



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE 202nd ORDINARY GENERAL CHAPTER
OF THE FRIARS MINOR CONVENTUAL**

*Clementine Hall
Monday, 17 June 2019*

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers!

I offer a cordial welcome to you, members of the General Chapter of your Order. I thank the new Minister General, Friar Carlos Trovarelli. My congratulations go to him and to the Definitors General for the trust their brothers have placed in them.

Recently the Holy See approved your Constitutions, renewed at the Extraordinary General Chapter held last summer. In order to incorporate this revision, you have now discussed and approved the new General Statutes which touch upon the essential elements of your fraternal and missionary life, such as formation, interculturality, sharing and transparency in economic management. This task is laborious, but is effort well spent! Indeed, the Constitutions are the necessary instrument to safeguard the charismatic patrimony of an Institute and ensure its future transmission. They express the concrete way of following Christ proposed by the Gospel, the absolute rule of life for all consecrated people and particularly for the followers of Saint Francis of Assisi, who, in the profession, commit themselves to “live according to the form of the holy Gospel” (cf. Saint Francis, *Testament*, 14). I am quite struck by that advice Francis gave to the brothers: “Preach the Gospel: if necessary, also with words”: it is a way of life. If every consecrated life “is born from hearing the Word of God and embracing the Gospel as its norm of life” (Synod of Bishops on the Word of God, *Propositio* 24), the Franciscan life in all its manifestations is born from hearing the holy Gospel, as the *Poverello* shows us in the Portiuncula when, after hearing the

story of the following, he exclaims: “This is what I wish, this is what I am seeking, this I long with all my inmost heart to do” (Thomas of Celano, *The First Life of Saint Francis*, ix, 22).

The Gospel is for you, dear brothers, “rule and life” (Saint Francis, *Regula Bullata*, i, 1) and your mission is none other than to be a living Gospel, “a living ‘exegesis’ of God’s word”, as [Benedict XVI](#) said (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, 83). The Gospel must be your *vademecum*. Always listen to it carefully; pray with it; and after the example of Mary, “Virgin made Church” (cf. Saint Francis, *Greeting to the Blessed Virgin Mary*, 1), meditate assiduously on it, so that, by assimilating it, you may conform your life to the life of Christ.

This way of following is characterized, first and foremost, by *fraternity*, which Francis considered a gift: “The Lord gave me some brothers” (*Testament*, 14). Fraternity is a gift to be received with gratitude. It is a reality that is always ‘on the move’, under construction, and thus asks for everyone’s contribution, without anyone excluding himself or being excluded; in which there are no ‘consumers’ but only builders (cf. *General Constitution ofm Conv.*, 55, 5). A reality in which one can live out paths of continual apprenticeship, of openness to the other, of mutual interchange; a welcoming reality, ready and willing to accompany; a reality in which it is possible to pause from everyday life, in order to cultivate silence and the contemplative gaze and thus recognize God’s influence in it; a reality in which you all consider yourselves brothers, both the ministers and the other members of the fraternity; an experience in which each one is called to love and nurture his brother, as a mother loves and nurtures her own child (cf. Saint Francis, *Regula non Bullata*, ix, 11). I encourage you to nurture your fraternity with the *spirit of holy prayer and devotion* “which all other temporal things should serve” (id.; *Regula Bullata*, v, 2). In this way, your fraternal life in community becomes a form of prophecy in the Church and in the world; and it becomes a school of communion, to be exercised always, following Francis’ example, in a relationship of love and obedience with the Pastors.

Another feature of your way of life is *minority*. I really like this: thinking about your *minority*. This is a difficult choice because it runs counter to worldly logic, which seeks success at any cost, wishes to take first place, to be considered as lords. Francis asks you to be minors, following the example of Jesus, who came not to be served but to serve (cf. Mt 20:27-28) and who tells us: “whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all” (Mk 10:43-44). May this be your only ambition: to be servants, to serve one another. Lived in this way, your existence will be a prophecy in this world where the ambition of power is a great temptation.

May you preach *peace*. The Franciscan greeting that distinguishes you is “Peace and good unto you!”, “*Shalom we tob*” in Hebrew, which we can best translate as *reconciliation*: reconciliation with oneself, with God, with others and with creatures, that is, to live in harmony: peace which brings you harmony. It is a reconciliation that moves in concentric circles, starting from the heart and extending to the universe — but in reality it starts from the heart of God, from the heart of Christ.

Reconciliation is the prelude to the peace that Jesus left us (cf. Jn 14:27). A peace that is not the absence of problems, but which comes with God's presence within us, and which manifests itself in all that we are, do and say. May you be heralds of peace, first and foremost through life and then through words. May you be instruments of forgiveness and mercy at all times. May your communities be places where mercy is exercised, as Saint Francis asks you in his *Letter to a Minister*: "And by this I wish to know if you love the Lord God and me, his servant and yours if you have acted in this manner: that is, there should not be any brother in the world who has sinned, however much he may have possibly sinned, who, after he has looked into your eyes, would go away without having received your mercy, if he is looking for mercy. And if he were not to seek mercy, you should ask him if he wants mercy. And if he should sin thereafter a thousand times before your very eyes, love him more than me so that you may draw him back to the Lord. Always be merciful to brothers such as these" (9-11). There is no peace without reconciliation, without forgiveness, without mercy. Only one who has a reconciled heart can be a 'minister' of mercy, a builder of peace.

To do all this, an appropriate *formation* is necessary. A formative path that favours in brothers an ever fuller conformity to Christ; an integral formation, which involves all the dimensions of the person; a personalized and ongoing formation, as it is a lifelong itinerary; a formation of the heart, which changes our way of thinking, feeling and behaving; a formation in faithfulness, well aware that today we are living in a transient culture, that 'forever' is very difficult and definitive choices are not in fashion. In this context, there is a need for solid formators, experts in listening and in the roads that lead to God, capable of accompanying others on this journey (cf. [Saint John Paul II](#), Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata*, 65-66); formators who are skilled in discernment and accompaniment. Only in this way can we contain, at least in part, the haemorrhage of abandonment that besets the priestly and consecrated life.

Dear brothers, I wholeheartedly impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and to all the Communities of your Order. I pray for you. And it also comforts me that the Minister General said you will pray for me. Thank you!