoming, combining **taste and harmony** with unpretentious simplicity. Our way of life should leave its mark even on the buildings and places where we live, since matter should be moulded by the spirit.

40. **Rents** for the properties we own are acceptable in the context in which we live and according to norms to be determined by the General Minister and his definitory. We highly recommend the sale of goods and land which we no longer use. If this is not possible they should be used for social purposes at non-speculative rents.

41. **Courses** should be organized for the proper training of Brothers, enabling them to combine competence in modern economic administration with fidelity to our lifestyle.
42. Following the Constitutions (71,5; cf. 163,3), the mid-term reports sent by the circumscriptions to the General Minister should include economic matters and should be transparent and complete. For this purpose a form should be drawn up for use by all circumscriptions. In the present context of globalization, a good **information network** is vital to ensure a more just distribution of the necessary assistance to needy Circumscriptions.
43. The transparency recommended for fraternities and circumscriptions also applies at Order level. In addition to the amount stipulated (e.g. the annual contribution from the circumscriptions and 10% of income for the missions), the account of the **General Curia** should receive the surplus of each province plus any unused donations. (cf. *Const.* 67,7). Long-term investments of capital earmarked for immediate solidarity (e.g. Mass stipends, donations for the poor) should be avoided.
44. The General Curia is the competent body to guarantee **solidarity** and fraternity on a world-wide basis. Using appropriate structures, it intervenes in those circumscriptions that are unable to provide for the vital needs of the Brothers (food, education, health, and the needs of the elderly). In coordinating the exercise of solidarity it is essential to keep in mind the cultural and social context in which the Brothers live.
45. It is good that the General Minister and his definitory should decide the ways, and create the **necessary structures**, to ensure effective and efficient solidarity. The management of the funds available to the General Minister, with the consent of his definitory, to respond to needs, should be evaluated at each General Chapter.