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General Minister of the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin
(Prot. n. 00966/19)

DECREE OF PROMULGATION

In conformity with what is provided by our Constitutions and by the documents of the Church, having obtained the positive vote of the General Council in its session of 27 September 2019, according to the spirit of the Ordinances of the General Chapters (cf. OGC 2 § 7), and making use of the apposite faculties of office, with the present decree,

we approve and promulgate the
RATIO FORMATIONIS ORDINIS FRATRUM MINORUM CAPUCCINORUM
and establish its validity for the whole Order.

We further establish that all our circumscriptions, individually or in common in their respective conferences, shall update their own *Ratio formationis* in harmony with the new *Ratio formationis of the Order*, with the necessary adaptations to the various settings and needs, in such a way that ensures an initial and ongoing formation that is consistent with an understanding of the identity deriving from the charism of the Order and adequate to the times that the Lord grants us to live in today.

Given in Rome, at the General Curia of the Order, on 8 December 2019, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, patroness of the Order.

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General Minister OFM^{Cap}

Br. Clayton Jaison Fernandes
General Secretary OFM^{Cap}

Preamble

After contemplating the faces of the people and intuitively grasping the mystery that lies hidden in every life, Jesus climbed a hillside and sat down. When His disciples drew near, he told them: How blessed are the poor in spirit ... blessed those who hunger and thirst for justice Blessed are the pure in heart. The Beatitudes, issuing from the very depths of Jesus' life, are the heart of the Gospel. They are a constant invitation to accept an unconditional offer of mercy and joy, and to be genuine in living it.

We Capuchin lesser brothers also hear these words of the Master today, and we feel the need to announce the good news of the Kingdom. Untiring in our search for God in Jesus – the Son who made Himself our brother, the root and foundation of our brotherhood - sharing what we are and have, practising justice and solidarity, working for peace and reconciliation, we aim to transform our lives into the presence of the Kingdom. For this reason, and enlightened by that light, we wish to form our hearts so that they learn to love in the same way that the heart of God loves, until we reach the point of having the same sentiments as Jesus (*Phil 2,5). We wish to be formed as His disciples.

Saint Francis fell in love with the word and life of Jesus. He discovered in poverty the way to embrace what is truly essential, and this is how he handed it on to us: I know the poor and crucified Christ, and I need nothing more (*2Cel 105). The Gospel suffices. The Rule, the Constitutions, the *Ratio Formationis*, or any other document of the Church or the Order, are tools to help us live more intensely and fruitfully according to the Holy Gospel, which is our form of life. Starting with the call of Vatican II to rediscover its roots, Religious Life began a profound reflection on itself, so that it could construct its own charismatic identity and hand it on with creative fidelity. Later on, in 1996, the Church held a Synod on the single theme of the consecrated life. John Paul II, in his final Exhortation (*Vita Consecrata*), beautifully describes the fundamental core aspects of the consecrated life: *Confessio Trinitatis; Signum fraternitatis; Servitium Caritatis*.

In 1981, our Order devoted a Plenary Council to a reflection on the reality of our formation (IV PCO, Rome 1981). This document, as a necessary reference point for the formation plans of most of the circumscriptions, in some sense took the place of a *Ratio Formationis*, which we did not have until now. It is undeniable that it was, and still is, a bold document, full of great insights and suggestions which, even today, have not yet been fully implemented. But nearly 40 years have passed, and the world, the Church and our Order have changed in many respects. Today's challenges call for new reflection and new responses.

The arrival of the pontificate of Pope Francis, with his Franciscan spirit, is giving new vitality and meaning to the Religious Life, to which he entrusts the task of awakening the world. The Pope dedicated the year 2015 as a year of reflection and celebration of the gift of the consecrated life in the universal Church: As we look to the past with gratitude, we are moved to live the present with passion, and to listen attentively and discern evangelically the ways which the Spirit is pointing out to us for the future. As part of his plan to renew ecclesial structures, the Pope has updated a number of important documents which also provide direction for the formation guidelines of religious Orders and congregations. Thus, the document *Ratio Formationis Fundamentalis*. The gift of the presbyteral vocation (2016), updates *Pastores dabo vobis* (1992); and the document *Veritatis Gaudium* (2017) does the same for *Sapientia Christiana* (1979). Our Order has always retained the spirit of reform and renewal. During the sexennium 2006-2012, all the brothers were involved in the work of reflecting on, revising and applying the Constitutions. The General Minister, in the name of the General Chapter of 2012, presented them to the CICLSAL, who approved and confirmed them in a decree dated October 4, 2013. They were promulgated in that same year, on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. The present *Ratio Formationis*, in harmony with the spirit of renewal, is a first application of the new Constitutions in the area of formation, aiming to strengthen the unity based on our one charism, present in many cultures.

During the last twelve years it has been the priority of the General Formation Secretariat (SGF) and the International Formation Council (CIF) to draft the text of the *Ratio Formationis*, using a participative and fraternal methodology which had different stages: times of listening, especially to the formation houses of the Order; times of shared reflection, in particular during the continental assemblies in Guatemala City, Prague, Addis Abeba, and Bangkok; and times of fraternal discernment, at the 2018 General Chapter and in meetings of the General Minister and his Council.

The text of the present *Ratio Formationis* is more charismatic than juridical. It has a strongly Franciscan character, and has been conceived and drawn up for the Capuchin Friars Minor, clearly identifying the essential content of our charism. For this reason, you will find in it constant references to Saint Francis as a model for the following of Christ, to the Franciscan sources, the documents of the Order and the ordinary teaching contained in the letters of the most recent General Ministers. We owe a debt of profound gratitude to Brother Mauro Jöhri, for having proposed, encouraged, believed in and accompanied this project.

The guidelines and principles presented here must be adapted to the sensitivity of the different cultural contexts of each circumscription, by means of a *Ratio Formationis Localis*, which in its turn will be the fruit of the reflection, participation and prayer of the brothers.

The Order, led by the General Minister, Brother Roberto Genuin, has placed mission at the heart of its priorities: the proclamation of the Gospel with the force of our charism. We are certain that the *Ratio* will provide a new impetus, fresh dynamism and renewed commitment, and will help us to respond with evangelical authenticity, both individually and as fraternities, to the great challenges presented to us by the world today.

Brother Charles Alphonse
General Secretary for Formation

Brother Jaime Rey Escapa
Vice-General Secretary for Formation

ABBREVIATIONS and ACRONYMS

1. Holy Scripture

Acts	Acts of the Apostles
Col	Letter to the Colossians
1 Cor	First Letter to the Corinthians
2Cor	Second Letter to the Corinthians
Eph	Letter to the Ephesians
Exo	Exodus
Gal	Letter to the Galatians
Gen	Genesis
Heb	Letter to the Hebrews
Jn	Gospel of John
1Jn	First Letter of John
1Kg	I Kings
Lk	Gospel of Luke
Mk	Gospel of Mark
Mt	Gospel of Matthew
1Pt	First Letter of Peter
Phil	Letter to the Philippians
Rom	Letter to the Romans
Rv	Book of Revelation

2. Documents of Vatican II

AG	Ad Gentes
DV	Dei Verbum
GS	Gaudium et Spes
LG	Lumen Gentium
PC	Perfectae Caritatis
PO	Presbyterorum Ordinis
SC	Sacrosanctum Concilium

3. Magisterial Documents of the Catholic Church

AL	<i>Amoris Laetitia</i> . Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis, (March 19, 2016)
SAFC	Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, <i>Starting Afresh from Christ</i> (May 19, 2002)
CVer	<i>Caritas in Veritate</i> . Encyclical Letter of Pope Benedict XVI (June 29, 2009)
CCC	<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i>
ChrisV	<i>Christus vivit</i> . Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis (25 March 2019)
CIC	<i>Code of Canon Law (Codex Iuris Canonici)</i> , (January 25, 1983)
DC	<i>Deus caritas est</i> . Encyclical letter of Pope Benedict XVI (December 25, 2005)
Economy	Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, <i>Economy in the Service of Charism and Mission. Boni dispensatores multiformis gratiae Dei</i> . Guidelines (January 6, 2018)
EG	<i>Evangelii Gaudium</i> . Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortatio of Pope Francis (November 24, 2013)
EN	<i>Evangelii nuntiandi</i> . Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Paul VI (December 8, 1975)
GEx	<i>Gaudete et Exsultate. On the call to holiness in today's world</i> . Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortatio of Pope Francis (March 19, 2018)
ICF	Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, <i>Inter-Institute Collaboration for Formation</i> (December 8, 1998)
Justice	JPIC COMMISSION, <i>A Formation Itinerary for a Prophetic Religious Life. Guide us in your justice</i> (Ps 5,9), Città di Castello (2010)
LS	<i>Laudato Si. On Care for our Common Home</i> . Encyclical letter of Pope Francis (May 24, 2015)
NewWine	Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, <i>New Wine in new Wineskins. The Consecrated life and its ongoing Challenges since Vatican II. Guidelines</i> (January 3, 2017)
NMI	<i>Novo millennio ineunte</i> . Apostolic Letter of Pope John Paul II (January 26, 2001)
PdV	<i>Pastores dabo vobis</i> . Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II (March 25, 1992)
PI	Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, <i>Potissimum institutioni, Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes</i> , (February 2, 1990)
RM	<i>Redemptoris Missio</i> . Encyclical letter of Pope John Paul II (December 7, 1990)

RFund	Congregation for the Clergy, <i>The Gift of the Priestly Vocation. Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis</i> (December 8, 2016)
VC	<i>Vita consecrate</i> . Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II (March 25, 1996)
VD	<i>Verbum Domini</i> . Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Benedict XVI (30, September 2010)
VG	<i>Veritatis Gaudium. On Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties</i> . Apostolic Constitution of Pope Francis (December 27, 2017)
FLC	Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, <i>Fraternal Life in Community</i> « <i>Congregavit nos in unum Christi amor</i> » (February 2, 1994)

4. The Writing of Saint Francis

Adm	Admonitions
BIL	Blessing of Brother Leo
CtC	Canticle of Brother Sun, 1225
ER	Earlier Rule, 1221
ExhP	Exhortation to the Praise of God
LBL	Letter to Brother Leo
LMin	Letter to Minister
LR	The Later Rule (with papal seal), 1223
LtAnt	Letter to Brother Anthony
LtOrd	Letter to the Entire Order
LtRPrp	Letter to the Rulers of the People
1LtF	First Letter to the Faithful
OfP	Office of the Passion
PrCr	The Prayer before the Crucifix
PrG	Praises of God, 1224
RH	Rule for Hermitages

SalBVM	Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary
SalV	Second Letter to the Faithful
Test	Testament, 1226
TPJ	True and Perfect Joy

5. The Writing of Saint Clare

2LAg	Clare of Assisi, Second Letter to Agnes of Prague
3LAg	Clare of Assisi, Third Letter to Agnes of Prague
4LAg	Clare of Assisi, Fourth Letter to Agnes of Prague
RSC	Rule of Saint Clare of Assisi
TestSC	Testament of Saint Clare of Assisi

6. The Hagiography of Saint Francis of Assisi

AC	The Assisi Compilation
AP	The Anonymous of Perugia
1C	Thomas of Celano, The Life of Saint Francis
2C	Thomas of Celano, The Remembrance of the Desire of the Soul
LF1	The Little Flowers of Saint Francis
LMj	Saint Bonaventure, Major Legend
L3C	Legend of the Three Companions
MP	Mirror of Perfection (longer version)
Ufil	Office and Liturgical Readings of St Francis by Julian of Speyer

7. Franciscan Thinkers

7.1. Saint Bonaventure

Brev	Breviloquium
Itin	Itinerarium mentis in Deum
LV	Lignum vitae

Mag	Christus unus omnium magister
SL	Soliloquium
VM	Vitis mystica

7.2. Blessed John Duns Scotus

Ord	Ordinatio (Quaestiones Oxonienses in Libros Sententiarum)
Rep Par	Reportata Parisiensia

8. Documents of the Order

FrCh	John Corriveau, Circular Letter 9: <i>On Our Fraternal Charism</i> , (February 2, 1996)
EBr	John Corriveau, Circular Letter 11: <i>Evangelical Brotherhood</i> , (February 2, 1997)
POT	John Corriveau, Circular Letter 16: <i>The Poor – Our Teachers</i> , (December 2, 1999)
GBCW	John Corriveau, Circular Letter 20: <i>Gospel Brotherhood in a Changing World</i> , (March 31, 2002)
LPV	John Corriveau, <i>Living Poverty in Fraternity. A Reflection on the Sixth Plenary Council</i> . Circular letter, n. 13 (Mai 31, 1998)
Const	Constitutions of the Order of Capuchin Lesser Brothers
GUW	Mauro Jöhri, Circular Letter 8: <i>Get Up and Walk</i> , (November 29, 2010)
FFCh	Mauro Jöhri, Circular Letter 4: <i>Let us Fan the Flame of our Charism</i> , (December 8, 2008)
MHO	Mauro Jöhri, Circular Letter 5: <i>Mission at the Heart of the Order</i> , (November 29, 2009)
Jöhrident	Mauro Jöhri, Circular Letter, <i>Friars Minor Capuchin: their Identity and sense of belonging</i> (October 4, 2014)
JöhriGift	Mauro Jöhri, Circular Letter, <i>The Indispensable Gift of Lay Brothers for our Order</i> , (April 5, 2015)
JöhriPrayer	Mauro Jöhri, Circular Letter, <i>Saint Francis of Assisi: a man transformed in prayer</i> , (October 4, 2016)
OCG	Ordinances of the General Chapters
PostNov	<i>Convention on Postnovitiate. Final document</i> . Assisi, September 5-25, 2004, in <i>Analecta Ofmcap</i> 120 (2004) 1015-1026

9. Plenary Councils of the Order

I PCO	<i>Our life in fraternity and poverty</i> (Quito, 1971)
II PCO	<i>Our life and practice of prayer</i> (Taizé, 1973)
III PCO	<i>Missionary life and activity</i> (Mattli, 1978)
IV PCO	<i>Formation guidelines</i> (Rome, 1981)
V PCO	<i>Our prophetic presence in the world</i> (Garibaldi, 1986)
VI PCO	<i>Living poverty in brotherhood</i> (Assisi, 1998)
VII PCO	<i>Fraternal life in minority</i> (Assisi, 2004)
VIII PCO	<i>The grace of working</i> (Rome, 2016)

Presentation

After the Lord gave me some brothers, no one showed me what I had to do, but the Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the pattern of the Holy Gospel. And I had this written down simply and in a few words and the Lord Pope confirmed it for me. And those who came to receive life gave whatever they had to the poor and were content with one tunic, patched inside and out, with a cord and short trousers. We desired nothing more
(Test 14-17).

“Jesus in his heart, **Jesus** on his mouth, **Jesus** in his ears, **Jesus** in his eyes, **Jesus** in his hands.” (*1Cel 115). Having the same feelings of Jesus according to the style of St. Francis is the ultimate and fundamental criterion of our entire formation program. Formation consists in conforming ourselves to the way of life of the Holy Gospel, an authentic path to holiness.

1. Objective

The ultimate aim of the *Ratio Formationis (RF)* is to strengthen our unique charismatic identity throughout the formation process; that is, to reinforce the values shared and accepted by all, which in turn are embodied in distinct cultural contexts. Only the general principles of formation are presented in the *Ratio*. It is the task of each circumscription to develop its own local *Ratio Formationis* in the light of these general principles.

2. Structure

The text is divided into three chapters and three appendices. The first chapter intertwines the history of Francis with ours, against the backdrop of the life of Jesus, who is the light and inspiration of our formation, both now and in the future.

Chapter Two presents the five dimensions that constitute the entire *RF* from an ecclesial point of view. Every formative process must **integrate**, in a balanced way, the five dimensions that make up the human person: charismatic, human, spiritual, intellectual and professional. These dimensions, keeping in mind the basic principles of Franciscan anthropology and the values of our own culture and charism, allow us to discover what is specific to our vocation and form of life.

Chapter Three introduces the constitutive dimensions, progressively and in the form of an initiation, into the different formation stages. Thus, it presents the **nature** of each stage, the **objectives** to be achieved – with a strongly Christological emphasis— **the dimensions**—with special emphasis on what is specific to Franciscans— the **specific times** and **the criteria** for discernment. In addition, some subjects of particular interest are included: **work**, in harmony with the concerns of our Order expressed in the VIII PCO; **the economy** - the learning of skills to ensure the fraternal and transparent management of money; **justice, peace and ecology**, following the recommendations of Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, as well as the guidelines given in the recent JPIC manual of our Order; and **new information and communication technologies**, which are associated with most of the anthropological changes that are occurring in our world.

The *RF* is completed by three attachments or appendices, monographs on the topics of culture, academic study and human maturity, especially in its affective and sexual aspects.

3. Style

Chapter I presents the figure of St. Francis in poetic language so that its universal and symbolic character can inspire our form of life in varying cultural contexts. By contrast, Chapter II is more educational and uses the language of *exhortation*, reserving *norms and proposals* to chapter III and in the attachments.

An *RF* addressed to the whole Order cannot be over-prescriptive in its language. For this reason, building on a plain yet sufficiently rich text, a certain tension has been deliberately maintained between norms, exhortations, proposals and aspirations. This respects the natural tension that exists between the general proposals of a *Ratio* and the concrete proposals of a *local formation plan*.

4. Methodology

Our aim has been to use a dynamic and participatory methodology, best expressed by the phrase *a text in progress on a journey*. Through various channels we have collected proposals, suggestions and insights from all the brothers. The resulting text is therefore the fruit of a collective effort, open to further refinement.

We offer a text which we hope will point the way and help us discover current sensitivities and trends in the field of formation, so that we are meaningful and genuine in today's world. It is therefore necessary to avoid ideological principles that prevent ideas from having reality as their point of departure and arrival.

5. Keys to interpret the text

Trinitarian and Christological: The protagonist is Jesus the Son of God. **Discipleship** is the background against which the life of St. Francis is interpreted and from which we build our *identity*.

Anthropological: Franciscan anthropology is dynamic and positive: the **experience of relationship** becomes the basic category by which anthropology itself is interpreted.

Franciscan: relationship makes **brotherhood** the appropriate environment for the growth and integration of our identity and charism. The life of the individual and of the fraternity must be built on the foundation of genuine freedom and responsibility.

Capuchin: **Conversion** and **simplicity** are the categories that best define the Capuchin interpretation of reality, where simplicity becomes a journey in search of the essential. A further category belonging to our charism is the concept of **reform**, understood as an existential need for continuous updating and renewal.

Francis, our brother

The Lord granted Brother Francis the grace to begin to do penance by leading him among lepers. He showed mercy to them and after hearing the voice of the crucified Lord at San Damiano he embarked upon the gospel life in order to follow in the footsteps of Christ, with a burning desire to pattern his life upon Him in everything. In this way, true love of Christ transformed the lover into the image of the Beloved (Const 3, 1).

1. It is only by living that we learn to live. Our experiences and encounters along the way are what constantly shape our identity in a dynamic manner. To build up the person we are is an exciting challenge, and not without difficulties. But we have a model, Jesus (*TestCl 1-5), who by walking the paths of our humanity discovered His own divinity: the Son, by becoming our brother, reveals our ultimate and final goal: to be brothers, only to become, at last, sons and daughters of God as well. Brotherhood is the way. Francis was fascinated by the humanity and humility of God the Most High, who in Jesus makes himself poor and crucified (*LtOrd 28; Adm 1, 16; 1Cel 84, 115; 2Cel 211; L3C 2; LMj 9,2), that he made the Gospel our *form of life* (*Test 14-15): that we should be brothers, in order to be more fully human, like Jesus, and to tell the story through the authenticity of our life lived in brotherhood.

I. SILENCE

*O God, sublime and glorious, come and enlighten the darkness of my heart;
give me an honest faith, a firm hope and a perfect love,
that I may know your holy will, obey it, and not go astray (PrCr 1-3).*

2. Oh the bliss of those who listen to silence: their eyes fill with light, their steps head straight for the depths of the heart. Let silence touch us, and we enter into deeper kinship with the world, open ourselves to peace, and live a more authentic life (*1Cel 6, 10, 71, 91; LMj 5,6; AP 56; MO 55).

In silence we glimpse the presence of the Mystery (*Ex 3: 1-15), and learn that if we are to allow Him to meet us, we must change direction and search for our true self. (*Gen 12:1), taking care of that inner space which goes beyond the limits of the superficial, and makes fruitful relationships with others possible: in them we also discover who we are. Silence is the source of desire, of dialogue and beauty, and, when it turns into contemplation, is the opportunity to welcome the gentle whisper of the voice of God (*1 Re 19: 3-15)¹.

¹ Cf. BERNARDINO DE LAREDO, *The Ascent of Mount Sion*, Faber & Faber, London 1952; FRANCISCO DE OSUNA, *Abbecedario spirituale*, Terza Parte: in *Mistici francescani*, Vol. IV, Fonti e ricerche, Edizione EFR, Padova 2010, 115-339; 498-620.

I.1. Meaning

3. God loves human beings into existence and invites them to live, gifting them with freedom. By so doing, God grants to humankind the capacity to be the architects of their own selves (*1R 23: 1). This logic of creation teaches us that living consists in taking responsibility for the journey, in shaping our own life, trying to discover our vocation: that which the world is expecting of us, the gift the Creator gives to us. Life is a gift that calls for our responsibility.
4. The heart of the Gospel is the form of life of Jesus, who chose not to spend His life for His own benefit, but by living for others² (*Phil 2:6-11) (*2LAg 19-20). In Him we discover that life consists in the art of the encounter. Jesus, by opening Himself to God and becoming an open door to encountering others, teaches us the Christian paradox: *that to possess life, we must surrender it* (*Jn 12:24-25).
5. Who would not wish to be a great knight? In his youth, Francis dreamt of nothing else: of being the greatest, the most powerful, the most admired. He seemed to have all the answers, until one day he was confronted by war, and experienced suffering and the shadow of death. The dream turned into a nightmare. He was taken prisoner in the battle of Collestrada and, imprisoned in Perugia, he discovered that the world was not what he thought it was. After his prison experience came sickness and crisis, when nothing made sense any more: he sees nothing but conflicts and enemies, fragments of a broken world. He feels lost (*1Cel 3; L3C 4; 2Cel 4).
6. When things become meaningless, life fills with fears that take us over and prevent us from knowing who we are. Then, feelings arise which we never knew before, casting a cloud over the way ahead: the anxious search for power, the desire to compete, the temptation to exclude others. Meaninglessness turns to loneliness, and loneliness to egoism, preventing us from seeing who we truly are (*2LtF 63-71). However, deep in the core of every human being, like an ever-beating heart, lies the desire for God³.

I. 2. The search

7. A person discovers who he or she is when they launch out and start walking (*Gen 12:1). Itinerancy (movement outward and inward, contact with other people, other cultures and ideas) is part of the deepest core of the human condition. It is this attitude that keeps us alert against conformity and compromise; from these God protects us by enticing us with the gift of a life that is open and always new (*2R 6, 1-3).
8. To follow Jesus means to live as He lived: always on the way, proclaiming the reign of God. This model of itinerant life keeps us rooted in what is fundamental(*LR 6,2). Our Franciscan tradition invites us to follow the poor and naked Christ, and to discover that His poverty frees us from the superfluous, that His nakedness leads us into the mystery of truth: *Nudus nudum Christum sequi* (*LMj 2,4; Const 60,5).

² Cf. H. SCHÜRMANN, *Jesu ureigener Tod: exeget. Besinnungen u. Ausblick*, Herder, Freiburg im Breisg 1976.

³ Cf. A. GESCHÉ, *Le sens (Dieu pour penser VII)*, Le Cerf, Paris 2003.

9. The life of Francis is full of questions: why do people kill one another? Why is there poverty and exclusion? Why suffering? On the way to Apulia, in his attempt to become a knight, he is awakened by a dream: *Whom do you wish to serve, the servant or the Master?* (*L3C 6) Francis understands that anyone running away from himself never finds himself. He has to abandon his armour, come off the high horse of his pride, be taken for a coward and a failure, and start again. It would take him a lifetime to unveil the meaning of that dream in Spoleto (*2Cel 6; AP 6).
10. To live means never tiring of searching for the way. The horizon remains open, to remind us that the meaning of life is built up, step by step, that the road is covered in tracks that disclose a part of the mystery. What we have to do is search with a passion, and walk on trustingly.

I.3. Mystery

11. Mystery is the part of reality as yet out of reach. Behind and beyond what we see, there is so much more. Humanity has failed in its attempt to reduce existence to the powers of its own reason. In the same way, faith is not exempt from the danger of constructing idolatrous images of a god made to the measure of our needs⁴.
12. To avoid falling into this temptation it is necessary to confront our experience with Jesus' experience of God. This is what we find in the Gospel: the encounters, the words and the silence through which Jesus enters the depths of the mystery of God (*Lc 9:28-36). In Him He discovers a love that is unconditional, free and always open.
13. Not without pain, Francis has to let go of his former images of God. He must leave behind the god who turns strong men into knights, who justifies the power of a few, who annihilates those who think differently, who incites hatred for the enemy. Only then does he experience the dark night of loneliness and the absence of God. In the silent contemplation of creation, Francis begins (*Gen 1: 24-31) to sense the presence of the Creator (*2Cel 7; L3C 6).

I. 4. Beauty

14. Human beings are naturally attracted to everything beautiful, because encountering beauty helps to overcome the experience of fragmentation. The beauty of the world opens us to a relationship of interdependence, which makes us brothers to all. There is nothing superficial about this: contact with real beauty enables us to know who we are and what we are doing in life (*Itin 2,8).
15. If we look carefully, we see how the Gospel also speaks to us of Jesus' relationship with creatures: in them, He finds a place where He can contemplate God. Jesus' discovery of the beauty of the world — the harmony of beings, their absolute dependence on God — helps Him construct a fraternal way of being together with everything that exists. The form of life lived by Jesus -- His authenticity, His inner freedom, His ever-open hands, His eyes full of mercy and tenderness -- is beauty in all its fullness. His is the most beautiful life-

⁴ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Fides et Ratio, on the relationship between Faith and Reason*, Vatican City 1998.

16. Francis, reader of the Gospel (*1Cel 22; L3C 25; AP 11; L3C 29), is also a reader of creation, (*1Cel 80-82; 2Cel 165; LMj 8,6; Brev 1, 2) the Book of Life. There he discovers God's desire to enter into relationship with every creature. In each one of them he contemplates—the different ways in which God becomes present, and, together with them, becomes a fascinated witness of God the Creator, to whom he cries out: *You are beauty*⁵(*PrG 4. 5).

II. THE ENCOUNTER

Let no-one leave you without first having seen your eyes filled with mercy (LMin 9).

17. No man is an island. God has created us unique and unrepeatable (*Gen 2:18.20), but not self-sufficient. Individualism (the temptation to reduce reality to one's own personal vision) destroys our capacity for relationship and hinders true personal fulfilment, by turning the other person into an object of self-affirmation and domination. Interdependence requires that we recognise others as different, and that we welcome them as gifts that enrich us. Without free and open relationships, life lacks meaning, since it is in discovering "otherness" that our own identity is constructed.

Encounters are the most important experiences in the life of Francis. Nothing happens by chance; rather, everything happens at specific times and places: while searching for the way, Francis is led to the peripheries of Assisi (*Test 2). Outside the city walls, in the little hermitage of San Damiano, he can hear the Word more clearly and, on the strength of it, is enabled to go out to encounter the lepers and follow the poor, naked Christ (*L3C 1-35).

II. 1. The Word

18. In the Gospel, Francis finds his *way of life*. He invents nothing, but discovers that the issue is to live as Jesus lived: *The Most High Himself revealed to me that I was to live according to the form of the Holy Gospel* (*Test 14). Jesus, as an itinerant preacher, proclaims the good news of the Kingdom: the free love of God that excludes no-one. To be precise, the Gospel —the book that recounts the encounters in Jesus' life, most of them with poor, sick and outcast people — proposes that we build our lives around this capacity to encounter others. The Beatitudes (*Mt 5: 3-12) and the invitation to mercy (*Mt 9: 10-13) sum up perfectly the type of encounter with the world to which Jesus calls us.
19. For Francis, the Gospel suffices, he lives *in and on* the Scriptures and *makes his home in them, as in a house* (*2Cel 102; LMj 11, 1): for us who are disciples of Jesus this is the vital frame of reference and discernment. He becomes present among us each time we remember His Word, and when we try to live our lives in the light of His words. Francis himself, in love with the words of Jesus, alerts his brothers to the temptation to overlay the Master's *unadorned and simple life* ,(*1Cel 6) and invites us to live evangelically and *sine glossa* (*Test 38-39).

⁵ Cf. L. DE ROSA, *Dalla teologia della creazione all'antropologia della bellezza. Il linguaggio simbolico chiave interpretativa del pensiero di San Bonaventura da Bagnoregio*, Cittadella, Assisi 2011.

20. Francis *is not a deaf hearer of the Gospel*, but a man who tries to live what he hears (*1Cel 22). From him we learn that the word of God is only understood in depth when it is put into practice; that to live centered on the word generates a new style of relationship: brotherhood (*1Cel 38; LMj 6,5). To live as brothers is the mirror of the values of the Kingdom, its most beautiful proclamation, the most genuine form of sharing the desire for God. To welcome diversity in a brotherly way constitutes the most credible way of contemplating and telling the story of our God, who makes himself a “lesser brother” in the mystery of the incarnation of the Son⁶.

II. 2. The leper

21. To take the risk of being present with the heart, (*Mi 6:8): inside the human misery of another: this is the dynamic of mercy. Some war wounds would leave their mark on the emotional memory of Francis until the end of his life. The gentle gaze of God’s mercy helped him to know, to welcome and to integrate his own wounds and shadow side. Only one who has experienced mercy can show mercy. This is something that completely changes our ways of relating to others: from accusation and judgement leading to guilt, we are led to empathy and understanding, inviting us to responsibility. For Francis, sharing the life of lepers was a school in the true sense (*1Cel 17; L3C 11). From that moment, the free gift of mercy became the foundation of the new project of evangelical living inspired by God Himself.
22. *When I was in sin it seemed too bitter for me to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I showed mercy to them. And when I left them, what had seemed bitter to me was turned into sweetness of soul and body* (*Test 1-3). For a long time, Francis feels insecure in the presence of lepers, and protects himself: up go the walls, he keeps his distance, he hides. It wasn’t a fear of physical contagion, but something more profound, it was fear of sharing the same fate as the lepers: fear of not being accepted, of being excluded, of having no rights, of not being known or loved by anyone. Being invisible: being nothing and nobody.
23. Francis kisses the leper - although we should really say, allows himself to be kissed. It was not just an act of sheer will-power to overcome his repugnance. His kiss was the expression of a sincere emotional experience, which eventually drove out all fear and transformed his whole emotional universe. Everything starts to take on new meaning: bitterness becomes sweet, a transition takes place, from needing to be recognised by others to having a good knowledge of himself. Thanks to the lepers, Francis begins to know himself and experiences the meaning of gratuitous giving. To kiss the Gospel and to kiss the leper are the same thing; listening to the words of Jesus and hearing the cry rising from the flesh of those who suffer, are the same thing: it is always Jesus who is speaking, and who plants the kiss (*Mt 25: 31-46) (*1Cel 17; 2Cel 9; L3C 11; LMj 1,5)⁷.
24. Among the lepers, far from all false security, true interior security arises. Here is the evangelical paradox: the less the power, the greater the freedom (*VII PCO 19). Where there is nothing to lose, real security is born, as a gift freely given. Here Francis learns another decisive lesson that was to leave its mark on his life and on that of his brothers: the incompatibility between brotherhood and power. Anyone who wants to be a lesser brother must serve and give up any kind of dominion over others (*Mk 10: 42-45; ER 3,9; 6,3; 16, 6; SalBVM 16-18; 2LAg 47).

⁶ Cf. D. DOZZI, *Così dice il Signore. Il vangelo negli scritti di San Francesco*, EDB, Bologna 2000.

⁷ Cf. F. ACCROCA, *Tutto cominciò tra i lebbrosi. Gli inizi dell’avventura spirituale di Francesco d’Assisi*, Porziuncola, Assisi 2014.

II. 3. The Son, poor and naked, has made Himself our brother

25. Jesus, naked, poor and crucified, lives at the half-ruined hermitage of San Damiano (*2Cel 10; L3C 3; LMj 2,1; L3C 13), surrounded by the lepers, awakening closeness and solidarity in those who contemplate Him. This is no judge who judges and condemns, this is a brother who shares our trials. *He was born poor, lives more poorly and dies utterly poor and naked on the cross* (*4LAG 19-23; VM 2,3). He does not keep his Sonship for Himself; on the contrary, He makes himself our brother (*Phil 2: 6; Lord 14), showing us that brotherhood is the best way to discover God.
26. Francis wants to follow Jesus more closely, traversing every stage of His life, step by step, from Greccio (*1Cel 84-87; LMj 107) (the Bethlehem experience) to La Verna (the Calvary experience) (*1Cel 94-96; 2Cel 217; L3C 69-70; LMj 13, 1-3). Discipleship, following the Master, is always at the centre: *He was always with Jesus! Jesus in his heart, Jesus on his lips, Jesus in his ears, Jesus in his eyes, Jesus in his hands, he bore Jesus always in his whole body!* (*1Cel 115).
27. Love, more than sin, is the heart of the mystery of the incarnation. The Most High and All-Powerful presents *Himself* to us, mysteriously, as infinitely small, divested of all power (*OfP 7, 9). God is total self-giving, absolute surrender (*LtOrd 28-29). He keeps nothing back for Himself. The cross, *the Tree of Life*, recalls the commitment of Jesus to justice and to the excluded (*Ord III, d.20, q.un., n.10). So far does he identify with them that he ends up like them: hanging from a tree, like a criminal outside the city (*Gal 3:13). His life and death make it clear that God is no part of a system that excludes anyone. This is the lesson of the Resurrection: it is the final, definitive word of love that God speaks concerning the life of Jesus. This was how Francis understood it⁸.

II. 4. The birds and the flowers

28. A big obstacle in the way of our following Jesus is the fear (*Mk 10: 32) that consists in bringing into the present something we think could happen to us in the future, thus preventing us from moving forward. The opposite of fear is trust, the serene and joyful affirmation of the present that moves us onward towards whatever must happen. *Look at the birds of the air* (*Mt 6: 26) ... *Look at the lilies of the field, see how they grow* (*Mt 6:28). Birds (symbols of freedom) and flowers (images of providence) are put forward by Jesus as models of the trustful disciple, who feels supported by God's loving kindness and tries to live each moment in depth.
29. In Francis, a new way of being holy is revealed to us. He falls in love with flowers, holds conversations with the birds and has close encounters with creatures; among them, he feels he is one of them (*2Cel 165; LMj 9,1; LP 88; MO 118). To the stones of enclosed spaces he prefers the cloister of the world (*ScEx 63), filled with colourful flowers that bear witness to the beauty of the Creator, and with the music of the birds that sing for God's glory (*1Cel 58-61; 80-82; 2Cel 165; L3C 20-21; LMj 12, 3-4; 8,6). Tired of the empty speeches of experience, Francis learns a new language from the lilies and the birds, a free and gratuitous word, full of trust and inspiring absolute confidence in the Lord (*Mt 6: 7-8).

III. DESIRE

Let us desire nothing else, seek nothing else, delight and take pleasure in nothing else but our Creator (ER, 23).

⁸ Cf. G. IAMMARRONE, *La cristologia francescana. Impulsi per il presente*, Messaggero, Padova 1997.

30. The search for meaning awakens the world of desire. We are talking about a key that sets our whole being in motion, launching us into an encounter with reality. Desire is always clothed in concrete experiences, keeps us alert to the energy of life, and connects us to Jesus, inspiring us to share His sentiments, to be like Him. Francis, *a man of desires* (*Itin Prol. 3), allows God to transform his desire to be a knight into an even more sublime desire: to be like Jesus (*Phil 2: 5).

III.1. The gaze

31. *It seemed too bitter for me to see lepers* (*Test 1). It is always a temptation to avert one's gaze and remain blind. Who can break the tendency we have to look only at ourselves? Conversion consists precisely in changing our way of looking at things, moving from indifference to compassion, allowing what we see to affect and transform us (*Lk 10: 30-37) (*Test 1-3).

32. Nothing escapes God's vision: *he looks* at the poor and *hears* their cry (*Ex 2:23-25), he turns them into the apple of His eye. Through them, God looks at us. These are the paradoxes of the Gospel: we are seen by those we do not wish to see. Only when Francis lets himself be seen by the eyes of the God of the lepers is he able to open his own eyes and learn how to look.

33. The Christ of San Damiano becomes the mirror into which Clare and Francis invite us to look. (*3LtCl 12-13; PCr). As we gaze into His eyes, our eyes are filled with mercy (*LMin 9-11). Something in His way of looking at us moves us from silence to listening, from solitude to solidarity, from contemplation to compassion. Thus begins the process of the transformation of our desires: we start by looking at things like Jesus, and end up seeing them as He sees them. And that is not all: you end up being another Christ. And there is even more: you yourself become another mirror, so that whoever sees you, sees Jesus⁹ (*4LAg 15-27).

34. Contemplation invites discipleship, and discipleship invites contemplation. Both sustain the meaning of our life as brothers. Together, from the vantage point of brotherhood, we extend God's gaze over the world prophetically, denouncing injustice and becoming witnesses to the hope and joy of the Gospel¹⁰.

III. 2. Brotherhood

35. *The Lord gave me brothers* (*Test 14). It was revealed to Francis that to be able to live like Jesus, brothers are indispensable. God has created us different, unrepeatable and unique. Brotherhood does not deny personal identity, on the contrary, it protects it from individualism; it does not destroy the person but enriches him with the gift of a broader space. Our identity as brothers can only be constructed in terms of relationship.

36. The project of Clare and Francis consists in following Jesus as brothers and sisters, in different, complementary styles (*RCI 6, 3-4). While Francis restores the apostolic model of itinerancy, preaching and brotherhood, Clare focuses on listening to and serving Jesus, in the style of Martha and Mary in the house at Bethany (*Lk 10: 38-42)¹¹.

⁹ Cf. J.C. PEDROSO, *Abrace o Cristo pobre. A espiritualidade de Santa Clara*, Centro Franciscano de Espiritualidade, Pericabá 2012.

¹⁰ Cf. T. MATURA, *15 Days of Prayer with Saint Francis of Assisi*, New City Press, New York 2009.

¹¹ Cf. N. KUSTER, *Franz und Klara von Assisi. Eine doppelbiografie*, Grünewald Verlag, Ostfildern 2011.

37. Our identity and charism are expressed in the way we live relationships. Poverty focuses us on what is fundamental, preventing material things from becoming obstacles between us: *And those who wished to adopt this life gave all that they possessed to the poor, and we desired nothing more* (*Test 16-17). All the brothers are equal: it is up to everyone to work with their hands (*1R 7, 1-9; 2R 5, 1-4; Test 20-22); preaching is not the exclusive preserve of clerics; one's place of origin does not count.

Brotherhood guarantees freedom and fosters gratuity in inter-personal relationships, and these require, unconditionally from all the brothers, that they renounce any kind of power (*VII PCO 4). For Francis, without freedom, creativity and responsibility, no truly fraternal relationships can exist: *In whatever way it seems better to you to please the Lord God and to follow his footprints and poverty, do it with the blessing of the Lord God and my obedience* (*Ltl 3).

38. The difficulties Francis encountered in fraternal relationships give credibility to the words he spoke to a brother who asked for his help: problems among brothers are not solved by escaping to a hermitage (*LMin 7). *Not to wish others to be better Christians* requires that we give up demanding that the other should meet my expectations, and should behave as I would in his place. Only in this way can we open up spaces where all is gift, freeing us from the anxious need to dominate. The secret for living up to these demands lies in contemplation. It is indispensable, for in it our eyes are charged with mercy: *Let there be no brother in the world who has sinned, however much he may have sinned, who after he has looked into your eyes, would ever depart without your mercy* (*LMin, 9).

III. 3. The Church

39. *And the Lord gave me such faith in churches* (*Test 4). The Franciscan project, with its creative fidelity and its sense of belonging in minority, gives the Church a new evangelical style. Our Lady of the Angels, the Portiuncula, the cradle of our Order, is surrounded by profound affective connotations: here were born the lesser brothers and the poor sisters (*1Cel 21-22; LMj 2,4); here, the brotherhood gathers around *Mary, the Virgin made church* (*SalV 1). According to Celano, this place of meeting and rest, this memorial of the origins, was the one that Francis loved most (*1Cel 106). The Portiuncula constantly calls us back to what is small and essential, it is the model of Franciscan ecclesiology and the sacrament of a church of brothers who proclaim the good news by living in brotherhood.

40. *In this world, I see nothing corporally of the most high Son of God, except His most holy Body and Blood* (*Test 10). The Church, the mystical Body of Christ (*LG 4), is born of the Eucharist¹². It is the symbol that sums up the whole life and message of Jesus: a free and total gift of Himself. The washing of the feet (*Jn 13, 1-17), the gesture on which the Church rests, highlights its deepest meaning and vocation: service, as its specific mode of being in the world. This involves a genuine experience of love and justice, where to see and touch the Body of Jesus helps us to see and touch Him in the bodies of the poor, and in that way to unmask all counterfeit spirituality (*Adm 1, 1-1-22). The Eucharist is for us *the source of the Church's life: the root, the focal point and the very heart of our fraternal life* (*Const 48,1).

¹² Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia, the Eucharist in its relationship to the Church*, Vatican City 2003.

41. The Church's meaning lies not in proclaiming itself to itself, but in proclaiming Jesus (*Mt 28: 18-20). The missionary dimension lies at the heart of our project: to be a Capuchin means being ready to go where no-one else wants to go (*JohriMis 1, 7), always in the style of Francis, who set out to meet the Sultan Malik Al-Kamil and to build peace through dialogue and respect¹³ (*1Cel 57; LMj 9,8). From him we learn that the Gospel is not imposed, but proposed, that mission starts from the recognition of the truth that dwells in the other person (*EG 14). The testimony of our life as brothers is without a doubt the most credible way of proclaiming this: *Let them not quarrel or argue or judge others when they go about in the world, but let them be meek, peaceful, modest, gentle and humble, speaking courteously to everyone, as is becoming* (*LR 3,10).

III. 4. The world

42. God has placed the world into our hands: as the place where our salvation is accomplished. Our social, economic and cultural structures are undergoing a transformation. There are inevitable challenges: to put an end to the scandalous inequalities by which large parts of humanity are excluded; to achieve sustainable development that respects the environment; to find pathways of dialogue between different religions, so that God does not become the pretext for waging war; to build a society in which intercultural harmony is our greatest treasure (*EG 59).
43. The malfunctions and wounds of our world can only be cured by love, by fostering a culture of encounter that breaks the logic of possession and domination and forms us in the logic of the free giving of self (*LS 16). It is a matter of passing from the *right to be* to the *gift of being*, thus overcoming the friend-enemy dichotomy, which is incompatible with Franciscan spirituality and recognises the other as a brother-sister, never as a threat¹⁴.
44. Our way of understanding poverty is deeply rooted in the experience of gratuity and interdependence, which naturally favours a culture of solidarity, helping to recover the communal sense of existence (*LPF 3.4; VI PCO 21). The new times require that we abandon the culture of consumerism and design new sustainable lifestyles, being aware of the fragile environment and of the life of the poor. A world without walls, without wars and without poverty is still possible. Structures must facilitate encounters between people, and never choke the creativity of our charism: what we are, not what we have, is the greatest treasure we can offer¹⁵.

IV. THE CANTICLE

*Praise to you, my Lord, for those who forgive for love of you,
and bear infirmity and tribulation (CtC 10).*

¹³ Cf. GIACOMO DA VITRY, *Lettera seconda*, FF 2202; GIORDANO DA GIANO, *Cronaca* 10, FF 233.

¹⁴ Cf. O. TODISCO, *La solidarietà nella libertà, Motivi francescani per una nuova democrazia*, Cittadella Assisi 2015.

¹⁵ Cf. A. MAALOUF, *Disordered World: Setting a New Course for the Twenty-first Century*, Bloomsbury, New York 2011.

45. How blessed is the light of the sun and the moon! The *Canticle of the Creatures* is the background music that accompanied Francis throughout his life. Its light burst forth at the end of his days, in the darkest of nights. The poem is the symbolic expression of his profound experience of physical and spiritual suffering. In sacred language Francis expresses himself, while at the same time his words declare the harmony of the world. All is a hymn to the power, the beauty and the goodness of God. The world shows its beauty in its simplicity, creatures exist as gifts freely given, unaware of the desire to possess. Reconciliation of humanity with itself, with others, with the universe and with God: this is the Canticle, a joyful celebration of life, pardon and peace (*CtC 1-14)¹⁶.

IV. 1. Blindness

46. Francis never saw the fulfilment of his dream for peace, conceived on his journey to Damietta. Crusades always end badly. On top of this sense of failure came an eye disease that finally left him completely blind (*1Cel 98, 101; LP 83): trachoma, or granular conjunctivitis, which causes insufferable pain, making daylight unbearable. (*2Cel 166; LMj 5, 9; LP 86; MO 89).

To this suffering an even greater one was added: the increase in the number of brothers who were convinced that the Gospel was not enough to live by. They asked for practical guidelines for the details of their life, regulations and commentaries to cover the starkness of the Gospel (*LP 17).

Francis, outwardly blind and inwardly full of shadows, finds himself subjected to a strong tension : caught between the demands of many brothers and the need to defend his original insight.

47. Despair and doubt weigh heavily on Francis' heart. He wants to see, but cannot. He does not feel strong enough, nor see clearly enough, to guide the brothers. Giving up his role as spiritual guide, he finally flees (*2Cel 133; LP 11; MP 45). He seeks refuge in a hermitage, far away from the brothers. Once more, as it had years before, an existential blindness overwhelms him, the shadows lengthen and the saddest thing happens: the sweetness of living in brotherhood is changed into bitterness (*MP, 1).

48. When the temptation to turn back grows ever stronger and he feels he has lost sight of the Master's footprints, Francis returns to silence (*1Cel 91; LMj 13,1) and, touched by it once more, listens to the gospel word as he had done at the beginning of his journey (*1Cel 91-93; LMj 13, 2): Jesus invites him to divest himself totally, to trust, to be as brave as when he first began. At that moment in his life, he had one final battle to win: once more to give up his dreams of knighthood, to abandon all forms of dominion and power and to embrace minority . The Gospel impels him to resume the only path, the only way: brotherhood¹⁷.

¹⁶ Cf. E. LECLERC, *The Canticle of Creatures: Symbols of Union; An analysis of St. Francis of Assisi*, Franciscan Herald Press, Chicago 1977.

¹⁷ Cf. E. LECLERC, *The Wisdom of the Poor One of Assisi*, Hope Publishing, Chicago 1994.

IV. 2. The wound

49. Francis does not forget that it all began with a kiss. The wounds of the lepers healed the wounds of his heart, and it was among them that he took the first steps in his vocation as a brother (*1Cel 17; 2Cel 9; L3C 11; LMj 2,6). Jesus too, the Master, became the disciple of a wounded woman, and learned from her the art of washing feet (*Mk 14: 3-9). This is how gratuity works: we learn to give without expecting a reward, to give for the sheer joy of giving, to give everything without reserve.

When the tensions and conflicts among his brothers increased and his own wounds were reopened, Francis remembered the history of that kiss, and found healing there once more.

50. The wounds in the body of Francis are the marks of Jesus, his total participation in the Paschal Mystery, the signs of his identity: love making him equal to his Beloved (*1Cel 94-96; L3C 4; L3C 69-70; LMj 13,3). The meaning is clear: when you touch people and love them, you touch and love Jesus, ~~–A~~ and He touches and loves you. Everything makes sense again. Everything – even the fragility of the brothers – is seen as grace (*1Pt 2:24). In his own body, wounded now like the body of Jesus, Francis puts his finger on one certain truth: one cannot live without brothers¹⁸.

IV. 3. Joy

51. We are all looking for happiness: it's an inborn tendency; without it, it's impossible to live. However, there are plenty of cut-price, lightweight offers of instant happiness around. This is happiness devalued, a false joy that ends in disillusionment, frustration and sadness.

In the account of *Perfect Joy*, Francis opens his heart and offers us his life's wisdom: *perfect joy does not lie in success*. It takes time to understand how profound this thought really is, because our experience seems to say the opposite: that only when we are applauded, recognised, and satisfied is it natural to feel joyful (*TPJ 1-15).

52. How should a lesser brother act when he does not feel valued by the brothers, when they consider him dispensable, when he does not feel loved by them? Francis answers with a reply that comes from the depths of his own experience. Here is true and perfect joy: if your heart is not troubled; if you persevere in your vocation to go on being a brother to all, without claiming anything as your own (even what you think you deserve), then you will have defeated the shadows of sadness, for ever (*TPJ 15)¹⁹.

53. The origins and horizons of Franciscan joy are found in encountering Jesus. The Easter experience - the encounter with the Risen One – leads one to a life open to all (*Jn 14,6). It gives us the strength not to give up on the dream of a fraternity of brothers who go about the world offering a style of relationship that is inclusive and free and is a source of freedom (*FrCh 4, 1-7). In a special way, our relationship with the poor focuses us on the Gospel and lets us see that, in truth, *what we are before God, that we are, and no more* (*Adm 19, 2). His unconditional, faithful love is the reason for our true joy.

¹⁸ Cf. P. MARANESI, *La fragilità in Francesco d'Assisi. Quando lo scandalo della sofferenza diventa grazia*, Messaggero, Padova 2018.

¹⁹ J.M. CHARRON, *De Narcisse à Jésus. La quête de l'identité chez François d'Assise*, Édition Paulines, Montréal 1992.

IV. 4. The Testament

54. As the end of life approaches, the awareness that God is Goodness grows in Francis: *God is Good, all Good, supremely Good, totally Good* (*PrG 3). Even the wounds and limitations of life are part of our condition as creatures, and they do not obscure the awareness that everything we have lived was a free gift. Only with such trust can death become a sister (*Ctc 12).
55. Just before he dies, Francis asks for the gospel account of the washing of the feet (*Jn 13: 1-20) to be read to him, and only then does he entrust his last will to his brothers: love freely given, fidelity to Poverty and obedience to the Church (*1Cel 110; LMj 14,6; TestS 1-5). He claims nothing for his own. Filled with gratitude, he gives back all he has received. There is nothing left for Sister Death to snatch away from him, since, when she goes to meet him, she finds only his body, naked on the bare earth, with the Canticle on his lips. So dies Francis: naked and singing (*1Cel 110; LMj 14,6; LP 99; MP 121).
56. In the Testament, Francis hands on to us his memory and the most important elements of our identity. The first Capuchins tried to understand The Poverello on the basis of that text. That was why they were called *the brothers of the Testament*. For us, the *Reform* constitutes a basic element of our charism. Our fidelity consists in never growing tired of believing that the Gospel dream is possible. And in going back to the Portiuncula, together with Mary our Mother, Our Lady of the Angels, to the heart of our brotherhood, lest we ever forget that the meaning of our life is to sing as we walk. Brothers, let us begin (*1Cel 103; LMj 14,1).

CHAPTER II

The dimensions of Formation from a Capuchin Franciscan perspective

Since formation tends towards the transformation of the whole person in Christ, it must be life-long, as regards both human values and the evangelical and consecrated life. Therefore, formation must involve both the actions and intentions of the whole person in its various dimensions—human, cultural, spiritual, pastoral and professional—taking every care to foster the harmonious integration of the various aspects
(Const 23, 2).

Preliminary Considerations

57. The Capuchin reform attempted to interpret, once again, the Franciscan form of life. The secret lies in going back, again and again, to Brother Francis, the *Forma Minorum*²⁰, not simply in order to repeat his experiences, but to recreate his genuine insights in new cultural contexts. Fidelity and creativity are key dispositions if we wish to follow Christ more nearly, and love Him more dearly (*VC 37; PC 2). With the *Rule* and *Testament* of Francis in their memory, Capuchins set themselves the task of rediscovering a more simple lifestyle, living in solitary places but not isolated from people, in simple structures that did not compromise freedom, seeking silence whereby they could, as a brotherhood, listen to the Gospel Word and put it into practice at the service of the most humble (*Const 5, 1-5)²¹.

58. Formation continues to be a priority in the Church and the Order. The post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis* (1992), in harmony with the basic areas of human growth, indicates the four dimensions which must always be present in any complete formation plan: the human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral (*PdV 43-59; Rfund 199-200). Later on, another post-synodal document, *Vita consecrata* (1996) adds the charismatic dimension, specific to formation in religious life (*VC 65).

59. The charismatic dimension highlights what is specific to the form of life of each religious family, in other words, its own values, by whose diversity the Church herself is enriched. In their turn, the charismatic values, in a dynamically creative way, give their specific tone to the other dimensions. It is an ever-unfinished task, which ensures that our form of life and presence in the Church will always be significant. Equally, the values of our charism are in close harmony with the great human values of love, liberty and justice, lived in a gospel perspective.

²⁰ Uffl, *Ultima antifona dei secondi Vespri*.

²¹ Cf. A. FREGONA, *I frati cappuccini nel primo secolo 1525-1619. Approccio critico alle fonti storiche, giuridiche e letterarie più importanti*, Messaggero, Padova 2006.

60. *Bonum* – the good - is the thread, drawn from our charism, that links all the dimensions. Franciscan anthropology, with its characteristic dynamism and optimism, opens the whole of the formation process, presenting a way (*itinerarium*) in which the profound and sincere desire (*desiderium*) for goodness (*bonum*) occupies the heart's centre, inviting us to empty ourselves of everything (*paupertas*) that prevents or blocks the original goodness. Only non-appropriation can guarantee relationships that are both *free* and *freely given* (*gratis*)²².

61. The method of integration requires that all the dimensions, with their respective charismatic force, are present, in a gradual progression by way of an initiation, in the different stages of the formation process. Formation in the consecrated life must always have priority, avoiding the danger that intellectual formation for ordained ministries may eventually alter the nature of our charismatic form of life (*Const 32, 2).

I. THE CHARISMATIC DIMENSION. THE GIFT OF BEING A LESSER BROTHER

Let us refer all good to the Lord, God Almighty and Most High, acknowledge that every good is His, and thank Him from whom all good comes (ER 17, 17).

I.1. Our charism as gift

62. Gratitude is the very heart of what is Franciscan. We have received everything as a free gift, so that we can freely give it in return (*Mt 10: 8). The formation process helps us to recognize gratefully and to welcome responsibly the precious gift of our own life and vocation. These gifts are not given for our own benefit, but for others. Consecration calls for the gift of self, after the manner of Jesus, who gave up His life freely and generously for the good of humanity (*Jn 10: 18). The fraternity is the first place where we give ourselves, and where we also become responsible for the different gifts of the brothers (*FLC 54).

63. The primacy of Goodness lies at the heart of the Franciscan vision of life. Our world, in God's eyes, is good. This optimism about man and creation, far from encouraging naivety in the face of the pains and shadows caused by sin, inserts us more fully into the very depths of everything that happens, and invites us to reveal the goodness, buried by injustice, inherent in every creature and especially in human beings. Our vocation to be brothers is realized by strengthening and spreading goodness (*Itin cap. VI; PrG 13).

64. To desire to live like Jesus, in a fraternity in the midst of our world, in simplicity and joy, is to receive God's greatest gift. Brotherhood and minority are the marks of our identity (*VII PCO 7): to be the brother of all without excluding anyone; to welcome as a matter of preference the smallest ones in our society; to be free in the face of all temptation to power; to be rich in emotions and sentiments; to live out a healthy tension between contemplation (the place where the desire for Goodness is forged) and mission (the place where we freely share in solidarity the good things we have received) (*FrCh 2). Our Capuchin form of life is a gift of God to the Church and the world.

²² Cf. J. B. FREYER, *Homo viator. L'uomo alla luce della storia della salvezza. Un'antropologia teologica in prospettiva francescana*, EDB, Roma 2008.

1.2. Brotherhood

65. God is a relationship of persons. Goodness communicates itself through love between the divine Persons (*LS 238). The Creator takes nothing to Himself as His own; on the contrary, He desires to share it with us. The Father, source of all good, offers us in His Son a model of humanity and a project for living it, and in the Holy Spirit gives us His strength and creativity by which to make it a reality (*2 Lf 4-9). In the image and likeness of the Trinity, let us build our identity, sharing the goodness we have received and establishing relationships based on love, liberty and justice (*FLC 21. 25).

66. Without relationships there is no brotherhood. Therefore, our first task and vocation is to become lesser brothers, in the style of Jesus, who did not cling to His condition as Son (*Phil 2: 6), but became the brother of all, without excluding anyone. Fraternal relationships offer us a space for human and spiritual growth, in which we learn, all together in brotherhood, to live, contemplate, study, reflect, discern and decide (*SAFC 33; PI 19).

1.3. Minority

67. Jesus presents us with a God who loves to make Himself small, to reveal Himself to humble and simple folk (*Mt 11: 25). It is on the cross, in the mystery of God's smallness revealed, that love becomes real in an act of total expropriation and unconditional self-giving (*OfP 7,8-9; ER 23, 3; Am 6, 1-2). This is the foundation of minority. Minority is a quality, not a quantity, which in turn gives shape to our own desires, unmasking the temptation to be great and do great things (*PCO VII 19). Francis discovers in the poor and the crucified the art of building free relationships, and a new way of looking at the world centered on what is fundamental (*L3C 6. 8. 10; 2Cel 5. 8; LMj 1,2. 6; 1,6). Moving in that same direction, the Capuchin reform managed to combine in a wonderful way simplicity in moderation with the search for the essential.

68. The essential always has to do with relationships. Welcome, dialogue and acceptance of diversity are indispensable if one wishes to build relationships that are transparent and inclusive in our fraternities. Minority is also openness of mind, and flexibility when faced with any cultural or religious ideology that would threaten our charismatic identity or prevent us from giving witness to our life of brotherhood and co-operation at various levels among ourselves²³.

1.4. Contemplation

69. The contemplative gaze of God (*Ex 34,6) rests on the poor in heart, the afflicted, the dispossessed, those who hunger and thirst for justice, the merciful, the pure of heart, the peacemakers and those who suffer persecution in the cause of right (*Mt 5: 3-10). Contemplation means to desire to see things through the eyes of God, to see what others do not dare to look at (*SL. Prol. 4). Whoever listens to God's voice prepares his ears to hear the cries of the poor. The Capuchin reform was born with a profound desire to return to the hermitages and lonely places, so favourable to an encounter with Christ poor and crucified, where silence is transformed into service and consolation for the victims of the plague, and contemplation becomes compassion (*PCO VII 31; Const 15,4; 50,2).

²³ Cf. *Address of his Holiness Pope Francis to Franciscans of the First Order and of the Third Order Regular*, Clementine Hall, November 23, 2017.

70. Affective prayer in brotherhood means sharing quality time and space to give thanks together as a fraternity for the gifts we have received (*Const 46,6). Prayer is grateful praise born of contemplation, when we discover the goodness of God living in us (*ExhP 1-17; PrG 1-11). The practice of contemplation purifies and transforms our images of God until we reach the freely self-giving God (Mt 5: 45), who in turn is the foundation for that gratuity with which we build our fraternal relationships. Without contemplation there is no brotherhood (*JöhriPrayer 3).

I. 5. Mission

71. *You received without charge, so give without charge* (*Mt 10: 8). A genuinely lowly and contemplative brotherhood becomes aware of the needs and sufferings of others and is open to search for new ways of justice, peace and care for creation (*ER 9,2). Our mission is to uncover all the good there is around us, to protect it and help it grow, and to share it, principally with those who are unjustly deprived of the goods of the earth which are common to all and meant for all (*2Cel 85-92; LMj 8,5; 7,6; LP 113-114; 31-34) (*LS 48-52).

72. The life of brotherhood is the first way by which we evangelize (*V PCO 21); therefore, everything we do is an expression of fraternity. As Capuchins we continue to be sent to places where no-one else wishes to go, to commit ourselves to create together oases of brotherhood in conflict zones and distant outposts: privileged spaces where we live out the gift of freely-given service (*MHO 1,7).

I.6. Reform

73. The Capuchin reform is not a past historical event; it is an attitude to life that forms part of our charismatic identity. The desire to be constantly renewed invites us to look within, while avoiding nostalgia for the past, and to take on the risks involved in our journey towards an unwritten future (*Const 125,1). Faced with profound social change, the Christian response is not one of fear, enclosing us within the false security of traditionalism. On the contrary, only faith and trust can help us discern the road ahead. We are called to get up and walk, to start again, with the Gospel and the insights of Francis and Clare in our hearts.

II. THE HUMAN DIMENSION. LEARNING TO BE BROTHERS TO ALL

What a person is before God, that he is, and no more (Am 19, 2).

74. Franciscan anthropology stresses the dynamic character of all creation. In its dynamism, every creature is called to attain its fullness²⁴. Identity is expressed in the very fact of being alive. From this arise such questions as: who do I wish to be, how do I wish to live, and what values do I wish to incarnate? How we take our place in this world, and how we participate in the current structures of society, culture and Church, depends on us. God creates us with the capacity and responsibility to build our own personal and institutional identity²⁵.

²⁴ Cf. J. DUNS SCOTUS, *Ord.* III, d.32, q.un., n.6 (XV, 433a).

²⁵ Cf. A. GESCHÉ, *Dieu pour penser. 2: L'homme*, Paris, Roma 1993, 63-102.

II.1. The human being as *Imago Dei*

75. *Let us make man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves ... God saw all He had made, and indeed it was very good* (*Gn 1: 26.31). Far from any kind of pessimism regarding human beings, Franciscan thought instinctively and enthusiastically grasps the goodness of every creature. We speak of *original grace*, meaning the goodness that God has placed in each one of us, the capacity to recognize God as the source of all Good, and in consequence, of the good that He accomplishes through each and every one of His creatures²⁶ (*Const 156,1).

76. God, the Supreme Good (*PrG 2), through the mystery of the Incarnation, has made us sharers in His goodness, proposing to us His Son Jesus as our reference and model of all that is human, and as the source of all fullness: His freedom, His way of loving and His commitment to justice are for us ways to human and spiritual growth. Our formation, through a process of personalized accompaniment, provides the necessary tools by which we become men who are truly free, emotionally mature and compassionate.

77. In religious life, the way of maturation and purification of motives requires that we know ourselves, that we accept our own psycho-social reality, and requires, too, the capacity to give ourselves. Jesus too, guided by the Holy Spirit, in a dynamic and free manner, built His own identity, choosing to align His fundamental choices with the plan of God the Father for Him. The issue is to have the same mind as Jesus, to internalize His values (*VC 65). Assimilation and transformation are the final result of the formation process (*Phil 2,4).

II 2. Solitude and relationship. The existential dimensions of the human person

78. One who is unable to be alone is unable to live with others. And vice-versa; because neither solitude nor brotherhood are a refuge for anyone who finds it difficult to face himself or encounter others. An inability to manage times of silence is often a source of conflicts, generally affective in nature. Contemplative solitude makes it possible to encounter the self, and stimulates a capacity for critical reflection, a necessary condition for dialogue and communication with the brothers²⁷ (*1Cel 6, 10, 71, 91; LMj 5,6; LP 56; MO 55).

79. Intimacy (*Ultima solitudo*) and relationship constitute the foundation of Franciscan anthropology²⁸. Brotherly relationships make us more human and protect us from individualism and self-sufficiency. Without liberty, there is no human dignity, no healthy affective relationships. If we wish for a world of healthy affectivity, like that of Jesus, we must know our own capacities, so that we manage our feelings, emotions and desires more soundly, and direct our whole lives toward the Good.

²⁶ Cf. SAINT BONAVENTURE, *In II Sent.*, 23, 2-3.

²⁷ Cf. D. BONHOEFFER, *Life Together. The Classic Exploration of Christian Community*, Harper Collins, New York 2008.

²⁸ Cf. J. DUNS SCOTUS, *Ord.* III, d.1, q.1, n.17 (XIV, 45a).

80. Liberty frees us (*Gal 5,1) from everything that is an obstacle to the presence of goodness, and makes us capable of loving something other than ourselves²⁹. In the life of the fraternity, each one seeks as his priority the good of the other, since relationships are nourished by the good that God accomplishes through each brother (*Adm 8,3). A critical awareness makes discernment between good and evil possible, because to refuse to take responsibility for one's own actions not infrequently leads to growth in evil and indifference³⁰. Real goodness is always shared, and is recognized by its inclusive character. We reach the point of doing good when we practice mercy and compassion.

81. The processes of formation for our life must give more attention to the psycho-affective and sexual dimensions (*Rfund 94). This is a rich and complex reality that permeates the whole of life and requires a multiple approach. Franciscan identity, expressed in the different cultural contexts, feeds on the following elements: contemplative silence, brotherly relationships, encounters with the poor, manual work by which our bodies come into contact with the earth, a passion for the Kingdom, a commitment to justice... These elements, potential areas of healthy gratification, are necessary if we are to be able to integrate positively all of our psycho-sexual energy. The cultivation of true friendship helps us to love and to freely allow ourselves to be loved (*IV PCO 52; PI 39-40).

82. A life without passion and without risk is a life that is sad (*ER 7,16) and boring (*2Cel 125; LP 120; MP 95). Traditionally, *eros* translates as passion and creativity, while *agape* better expresses gratuity in relationships. *Agape* frees *eros* from the desire to possess and to have power, which turns persons into mere objects of pleasure in order to satisfy one's own needs. For its part, when *eros* is integrated and channelled, never denied or repressed, it allows *agape* to desire passionately: to seek God, to be like Jesus, to enjoy human relationships and friendships (*1Cel 30; L3C 41; LMj 3,7) (*DC 6-7).

II.3. The human being, created unique and unrepeatable

83. Franciscan tradition rediscovers the value of the concrete individual. God has created us unique and unrepeatable, with different gifts and talents³¹. Every brother is a work of art, who, exercising his personal freedom, has to discover his own capacities and how to share them creatively. (*Adm 5, 1-2).

84. Francis presents himself as *Homo nudus*³². Nudity is an image of creatureliness (*1Cel 15; 2Cel 12; LMj 2,4; L3C 20). To be a creature means accepting that one is poor, in order to be rich in sentiments and experiences. This requires that one lets go of one's fears and insecurities, and achieves a harmonious integration of the limitations proper to the human condition. Only when we are poor and naked, like Jesus on the cross and Francis at the hour of death, do we experience true freedom (*1Cel 110; 2Cel 214; LMj 14, 3.6).

²⁹ Cf. J. DUNS SCOTUS, *Ord.* IV, d.49, q.5, n.2 (XXI, 172a).

³⁰ Cf. H. ARENDT, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: a Report on the Banality of Evil*, Penguin Classic, London 2006.

³¹ Cf. G. IAMMARRONE, *Identità e razionalità della persona nella testimonianza e nel pensiero francescano*, Miscellanea Francescana 111 (2011) 7-44.

³² Cf. M. BARTOLI, *La nudità di Francesco*, Edizione Biblioteca Francescana, Milano 2018.

85. *Praise to you, my Lord, for our sister bodily death* (*CtC 12). In death, all experience becomes definitive and complete. Francis accepted death with a song on his lips (*mortem cantando suscepit*, writes Celano) (*1Cel 109; LP 7; MP 123). It is not a question of joy apart from pain. On the contrary, it is the moment in which everything becomes transparent³³. Death, too, is a gift, because only death awakens us out of the dream of omnipotence, to experience the wealth of one who has emptied himself in order to be filled with love and liberty (*LP 99; MP 121).

III. THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION. LEARNING TO DESIRE

Blessed is that religious who takes no pleasure and delight except in the most holy words and deeds of the Lord (Adm 20, 1).

86. Human beings are constitutionally religious; the spiritual dimension opens and completes formation. Amazement and surprise open the way to a search for meaning. For Christians, God, through His Word, comes to meet everyone who searches for Him. This Word, made flesh by the working of the Holy Spirit, has a real face: Jesus of Nazareth, in whom we see the true faces of God and of man (*VC 19).
87. The anxious need to satisfy all desires immediately ends by annihilating them. To desire is an art. From the superficial we arrive at the essential, and there we find the true desires that are woven into the meaning of life. Jesus occupies the centre of our desires: to be a lesser brother consists precisely in having His sentiments and principles, His relational style, His way of understanding and living life, His capacity to direct His every desire towards the Good.

III.1 The spirituality of listening

88. Francis, that living interpretation of the Word of God, was never a deaf hearer of the Gospel (*1Cel 22). He resolved to follow Jesus more closely, and, through the Gospel, established a personal and affective relationship with Him that went beyond merely intellectual knowledge about His words (*LS 12; Rnb 22, 9.16).
89. Our charism is founded upon listening to the Gospel and putting it into practice. For every lesser brother, the Gospel thus becomes the *humus* of our formation: *This is the rule and life of the Lesser Brothers: to live in accordance with the form of the holy Gospel* (*LR 1, 1). Francis is represented as the model of spiritual life (*forma minorum*)³⁴, (*2Cel 173; LMj 9,4; LP 106), helping us to overcome fundamentalism on the one hand, and devotional sentimentality on the other, by placing the relational dimension at the heart of everything: a personal encounter with Jesus, alive and present in His Word, in the shared bread of the Eucharist and in the poor (*ER 22, 41). Without such an encounter there is no experience of life.

³³ Cf. R.M. RILKE, *The book of Hours. Third book: the book of Poverty and Death*, Hogarth Press, London 1961.

³⁴ Ufil, *Last antiphon of Second Vespers*.

90. In his Admonitions, Francis recalls that, with regard to the the Scriptures, there are two attitudes: that of those who *only wish to know the words and interpret them for others, and that of those who do not wish to own the word, but return it to the Most High Lord God, to Whom every Good belongs* (*Adm 7, 1-3). To appropriate the Word to ourselves and be content with mere analysis and academic knowledge prevents us from growing and opening up to the relational aspect. Conversely, the dynamic of “giving back” – receiving and giving - helps us to grow and to transform our own lives and those of our fraternities.

91. The Word of God has been entrusted to the People of God, the Church (*LG 4). We must insist on the centrality of the ecclesial principle: it is the Christian community, not the individual person, which is the original setting where one *listens to, interprets and discerns* the Word. For us, the Christian community is the fraternity. Brotherly communion among those who share the dream of the Gospel is the environment that best fosters discernment and human and spiritual growth. It helps each brother at the different stages of life to enter into dialogue with the surrounding world, and with his own inner world, in a dynamic process of personalization that avoids all subjectivism. (*VD 86)

III. 2. Following Jesus: Beauty and freedom

92. The religious life, like every Christian calling, is born of listening to the Word. Evangelical radicalism consists in making the Gospel one’s own form of life. Only love, beauty and goodness can explain the mystery of our vocation (*Const 169, 4). As followers of Christ, poor, obedient and chaste (*VC 22), we embark on a journey that moulds the core areas of our life, in which our identity and belonging are expressed.

93. The spirit of the Beatitudes (*Mt 5: 3-12) is the key to the symbolic interpretation of our consecration: blessed are those who desire and dream of having a heart that is pure (poverty), humble (obedience) and clear (chastity), because the grace of the Holy Spirit turns obedience into a source of freedom and authenticity; makes poverty a source of justice and solidarity that gives and shares itself; and chastity in turn becomes a source of life that is fruitful, rich in affective relationships and tender sentiments. (*SAFC 24; Adm 14. 16. 17; LR 10, 7-8)

94. The Franciscan way of living the religious vows in practice (*ER 1, 1; LR 1, 1; RCI 1, 1-2) invites us to overcome any tendency to reduce poverty to materialistic considerations and to resist the temptation to be indifferent. It opens up ways of seeking what is essential, and of preventing material things from becoming obstacles to our fraternal relationships (*CIC 600; Const 62, 1-5). Equally, it protects us from reducing obedience to psychological considerations, and from the temptation to individualism, by creating opportunities where we can express our dependence on one another as brothers (*CIC 601; Const 162, 1-2); . Finally, it alerts us to the danger of reducing chastity to biology, and to the temptation to be sad at heart, by putting before us the goal of an affective life that is open, capable of integrating solitude and bringing us closer to the poor and suffering (*CIC 599; Const 169, 5; FFCh 2.1).

III. 3. Contemplation: an invitation to discipleship

95. Formation processes that do not foster silence and interiority run the risk of promoting a superficial spirituality. Silence enables us to hear the cries and lamentations of our world. Without silence there is no contemplative prayer. Those beginning formation for our life need to be capable of gradually giving up any images of God that prevent a truly searching and listening attitude (*Const 15,1; CIC 577).

96. Capuchin tradition has handed down to us various methods of mental and affective prayer. Among these, clearly inspired by the Bible, one stands out which makes the reader not a mere spectator but a key player inhabited by the Word³⁵.

97. Franciscan contemplation has its own characteristics (*V PCO 7-9). As a fraternity we contemplate the poor and naked Christ, who identifies with the poor and the suffering. To contemplate, in this case, means to allow God's gaze to rest on us, to look, and allow ourselves to be looked at, to love, and let ourselves be loved, renouncing any effort to own what is contemplated. All our effort must consist in doing nothing. He is the protagonist, not us. It is love that will gradually transform us into that which we contemplate, introducing us to the pedagogy of self-donation, where all that we receive is given back. (*PrG 11). The fruits of contemplation are to be given away, without forgetting that in the Franciscan perspective the ultimate aim of every contemplative act is always compassion³⁶.

III. 4. The sacramental life, devotions and holiness

98. The sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation occupy a fundamental place in our daily life. In the Eucharist, that mystery of love and justice, Jesus continues to become the *Bread of Life* (*Jn 6: 48), freely giving Himself so as to feed our desire that we too will be transformed into bread that is given to others (*DC 13). At the same time, aware of the fragility of human relationships and of our tendency to keep things for ourselves, the sacrament of Reconciliation helps us overcome all temptation to pessimism, and to place all our trust in the transforming power of love. (*2Lf 22-24; LtOrd 30-33; Adm 1, 1-22; CIC 246; Const 52, 1ss. 114).

99. Through the Liturgy of the Hours, as well as joining in the universal prayer of the Church, we are somehow united with the joys and sufferings of our world. The psalms bring together in a single voice the voices of all people: all human experiences, sentiments and emotions, from joy-filled praise to loud lament, sustained always by hope. Nothing that is human is foreign to us. The liturgical sensitivity and creativity of St Francis, along with the simple liturgical celebrations of the first Capuchins, help us avoid formalism and overabundance of words (*ER 3, 1-13; LR 3, 1-9; REr 1-6).

100. Holy Mary, *Daughter* of the Father, *Mother* of the Son and *Spouse* of the Holy Spirit (*OfP, antf 1-2; SalBVM 1-2), is the form of the Church and the model of all disciples, because she believed and put into practice the teachings of the one Master (Lk 11: 28). With her, the model of true devotion, we become familiar with the Word of God. Her Magnificat, a poetic song entirely woven from the threads of the Sacred Page, reveals how much she is at home in the Word of God, moving in and out of it quite naturally. Mary speaks and thinks with the Word of God, God's Word becomes her word, and her word is born of His Word. Pierced in her inmost depths by the Word of God, Mary becomes the mother of the Word Incarnate³⁷(*DC 41; VD 28). Together with her, the spiritual wisdom of Francis and Clare is a fruitful reference point on our ongoing journey to Christ.

³⁵ Cf. MARTIAL D' ÉTAMPES (Maître en oraison, 1575-1635), *Traité facile pour apprendre à faire l'oraison mental. Suivi de l'exercice du silence intérieur*, Sources Mystiques, Éditions du Carmel, Toulouse 2008; I. LARRAÑAGA, *Encounter. Prayer Handbook*, Médiapaul, Québec 1998.

³⁶ Cf. L. LEHMANN, *Francesco, maestro di preghiera*, *Bibliotheca ascetico-mystica* 5, Istituto Storico dei Cappuccini, Roma 1993.

³⁷ Cf. SAN LORENZO DA BRINDISI, *Mariale*, Media House, Delhi 2007. This work is composed of 84 sermons dealing with all aspects of Mariology, all from a Franciscan perspective.

101. The ultimate purpose of our life, even today, is to become holy. The proposal to be a *Capuchin*, a *missionary* and a *saint* has brought many fruits of holiness to the Church ³⁸. However, new sensitivities nowadays invite us to move beyond the model of the heroic sanctity of an individual, and to give greater attention to fraternal life as a source of holiness: communities made holy by their commitment to Christian discipleship and their creation of life-plans that bear fruit (*GEx 140-146).

IV. THE INTELLECTUAL DIMENSION. LEARNING TO THINK WITH THE HEART

Where there is charity and wisdom, there is neither fear nor ignorance (Am 27,1).

102. *Weakness of identity* is one of the characteristics of our culture. The different stages of formation ought to help us build up a mindset (*forma mentis*) that feeds and sustains the different ways of giving meaning to reality (*forma vitae*): if you do not live as you think, you end up thinking about how you are living. To be precise, Franciscan thought offers a particular way of contemplating and living out the inexhaustible depths of the mystery of reality. It begins with philosophical and theological reflection on what Francis experienced in his own life.

103. For a Franciscan, the intellectual dimension cannot be reduced to study. On the contrary, it dynamically integrates the other dimensions of life in a vision in which the will directs the intelligence towards love. (*Itin Prol. 4) In this process, priority is given to the affective way of coming to know reality: you only know well that which you love ³⁹.

IV.1. Learning how to learn

104. For anyone choosing fraternal life, some elements are indispensable: a capacity for relationships, an open mind, tolerance and flexibility. The wisdom of life invites us to integrate our own abilities and limitations, and even to discover that mistakes are part of the way we learn. Life in brotherhood requires us to protect the gifts of the brothers, accepting the richness of diversity and overcoming fear (*Mt 25: 25).

105. Today's culture is full of anthropological challenges which call for great sensitivity in our formation, so that we approach the mystery of the human person in a manner that is demanding, critical and humble at the same time. We are called to be *experts in humanity*, able to read and interpret the expectations and fears of our contemporaries, understanding their motives, discerning their doubts, accompanying them in their sufferings, and, in a respectful dialogue, offering the wisdom of the Christian mystery (*GS 1).

³⁸ Cf. S. HARDALES, *Compendio histórico de la vida del Venerable siervo de Dios, el M.R.P Fr. Diego José de Cádiz*, Cádiz 1811, 8.

³⁹ Cf. K. OSBORNE, *The History of Franciscan Theology*, Franciscan Institute Publications, New York 1994.

106. The way we look at the world cannot be dissociated from affectivity. Contemplation becomes a source of knowledge, bringing tenderness and hope. Only love heals the world's wounds, while making us aware of its imbalances. It is the human being, and not human products, that must occupy centre stage, through the creation of a culture of real brotherhood, which recognizes that we need one another, and at the same trusts in the goodness of human beings and in their capacity for compassion (*EG 71).

IV. 2. Insight, experience, affectivity, relationship

107. The Franciscan tradition tries to overcome the duality of life and study (*LtAnt 1-2; Const 38, 5). The mystery of the Trinity casts light on the human faculties, broadening our vision of humanity. Thus, in the **memory**, linked to the person of the **Father**, resides *imagination* and *creativity*; in the **intelligence**, linked to the **Son**, rests the capacity to *reason* and to search for meaning; and finally, in the **will**, associated with the person of the **Holy Spirit**, resides the capacity to *desire*, which is always expressed through love (*Itin II, 5) (*VC 22b).

108. In a dynamic and gradual way, human intelligence integrates the knowledge, abilities and aptitudes that give insight into the meaning of life, and directs the will so that desire finds that which is truly real, beautiful and just. Knowledge becomes wisdom, thanks to the senses, which introduce us into the world of affective experience: truth manifests itself only in love. (*CVer 5). We do not exist to fill ourselves with knowledge and to do many things. To live is to construct, to experience one's own life.

109. For the Franciscan tradition, human beings are not only rational animals, they are also creatures of desire, always in relationship with the God of desire (*Gb 42:2; Rnb 9; Itin Prol 3). To think and desire correctly in a Franciscan way means knowing the *object* of desire and the *means* to achieve it⁴⁰. Purification of one's will and its motives aims to foster lifestyles that are consistent with fraternal relationships, pastoral practices, with one's vision of the world, of the economy and of politics (*LtOrd 62-65). All of this must be assimilated into one's life, gradually, in each stage of formation.

IV. 3. Transforming the world together, through our poverty

110. The transforming power of reflection cannot be reduced to the sphere of individual thinking. It is the fraternity which feels, thinks, contemplates, and commits itself to action. From academic formation onwards, we must insist on the need for a methodology that favours group dynamics. In this way we learn to think together, and to overcome both a competitive or self-sufficient spirit and intellectual narcissism. At the same time, we enter into interdisciplinary dialogue with other areas of knowledge. It is a matter of thinking and acting together, because knowledge is not simply intelligence, but experience and life, and life consists in relationships (*CVer 19).

⁴⁰ Cf. C. E. SALTO., *La función del deseo en la vida espiritual según Buenaventura de Bagnoregio*, Antonianum, Roma 2014.

111. For Francis, the poor became a source of wisdom. (*Const 19, 2-3; CIC 668). They are our teachers. If we want to have a real encounter between study and life, then the peripheries, those outer limits in geography or in life itself, are privileged places. Courage, passion and creativity, aided by intelligence and reason, team up with justice, solidarity, and brotherhood. The biggest challenge in the contemporary world is that no human being should be excluded (*EG 197-201).

112. Intellectual formation takes as its starting point the cultural context in which a person lives: family, school, rituals, relationships, language, etc⁴¹. The first requirement is to know and love one's own culture, without turning it into an absolute or losing the ability to be critical in the face of its limitations. On the other hand, training in intercultural awareness is becoming more and more necessary. We all need to learn to accept differences, how to be in relationship with others, and to develop an affective capacity for dialogue. The task of interpreting Franciscan thought within the different cultures is a work in progress.

113. Humble listening, allied with creativity and relational wisdom, were the values that allowed St. Lawrence of Brindisi to integrate life, study, holiness, and apostolic activity in one harmonious whole. In order to understand our mission correctly and to be responsive to the challenges of today's culture, the Apostolic Doctor reminds us that for Capuchins, reflection must always come from a living contact with the real problems of people on the one hand, and Sacred Scripture on the other. The centrality of Christ in our life helps us to understand mission in its itinerant dimension: along the way, our brother Lawrence contemplates, thinks, writes, and exercises his diplomatic activity helping his contemporaries to build peace and strengthening the common good⁴².

114. St. Bonaventure, in the *Itinerarium*, indicates the attitudes that are necessary for anyone embarking on study and reflection in a Franciscan perspective: *Do not assume that mere reading will suffice without fervour, speculation without devotion, investigation without admiration, observation without exaltation, industry without piety, knowledge without love, understanding without humility, study without divine grace, speculation without wisdom inspired by God*. These words are in perfect harmony with St Francis' recommendation to St Anthony, which remains valid today: *I am pleased that you teach sacred theology to the brothers, providing that, as the Rule says, you do not "extinguish the spirit of prayer and devotion" during study of this kind* (*Itin Prol., 4; LAnt 1,3).

V. THE MISSIONARY-PASTORAL DIMENSION. LEARNING TO PROCLAIM AND BUILD BROTHERHOOD

Let them not engage in arguments or disputes, but be subject to every human creature for God's sake, and let them proclaim that they are Christians. (ER 16).

⁴¹ The initial *transmission* of the faith takes place by means of various rites approved by the Church. The Second Vatican Council recognizes that these rites belong to the patrimony of the Catholic Church, have the same dignity and rights and must be preserved and promoted. (Cf. SC 3-4) The rites embrace the customs and the various ways of living and celebrating the faith in communities with their different cultural, theological, and liturgical traditions, as well as their structure and territorial organization, but always professing the same, one doctrine of the Catholic faith, remaining in full communion among themselves and with the Holy See. [Cf. Const. 179,4; CIC/1983; CCEO/1990].

⁴² Cf. IOANNES PP. XXIII, Bulla *Celsitudo ex humilitate*. S. Laurentius Brundusinus doctor ecclesiae universilis declaratur, AAS 51 (1959) 456-461.

115. *To live together as lesser brothers is a primary part of our Franciscan vocation* (*Const 24, 7), which in turn becomes the first element of evangelization (*V PCO 21). Brotherhood and mission are our reason to exist, and it is the quality of our relationships, not pastoral efficiency, that defines our charism and makes us genuine witnesses of the Gospel.

V.1. The Son's mission: to become our brother

116. In Jesus, the mystery of the Trinity is manifest as love and communion. God has wished, freely and gratuitously, to share His inmost life. He has chosen and predestined us to be members of His family (Eph 1:11)⁴³. This is precisely what constitutes the Son's mission: to become our Brother, so that we could become sons of God and learn to live together as brothers (*Const 89,3).

117. The Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, is the protagonist of the whole of the Church's mission (*RM 1-21). Francis experienced God as the Highest Good which, by means of the gift of the Holy Spirit, makes us sharers in His infinite goodness (*Bonum diffusivum sui*). The Risen Lord sends us as joyful witnesses of his Gospel (*EG 259-261) and promises us the power of his Spirit to sustain our vocation as missionary disciples. (*Jn 14: 15-31) The same Spirit is light to the mind and a burning fire in the heart that guides our steps in building a new humanity in which Christ will assuredly be all in all.

118. Baptism transforms us into disciples and missionaries. Listening to the Word, breaking bread in the Eucharist and contemplating the face of Christ in the poor are the privileged places for intimacy with the Master (*EG 119-121). From this intimacy the desire for mission is born; the desire to build together the Kingdom of Heaven (*ER 14-16; LR 12, 1-4).

V. 2. Our vocation is ecclesial

119. Mission is the reason why the Church exists (*EN 14): it exists to evangelize. Jesus Himself, by washing the feet of the disciples, makes clear the meaning and mission of any ecclesial community: to love, wash and heal the wounds of our world (*Jn 13: 1-11). On the basis of its vocation to service, the Church is called to take flesh also in the "outer limits", creating oases of humanity and working for the common good, and to build peace (*CVer 7).

120. Saint Francis, *Vir catholicus et totus apotolicus*⁴⁴, submits his life-plan to the discernment of the Church, which through its magisterium helps us to understand the beauty and the demands of the gospel life (*Test 14, 15). The Church recognizes that the Project of the Poverello is not an impossible dream: to live as true brothers in the midst of the world is the most faithful and finest way to proclaim Jesus and His Gospel (*1Cel 33; L3C 49; LMj 3,9).

⁴³ Cf. J. DUNS SCOTUS, *Ord.* III, d.7, q.3, n.3 (XIV, 354b-355a).

⁴⁴ JulUff, Ant. First Vespers, 1.

121. The charismatic force of our Capuchin vocation, committed as it is to the mission of the Church, makes us experts in communion, thanks to the witness of relationships (*VC 46). We are sent by the fraternity and our mission makes sense only if we remain in communion among ourselves and with the Church. The community aspect of pastoral work is the best antidote against activism and individualism (*ER 16, 1-4; LR 12, 1-2; Const 101, 1). It also protects us from the temptation of “apostolic narcissism”, and from many other emotional pathologies, as well as the misuse of money⁴⁵.

V. 3. Formed for Mission

122. Mission occupies a central place in the history of the Order (*III PCO 34; MHO 2,4). All the stages of formation must keep Mission in mind. A process of continuous and coherent initiation should help us to embody the values of our charism, overcome difficulties, and integrate cultural differences.

123. The formation plans of the different circumscriptions should foster the pastoral dimension, providing varied programs that take into account the gifts and talents of each brother. All the brothers must have the same rights and the same opportunities in formation (*Const 43,1; IV PCO 68). On the other hand, there needs to be a balance between contents and experiences, so that that holistic formation is assured. All pastoral experiences must be guided and evaluated.

124. By the time they reach the end of initial formation, the brothers should have sufficient knowledge of the world, both locally and universally. They should also have acquired the necessary tools with which to discern the pastoral needs of different social and cultural environments, paying attention to ecumenical dimension and to inter-religious dialogue (*LS 214-215; Const 178,2; LrRPrp 1)⁴⁶. A lesser brother is known for his closeness and solidarity with the poor, for the appreciation and respect he has for different cultural, ethnic and religious groups, for his commitment to social justice, for peace-building, and for his ecological care of the planet.

125. Our world is more and more multi-ethnic and multi-cultural. We need, as a matter of urgency, to find our place in this new reality. It is our mission to make space for listening and dialogue between faith and reason; between believers and unbelievers, between the different Christian confessions and different religions. This calls for openness and flexibility, avoiding fundamentalism and any attitudes that prevent us from experiencing the fragment of truth present in the love that resides in others (*VC 102; 1Cel 22; LegM 3,1).

126. The means by which people relate and communicate are in a continuous process of transformation and change. Formation plans must give special attention to the question of how to integrate thought and action in the new digital languages. This must be done intelligently, critically and creatively. The mass media touch critical points in the world of our thoughts and feelings, helping us to share experiences, knowledge, work and entertainment. The correct use of these media according to gospel principles means that we must be alert to the risk of addiction, and to their impact on the use of free time, on fraternal relationships, on pastoral and intellectual work, etc (*EG 62).

⁴⁵ Cf. P. MARTINELLI, *Vocazione e forma della vita cristiana. Riflessioni sistematiche*, EDB, Bologna 2018.

⁴⁶ Cf. *Speech of Pope Francis to the inter-religious meeting at Founder's Memorial in Abu Dhabi*, 4th February 2019.

127. Our life has an eschatological character (*LG 46; Rv 21: 4). We are missionaries when we announce, as brothers, the Gospel of encounter and the joy of service; when we humanize the earth by creating bonds of brotherhood; when we contemplate the beauty of creation with gratitude and admiration; when we recognize the good that God continues to accomplish in every living creature; when we join in the song of Mary and proclaim the mighty deeds that the Lord is constantly performing in each one of us(*Lk 1: 49; LS 246).

Chapter III

THE STAGES OF FORMATION IN THE CAPUCHIN FRANCISCAN PERSPECTIVE

Formation for the consecrated life is a journey of discipleship guided by the Holy Spirit leading one progressively to assimilate the sentiments of Christ, the Son of the Father, and to shape one's life according to His obedient, poor, and chaste life (Const 23, 1).

I. OUR FORMATION: THE ART OF LEARNING TO BE LESSER BROTHERS

I.1. The new socio-cultural and ecclesial contexts

128. The fabric of the world is dynamic. Changes are ever more complex, rapid, and profound. New desires and needs, new sensibilities and new ways of relating appear at dizzying speed. (*LS 18) The Church and the Order, in the area of formation, feel the urgency of taking an active, critical, and creative part in this process of personal, social, cultural, and religious transformation (*Const 24,4).

129. Today, more than ever, culture is characterized by anthropological pluralism and by the challenges of the digital world (cyber-anthropology). Being permanently connected to the internet influences our way of thinking, remembering, and communicating with one another, our way of understanding freedom, our capacity to reflect, our management of time, and the ways we express our intimacy (*liquid affective relationships*). Technology requires careful examination (*Const 96,1; CIC 666).

130. In this context of change, the emotional prevails over the rational, subjectivism swamps the sense of belonging and a defense of the self overrides collective identity. At the same time, values such as respect for law, solidarity, social commitment, and a growing interest in the environment are also perceptible.

We need a new, more equitable model of development, a world without borders, respectful of diversity, and responsive to basic needs: health, education, dignified housing, drinking water, clean air and renewable energy. We need a society that still believes that peace, the end of poverty, sustainable development, and the promotion of social justice are possible (*LS 194).

131. The Gospel shows us the value of the human person, of encounter, and of authentic relationships. It invites us to journey and dialogue with others. Surprise and admiration stimulate religious experience and the transcendent. It is beautiful to believe; it generates hope and gives meaning to life (*Lk 9: 1-6).

I.2. Our Capuchin Franciscan Identity Today

132. The identity of God lies in the relationship of love between the divine persons. In Jesus we have been called to be part of this Family, to be sons in the Son. The human vocation consists in recognizing the presence of this freely-given love in our personal story, taking on the responsibility of building our own identity in relationship with God and allowing ourselves to be drawn into this mystery of love (*Eph 1: 3-6).

133. Christ, who is our model of what it means to be human, progressively identified Himself with the saving will of the Father (*1Tim 2: 4). Together with His disciples, using gestures and words, He proclaimed the Good News, the unconditional love of God, and universal brotherhood⁴⁷. His dedication and faithfulness brought Him to death on the Cross, by which He expressed His freely given love for God and for us. The Father raised Him up, thereby confirming the project of the Kingdom, which through the Holy Spirit continues to live in the Church and in the world (*Acts 13: 26-33).

134. Francis experienced God's mercy among the lepers (*Test 1-3; Const 109,4). It was a long journey—from his conversion at San Damiano with all its questioning, to its culmination in the gift of the stigmata on Mount La Verna - a journey from the encounter with Christ in the lepers, all the way to total configuration to Him (*1Cel 17; L3C 11; 2Cel 9; LMj 2,6; 1Cel 94; L3C 4; L3C 69; LMj 13,13; PrG 1-14).

135. In the light of our Capuchin tradition, of our Constitutions, and of the recent documents of the Order, we can present the central values of our charismatic identity: brotherhood lived in minority, contemplative prayer, the care and celebration of creation, attentive reading of the Word, and presence and service among the poor and suffering (*Const 4,2; 5,3-5; FFCh 14-19). The implications that flow from these values are: the search for essentials, the renunciation of self (*Const 109,2), simplicity of life, the cultivation of love, itinerancy and total availability. We are called to creative fidelity and to find ways of witnessing to these values in the different cultures. To transmit these values in their entirety and with passion is one of our major challenges (*JöhrIdent 1.2-4).

136. In some circumscriptions of our Order the lay dimension of our vocation is in danger of disappearing. Our one vocation as lesser brothers without distinction can be lived in two ways: clerical or lay. The latter too is a complete way of life, both at the human and spiritual levels. In vocation ministry and in the plans for initial formation, this dimension of our vocation must be presented, promoted, and fostered (*VII PCO 7; JöhriGift 4).

I.3. Initiation into our life

137. Since 1968 our Constitutions have established that formation for our life is to be carried out as a process of initiation, by analogy with the Christian initiation *FFCh 23). This important insight of the Order needs to be properly understood, so that it can be put into practice faithfully and creatively (*Const 26-32).

138. The process of initiation is a journey of growth: dynamic, personalized, gradual, integral, and continuous. Even though it is more intense in the first years, it lasts for the whole of life (*IV PCO, 57). The objective is to accompany and assist the candidate so that, beginning from his concrete circumstances and by appropriate formative means, he may live an authentic journey of conversion and become a disciple of Jesus. Doing this in the style of Francis, with elements proper to the Capuchin tradition, he will be able to dedicate himself freely and totally to the Kingdom of God.

139. Initiation into our life requires gradual separation from all that is not in line with our values and the assimilation of new values, together with incorporation into our Order (*LR 2,1-14; FFCh 28). It emphasizes the transmission and progressive learning of the values of Capuchin Franciscan life (*IV PCO 61).

⁴⁷ Cf. J. DUNS SCOTUS, *Ord.* III, d.20, q.un., n.11 (XIV, 738b).

140. The initiation process, comprising the anthropological, Christian, and Franciscan foundations of our charism, provides for a combination of daily life with other concrete experiences (*Const 26,1): different fraternal services, manual work, presence with the poor, missionary experiences, and longer periods of silence and contemplation.

141. Personalized guidance is absolutely necessary, with special attention given to formation in interpersonal relationships and the acquisition of skills which the brother will progressively assimilate by sharing in our fraternal life (*EG 169-173). The formation journey is personal and promotes the qualities that make each brother unique and unrepeatable in his following of Jesus (*Const 18, 2).

II. THE PRINCIPLES OF FORMATION

II.1. Brotherhood at the heart of the formation process

142. Born of the Mystery of the Trinity, religious life is defined as *confessio Trinitatis* (*VC 16). Present in the heart of the Universal Church, it is called to be a *signum fraternitatis* and an expert in communion (*VC 41). The Holy Spirit, source of the different charisms, has granted us the gift of *minority*, so that by proclaiming to all of humanity the fraternal dimension of creation, we might build relationships that are genuinely human.

143. *The Lord gave me brothers* (*Test 14). Brotherhood was not Francis' idea, but an initiative of God himself, so that we might following the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ together as brothers. No-one is formed by himself; rather, we all form one another, in brotherhood (*Const 24,4).

144 The opportunities it provides for seeking, listening, dialogue, and discernment make the fraternity a privileged place for encounter with God and for the formation and accompaniment of the brothers. The fraternity is also, by nature and mission, a place where our charism is handed on. To be formed means gradually acquiring the 'form' of a lesser brother, receiving it *from* and *in* the brotherhood, learning how to establish horizontal relationships, living what is essential, discovering the deep joy of discipleship, and announcing the Gospel with the witness of one's own life (*IV PCO 13-22).

II.2. Franciscan Accompaniment

145. Jesus the Good Shepherd knows us by name, protects our freedom and offers us a life rich in meaning. He takes the initiative and invites us to follow him. Walking before us, he himself is both the Way and our Brother on the journey of life (*Jn 10: 11-16; LK 24:13-35; Adm 6).

146. The Word of God is always the first point of reference in accompaniment. Listening to the Word in brotherhood, we learn to read our life as a grace, with its dreams and desires, its failures and difficulties. The life of Jesus, revealed in the Word, is the heart of the formative process. (*SAFC 24).

147. The *Letter to Brother Leo* contains the essential elements of Franciscan accompaniment. Francis places himself on the same level as Leo and speaks of his own experience. He accompanies Leo with motherly tenderness, leaving him totally free and inviting him to discover his own path creatively. Francis encourages a sense of shared responsibility, values what is positive and avoids inducing a sense of guilt. He points the way, assisting his brother in his desire to live the gospel way of life (*LBL 1-4).

148. For Francis, accompaniment consists in drawing his brother to the Lord by means of mercy and love. He welcomes the brother with respect, not inspiring fear of correction or admonishment, yet firmly refusing those brothers whose motivations have nothing to do with the spirit of the Gospel. (*LMin 11; Adm 3,7-10; Test 40-49)

149. Accompaniment, while not being an imposition, has as its priority to help each brother to grow in freedom, respecting his uniqueness. Accompaniment means creating opportunities that make responsibility, trust, and transparency possible in every area: in affectivity, work, the use of money and new technologies, etc⁴⁸.

150. A decisive yardstick in discernment is to allow oneself to be guided. This is true even for formators, who must have the ability both to accompany and to be accompanied (*RFund 44-49; ChrisV 291-298).

151. With the wisdom of centuries, the Church expects those who have responsibility for formation to be able to distinguish clearly between accompaniment in the internal forum and that in the external forum. Following the spirit of canons 985 and 630.4, the master and vice-master of novices, and those in charge of the team in the various formation houses, are not to hear the confessions of their charges.

II.3. Franciscan Discernment

152. *Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me* (*Mt 25: 40). The presence of Jesus in the poor becomes a central element of Christian discernment. The works of charity, also called works of justice and of solidarity, together with the Beatitudes (*Mt 5: 1-13), establish the criteria for belonging to the Kingdom: poverty of spirit, joy, mercy, peace-building, sincerity of heart, and being misunderstood and persecuted (*ChristV 31).

153. At the time of his conversion, Francis composed a prayer that would accompany him for the rest of his life. From God, who is Light, he asks for faith to guide him, hope to support him in difficulty, and love that excludes no one. God guides Francis personally to the ruins of the chapel of San Damiano, where Christ lives among the lepers. There, Francis found the help he needed to continue the journey (*PrCr 1-3).

154. The fundamental instances of discernment, as well as Sacred Scripture and the sources of our charism, are: fraternal life, which verifies our capacity to establish mature, freely-given human relationships; contemplation, in which our images of God are purified by experience of the God of Jesus; and minority, in which we test our capacity to commit our own life to those who suffer and who are the lesser ones in this world (*2Cel 193).

⁴⁸ Cf. ORDINE DEI FRATI MINORI, *Jesus ibat cum illis. L'accompagnamento francescano. Approccio formativo*, Assisi 8-22 settembre 2013.

155. In his *Letter to a Minister* – the Franciscan gospel of mercy – Francis invites us to live in a constant attitude of discernment. Radical love manifests itself when we consider every difficult situation as a grace, and learn from it; when we refuse to make others into our own image and likeness; when we distinguish between the hermitage as a place of escape that reinforces individualism and self-sufficiency, and the hermitage as a place where we encounter God in silence and which nourishes the sense of fraternal relationships⁴⁹ (*LMin 1-11).

III. LEADING ROLES IN FORMATION

III.1. The Holy Spirit

156. The Holy Spirit, General Minister of the Brotherhood, is the first formator (*Const 24,1; IV PCO 78). Capuchin life consists in letting oneself be shaped and led by the Spirit, who instills in us the sentiments of Christ, and the desire to configure ourselves to Him, the poor and crucified One. Brotherhood is born and grows under the merciful hand of the Spirit, who stimulates us to seek and discern the paths that He wills for each of the brothers and for the entire brotherhood (*Post2004 3,1).

157. The formators are necessary instruments in the formative process. However, we must never lose sight of the leading role of the Holy Spirit, who is constantly revealing the beautiful and exciting horizon of the Gospel *Const 40,1).

III.2. The candidate, the fundamental subject of formation

158. Consequently, each brother, under the action of the Holy Spirit, is the protagonist of his own formation (*IV PCO 79). The process of initiation begins with working on oneself (*Const 24,5). This requires openness, effort, transparency, the recognition of one's limitations, the capacity to accept advice, and growth in creativity.

III.3 The Church, Mother and Teacher

159. Through the action of the Holy Spirit, the Church preserves and makes present the memory of the passion, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Baptismal grace joins us to the People of God (*LG 9-19), teaching us to exercise our baptismal priesthood creatively, our prophetic vocation courageously, and our true dignity with humility. We are members of the Mystical Body of Christ (*LG 8) in an ongoing state of formation, learning from one another how to clothe ourselves with the very sentiments of Christ. The Church, imitating her Master, mercifully gathers all human beings and becomes the universal sacrament of salvation (*LG 48). Hence the importance of learning to accompany and discern in communion with the whole Church.

III.4. The formation fraternity

⁴⁹ Cf. J. HERRANZ, *El discernimiento en Francisco de Asís: Oh Dios, concédenos querer siempre lo que te agrada*, Frontera/Hegian 66, Vitoria 2009.

160. The fraternity is the indispensable location where initiation into our life takes place (*Const 24,7). This is where we experience beauty and the demands of the values we have received, and strengthen our personal commitment (*IV PCO 80).

161. The Order, through its various circumscriptions, is the first instance of formation. Beginning with the General Minister and the Provincial Minister or Custos, all the brothers are responsible for formation. Both the province as a whole and each individual fraternity are formators and are called to welcome and form the new members in our way of life (*Const 28, 2).

162. Particular formation fraternities are established for each stage of formation. Brothers who are called to make up these fraternities must endorse the formation plan, radiate the Capuchin charism and live its values and essential elements in everyday life. The presence of a senior brother, as a significant point of reference endowed with moral authority and consistent in the example of his life, is desirable (*Const 27,1-2).

163. The fraternity will periodically evaluate each of the candidates by means of life reviews, local chapters and assessments, which should take place at least twice a year, to provide the director and the candidates themselves with the elements they need to work on (*OCG 2/15,1).

164. Each circumscription should assess the number of brothers there can be in a formation fraternity, so that its members can be properly formed. A formation house with fewer than 3-5 formandi is not considered suitable for formation. An excessive number of brothers in formation does not facilitate personalized formation. In each house the number of formators and the size of the formation fraternity must be adequate to the number of those being formed. Only in this way will it be possible to provide personalized accompaniment that is healthy and brotherly. Openness to collaboration between different circumscriptions and conferences of the Order will make it possible to implement the necessary updates in the area of formation.

III.5. The formation team

165. The primary task of the formators is to accompany the brothers in formation as they discern the call to our life, and to help the fraternity, especially the Provincial Minister, to assess their capacity for it.

166. Formation is an open horizon that demands respect for the mystery of God present in each person. The formation team specifies what is required in practice of each candidate, and clarifies the objectives and the means to achieve them. Taking as a starting point what has already been achieved in the previous stage of formation, they prepare the brothers for the next stage. In this way the necessary step-by-step nature of the process is respected.

167. The formation team shares the same criteria, avoiding any divergence in the actions of the formators who make up the team. None of them acts individually, but all work in a co-ordinated way and in harmony with the different formation instances of the circumscription: the Secretary and Council for Formation, the director of ongoing formation and the director of vocations promotion.

168. It is important that the formation teams be composed of formators who are conscious of our shared vocation to be brothers, living it in its different expressions: lay or clerical.

169. The training of formators is one of the Order's priorities. The ministers and Custodes will select the formators with care, providing the necessary means for them to improve and enrich their skills.

III.6. The profile of the formator

170. The Capuchin formator is a brother who is convinced of the beauty of our form of life, lives his own vocation joyously (*TestCl 1-4), shares his experience of searching for God, is free and docile to the Spirit, avoids the extremes of psychologism and devotionism, and is open to the Word.

171. Called to exercise a true spiritual fatherhood, the formator, avoiding a paternalistic attitude, accompanies the brother in the process of learning to be free and authentic in life. He is able to foster the growth of God's gifts in him, so as to promote sincerity, creativity and responsibility.

172. The formator must be endowed with human and Christian maturity, demonstrating a capacity to integrate positively his own limitations and difficulties. He will have a realistic self-image, healthy self-esteem and be emotionally balanced; he accepts calmly that he does not have all the answers, nor all the skills; he is open to working with others and allows the other brothers' qualities to complement his own; he is always ready to continue learning how to be an authentic lesser brother (*IV PCO 81).

173. The formator creates opportunities for listening and dialogue with the brothers of the formation fraternity and with those in formation. He does not view formation as an individual job, but is able to work as a member of a team and to ask for help; he is able to initiate and accompany processes; he offers the necessary tools by which his charges are able to undertake the Franciscan way and understand our charism; he has a strong sense of belonging and is sensitive to situations of poverty and marginalization.

III.7. The poor

174. The poor are our teachers. Thanks to them, we are able to understand the Gospel (*ChrisV 171) and live it more effectively. When we touch the body of Christ in the wounded body of a poor person, we confirm the sacramental communion we receive in the Eucharist. His presence fills our lives with meaning and joy (*V PCO 91).

175. The Lord led Francis among the lepers. The primitive brotherhood used this experience as a school of mercy and service freely given, where bitterness is turned into spiritual and bodily sweetness, and where the eyes of those who gaze on Christ the Master are able to recognize and serve Him in the poor.

176. The poor truly become our formators when we try to understand reality from their point of view and make their priorities our own. The fruits of this are immediately obvious: we focus our gaze on essentials; we live better with less; times of need and social injustice help us to live our faith with greater consistency; trust and abandonment to providence, resting in the Father's hands, becomes a real, practical life-choice.

IV. The Stages of Formation from a Capuchin-Franciscan Perspective

177. The following numbers present some guidelines for the stages of our formation process. What is necessary is to move from an activity-based formation to one that promotes gospel attitudes. Underlying the formulation of each stage is the intention to think of the formation journey in terms of an initiation. The assimilation of the theoretical aspects will have an effect on how deeply experiences are lived, and the achievement of the aims we set ourselves will depend on how genuine those experiences are. All the elements are intrinsically linked.

178. This is the ultimate goal of the formation journey: *Let all the brothers, with the help of God the Father and enlightened by the Holy Spirit, following in the footsteps of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the style of Francis and Clare* (*ER 1, 1), *live with responsibility in evangelical freedom, living a life full of mature affective relationships and committed to building a more fraternal and just world* (*Const 23,1).

179. Since we know that the initiation of the new candidates is the mission of the fraternity as a whole, we must make sure that it is in a state of continuous formation, renewing itself especially in the values of our charism, drawing its motivation from our form of life.

180. The values of our charism are communicated by means of experiences and contents that require categories drawn from the particular cultural context, so that they can be assumed in a personal and genuine way. Unless these values are properly appropriated there is the risk of weakening future collaboration. For this reason we strongly suggest that initial formation is not the time to begin projects of fraternal collaboration (*IV PCO 29; NewWine 39).

1. Ongoing formation

181. The iconic gospel event of Emmaus (*Lk 24: 13-35) presents two companions who, after the death of Jesus, are on their way out of Jerusalem. From their uncertainty and bewilderment they move to an encounter with the Risen Lord who puts Bread and the Word at the center of their lives. He transforms their sadness into joy and continues to do so for His disciples and those who announce his Kingdom.

182. From the disciples of Emmaus we learn that it is always possible to start afresh, that we must never consider our formation as complete. The whole person is subject to renewal at every stage of life. This is why ongoing formation, as a continual process, is a necessary and intrinsic part of our vocation.

1.1 Nature

183. Ongoing formation is a process of personal and community renewal and of harmonious adaptation of structures and activities, by which we are enabled to live our gospel vocation in actual everyday situations (*Const 41.2; CIC 661).

184. There are two kinds of ongoing formation: the ordinary, focused on everyday living, through which we assess the quality of our life, and the extraordinary, which runs alongside our daily experiences and casts light on them. Both kinds unfold on three levels: individual, local and provincial (*VC 71).

1.2 Objectives

185. To create and protect areas of freedom in our following of Jesus, enabling us to continue to learn from experience and strengthening personal responsibility.

186. To take care of our affective life by building authentic, free, and profound interpersonal relationships, growing in the sentiments of Christ Himself, so that a meaningful life is ensured.

187. Following the example of Jesus, to foster greater sensitivity in the area of solidarity and a more active commitment in the building up of justice, in ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, in the search for peace and respect for creation (*Const 144,6).

1.3 Dimensions

188. The spiritual dimension

- Maintain a close relationship with God in daily life, to inspire our way of thinking and living according to the form of the Holy Gospel.
- Cultivate a spirituality that, by means of interior silence and listening to the Word, leads to the discovery of God in the realities of daily life.
- Re-read our Franciscan charism with the needs and challenges of our time in mind, so that we are able to welcome the newness of the Spirit and play our part in transforming our circumstances with the strength of the Gospel.

189. The human dimension

- Take care of one's vocation, managing time and personal and common formation responsibly.
- Face the challenges of life creatively, aware at every moment of one's limitations and gifts.
- Strengthen the sentiments of esteem and communion, valuing our brothers and creating opportunities for encounter and communication.

190. The intellectual dimension

- Establish a Franciscan style of studying, sharing the experiences and knowledge acquired, to help us grow in brotherhood.
- Place the pastoral-biblical dimension and the Franciscan charism at the centre of ongoing formation.
- Broaden and renew one's vision of the world, enriching it with fraternal dialogue and the various prospects today.

191. The missionary-pastoral dimension

- Evangelize by life and word through the witness of fraternal relationships.
- Collaborate in the pastoral commitments of the Church, responding to the most urgent needs.
- Recognize the importance of accompanying spiritually men and women today.

192. The charismatic dimension

- Intensify fraternal life so that our plan of life is more effectively achieved.
- Give priority to active and affective listening as one of the strong points of our way of relating in accordance with our charism.
- Reclaim the spirit of the Capuchin reform to discover the beauty of simplicity.

1.4 Means

193. The ordinary means offered by the local fraternity:

- The liturgical life, which is the school of Christian and Franciscan values.
- Local chapters, the review of life and fraternal correction, the sharing of meals, and recreation are all spaces that help to create healthy and open relationships.

- Reading and reflection, indispensable for human and spiritual growth.
- The appropriate use of communications media as tools for updating.

194. The ordinary means offered by the provincial fraternity:

- Retreats, formation weeks, meetings, seminars and celebrations.

195. The extraordinary means:

- Periods of study, courses in biblical and Franciscan spirituality, sabbaticals, etc.

1.5 Times

196. Formation must take account of the various stages of life. The following is suggested by way of example⁵⁰:

Young adulthood. A time typically marked by enthusiasm and activity. A time to learn new ways of living our charism and taking on responsibilities; allowing oneself to be guided by the brotherhood.

Middle years. A search for essentials and interior growth. There is always the risk of disappointment and individualism.

Advanced age. The time of fullness and of passing on experiences to the next generation. The time to welcome Sister Death with Christian hope.

1.6. Other topics connected with formation

197. **Work** is a grace that allows us to feel fulfilled, humanly and professionally. The friars are true witnesses and formators when they live a healthy balance between activity and fraternal life (*VIII PCO 9).

198. **Economy.** All the friars must be aware of the economic realities of the province and how they are administered according to the principles of solidarity (*Economy 97; VI PCO 29).

199. **Justice, peace, and ecology.** One of the tasks of ongoing formation is to promote a socially responsible life-style, aware that what we consume has an impact on all. It is possible to live better with less. Furthermore, in all our fraternities and ministerial services, policies and practices must be put in place for the protection of minors and vulnerable adults (*Justice 50-53).

200. **Means of communication and new technologies.** Ongoing formation should help the friars to be aware of the existence and consequences of virtual reality. The digital media, used in the service of evangelization, foster a more human and inclusive society. On the other hand, the risk of neurotic dependence on technology should not be underestimated (*VIII PCO 70).

1.7 Towards a culture of appraisal

201. When the time comes for evaluation, we must assess the values we proclaim, the choices we have made, and the reality of our personal and fraternal life.

⁵⁰ Cf. A. CENCINI, *La formazione permanente nella vita quotidiana*, EDB, Bologna 2017.

202. It pertains to the local chapter to evaluate the plan of the fraternity. A periodic evaluation of the journey being made is recommended.
203. It is suggested that in the canonical visitations the general visitor, Provincial Minister or Custos accompany and evaluate ongoing formation with each friar.
204. It may be appropriate to draft norms at the level of the circumscription to promote in-service training for specific pastoral ministries (reconciliation, preaching, catechesis...). Ongoing formation is a right and duty for all.

1.8 Other considerations

205. Each circumscription must have a programme of ongoing formation that meets its own needs and circumstances. To this end, collaboration between circumscriptions is also to be encouraged.
206. It is important to take particular care of brothers in their first years of ongoing formation (after five and ten years of perpetual profession).
207. *All the ministers and guardians shall regard it as the primary ordinary duty of their pastoral service to promote the ongoing formation of the brothers entrusted to them (*Const 42,2).*
208. Each circumscription or group of circumscriptions is to have a friar or a team of friars responsible for ongoing formation.
209. The General Secretary for Formation shall collaborate in ongoing formation, offering activities, courses, and initiatives to the circumscriptions that are unable to conduct them by themselves (*Const 25, 7).

Initiation into our life

210. Initial formation lays the foundations for dynamic growth in the identity of the consecrated person, and the process continues to strengthen throughout the whole of life.

2. The vocational stage

211. Abraham is the icon of a human being who is open to God. The account of his call (*Gen 12: 1-9) emphasizes the key elements in every vocation. First of all, the human person is invited to go out of the closed circle of the known and familiar and to stake his life with trust in God. Secondly, we see that vocation is a dynamic process that activates all the dimensions of the person, especially the relational capacity and the quest for the good.
212. The image of Abraham reminds us that it is up to every human person to respond to God's call. God has a plan for each one, and invites us to go forward with confidence and to be courageous in our search. Every vocation is a gift of the Holy Spirit to build up the Church and serve the world. It is the task of the Christian community to awaken vocations, to welcome them and cultivate them. We must promote the idea that all are responsible for creating a culture of vocations (*CIC 233).

2.1 Nature

213. *In His goodness God calls all Christian faithful in the Church to the perfection of love through different states of life, so that the salvation of the world may be advanced by means of personal holiness (*Const 16, 1).*

214. *Concern for vocations arises above all from the awareness that we ourselves are living and offering to others a way of life rich in human and gospel values, which, while offering genuine service to God and people, fosters personal growth (*Const 17, 1).*

2.2 Objectives

215. To create opportunities for discernment that enable a person to make a free and responsible vocational decision (*ChrisV 136-143).

216. To propose pathways for affective growth in the relational style of Jesus, along with the invitation to live the logic of self-gift.

217. To present a vision of a world founded on the principles of Franciscan spirituality.

2.3 The dimensions

218. The spiritual dimension

- Offer the necessary help so that the process of vocational discernment results from a personal choice made in faith (*ChrisV 246).
- Encourage prayer, the sacramental life, and daily reading of the Word of God.
- The candidate discovers, by looking within himself, a journey of openness to the transcendent and the beauty of creation.

219. The human dimension

- He expresses an age-appropriate level of self-awareness.
- He allows himself be accompanied on the journey of vocational discernment.
- He shows a desire to belong to a group and the ability to make relationships.

220. The intellectual dimension

- Present the principles and fundamentals of the experience of Christian life.
- Offer a first critical approach to the Mystery of Christ.
- Begin a first contact with the lives of St. Francis and St. Clare, presenting the values of the Franciscan charism in a simple way.

221. The missionary-pastoral dimension

- If the candidate is already participating in some pastoral activity, he should be encouraged to continue. If not, some pastoral commitment may be suggested.
- Make known, in a general way, the pastoral services and apostolates of the Order, the province or the custody.
- Introduce the practice of reading the Gospel, with emphasis on those texts that most clearly present Jesus' pastoral way of teaching in the proclamation of the Kingdom of God.

222. The charismatic dimension

- Help the candidate to listen to the deep desires of his heart, and his reasons for choosing our form of life.
- Make prayer the basic context for vocational discernment (*ChrisV 284).
- Present the Capuchin life rooted in sound ecclesiology and within a theology of the religious life that values the vocations of all the People of God.

2.4 Times

223. The time for discernment before entering the Order is variable, but it must in any case enable the candidate to know our life and enable those in charge of the accompaniment to perceive in him solid vocational signs.

2.5 Criteria for discernment

224. The criteria we present here refer to the whole person seen through the lens of faith (*Const 18,3):

- Physical and mental health
- Sufficient maturity, especially in the affective and relational aspects
- Suitability for fraternal life in common
- Ability to reconcile the ideal and the concrete
- Flexibility in relationships
- Willingness to change
- Trust in the formators
- Adherence to the values of the faith

225. Sociologically, people between sixteen and twenty-nine years are considered young. Pastoral experience suggests that after the age of thirty-five or forty it becomes difficult to learn the new, particular habits – especially the sense of openness – demanded by religious life⁵¹.

2.6 Other indications

226. Ensure that the candidate knows, at least in broad outline, our specific identity within the Church, so that we avoid admitting candidates who only want to be priests (*IV PCO 21).

227. Establish guidelines and specific criteria for accompanying teenagers, young people, or adults who are considering a vocation, in accordance with their culture and with the real possibilities that are available to receive them. Where they exist in the Order, minor seminaries and centres of vocational guidance, as well as the experience of volunteer work, are good opportunities to experience our life (*OCG 2/2).

228. Each fraternity should have a brother in charge of youth work and vocations promotion, duly trained to provide the accompaniment of the candidates. Each circumscription should have a secretariat for Vocations Promotion (*Const 17,3-4).

229. In order that candidates may progressively acquire the qualities required for admission to our life, it is necessary that suitable structures are provided in each circumscription or group of circumscriptions to offer the formandi, before the beginning of the postulancy, a personalized formative path (reception, pre-postulancy, aspirancy, minor seminary) which may last at least one year, depending on individual needs and rates of maturation. The formators must verify that the objectives set in the vocational stage have been achieved, above all "the required human maturity, particularly affective and relational" (*Const 18, 3.e; PI 63).

⁵¹ Cf. XV Ordinary General Assembly, *Young People, the faith and Vocational Discernment*, I, 1 (Preparatory Document).

THE STAGES OF INITIAL FORMATION

3. Postulancy

230. The iconic gospel scene of Christ's baptism (*Mk 1: 9-11) presents Jesus as the one in whom God is well pleased. Though He is the Son, He makes himself our brother so that as brothers we might learn to be sons of God. Brotherhood is the great school in which God reveals to us our identity: the gift of being sons and brothers.

231. The Baptism of Jesus shows us that God sets his Spirit on each of us and marks us with his love. In postulancy, by committing himself to a vocational discernment process in our religious family, the postulant deepens his personal relationship with God and acquires a greater awareness of what it means to follow Christ.

3.1 Nature

232. *Postulancy is the first period of initiation when one makes the choice to adopt our life (*Const 30, 1).*

233. *During this period, the postulant comes to know our life and makes a further and more careful discernment of his vocation. For its part, the fraternity comes to know the postulant better and ascertains the growth of his human maturity, especially affective maturity, and his ability to discern his life and the signs of the times according to the Gospel (*Const 30, 2).*

3.2 Objectives

234. To help the postulant acquire the necessary self-knowledge and autonomy so that he is able to integrate in a mature way his own history and personal reality, with all its lights and shadows.

235. To deepen his relationship with Jesus Christ, contemplating His attitude of love, His goodness, mercy, and compassion.

236. To awaken interest in social issues arising from injustice, violence, poverty and the violation of human rights.

3.3 The dimensions

237. The spiritual dimension

- Through accompaniment, the postulant is helped to write an autobiographical narrative from a faith point of view, so that he becomes aware of God's call.
- He allows himself to be progressively introduced to the mystery of the Eucharist and the sacrament of Reconciliation.
- He begins to learn the liturgical prayer of the Church and contemplative prayer.

238. The human dimension

The postulant:

- Learns to understand and manage his own emotions, with particular attention to the affective aspect;
- Practises physical and psychological self-care in order to gain a healthy self-esteem;
- Is given the elements for the drafting of a *personal life plan*, starting with an autobiography.

239. The intellectual dimension

- He studies the Catechism of the Catholic Church in greater depth;
- Gets to know the person of Jesus by means of a systematic programme of Gospel reading;
- Reads a classic hagiographical life of St. Francis and St. Clare, as well as a modern biography.

240. The missionary-pastoral dimension

- He acquires stronger faith-based principles for the apostolic life, with the help of accompaniment;
- Commits to a first experience of apostolic work and service to the poor;
- Grows in missionary and social awareness, paying special attention to reading the signs of the times.

241. The charismatic dimension

- The postulant draws closer to the person of Francis, discovering in him an original and beautiful way of embodying the insights of the Gospel.
- He comes to appreciate fraternal life, minority, silence and the beauty of creation. He cultivates a spirit of availability for the needs of the world and the Church.

3.4 Duration

242. The duration is variable, depending on the needs of the candidates. In recent years, because of changes in society, Church and the family, there has been a tendency to prolong the time of the postulancy, in the desire to assist discernment and to enable greater human and Christian maturity. Our legislation indicates a minimum period of one year (*OCG 2/11). However, in most of the geographical areas of the Order the time is two years (*FFCh 31).

243. Postulancy begins when the candidate is admitted by the Provincial Minister (*Const 29, 2).

3.5. Other formation-related themes

244. *Work*. During postulancy it is important to help the postulants to discover work as a grace and an opportunity. Simple tasks and domestic work are to be encouraged (*VIII PCO 7).

245. *The economy*. The postulants are to be introduced to the principles of Franciscan spirituality: namely, freely given service and the logic that everything is gift. This demands that we leave behind the culture of consumerism and exclusion (*Economy 16).

246. *Justice, peace, and ecology*. Those who choose our form of life commit themselves to protecting the environment and to work together creatively to resolve problems affecting our planet (*Justice 56-58).

247. *Communications media and new technologies*. Candidates need to be formed to use digital media responsibly, safely, and usefully. It is appropriate that the postulants do not manage their own social profiles in ways that distance them from the fraternity.

3.6 Criteria for discernment

248. In assessing the suitability of a candidate the following criteria are to be kept in mind (*CIC 597,1-2; Const 18,2):

- Mental-physical equilibrium (medical examination and psychological assessment) with a required medical and criminal records check.
- Capacity for initiative and co-responsibility
- Right use of freedom and of time
- Willingness for service and for work
- Capacity to make responsible, free choices
- Knowledge and practice of Christian life
- Sufficient clarity regarding motivations
- Openness to accompaniment in formation
- Aptitude for community life
- Readiness to follow Christ in poverty, obedience, and chastity

3.7 Other considerations

249. It is preferable that during postulancy there should be no academic studies, precisely so that priority can be given to other studies, courses, or workshops that are in harmony with the aims of this stage of formation.

250. The place should foster integration into the fraternity, recollection and meditation; it should be simple and offer possibilities for manual work and contact with the poor. It is important that the candidate is not removed from his cultural context.

251. In order to make their personal accompaniment more profound and effective, it is advisable that the postulants live in the same fraternity and with the same director.

252. The postulancy marks the beginning of the journey of incorporation into the Order. It is also the moment when the question of belonging to other possible groups (*Jöhrident 2.3.3) – family, groups of friends, ecclesial movements, political parties, ethnic groups, etc. – is clarified, so that the new identity acquired in our Capuchin family can become established.

253. At the end of the postulancy, a meeting between the formation teams of the postulancy and novitiate is arranged: a detailed report on each of the postulants is presented, with special reference to the five dimensions.

254. The postulants, from the first days of their entering into the fraternity, must learn the policies and procedures of their circumscription for the prevention of the sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults.

Having received an explanation of the subject, they will sign a document stating that they are fully aware of these policies, that they are prepared to observe them and to receive regular formation on this topic during the course of their initial and ongoing formation.

4. The novitiate

255. The iconic gospel scene of Bethany (*Lk 10: 38-42) introduces us to a house with open doors. Here we learn to listen like Mary and serve like Martha. They are not two different things. Listening always bears fruit in service; there is no service unless it is born of listening. A long journey of apprenticeship is involved, in which Christ the Teacher continues to invite us to listen to His Word, alive in the Gospel, and to serve Him in our brothers and sisters, especially those in need.

256. As at Bethany, in the novitiate one learns to steer one's life in the direction of Jesus, by listening to His words and learning from Him who made himself the servant of all. This is the wonderful art of service,

4.1 Nature

257. *The novitiate is a period of more intense initiation and more profound experience of the Capuchin Franciscan gospel life in its fundamental demands. It requires a free and mature decision to try out our form of religious life (*Const 31,1; CIC 646).*

4.2 Objectives

258. To review one's own story in the light of grace and as an instance of salvation, of God's freely-given love and compassion.

259. To develop in the novice the ever-growing conviction that Christ is the centre of his life, through contemplation of the mystery of His divine humanity, so that he strives to embody His sentiments and attitudes.

260. To understand more deeply the consequences of following Jesus, willingly going against the consumerist world that is constantly producing more exclusion; to learn how to dialogue in community, so as to welcome diversity as an enrichment and to accept that others may see, think and act in different ways.

4.3 The dimensions

261. The spiritual dimension

- The novice claims as his own the spirituality of the Capuchin tradition, centered on the Eucharist, the Liturgy of the Hours and mental prayer, assisted by *lectio divina* and the sound traditions of the Order (*Const 31,3).
- He learns the habit of interior silence.
- He acquires a deeper grasp of the theology of the vows through contemplation of the person of Jesus, poor, obedient and chaste.

262. The human dimension

- By relating with the brothers, the novice learns to share more deeply his own personal story.
- He learns to integrate his affective-sexual growth into his vocational journey, establishing healthy, mature, self-giving relationships.

- He practises personal and community discernment as a means of tuning in to the saving plan of God.

263. The intellectual dimension

- Completes the study of the Catechism with the theology of religious life and of the values proper to our life.
- Presents a general and systematic introduction to the Bible and the liturgy.
- Delves more deeply into the contents and spirituality of the Rule, the Testament, the Constitutions of the Capuchin Friars Minor, the Plenary Councils, and other documents of the Order.

264. The missionary-pastoral dimension

- The novice discovers in our charismatic mission a way of working together to build up a more evangelical and fraternal world.
- He has meets with brothers of the circumscription who embody in their own lives the mission of Jesus.
- He experiences some forms of service among the poor and needy

265. The charismatic dimension

- By living among brothers, the novice learns the art of being a brother.
- He discovers that being a Capuchin lesser brother is our particular way of being Church, by creating environments of welcome, encounter and tender-hearted love.
- He learns to welcome and pass on the values of the charism with creative fidelity.

4.4. Duration

266. The Code of Canon Law (CIC) establishes that, for the novitiate to be valid, it must last for an uninterrupted period of twelve months spent in the novitiate house, and may not last longer than 18 months. Any absence of more than fifteen days must be made good, while an absence of more than three months invalidates the novitiate (*Const 31,6; CIC 647,3; 648,1; 653,2).

4.5 Other formation-related themes

267. **Work.** Manual work is one of the values of our charism and is part of our spirituality. God places the work of creation into our hands, inviting us to take care of it. At the same time, by working together we cement the bond of interdependence among ourselves. (*VIII PCO 10).

268. The **economy.** The novices will learn how to use material goods in a manner inspired by the gospel, to be detached from money, to discover the value of a simple life-style, and cultivate generosity of heart. (*Economy 18).

269. **Justice, peace and ecology.** The novitiate is also a time to open our eyes to the reality of the world we live in. Subjects such as human rights, care of the environment, hunger and war require a response – mystical, prophetic, and in solidarity. (*Justice 60-62).

270. **Communications media and new technologies.** During the novitiate, a limited use of mobile phones and computers is recommended, and these should be in a public room. A life centered on essentials protects us from being enslaved to technology (*LS 47).

4.6 Criteria for discernment

271. We offer a few criteria for discerning the suitability of a novice for first profession (*CIC 642):

- A proportionate level of human and affective maturity and a capacity to form good interpersonal relationships.
- A spirit of initiative, together with active and responsible participation in his own formation.
- The capacity to accept differences in others and to live in brotherhood.
- The ability to take responsibility for one's work.
- Openness to the Word of God.
- A life of prayer and contemplation.
- Flexibility and dialogue with formators.
- A sense of belonging to the fraternity and the Order.
- The capacity to serve the least ones and those on the margins of society.
- An understanding of the vows and a serious desire to live them with joy and serenity.
- Sufficient knowledge of the Capuchin Franciscan charism.

4.7 Other considerations

272. The ideal number of novices is at least four, while the maximum number should ensure that individual accompaniment is possible, rather than "one size fits all". For this reason we propose a maximum number of 15.

273. At the end of the novitiate there must be a handover between the formation teams of the novitiate and the postnovitiate, so that the situation of each brother is passed on in terms of goals achieved and the main areas of growth he will face in the post-novitiate.

5. The post-novitiate

274. The death of Jesus on the Cross (*Jn 19: 30) teaches us that only one who gives himself totally is able to love until the end. The Cross is the icon of freely-given love, availability, and offering of self. It is the school of the meaning of life, where we learn that *a grain of wheat that falls into the earth and dies produces much fruit* (*Jn 12: 24).

275. In the Cross, Francis discovered the poverty and nudity of Jesus and perceived in his own life an attempt to live a life of ever greater poverty and simplicity. The post-novitiate, the last phase of initial formation, must assist the brothers to shape their lives to the form of life of the Master.

5.1. Nature

276. *The post-novitiate, which begins with temporary profession and concludes with perpetual profession, is the third stage of initiation. During this period the brothers progress further in maturity and prepare themselves to make a definitive choice of the gospel life in our Order* (*Const 32, 1).

*277. Because of its essential reference to religious consecration and to perpetual profession, the journey of formation undertaken in the post-novitiate must be the same for all the brothers. Since the gospel life in brotherhood holds the primary place in our vocation, it must also be given priority during this period (*Const 32, 2).*

5.2 Objectives

278. To live life in a spirit of freedom and self-giving, which are the foundations of religious consecration.

279. To strengthen communication, mutual recognition, transparent relationships and shared fraternal responsibility.

280. To give witness to solidarity, justice and truth side by side with those who are suffering.

5.3 The dimensions

281. The spiritual dimension

The postnovices:

- Reinforce the centrality of the consecration of their life.
- In prayer and the Word, discover the constant action of the Spirit.
- Learn to balance action and contemplation in a healthy tension.

282. The human dimension

- Build an emotional makeup that fosters interdependence and helps to overcome individualism.
- Achieve harmonious integration of spiritual, physical and affective needs, through accompaniment.
- Learn to manage ~~his~~ their time so that there is a healthy balance between serving the poor and personal and community needs.

283. The intellectual dimension

- Learn to reflect critically and openly, according to the Gospel.
- Engage in deeper study of Sacred Scripture, theology, liturgy, and the history and spirituality of the Order. All the brothers, regardless of their choice to be cleric or lay, must receive sufficient basic instruction to provide a solid foundation for their life of consecrated service.
- Acquire sufficient knowledge of the history of the Order and of his own circumscription.

284. The missionary-pastoral dimension

- Learn to plan and evaluate pastoral commitments as a fraternity.
- Avail of periods of missionary experience, in frontier situations.
- Seek a balance between action, the spiritual life, the needs of fraternity life, and study.

285. The charismatic dimension

- Deepen their resolve to follow Christ, even in the face of difficulties.
- Construct a solid identity based on our charism, shaping their life according to that of the Master.
- Reinterpret all of reality in the light of the mystery of the cross, where love takes concrete form in freedom, in dispossession of self, and gift.

5.4 Duration

286. The post-novitiate lasts for at least three years, and can be extended by three more years. If a brother or those in charge of formation think it appropriate, and by way of exception, it can be extended up to a maximum of nine years (*Const 34, 2; CIC 655; 657,2).

287. The integration and consolidation of the values of our charism is a long, patient, and progressive journey. Here the principles of personalized formation need to be kept in mind.

5.5 Other formation-related themes

288. **Work.** The post-novitiate is the right time to know and experience the different forms of work that are possible in the Order. The ultimate criterion of discernment can be neither the self-realization of the individual nor institutional needs, but the will of God the Father (*FFCh 9) (*VIII PCO 11).

289. **The economy.** We must adopt stronger, more transparent criteria for the use of our resources, living in solidarity with one another and with the poor, consuming responsibly and an economy that is socially aware. It is desirable that the brothers take part in drawing up the fraternity budget (*Economy 19).

290. **Justice, peace, and ecology.** Living a simple, plain lifestyle, let the postnovices practise dialogue and respect and learn to value diversity. Love for Christ should result in a desire to build peace and embrace the cause of the Kingdom in favour of the poor. (*Justice 63-66).

291. **Communications media and new technologies.** We need to promote a critical sense in the proper use of the social communications media. It is appropriate to organize specific courses and seminars, to draw up directives in the different cultures and to assess the possibility of creating and managing resources for pastoral work and evangelization using the new technologies. (*V PCO 58; RFund 182).

5.6 Criteria for discernment

292. When assessing the suitability of a brother for perpetual profession, these are some of the criteria: (*CIC 656):

- The capacity to make a final commitment and to live the evangelical counsels
- Affective maturity
- A personal relationship with God and a life of prayer
- Personal initiative and responsibility for one's own religious life

- The ability to live and work in brotherhood
- Service of others, especially the poorest
- A sense of justice, peace and respect for creation
- Sufficient interior freedom and practice of poverty
- A sense of belonging to the brotherhood, the Order and the Church

5.7 Other considerations

293. Formation fraternities that are too large should be avoided. Instead, we should opt for fraternities that strengthen identity and the sense of belonging and facilitate accompaniment.

294. Initiation into our life is completed by perpetual profession. Once he is perpetually professed, the brother should continue to nourish his desire for growth.

6. Specific initial formation

295. The Constitutions divide our formation into two phases: initial and ongoing. The first phase, concluding with perpetual profession, includes initiation into religious consecration and offers the possibility of beginning, in this period, preparation for work and ministry (*Const 23,4; FFCh 23).

296. The Constitutions establish two clear principles: First, the life of gospel brotherhood and formation for consecration must have priority during the time of initiation (*Const 32,2) (*CIC 659). Second, initial formation is equal for all. Therefore, initiation into consecrated life and specific formation for Holy Orders must not be confused; they are not equivalent.

297. Given the various sensibilities that exist in the Order regarding models of the post-novitiate, there is a certain tension between the charismatic and clerical dimensions. Reflection and dialogue, in line with PCO IV and the document *Formation for the Capuchin Franciscan Life in the Post-Novitiate* (Assisi, 2004), the Constitutions, and the reflections of the recent General Ministers, will help us find the right balance between the two dimensions (*FrCh 3, 1-8; FFCh 33-36).

298. *The state of consecrated life by its very nature is neither clerical nor lay* (*CIC 588.1). Hence it has its own value, independent of sacred ministry (*VC, 60). The identity of the Franciscan Order goes back to our form of evangelical life, which defines us as an Order of brothers and not as a clerical congregation. Therefore the one vocation of the lesser brother, lived in its lay or clerical expressions (as well as ensuring a common formative path for all), is open to different itineraries for specific formation: one for those who have received the gift of living the religious vocation in its presbyteral expression, and another for those whose gift is to live its lay dimension (*VIII PCO 42).

299. It has become necessary, on the one hand, to study more deeply ways of living the priesthood based on the demands of our charismatic identity, “taking into account the character of our brotherhood” (*Const 39, 4; Ebr 3, 1-4). On the other hand, we need to update our thinking about ways of living the lay option, increasing formation opportunities for lay brothers and helping every brother to develop his own grace of working (*Const 37, 4).

300. The formation fraternity, together with the brother in formation, must discern and verify through personalized accompaniment the reasons for his own vocational decision, guiding the brother toward the gift of ordained ministry or that of fraternal ministry.

301. The common, basic formation for all the brothers must include an introductory study of Sacred Scripture, theology, liturgy, and Franciscan spirituality and history (*Const 32, 3). Academic recognition of the studies done by those who continue toward Holy Orders is desirable.

7. Collaborative formation

302. Our common vocation transcends all frontiers, and as it welcomes the richness and originality of each culture, transforms it by creating opportunities for communion. Our Order is a universal brotherhood, made up of a network of provincial and local fraternities. Therefore, if we do not wish to be victims of provincialism, we must create more flexible and dynamic structures that foster integration between circumscriptions and a greater openness, as well as a sense of belonging to the Order.

303. It is important to overcome provincialism also at the level of formation, through the promotion of dialogue, mutual knowledge and collaboration. The following principles should guide collaborative formation within the Order:

- The conviction that we do not collaborate because we are forced by necessity, but because it is something that brotherhood itself demands;
- The good of the brother in formation has priority;
- The best use of formation personnel;
- A more reasonable use of material structures and economic resources (*OGC 2/8).

304. To reinforce collaboration in formation, we recommend the creation of formation structures that depend not on provinces but on a conference, whose task it will be to take charge of the formation fraternity. It should be ascertained whether it is appropriate to extend this principle to collaboration between different conferences (*OGC 2/5).

305. **Conclusion.** Mary, our Mother and Teacher, welcomed the Word, pondered it in her heart and put it into practice. She was the first disciple of Jesus, listening to the Master and transforming love into service (*LtOrd 26-28). The Almighty continues to do great things in each one of us. Today also, pupils in the school of Nazareth, let us learn to live in brotherhood, with joy and simplicity, in order to be witnesses of the tender love and presence of God in our world (*ChrisV 43-48).

Appendix I

“The whole world is our cloister.” (*The Sacred Exchange between Saint Francis and Lady Poverty*, 63)

I. One charism in a diversity of cultures

“In order that the Rule and intentions of our Father and lawgiver may be faithfully observed throughout the world, let the ministers make sure to seek the most suitable ways for the brothers to live their lives and conduct their apostolates. This may be done in a variety of forms, in accordance with different regions and cultures and the needs of times and places.”

(Const 7,4).

1. Some general considerations

1. The world grows ever more diverse. The very young, fast-growing population of the Southern Hemisphere contrasts with the Northern, with its progressive ageing and demographic decline. 60% of the world's population lives in Asia (4,400 million), 16% in Africa (1,200 million), 10% in Europe (738 million), 9% in Latin America and the Caribbean (634 million). The remaining 5% are in North America (358 million) and Oceania (39 million). Currently more than half of the world's population lives in an urban area⁵². Among the urgent issues requiring an immediate response today, a two-fold challenge is emerging: to tackle the growing flow of migrants according to human and Christian criteria and to create opportunities for integration and diversity that promote coexistence and cohesion among different peoples.
2. Our Order is no stranger to these demographic changes. Africa and Asia are growing apace, while Eastern Europe and Latin American remain stable and Western Europe and North America suffer from a notable decline in the number of friars. In the Capuchin world no single culture or geographical area is dominant (in the past it was Europe). To keep alive the charismatic identity and unity of the Order demands that friars belonging to different cultures learn to encounter one another (*LG 12,1; EG 130). Authentic dialogue encourages a plurality of interpretations of the one charism that is communicated and understood in different languages and through diverse worldviews (*Const 100, 5).
3. Collaboration is a sign of unity and communion in an increasingly globalized world. At the same time, however, it calls for ever greater attention and sensitivity to the different ethnicities. True collaboration can only be understood on the basis of a mystique of brotherhood, able to accept differences and integrate them into a harmonious synthesis that leads to a greater sense of belonging (*EG 131). Overcoming provincialism and ethnocentrism, together with formation for interculturality, makes real, effective, and lasting collaboration possible (*Const 100, 6).

⁵² United Nations, *State of the world population 2017*. New York 2018 (www.unfpa.org).

II. From multiculturalism to interculturality

4. Culture is the totality of distinct spiritual, material, intellectual, and affective features that together characterize a social group. It includes lifestyle, fundamental human rights, the system of values, traditions, and beliefs. By means of culture we discern values, make choices, express ourselves, come to know ourselves, recognize ourselves as unfinished projects, and tirelessly seek the meaning of existence (*GS 53). The entire edifice of a culture seeks to satisfy fundamental needs, at least under three aspects: the material (housing, food), the relational (family, friends, companions), and the symbolic (art, beauty, spirituality).
5. Our world is characterized by mutual interdependence. Consequently, relationship is the fundamental element that distinguishes the human being: relationship with oneself, with others, with the environment, and with God. It is precisely in this area of relationships that we construct and understand our identity: our ways of acting and thinking, our feelings and values, the rules and signs of belonging that are transmitted from one generation to the next in every culture.
6. There are many different models of relationship between cultures⁵³. One is the colonial, in which one culture imposes itself on another, demanding the other's rejection of its own roots. This produces a lack of fidelity to one's own culture, motivated by the desire for acceptance and membership in the new group. In this model differences are seen as a threat. A second model is the multicultural, where different cultures coexist in the same geographic space but avoid any kind of exchange. Here we can speak of cultural pluralism in which there is tolerance, but without integration. Thirdly there is the intercultural model, where cultures meet without losing their own identity. Differences blend together and enrich one another, generating new kinds of relationship. The starting point is to know and love one's own culture so as to be able to recognize the differences of the others. This model is characteristic of the mission of the Church and the way of life of our Order.

III. Bringing the Gospel to the heart of every culture

7. Creation is a hymn to goodness and beauty (*Gen 1: 31). God has taken creation so seriously that each creature is unique and an essential expression of a multiform variety. The biodiversity of the planet is the greatest reflection of His creativity. God does not mass-produce creation; it is precisely in His paternity that the origin of all diversity is found. The ideal of love does not consist in the fusion of differences but in the fertile relationship between differences. Otherness - the challenge of encounter with the other, recognizing other ways of being and living - is what makes brotherhood possible (*Gen 4).

⁵³ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools: Living in Harmony for a Civilization of Love*, Rome 2013.

8. The incarnation of Jesus is not something abstract; it is an event that occurred in a particular time and place. The critical stance Jesus adopted toward the thought and behaviour of the religious authorities made him a 'marginal Jew.'⁵⁴ For Jesus, salvation was offered to all, not only to the Jewish people (Lk 14: 16-28); it is freely given and cannot be bought (*Lk 18: 10-14). Jesus questions certain sacred institutions such as some practices of the Temple (Mt 21: 13), and breaks the mold of any ethnic sense of belonging based on flesh and blood, thereby broadening relational horizons. The parable of the Good Samaritan (*Lk 10: 25-37), the meeting with the centurion (*Mt 8: 5-11), the water shared at the well of Sichem (*Jn 4: 9), the dialogue with the Syro-Phoenician woman (*Mk 7: 24-30), as well as other encounters and miracles that took place beyond the borders of Jesus' own land, would come to a climax in the most difficult of all Christian teachings to practice: the love of one's enemy.
9. Pentecost symbolizes the opening of the Gospel to cultures (*Acts 2: 1-4). The Holy Spirit, source of freedom and unity, in order to communicate the ever-living memory of Jesus, eliminates all borders imposed by race, by discriminatory laws, and by the separatist rules of the Hebrew tradition. Through sincere dialogue and discernment of the signs of the times, the Holy Spirit continues to guide the Church, so that in its assimilation of different cultures, it might learn to live the Good News in plurality (*Gal 2: 1-10, Acts 15: 1-34).

4. The Church, school of interculturality

10. Since the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, the Church has expressed its determination to open itself to dialogue with the contemporary world. Since then, and now with the recent apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, the Church continues to devote itself to the task of evangelizing cultures so as to inculturate the Gospel and continue to announce the Kingdom of God and its justice.
11. The catholicity of the Church depends on its real openness to cultures. We need to go out to encounter others without ceasing to be ourselves, but always ready to welcome diversity. Christianity does not have one single cultural model; it brings with it the face of all the different cultures in which it has been accepted and where it has left its mark (*NMI 40). Among the different peoples that experience the gift of God in their own culture, the Church manifests its catholicity and displays the beauty of this pluriform face. The image that best represents the Church is not an immobile sphere with a static center, but a polyhedron which reflects the convergence of all its parts, each of which preserves its distinctiveness. (*EG 236; ER 1,2. 12,3).
12. Consumerism, narcissism, and individualism are expressions of a dominant culture that does not always understand someone who renounces a comfortable and self-sufficient life or builds relationships of inclusive intimacy not centered exclusively on the biological-genital dimension (*VC 87). Religious life that is attentive and sensitive to the modes of expression of the culture in which it finds itself is always a fertile life, able to propose alternative ways of sharing work and resources (poverty), of loving and being loved (chastity), and participating in projects developed in common (obedience)(*NewWine 40).

⁵⁴ Cf. J. P. MEIER, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, vol. 3, *Companions and Competitors*. New Haven: University Press, Yale 2001.

5. “Let the brothers make nothing their own, neither house, nor place, nor anything at all.” (*LR 6, 1)

13. The Franciscan movement played a leading role in the transformation of society from the feudal to the bourgeois model, and took a critical and active part in the construction of a more free and fraternal society, with equal rights for all. The meeting of the sultan Al-Kamil and St. Francis reminds us that dialogue and encounter, if authentic, are able to overcome all walls and frontiers, interior or exterior, that impede the culture of peace. The Rule insists on the importance of the relational dimension that lets one see the other as brother: “[let them]not engage in arguments or disputes but to be subject to every human creature for God’s sake and acknowledge that they are Christians.” (*ER, 16,6)
14. To live *without anything of one’s own* (*LR 1: 2) and to have recourse to the *table of the Lord* (*Test 22) – which is the same thing - not possessing anything (expropriation) and accepting freely what is given (mendicancy). These essential elements for understanding Franciscan poverty also make it possible to live interculturality. To yield ownership of our own thoughts and desires makes it possible to encounter other ways of thinking. The mysticism of Franciscan itinerancy, moving from one cultural environment to another and learning to let oneself be taught, is made up of renunciation and freedom, of lightness and sobriety, of commitment and openness⁵⁵.

VI. The Capuchins and the continual return to St. Francis

15. Memory, tradition, history, transmission, symbols, dreams, and promises make up the soul and language of Capuchin culture. We share a vision of the world that expresses itself through material elements, styles of relationship and symbolic aspects that make us different and help us to keep our identity alive: the desire to return to St. Francis, simplicity and poverty, a way of sharing what we have together with the common use of things, the practice of authority and power, the manner in which we live among the people, our habit and simple clothing, the location and basic nature of our buildings, the simple means of transportation we use, our healthy relationship with the communications media and new technologies, etc.⁵⁶ Our Capuchin saints are the best expressions of our identity⁵⁷. It becomes a challenge, which grows more urgent with every passing day, to develop greater sensitivity to models of cultural sanctity.
16. Capuchin culture in the present is marked by the different cultures that make it possible and condition it in various ways. The transmission of the essential and common elements from one culture to another demands a good knowledge of both local and Capuchin culture⁵⁸. Only what is loved and lived with passion is transmitted. Not all values are understood in the same way in all cultures. For this reason, in order to ensure the transmission of the charism and the sense of belonging to one single Order, our styles of presence have as their starting point and goal the life of evangelical brotherhood.

⁵⁵ Cf. L.C. SUSIN, *Vida religiosa consagrada em processo de transformação*, Paulinas, São Paulo 2015.

⁵⁶ Cf. G. POZZI, *Devota sobrietà. L’identità cappuccina e i suoi simboli*, EDB, Bologna 2018.

⁵⁷ Cf. C. CARGNONI, *Sulle orme dei santi. Il santorale cappuccino: santi, beati, venerabili, servi di Dio*, Istituto Storico dei Cappuccini, Roma 2000.

⁵⁸ Cf. L. IRIARTE, *Fisonomía espiritual de los capuchinos. Rasgos fundamentales de su espiritualidad*, in *Estudios Franciscanos* 79 (1978) 267-292.

17. Reflection on inter-culturality has been and remains one of our greatest challenges. In PCO III on *Missionary Life and Activity* (Matli, Switzerland 1978), in PCO V on *Our Prophetic Presence in the World* (Garibaldi, Brazil 1987), in the Lublin assembly on the theme of *Capuchin Identity and Culture* (Lublin, Poland 1992)⁵⁹ and in the international meeting on *Evangelical Brotherhood in a Multi-ethnic World* (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia 2004)⁶⁰. we find guidelines for reflection and practical suggestions to help us discover new aspects of our identity that are present in different cultures.
18. The establishment of inter-cultural fraternities demands discernment and careful accompaniment; it is not enough to put friars from different cultures under the same roof. Certain personal aptitudes and a robust spirituality are necessary to live an inter-cultural fraternal life. These prerequisites for living in an inter-cultural fraternity demand special formation that is good and solid⁶¹.

II. From the *Ratio Formationis Generalis* to the *Ratio Formationis Localis*: Getting started

19. In the drafting of Formation projects and programmes, certain rules and principles will need to be followed, albeit with some flexibility, to help us to share the successes and limitations in the implementation of the *Ratio Formationis*.
20. The Capuchin culture is able to think, feel and dialogue with other cultures and to be respectful of various ways of expressing emotions and feelings, the perception of time and space, aesthetics, gastronomy, hygiene, organizational forms and other social and ethnic values.

1. Methodology

21. The process of intercultural formation takes as its starting point the spirituality of *kenosis*, which requires that differences are recognized and respected; it calls for listening and dialogue, openness and interaction with other cultures.
22. There must be a clear and critical awareness of the non-negotiable charismatic values that are to be communicated to each culture.
23. On the one hand, care must be taken to make sure that the contents and experiences of initiation are introduced gradually. On the other hand, all the dimensions are integrated within a charismatic perspective, while specifying the emphasis given to these dimensions at each stage of formation.

2. Key roles

24. The formation secretariat in each circumscription is responsible for adapting the general principles of the RF to its own situation, and for reflecting upon, reviewing and evaluating the projects of the various formation houses.

⁵⁹ *Analecta Ordinis Fratrum Minorum Capuccinorum* 108 (1992) 401-614.

⁶⁰ *Analecta Ordinis Fratrum Minorum Capuccinorum* 120 (2004) 1095-1101.

⁶¹ Cf. P. MARTINELLI, *Interculturalità e formazione alla vita consacrata*, en UNIONE SUPERIORI GENERALI, 73^o conventus semestralis. *Nella storia verso il futuro. Cambiamenti geografici culturali nella vita consacrata. Sfide e prospettive*, Litos 2009, 77-105.

25. Every brother and every formation fraternity must be familiar with the formation plan of the circumscription or conference. and actively participate in its preparation and revision. The primary responsibility for encouraging, preparing and implementing the formation programme rests with the Provincial Minister or Custos with his Council.
26. The General Minister and his Council, through the General Secretariat for Formation and the International Formation Council, have the task of assessing and approving the formation programmes and certifying that they are in line with the general principles of the RF.

3. Contents

27. The contents of formation are not transmitted in abstract ways, but are mediated by cultural categories that enable them to be understood, as well as by appropriate structures that create meaningful experiences. Images and experiences of God, Christ, the human being, the Church, the world, society, St. Francis and St. Clare, shape our personal and communal vision of spiritual life and the world. Creative fidelity requires that these images and experiences are periodically reviewed at a personal and community level from a cultural point of view.
28. The charismatic values presented in the RF can be integrated in different ways and in varying degrees, by the principle of relationship. Here below, we indicate our values that must be present in every culture.

A. The centrality of fraternal life

- The size of the fraternity, of the formation team and the number of brothers being formed
- The equality of all the brothers, regardless of their choice for the lay or clerical state
- Fraternal ways of relating and exercising the service of authority

B. Contemplative life and prayer

- Times of personal, communal and liturgical prayer
- Formation in the capacity for silence, meditation and listening to God and the world
- Centrality of biblical spirituality: the presence of the Word of God in prayer

C. Life in Minority

- Humble acceptance of the personal limitations of the brothers in fraternal relationships
- The principle of basic simplicity: having the minimum necessary, not the maximum allowed
- Formation houses located in poor areas that facilitate contact with ordinary people

D. Mission

- Guided pastoral experiences, conducted together with other brothers, must be expressions of the whole fraternity, avoiding individualism
- Mission is born of a close, affective relationship with the Master, lived in fraternity, avoiding attention-seeking and pastoral narcissism
- Pastoral activities must be in line with our vocation as minors, and train us to be willing to go where no one else wants to go.

29. Guidance - accompaniment

- Define the areas where guidance/accompaniment is needed, and distinguish between accompaniment, spiritual direction, confession and psychological counselling. Fundamentally, formation is concerned with personal growth and the understanding of our charism
- It is the fraternity that provides guidance in the charism, though we cannot forget that the quality of that guidance will depend on the specific training that the formators have received
- In certain cultures the world of relationships is especially complex. Values such as respect and tradition should not become obstacles to the trust and sincerity necessary for effective accompaniment.

30. Discernment

- In addition to the principles for discernment provided by the Church and the Order, each culture must incorporate its own criteria, especially concerning vocational discernment and motivation
- When applying the criteria for discernment, it is essential to have a love for and knowledge of both the local and Capuchin culture
- Charismatic discernment is called for not only with regard to the contents, but also to the methods and structures of formation

31. The Training of Formators

- Formators should be able to work as a team, especially in the areas of accompaniment and discernment
- They should have a solid formation in the areas of theology, religious life and Franciscanism
- They should have experience in the area of human formation: techniques and strategies for discernment and human-spiritual guidance.

32. Collaboration (between circumscriptions and Conferences)

- Recognize the tension between the identity and sense of belonging enjoyed by the circumscriptions and the new structures of collaboration in the Order.
- Ensure that the collaboration process is the result of the reflection and participation of all interested parties.
- Accompany and assess processes of collaboration with brothers and organizations that do not belong to the collaborating circumscriptions.

4. Time Frame

33. To implement the RF effectively, a protocol must be drawn up providing opportunities for the necessary formation, facilitation, guidance and evaluation. The primary responsibility for enacting this protocol over the next two years rests with the General Secretariat for Formation, the members of the International Formation Council and the formation delegates of the circumscriptions.

Appendix II

“Where there is charity and wisdom, there is neither fear nor ignorance.” (Adm 27, 1)

“While engaged in studies, therefore, let the brothers develop their hearts and minds in such a way that, in keeping with the intention of Saint Francis, they grow in their vocation. In fact, formation for any type of work is an integral part of our religious life” (Const 38, 5).

I. Ratio Studiorum

I. Preliminary considerations

1. Life is an unending process of formation. The heart of study according to our charism is the desire to learn and the will to transform what is learned into service. Franciscan study is a way of understanding life. It has a sturdy past which is full of valid insights for the present and the future, and is furnished with its own contents and methodologies.
2. Ways of learning are in constant transformation. The generalized access to new technologies offers us parameters of understanding, possibilities of relating, new ways of transmitting our values, rooted in the tradition of Franciscan thought. By strengthening intellectual formation in the Order we will be able to be more effectively responsive to the challenges of the future.
3. Our *Ratio Studiorum* is geared towards wisdom, born of experience. ~~has a sapiential character.~~ The ultimate goal of study is life, real life; study means to steer one's life in the direction of seeking the good. The person is one who both learns and teaches. Reflection and study are fundamental for whoever wishes to learn to live with goodness as both their starting point and final destination.

II. Paradigm shifts in the field of studies

4. The traditional system of teaching has long been based on the understanding and repetition of the teacher's ideas; the best student was the one who most accurately repeated what he had read and heard. This teaching method has given way to other systems that give greater weight to participation, creativity, critical ability, and collaboration among students.
5. The following are some of the positive characteristics of the *Bologna Process*⁶², which all the study centers of our Order must gradually make their own. It aims:

⁶² The *Bologna Declaration* is an education agreement signed in 1999 by the greater part of European governments, joined also by the Holy See in 2003. The Congregation for Catholic Education, through AVEPRO (Agency of the Holy See for the Evaluation and Promotion of the Quality of Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties: www.avepro.glauco.it) proposes the development of a culture of quality with academic institutions directly dependent on the Holy See. The quality of study program must be considered an intrinsic and necessary value of a university).

- To introduce more active teaching methods depending on the contents, skills and abilities that the student needs to acquire in order to complete his academic-formative journey.
- To renew academic programs, structures, and evaluation systems.
- To foster both personalized accompaniment and group work-
- To establish channels for the communication of knowledge, promoting opportunities for joint reflection and sharing of research findings.
- To promote the mobility of students and teachers.
- To promote teamwork among teachers from various departments.
- To implement different systems of quality assurance and establish an academic memory bank that reflects the work of teachers and publications.
- To introduce standard recognition of degrees and credits (ECTS – *European Credit Transfer System*).

6. The Church; in the Apostolic Exhortation *Veritatis gaudium* (VG) on ecclesiastical universities and faculties, proposes:

- A unified vision of the world that overcomes the fragmentation of knowledge.
- An integrated, relational, anthropological vision with persons at the center, offering alternatives to competitive individualism.
- An integrated, interdisciplinary understanding of knowledge that challenges utilitarianism and pragmatism.

7. Universities are not deposits of useful knowledge to be transmitted by professors to students, but rather, *cultural laboratories* meant to transform situations by creating and trying out new ideas and projects. This paradigm shift must be guided by four fundamental principles (VG 1-6):

- **Contemplation**, which brings us spiritually, intellectually and existentially into the heart of the *kerygma* and allows us to be both bold and faithful, even in difficult existential and pastoral situations;
- **Dialogue**, which requires communion and communication in order to create an authentic culture of encounter;
- An **inter-disciplinary** approach as an intellectual principle, reflecting the unity of knowledge in its diversity and with respect for its many expressions;
- **networking** of the different ecclesiastical institutions at the international level.

III. Jesus, the Teacher

8. Truth is not an abstract idea but a concrete person: Jesus the Word of God, who makes His life into a teaching. Jesus observes the realities around Him and then, beginning with silence and solitude, contemplates with His heart what He has seen with his own eyes. From contemplation comes the will and the decision to transform situations by announcing the values of the Kingdom: love, goodness, truth, justice, freedom, and reconciliation (*Mt 5: 3-12).

9. Jesus chooses his disciples and, together with them, forms a community in which lessons are taught and learned through the sharing of experiences in brotherhood, in a deeply personal way. (*Lk 6: 12-16). His style is itinerant and open to men and women, His method one of dialogue and rooted in real life. In this way He helps the people He encounters on the way to integrate their abilities and their limitations, always offering horizons of growth.
10. Jesus' teaching spreads like concentric circles: the Twelve (*Mt 10: 1-20), the seventy-two (*Lk 10: 1-12), the multitude (*Lk 5:3), and still others besides. Thanks to the creative vitality of the Spirit, the Christian communities pray, reflect, proclaim the good news, take care of the poor and the sick keep the presence of Jesus alive in history and in society.

IV. Study in the Franciscan tradition

11. St. Francis, in his short letter to St. Anthony, offers a valuable frame in which to place study in terms of our charism: the spirit of prayer and devotion (*LtAnt). The fruits of study, like those of prayer, must be made available to the brothers and used in the building of a more fraternal and just society.
12. *Paris has destroyed Assisi*: With this phrase. Jacopone da Todi underlined how often study had been seen as the enemy of humility⁶³. At the same time one finds accounts that tell of the poor and simple life of the friars who first arrived in Paris. Their way of life prompted the interest of various masters in the university who then joined the Order, and transferred their academic chairs to the peripheries where our friaries were situated⁶⁴.
13. The *Greccio Letter* (*L3C 1, 1-14) which precedes the hagiographical account of the *Legend of the Three Companions*, all the way to the *Summa Fratris Alexandri*, a collective work of theological thought and point of reference for Franciscan thought, clearly testifies to the fact that the Franciscan charism was predisposed to shared intellectual work. Humility, the evangelical virtue *par excellence* in our spirituality, continues to be the foundation of fraternal life and intellectual work in common. In this sense, the presence of the first friars on the outskirts of Paris, living among the simple people and experiencing the problems of daily life, stamped a distinctive character on the Franciscan way of thinking⁶⁵.
14. From its beginnings, even the Capuchin reform lived through the tension between the virtue of humility and the task of study. Nevertheless, already in chapter IX of the Constitutions of Saint Euphemia (1536) we find the essential outlines of a new vision of study with a strong Christocentric focus, sapiential and geared to preaching, with contemplation of the life of Christ, the mirror of humility and poverty, as its life blood.⁶⁶

⁶³ JACOPONE DA TODI, *Le poesie spirituali del B. Jacopone da Todi, con le scolie e annotatione di Fra Francesco Tessati da Lugnano* 1.1 Sat 10 (Venetis 1617), 431.

⁶⁴ THOMAS OF ECCLESTON, *De Adventu Fratrum Minorum in Angliam*, n. 31.

⁶⁵ Cf. M. BARTOLI, *Una università francescana? Riflessioni sull'incontro tra minorità evangelica e sapienza accademica*, in A. SCHMUCKI – L. BIANCHI (Ed.), *La ricerca della verità in un'apertura alla comunione. Spiritualità francescana e vita universitaria*, EDB, Roma 2018, 43-57.

⁶⁶ Cap IX, 121-125: books and libraries (121); devout and holy study (122); exhortation to students that they might study in poverty and humility (124); the prayer before lessons (125). Article one of these Constitutions provides that the four gospels are to be read three times a year, that is to say one each month; Cf. F. ELIZONDO, *Cristo y san Francisco en las Constituciones Capuchinas de 1536*, in *Laurentianum* 24 (1983) 76-115.

15. After the strong eremitical tendency of the early years, the demands of preaching moved the first Capuchins to establish study programmes. The objective was to preach to every creature the love of God as founded in the Scriptures, above all on the law of love contained in the Gospel. The Capuchin friars had a clear sense that the study of Scripture transforms our images of God and helps us to leave behind the spirituality of fear⁶⁷.

V. Study according to our charism

16. Intuition, relationship, experience, and affectivity are the pillars underpinning the vitality of Franciscan thought. Faced with a culture of *groupthink* (strongly marked by ideology)⁶⁸ and *weak thought* (fed by relativism)⁶⁹ our alternative is *humble thought*, which proposes without imposing itself and is rooted in the principles of goodness and the logic of free gift⁷⁰. What our charism offers is a culture of collaboration, agreement, encounter, and service to the poorest and the marginalized.

Thinking together: building an evangelical brotherhood

17. Study is not an isolated exercise of individuals competing to be the best. As brothers we study together within the framework of the brotherhood. Times for community reflection do not cancel out the richness of each one's individuality but protect us from self-sufficiency and individualism. We are called to combine study and life, to learn and to think, to decide and to evaluate, together. This must begin from the first stages of formation, so that we work effectively at the various levels of responsibility: provincial councils, formation groups, pastoral teams, academic councils, etc. Shared decision-making is the best means of ensuring that fraternity projects are implemented.⁷¹

Honing our listening: hearing the Word of God

18. Contemplation nourishes study and study feeds contemplation. The Franciscan school speaks of contemplative study, in other words, of the capacity to approach reality starting from the world of the affections. The intellectual and spiritual dimensions complete one another. Listening to the Word of God in fraternity makes us more sensitive and allows us to understand with the heart people's concerns, anxieties, and dreams. Study helps us to identify responses to real questions based on the Franciscan hermeneutic, which discovers the presence of the Trinitarian God in the Paschal Mystery, the beauty of creation and in the fabric of human relationships.

Opening our eyes: compassion for the suffering of the world

⁶⁷ Cf. F. ACCROCCA, *L'ombra di Ochino. I Cappuccini, la predicazione e lo studio agli inizi della nuova riforma* in F. ACCROCCA, *Francesco e i suoi frati. Dalle origini ai Cappuccini*, Roma 2017, 399-424.

⁶⁸ The original term is '*pensée unique*,' a pejorative expression for ideological conformism coined by French journalist Jean-François Kahn. – trans.

⁶⁹ A term **taken** from the critique of postmodernism by the Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo. – trans.

⁷⁰ Cf. O. TODISCO, *Il dono di essere. Sentieri inesplorati del medioevo francescano*, Messaggero, Padova 2006.

⁷¹ Cf. M. BARTOLI- J.B. FREYER- N. RICCARDI- A SCHMUCKI "*Tu sei il summo bene*". *Francesco di'Assisi e il bene comune*, Edizione Biblioteca Franciscana, Milano 2017.

19. The poor are our teachers. Study too helps us to change the way we see things. **Minority is not just a quality of life, but above all a vantage point – a way of observing reality – as we try to view the world as seen from the peripheries, with the eyes of the poor.** To respond to the social dimension of evangelization is an integral part of the mission of the Church, which opts to serve the least ones, those marginalized by society (*VG 37). Study makes us responsible and helps us to acquire the necessary competence to build peace, mediate conflicts, and fight against poverty and inequality.
20. From the perspective of the Franciscan charism, study – both in content and method – must meet our desire to contemplate, together as lesser brothers, the mystery of reality from the point of view of the poor and marginalized.

II. THE CURRICULUM: CORE SUBJECTS FOR EACH STAGE

21. **The following subjects must be incorporated into the formation programmes of every circumscription in a gradual, organic and systematic way.**
22. To reinforce our charismatic identity, all the brothers, whatever their choice of the lay or clerical state, must learn the basic contents of biblical, theological and Franciscan study, progressively distributed in the different stages of formation.
23. The Franciscan methodology is active, creative and participatory, and promotes the values of effort, discipline, perseverance and responsibility. The critical and shared reading of texts is strongly recommended to stimulate communal reflection. At the same time, annual planning should include evaluation sessions.

I. Ongoing Formation

24. Each brother, by continuously deepening his grasp of the proposed subjects, should arrive at a personal synthesis that is open to fraternal discussion.

1.1. Christian Formation

- The following of Jesus according to the different methods of reading the bible. Integration of the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith in everyday life
- Moral & Pastoral theology in the light of the signs of the times
- Individual and communal reflection on the challenges of evangelization and inculturation; application of the social doctrine of the Church
- Formation and accompaniment of those in charge of catechetics, apostolic movements and who collaborate in our apostolates
- Use of the media in new evangelization contexts
- shared responsibility for the common good and the administration of economic and cultural assets.

1. 2. Franciscan Formation

- Reading and critical interpretation of the life of St. Francis and St. Clare
- A personal synthesis of God, of Christ, of creation, humanity, the Church and society in the light of Franciscan thought

- Reading the Bible, the principles of law, art, literature and the economy from the Franciscan point of view
- Involving the laity and including them in our life and mission
- The spirit of Assisi and current challenges: the ecological crisis, building peace processes, the right to life, social inequalities and exclusion.

II. Postulancy

25. The postulant, through an *initial knowledge of the Charism, is introduced* to our Franciscan form of life.

2.1. Christian Formation

- The person of Jesus and his message
- Deeper study of the Creed and the sacraments
- presentation of a summary of Christian spirituality
- Foundations of Christian morality
- General principles of liturgy (without neglecting the rite itself)
- Introduction to the faith-filled reading of the Holy Scriptures
- Introduction to the meaning of prayer

2.2. Franciscan Formation

- The Religious Vocation in the Church.
- Introduction to the life of St. Francis & St. Clare
- Summary of the main elements of the Franciscan spirituality & charism
- Presentation of the Franciscan and Capuchin Family

III. The Novitiate

26. The novice must *know* the Christian and Franciscan life in the light of what the Constitutions prescribe

3.1. Christian Formation

- The figure of Jesus in the Gospels
- ✚ The various charisms and ministries in the Church
- Anthropological, biblical and theological aspects of vocation
- vocational psychology and guidance: motivations and attitudes
- Mary, Mother of believers and model of every disciple

3. 2. Formation for the Religious life

- Biblical foundations of religious life
- Brief history of the forms of religious life
- Essential elements of religious life from a theological perspective
- Theology of the Evangelical Counsels

- Introduction to the spiritual life

3.3. *Franciscan Formation*

- Life of St. Francis and St. Clare
- Writings of St. Francis and St. Clare
- Franciscan hagiographical sources
- Franciscan charism and spirituality
- Constitutions, Ordinances and Plenary Councils of the Order
- History of the Order and of the Circumscription
- Figures of holiness of the Order

3.4. *In-depth study of the Constitutions*

- The Constitutions of St Euphemia and their historical development
- The renewal of the Constitutions after Vatican Council II
- Interdisciplinary analysis of our Constitutions
- Inculturation of the Constitutions

3.5. *Introduction to Prayer and Liturgical life*

- Biblical and theological foundations of prayer
- Prayer and contemplation in Franciscan-Clarian Spirituality
- Personal prayer and community prayer
- Methods and techniques of prayer and meditation (praying the Word)
- The liturgical year, the Eucharist and the liturgy of the Hours
- Liturgical practice

IV. The Postnovitiate

27. The temporarily professed, in view of perpetual profession, should deepen and strengthen their knowledge of the Charism:

4.1. *Formation for Religious life*

- The personal vocation: origin and itinerary of one's own vocation
- Personal experience and assimilation of the project of Franciscan life
- Discipleship: a total configuration to Christ
- Religious vows, fraternity and mission
- The Order today: priorities and challenges arising out of our charism

4.2. Franciscan Formation

- *The Franciscan Question*
- Franciscan history
- The philosophical-theological thought of the Franciscan masters (St. Anthony, St. Bonaventure, Blessed John Duns Scotus, Roger Bacon, William of Ockham, Peter G. Olivi, St. Lawrence of Brindisi)
- Franciscanism in our time: justice, peace and the protection of creation; the missionary dimension and inculturation of the charism

V. Other elements to be addressed in the different stages

- Technical preparation: crafts, practical jobs and housework
- Economics and administration: budgets and balance sheets
- The capacity to analyze the real situation of the world
- Literature, music and plastic arts.
- Study of modern languages
- Audio-visual technology, computer science and communication sciences
- Knowledge of one's own culture

VI. The Cultural Facilities of the Order

28. The ultimate purpose of the cultural facilities is to preserve our spiritual and cultural patrimony and to update the agencies by which the values of our charism are passed on. From time to time, the impact of these agencies on the various areas of the Order's life should be assessed, especially on formation. The Historical Institute, the Central Library, the General Archives, the Franciscan Museum, the journals *Collectanea Franciscana* and *Laurentianum*, the Franciscan Institute of Spirituality and the International College, must all meet common objectives that are the fruit of joint planning.

6.1. The academic study centers of the Order

29. The academic study centers of the Order are privileged places of formation where the values of our charism are studied and transmitted, both in content and methodology. Collaboration between the different centers, especially those in the same conference, is to be promoted, both as regards teaching staff and academic courses. Collaboration with other academic centers of the Franciscan family is also desirable (*Const 39,3).

6.2. The International College 'San Lorenzo da Brindisi'

30. The purpose of the International College is to foster the spirit of brotherhood in the whole Order, to complete formation and promote Franciscan culture (*Const 43,7). Among the Order's intercultural centers, it offers a wealth of opportunities. Greater attention needs to be paid to human formation (the avoidance of individualism), to creating venues and facilities that strengthen interculturality (avoiding the trend toward multiculturalism), and finally to recovering the primary function of the College: to develop a basic Franciscan formation that is integrated in a balanced way into the academic programs, thereby improving the totality of formation in the charism.

6.3. Our house in Jerusalem

31. This fraternity runs a specific facility that enables us to put into practice the priority of the charism in our formation plans: the holy Gospel as form of life. It is a privileged place for ongoing formation, the training of formators, and the specialized formation of the friars dedicated to the study of the Bible. Jerusalem is also a place of interreligious dialogue, of contact with the cultures that gave birth to the Bible, and of profound knowledge of biblical spirituality.

6.4. The Historical Institute

32. Identity is a living, dynamic reality. Only those who care for and protect their collective memory are able to open up new paths into the future. The historical memory of the development of the Order goes beyond the borders of the European continent. Brothers must be trained and structures established, so that we are able to safeguard our rich historical memory in all the places where we are present. An ambitious and flexible research project is needed, in which the greatest number of Capuchin scholars are able to collaborate.

6.5. The Central Library

33. Thanks to the stories, personalities, and ideas preserved in our libraries, we are able to continue building our future. The habit of visiting and using our libraries is one of the best indicators for measuring the quality of reflection in our Order. The Central Library collects Capuchin-Franciscan bibliography, namely, every published work by Capuchin friars. At the same time it provides training and guidance for the other important libraries of the Order, reinforcing the process of communication among them.
34. All our fraternities (*OCG 2/20), especially the formation houses, must have a small library for common use, equipped with the more important publications in Franciscan studies, theology, and biblical scholarship. The creation of one's own digital library is not incompatible with the care of the fraternity library.

6.6. Archives

35. Every fraternity and each circumscription must have an archive and a friar in charge of it. All written records and material that reflects in a significant way the life of our charism and the apostolic activities of the brothers should be collected and preserved there, so that the history of our presence and activity is documented. (*Const 142,1).

6.7. The Museum

36. It is a place that promotes reflection on the beauty of our form of life as Capuchin lesser brothers. The art of forging a dialogue between what we have been and what we are today is a true source of learning as we continue to build our identity.

The Central Museum of the Order also has the function of providing training and guidance to the various museums in the circumscriptions. Musicians, architects, poets, painters, and sculptors have never been lacking in our Capuchin family... it remains for us to be familiar with the work of Capuchin artists and continue to foster an artistic sense among the friars (*Const 43, 8).

6.8. Channels for communication: The publications of the Order

37. Each conference should have at least one journal that promotes the publications of the brothers who are involved in scholarship and teaching. Such journals are invaluable tools at the service of ongoing and initial formation and assist us, through listening and reflection, to establish a fruitful dialogue between our Franciscan culture and the culture of our day.
38. Digital culture offers us the opportunity to create our own digital platforms for the creative communication of the newness of the Gospel. Good use of these platforms will help us give voice to the various formation and pastoral initiatives of our friars, to share ideas, and to strengthen mutual awareness and communion among the circumscriptions of the Order (*Const 156,7).

Appendix III

LET US LOVE WITH OUR WHOLE HEART (ER 23,69)

*“Since chastity flows from love for Christ, may we bind our hearts inseparably to Him Who chose us first and loved us to the ultimate gift of Himself, making it our concern to belong totally to Him”
(Const 170, 1).*

I, AFFECTIVE AND PSYCHO-SEXUAL MATURITY

1. Preliminary considerations

1. The structuring of human relationships and the understanding of different identities are undergoing profound transformations. Within contemporary culture, marked as it is by a strong hedonistic accent which tends to reduce sexuality to something solely biological, we must reaffirm that it is within the relational and affective world that maturity is built and achieved (*AL 151). Our formation plans, **based on a positive understanding of sexuality**, must overcome certain departures from this positive approach, such as, on the one hand, a spiritualizing tendency, whereby feelings are disembodied and our humanity is impoverished and falsified. On the other hand, we need to avoid the tendency to reduce the whole mystery of love to simple psychological theories that obscure **the beauty of the various gospel ways of living affectivity**.
2. Certain socio-cultural principles that regulate the sense of belonging to or exclusion from a group play a decisive role in the construction of the affective-sexual structure of the person. Each culture offers different ways of understanding and expressing our humanity. Sexual identity contributes to giving a response and meaning to experiences and needs, helping us to understand who we are. Nevertheless, while there are societies where matters related to sexuality are discussed openly, in others they continue to be taboo and, in not a few cases, subject to restrictive religious views.
3. Any attempt to define the psycho-affective profile of the Capuchin lesser brother has as its purpose to offer tools for **living religious consecration in a positive and authentic manner**. We are called to embrace a type of formation that helps us **to conform our sentiments to those of Christ (*Phil 2:5, VC 65)**. This means trusting in the transformative power of love; knowing how **to channel sexual energy with the strength of the Holy Spirit by appropriate means and tools, how to recognize and shape our emotions and impulses, and accept and understand the limitations and wounds of our style of life. Following Jesus, especially in his humanity, we find the key to interpret the mystery of our humanity (*Postn2004 5.2).**

2. God is a mystery of Love

4. **“Whoever fails to love does not know God; because God is love” (*1 Jn 4:8)**. The Divine Persons express the intimate identity of God, loving one another freely, transforming the love they receive into a gift without appropriating it to themselves. This expansiveness becomes actualized in the **incarnation**; through the Son, the world is filled with God. The Creator, in making himself a creature, transforms history into love. **The Trinity and the incarnation are the model and path that enable us to convert our possessive love into a love that is sacrificial (*DC 7).**

5. In Jesus God takes on our human nature, including the reality of our affectivity and sexuality. His affectivity is rooted in a deep intimacy with God the Father. While He lived among us, Jesus loved us with a human heart (*GS 22). The gospels illustrate the feelings and emotions of Jesus: his marvelling at creation, His compassion for the weak (*Mk 1:40-45), his preference for the least ones(*Mt 19:14), His respect for women (*Jn 4: 4-43), His passion for friendship (*Lk 10: 38-42), His fearlessness in sharing closely with His disciples. **His surrender to the plan of the Kingdom leads Jesus to choose a life of chastity, so that all his energies are focused on discovering and fulfilling the will of God.** On the Cross, the two planes of Jesus' heart meet and embrace: the vertical plane, which expresses his absolute love of God, and the horizontal, which transforms this unconditional love into commitment to each and every person in their actual circumstances.
6. In the **Eucharist, the sacrament of love and center of our life,** which makes present the gestures and words of Jesus, we find ourselves in His company and with those for whom He surrendered Himself. The mystical and prophetic dimension of the Lord's Supper consists precisely in this: that we **offer our lives, totally and freely (*DC 14).**
7. Through His gifts, **the Holy Spirit, the creative manifestation of God's love,** keeps the desire of God burning within us, making us free, authentic, responsible, and simple (*Post2004 5,3). The Spirit nourishes and strengthens both the desire to love and to be loved, and guides us to search for the good.

3. Capable of an ever-greater love

8. The rich and complex reality of our sexual nature manifests itself in the desire for intimacy and relationship, in the need for solitude and encounter, in the longing to be known completely and loved unconditionally, in the integration of the affections, and in experiencing our bodiliness.
9. **The gift of sexuality fosters our ability to love, to form relationships, to create moments of empathy, tenderness, and altruism** – experiences without which we cannot achieve spiritual maturity and a harmonious affective life. The integration of the many facets of sexuality into the complex fabric of life allows us to live out our vocation by embarking on a gradual journey of conversion: from a selfish and possessive love to another kind of love that is of altruism and renunciation, able to give itself for one's neighbour (*PCO IV, 52).
10. Greater attention to the psychosomatic dimension assists growth in self-esteem. **The body has its own language that we must learn and hear: pleasure, pain, loneliness, company, fear, anger, and joy are all part of our spiritual life. From this it follows that it is important to take care of our sensory capacities.** Touch is an essential element in the building of human relationships; it is thanks to touch that we are able to express ourselves⁷². Jesus himself came close to many people and healed them with his touch (*Mt 7:31-37). Francis, thanks to physical contact with the lepers, healed their wounds (*Test 1-3; L3C 11).

⁷² Cf. D. J. LINDEN, Touch. *The Science of the Sense that makes us Humans*, Penguin Books, London 2015.

11. Our memory preserves past memories of feelings: moments when we received healthy affection but also negative experiences that can leave wounds and complicate the harmonious integration of relationships in normal affective development. **There is a necessary distinction to be made between temporary problems, often linked to a growth process, that can be overcome with new experiences or relationships, and deeper difficulties that require life-long attention and vigilance if they are to be accepted and integrated.** Most people tend to repeat behaviour according to their own models, and the same thing happens with greater intensity in those with serious affective and emotional problems. In these cases they tend to repeat the negative emotional situations and self-harming behaviours that can provoke frustration, sadness, fear, anxiety, shame, and feelings of guilt and confusion. On the other hand, when such energy is channeled positively it opens up possibilities for a life of productivity and genuine relationships⁷³.
12. **The search for ever-greater love is a journey involving renunciations.** In the affective life of consecrated persons it is always necessary to accept and integrate a certain woundedness, seen always through a positive lens. It is necessary, at least, to enter into this integral spiritual process. After this, everyone can either reach a higher level, or else stop halfway⁷⁴. In addition to creativity, love requires discipline and purification. Without these, a fruitful spiritual life becomes impossible. There are affective spaces that only God can fill. The human heart is never fully satisfied⁷⁵.

4. Like Francis, lovers of the Creator and all creatures

13. Love transformed Francis into the image of the Beloved. It was a journey of transformation that lasted the whole of his life (*LM 13, 3). **His personal relationship with Jesus helped him to know his own narcissistic tendencies and to integrate his own limitations. Contemplation, the encounter with the lepers, penance, and the gradual mortification of his body and mind all formed part of the process of the purification of his motives.** Francis was able to integrate all the dimensions of his personality in a harmonious and creative way.⁷⁶
14. **A universal love for humanity and for the world, without excluding anything or anyone, is the most exalted sentiment that can lift the human being. Francis was in love with God and with creatures.** Recognition of and openness to their otherness allowed him to enter into affective and fraternal relationships with the whole of creation. Water is a sister, humble, useful and pure, as well as a Franciscan symbol of chastity, for in its free gift of self it embraces without appropriation and without limiting the freedom of the one embraced (*Cant 7).

⁷³ Cf. D. GOLEMAN- R.J. DAVIDSON, *The Science of Meditation. How to Change Your Brain, Mind and Body*, Penguin Life, London 2017; A. LOYD, *Beyond Will Power*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 2015, 51-167.

⁷⁴ Cf. A. MANENTI, *Comprendere e accompagnare la persona umana. Manuale teorico e pratico per il formatore psico-spirituale*, Edizioni Dehoniane, Bologna 2013.

⁷⁵ Cf. P. GAMBINI- M. O. LLANOS- G. M. ROGGIA (Ed.), *Formazione affettivo-sessuale. Itinerario per seminaristi e giovani consacrati e consacrate*, EDB, Roma 2017.

⁷⁶ Cf. S. FREUD, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Norton & Company, New York 2010, 237-238.

15. The fraternity is the place of our human and affective growth; therefore we entrust ourselves to it freely and with all our heart (*Const 21, 4). Growth in maturity is a fraternal journey, because it is only by growing together that we arrive at a true and harmonious integration of all the dimensions that make up our life. Brotherhood, where it is genuine, helps us to form quality relationships, to create moments of shared familiarity and to manage constructively our feelings and affections (*IV PCO 55; Const 172, 6).
16. Friendship is a gift that makes human and spiritual growth possible. Francis, friend and brother to all, was distinguished both for the richness of his feelings and desires and his ability to express them (*Const 173, 4). Authentic relationships generate opportunities for freedom and avoid situations of dependence and manipulation (*Const 173, 5). To share one's friendships with the brothers of the fraternity as well as contact with one's own family fosters the creation of a healthy atmosphere in our communities – without forgetting, however, that the fraternity is our family (*Const 173, 6).
17. Our collective imagination and the socio-political and religious organization of society are marked by masculine stereotypes (*NewWine 17) that prevent our recognition of the gift of femininity (*VC 58). At times, even our language and behaviour, reflecting our male-dominated, clerical universe, communicate feminine images that are not emotionally healthy. For Franciscan spirituality, the affectionate relationship between St. Francis and St. Clare is a model of true integration and reciprocal complementarity. Clare, as a faithful interpreter of the gospel intuitions together with Francis, embodies the feminine vision of our charism. From both we learn that our behaviour with everyone, including women, must distinguish itself by its respect and sense of justice, promoting the dignity and mission of women in society and in the Church (*Const 173, 4).

5. Some current difficulties and challenges

18. The paradox of individualism combined with an inability to live personal intimacy or manage one's own solitude creatively explains most of the difficulties we encounter in our affective life (*SAFC 18; PI 43). Affective emptiness tends to feed on extreme activism, the possession of unnecessary things, undue compensations, inappropriate relationships, or the excessive or improper use of the mass media (*Const 171, 3). The result is always the same: life becomes boring, consecration loses its meaning, and the person becomes emotionally and affectively unbalanced, to varying degrees of pathology.

19. Without losing sight of the complex interdisciplinary relation between the socio-cultural, psychological, and biological areas, sexual orientation must always be compatible with the form of life that we have freely chosen. The formation process must verify that each brother is mature in his relationships, and shows a healthy understanding and acceptance of his sexual identity (*Const 172, 3). Sexual identity is one of the aspects of the person that most distinguishes his individuality. Just as there is no generic way of loving, neither is there a generic sexual identity. The guidance given during formation must avoid the temptation to pigeon-hole the friars into pre-conceived sexual typologies (*Postn2004 5, 2).

It is necessary to distinguish between those who have a recognized and affirmed homosexual psycho-affective structure (experience and certain knowledge of one's own homosexual identity, accompanied in some cases by demands for institutional recognition) and those who, not being affectively mature, are unsure about their sexual orientation and are in search of their identity.

These, because of fear and inability to recognize their own feelings, often deny and do not share their confusion in the affective-sexual area with formators. In such a case the indications of the Church are to be followed⁷⁷. It is appropriate, however, to protect our environment from certain ideas and proposals marked by forms of recognition and ways of living relationships that generate tension and exclusion in the dynamics of fraternal life. In the near future we will also have to give greater attention to the question of 'gender ideology' in accordance with the indications of the Church⁷⁸.

20. The use of the media, and the new information and communication technologies is also something on which we put our own personal stamp. These media can help us to form enriching relationships and greatly enhance the flow of communications – or do exactly the opposite. Access to practically unlimited information in the absence of adequate formative principles has consequences for our ability to concentrate. Furthermore, the abuse of these media, above all the Internet, leads to a lack of care for fraternal relationships, a loss of motivation, and even depression in some cases. Urgent and special attention is necessary in cases of online pornography and gambling addiction.
21. The Order, in the 84th General Chapter, recognized that the abuse of minors and vulnerable adults is a crime against justice and a sin against chastity⁷⁹. Abuse has grave and enduring effects on a great many people and communities, especially on the victims themselves. The abuse of power, whether physical or psychological, has consequences beyond those that are visible and external. There are wounds also at the psychological and emotional levels; these are deeper and more difficult to care for and heal (*PCO VII, 22). Passive participation, complicit silence, and the acceptance of violence are equally grave. Each circumscription of the Order, observing civil law and with the explicit approval of the General Curia, must have its own norms for the prevention of abuse. We strongly recommend special days of formation on these norms so that they are known, accepted, and put into practice by all the brothers.
22. May the Virgin Mary, model of consecration and docility to the Father's plan, ever open to the creative love of the Holy Spirit, walk with us and help us to make the sentiments of her Son our own, so that our lives may be emotionally fruitful and be a prophetic and eschatological sign for the People of God.

⁷⁷ Congregation for Catholic Education, *Concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies in view of their Admission to the Seminary and to Holy Orders*, 2005. Congregation for the Clergy, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation*, 2016 (nn. 199-200). Cf. Pope Francis, *The Strength of Vocation. Consecrated Life Today*, Claretian Communication Foundation, Quezon City 2018.

⁷⁸ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, "Male and Female He created them". *Towards a Path of Dialogue on their Questions on Gender Theory in Education*, Vatican City 2019.

⁷⁹ *Analecta Ordinis Fratrum Minorum Capuccinorum* 128 (20012) 744-745.

II. FORMATION IN AFFECTIVITY

23. Affectivity and sexuality are pervasive realities in the dynamic process of formation. As a result, formation **must be based on a healthy understanding of the body**, paying attention to the advances made in human sciences.
24. Both human and intellectual formation are important in the process of integrating the values of our charism. Structured programmes must be established to reinforce the process of holistic growth, using practical methods and specific contents.
25. **To re-read Christian discipleship in the light of the *affective way* is a privileged place of formation.** What is *affective* is *effective*! As a result, formation must go ever deeper until it touches and transforms the heart. For St. Francis it was vitally important to taste and experience the sweetness and goodness of the love that is God, and to let everyone experience it.
26. The fraternity is the primary and original place where we grow into mature relationships, live our affectivity with spontaneity and normality. **It is everyone's responsibility to create healthy affective relationships** by which new ways of living the charism and experiencing faith become possible.
27. **A formator must have a solid spiritual and psychological formation that enables him to know, identify and interpret the various affective problems that may occur in our particular style of life, and provide practical guidance for resolving them.**

28. General Objectives:

- To be conscious of the way affectivity and sexuality function, as viewed from biological, psychological, socio-cultural and spiritual perspectives, in order to identify and manage our emotions, feelings and attitudes.
- To learn to live our sexuality and affectivity, converting the sexual impulses by God's grace into the energy of love, establishing responsible relationships and facing the real, concrete challenges of daily life, both within and outside our fraternities.
- To be aware of how our personal history hinders or enables a positive experience of religious consecration. Most conflicts and difficulties in relating to others are largely explained by unhealed negative experiences.

29. Youth work and Vocations Ministry

Specific Objective: **To identify the different ways of living affectivity and sexuality in the socio-cultural context from which the young person comes.**

- Learning to share and accept emotional experiences
- Becoming aware of affectivity and sexuality as resources
- Being comfortable with one's own body and able to organize one's time

30. Postulancy

Specific Objective: To open himself to an integrated understanding of his affectivity and sexuality: learning to understand and manage emotions, the postulant:

- Acquires greater knowledge and awareness of his sexual life-
- Learns to identify stress
- a required medical examination and psychological assessment of the candidate as well as a criminal records check.

31. Novitiate

Specific Objective: To learn to read and interpret his own psycho-affective history in the light of faith, the novice:

- Deepens his knowledge of himself and of his own vocational history
- Integrates sexual development into the vocational journey
- Learns to take care of himself, at the human, psychological and spiritual levels

32. Post-novitiate

Specific Objective: to learn to establish free and responsible relationships, based on the experience of religious consecration, the postnovice:

- Learns to listen and communicate in a deeper way
- Ascertains the ability to choose a life of chastity
- Learns to set limits on himself and others regarding relationships

33. Ongoing Formation

Specific Objective: the positive management of the normal difficulties that arise in the areas of affectivity and sexuality. The brothers:

- Acquire the ability to talk about pastoral experiences in depth
- Are able to manage affective conflicts inside and outside the fraternity
- Learn to reflect on the consequences of their behaviour.

34. Tools:

- Reading the Word of God as an opportunity for an affective and personal encounter with Christ
- Regular formational and spiritual guidance, including psychological help when necessary.
- Telling one's story, including its sexual dimension, as a personal history of salvation
- Fraternal formation meetings about the interior world and the emotions, clarifying doubts and fears
- Personal care: physical exercise, healthy eating habits, leisure time, personal hobbies, etc.

GLOSSARY

Accompaniment

The dynamics of the formative relationship. Through it, those who experience the call to religious life and those who, from within the relationship, walk with them, together embark on a journey of increasing authenticity. Desires are purified and embodied in reality; growth occurs.

Typical characteristics of Franciscan accompaniment are: the centrality of brotherhood, respect for the person, the ability to awaken profound questions, openness to others, as well as the indispensable role of affective prayer and relationship with the poor.

Affectivity

The area of the person that includes feelings, emotions, internal attitudes and relational skills. It is strongly marked by our past positive and negative experiences and disposes us to love and to care. In the affective world of the religious, the mature integration of psycho-sexual reality through a healthy network of relationships, the care of psychological and bodily health, the cultivation of friendship and the growth of the self-giving capacity which enables intimacy with the other, play a decisive role.

Anthropology

This refers to the self-knowledge of the human being, manifested in the various ways of understanding one's own life, relationships, worldview and experience of God. For Franciscan theology, the world is full of signs and images: the human being, as *imago* and *capax Dei*, is the sign that best illuminates the identity of the Creator and, at the same time, is the interpreter of the book of creation. The human being can only be understood on the basis of his becoming in time and in history: he is *homo viator*, man as a dynamic project whose ultimate goals are that which is right and good.

Beauty

The quality of God which Francis discovers and proclaims; in its presence he feels joy and admiration. This is how God is: self-giving by nature, He instils His beauty into creatures, in such a way that in them one can glimpse the beauty of the Creator. According to Franciscan theology, aesthetics and ethics merge in the category of the beautiful, giving rise to a way of being that is expressed through relationships.

Belonging

The conscious attitude of participation in a community through mutual relations, which provide identity and sustain affections, values and behaviours consistent with it. Belonging roots one's identity in a particular daily framework formed by the bonds of a human group in a given time and culture, with its benefits and limitations. The identity of a Capuchin Friar Minor complements an appropriate sense of belonging to the local, provincial and international fraternity, as well as to the particular and universal Church.

Bonum

A quality of God, which coincides with the mystery of His being. According to the theology of creation, God grants to creatures, and in particular the human creature, **the gift of original goodness** (and He saw that everything was very good, Gen 1:31), so that the gift of life always remains sustained by the present and active possibility of letting goodness be the guide of conduct. In Francis' experience and in Franciscan thought, *bonum* is the heart of the human vocation and the source that nourishes desire.

Book

An image that expresses the dynamics of revelation. In Franciscan thought there are three books where we find the language of God: Sacred Scripture, the inspired Word that contains the history of salvation; Creation, a beautiful and gratuitous gift that invites contemplation and care; the person of the Son, the eternal Word of the Father, revelation of the face of God, the definitive and total affirmation of His unconditional and free love.

Charism

A term used to describe the particular gift or gifts a person has received to make them grow and to place them at the service of others within the Church. In this sense, we speak of Francis of Assisi and his charism as the recipient and source of a living force that continues to be present today in the life of the Church.

Contemplation

A natural disposition, enabling the person to abandon himself totally to the encounter with God.

In the contemplative attitude, Francis discovers the amazing fact that God is God, and this gives rise to the need for thanksgiving and praise. By gazing steadily into the face of Christ the poor man, Francis sees his own true face, and the contemplation of the face of the poor allows him to incarnate the real features of Jesus in concrete ways. **In Franciscan prayer, contemplation moves affection, purifies desire, creates brotherhood and launches us into an encounter with the reality of the world.**

Culture

A set of distinctive features, spiritual and material, intellectual and emotional, that characterize a social group. It includes ways of life, fundamental human rights, value systems, art, traditions and religious beliefs. Culture provides elements for reflection so that we can express ourselves, become aware of ourselves, establish relationships, promote ethical behaviour, seek the meaning of life and create works that transcend us.

Desire

A constitutive dimension of human nature, expressing an original poverty that seeks to be filled.

Understood as expectation and as search, desire is the driving force of life. In the case of Francis, his life's journey coincides with the purification of his desires, from his dream of being a knight to the point when, with the gift of the stigmata, his life is totally conformed to the life of Jesus. In Franciscan spirituality, desire is a free gift of the Spirit feeding an insatiable hunger. In its highest degree, it consists in the identification of one's own project with the gospel project of Jesus.

Discernment

The tool we use to ask questions about the meaning of life. For Francis, discernment is identified with the Gospel, which invites us to live in a permanent state of searching, longing for the Spirit of the Lord, and helps us to direct our desires towards the good. In Franciscan spirituality, the original place of discernment is the brotherhood, where the freedom of each brother is protected in the creative practice of following Jesus, and where we are sustained to remain open before the Holy Spirit, whose presence purifies our judgements, our fundamental options and our relational world.

Following

Francis of Assisi speaks of "following" and not "imitating" Christ. Following is the action of setting out and walking in the footsteps of the Master. It starts with the free gift of the call and the free and radical response of the disciple. This action establishes a new, dynamic and decisive relationship with Jesus that requires a conversion of the way of thinking, feeling and acting, assuming the fundamental attitudes of the Master and reorganizing existence from a new hierarchy of values that embraces the relational dimension at its four levels: with oneself, with God, with others and with creation.

Following in Christ's footsteps is a process and a journey that leads the disciple to conform his life to Christ's. It is the fullness of human life and of the penitential life.

Freedom

A dynamic human attitude, which unfolds through personal options and relationships. In Franciscan thought, freedom is the process of transformation from egocentric relationships to being centred on the good of others, learning to love others for what they are and for the goodness present in them. Freedom brings into play maturity, autonomy and, ultimately, happiness.

Gospel

The book that contains the treasure of the life of Jesus. For Francis, it becomes a compass that guides his life at every step. From the Gospel comes the desire to mould his life to the form of life of Jesus: to look, to listen, to feel and to desire like Him. The unadorned directness of the Gospel is the guide for those who, like Francis, want to be lesser brothers. Therefore, every document or legal provision, if it is Franciscan, and everything we do to inspire our life according to our charism, must exude a strongly evangelical flavor and content.

External and internal forum

The current code divides the exercise of the authority of governance into the external and internal forums (Cân. 130).

In the external forum, the church exercises the power of governance to pursue the common public good and orders the social relations of the faithful. The power of governance in the external forum is exercised for the juridical effects of public order; thus, all that concerns discipline, order and the social relations of the faithful among themselves and with the different authorities, pertains to the external forum.

The internal forum is the area of the innermost conscience that the candidate or the person being formed share, freely and consciously, with their spiritual companion, not so that the latter decides on their vocation but aiming for a better understanding of what God is asking of them. Everything that pertains to the inner conscience and is closely related to one's relationship with God, belongs to the internal forum.

Identity

The set of life experiences and personal encounters that remain alive in our emotional memory and are capable of promoting or blocking our growth processes. It is a dynamic and positive concept inviting us to choose how we wish to build our lives taking personal responsibility, and helps us, in the end, to be what we want to be.

Initiation

In cultural anthropology, the set of rituals, instructions and trials necessary in order to join a group. At the beginning of Christianity, the term referred to the process that led a pagan to Christianity. It was characterized by four phases: 1) announcement of the desire to join; 2) experiential catechesis; 3) trials and rites culminating in the initial sacraments; 4) mystagogic catechesis. Since the revision of 1968, our Constitutions have insisted that initial formation is an initiation, aimed at enabling those who feel the call to our lives to acquire the specific values of the Capuchin charism.

Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC)

This expression points to the connection between each part with the other parts that form the totality of creation, all of which originate from the same source: God. Hence the need for a style of relationship based on equity (justice), harmony (peace) and care of the world (integrity of creation). The JPIC Office of the Capuchin General Curia, according to PCO 5 n. 97, is called to be the voice of the poor for the whole Order and to collaborate with ecclesiastical, Franciscan and civil bodies in the area of justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

Relationship

The intimate connection that is established between two realities, depending on the intensity, frequency and depth of the interaction. In Franciscan theology, it expresses above all a category of God's being, of His desire and His capacity to enter into relationship with all creatures and, above all, with human beings. From the anthropological point of view, relationship is the possibility of responding freely and generously to God's offer of love and the way of bonding one's own life to the life of others.

Symbol

An image with driving force, capable of revealing to man, through the immensity of the cosmos, the depth of his own being. This dynamism reveals and makes present his own meaning, which enables him to understand reality in a way that speaks to human affectivity and the desire for life. Thanks to his symbolic way of looking at reality, St. Francis was able to unite manifestations of the divine in the material world with the infinity of transcendence. His language, too, is symbolic, full of dreams, poetry, music and images, which are powerful and transforming.