

A BREATH OF LIFE

ROME, 21 JULY 2022

PROT. N. 00514/22

TO ALL THE FRIARS OF THE AMERICAS TO ALL THE FRIARS OF THE ORDER

Dear Brothers,

Last May, we experienced an important moment in the life and animation of the Order in the Americas. After a long period of preparation, all the ministers were finally able to come together and meet in São Pedro, São Paulo, Brazil, with most of the General Council present.

And these were truly days of chapter, of fraternity, of listening to the Spirit, of enthusiasm, of openness to the future and the hope that comes from God. I heartily thank the Lord who, without a doubt, guided this work, and over time brought about the involvement of almost all the friars in the Americas, effecting – almost spontaneously – a powerful re-emergence of the values we want more and more to embrace, and which must serve as the guiding principle for rekindling the flame of our charism.

Now I wish to send you the finalized *Document of the Capuchin Pan-American Meeting*, which has been duly revised and edited. There you will find a lot of material, including some instances of repetition which we felt it best not to eliminate since they better expressed the genuineness of the work done in groups. Upon reading it, one can sense the enthusiastic, decidedly visionary spirit of authenticity for the future of our life, newly remodeled on the values that are the essence of our charism. It brings us back to reflections on mission, collaboration, formation and structures, and identifies the paths we'd like to take in order to be more authentic Capuchins.

I want to take the opportunity in this writing to thank the Councilors who attentively accompanied all the preparations, as well as the different commissions, who with great dedication and effectiveness were able to involve



all the friars in this dynamic enterprise of shared responsibility and life. And I thank all the friars who have allowed themselves to become involved. I am sure that over time, there will be beneficial effects for the entire Order coming from the Americas.

But I also take this opportunity to invite other parts of the Order to take to heart this American encounter. Because what they experienced and gained from their efforts actually expresses the values that we all carry in our hearts, and which we all would like to see shared and realized more effectively. So, even if different ways and means are necessary due to different social and cultural

circumstances, why not try initiating something similar in other continents as well?

May the Lord, ever bounteous with His gifts, guide us all; and may he instill in everyone, through the intercession of our Father St. Francis, peace, confidence and courage.



BR. ROBERTO GENUIN
GENERAL MINISTER OFMCAP

FINAL DOCUMENT OF THE PAN-AMERICAN MEETING OF CAPUCHINS

San Pedro, Brazil May 1-8, 2022

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE MEETING

Br. Roberto Genuin, in his first circular letter of April 14, 2019, announced a Pan-American Meeting for all the major Superiors across the American continent. The intent of this conference was to develop principles for mutual help and proposals for possible changes in the structures of the circumscriptions since several of them—particularly in Spanish-speaking areas and some regions of North America—are suffering a strong decrease in the number of brothers. The four major themes chosen for reflection were: mission, formation, structures and collaboration.

Following this initial convocation, all the fraternities across the Americas met in a series of local Chapters in which they reflected: (i) on the history of our presence in the continent, in thanksgiving to God for so many gifts that he has bestowed upon the local churches through

our Order; (ii) on our dreams as Capuchins in these lands, expressing our ideals and hopes; (iii) contemplating the lived experience of our present and concrete situations and how we are responding [to the needs of the local churches] from the charismatic dimension of our life as Capuchins; (iv) and, finally, discussing our missionary life in the Americas.

While we were eagerly expecting the start of our Pan American Meeting, which was set to take place in 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic suddenly frustrated our plans. Thus, it was postponed to May 2021. Later, the decision was finally made to begin the Meeting on a virtual platform on May 3, 2021 as a series of smaller meetings, which would later culminate with the final *in-person* conference in May 2022. As it turned out, this time period when we could not meet in person providentially offered us the opportunity to reflect upon the four major themes in a deeper way with the help of all the brothers across the Americas.

There were five official sessions: the opening session and four work sessions—each dealing with one of the main themes of the conference: mission, formation, structures and collaboration. Additionally, virtual meetings were held for groups of brothers involved with different ministries, such as: (i) those who work with JPIC, (ii) those brothers who are in formation, (iii) brothers who are formators, (iv) brothers who are in pastoral work (i.e., pastoralists) and, finally, (v) the young brothers who made perpetual vows since 2010. In one way or another, all the brothers of the Americas were summoned to participate. In these meetings, brothers with expertise in different areas accompanied us by sharing their well-prepared reflections on these topics, and through break-out group sessions many new proposals and contributions came to life.

All these reflections, from the local chapters to the virtual meetings, were collected, systematized and elaborated upon so that the major superiors and the delegates could study them for 8 days during the face-to-face meeting in San Pedro (SP), Brazil.

In a joy-filled and fraternal conference that took place from May 1 to 8, 2022, presided over by the Minister General, Br. Roberto Genuin, Br. Bernardo Molina offered us a thought-provoking talk on our spirituality as it is found in the writings of Saint Francis, as a way of gratitude for past history; Br. Carlos Susin spoke about the challenges present today in our societies in the Americas; and our brother Cardinal Sean O'Malley gave us the opportunity to deepen our appreciation for our charism in the Church and reminded us of our need to be authentic Capuchins in order to look towards our future.

We present to you the following resolutions that were agreed upon by the Capuchins of the Americas, with the aim of rekindling the flame of our charism in this immense Continent. These simple and practical directives represent our

initial attempts in dealing with the challenges before us during these years of fraternal reflection. As such, these resolutions are open to new insights and developments that could take place in the future. Although these themes are often interconnected, we have maintained the thematic division—i.e., *Mission, Formation, Structures and Collaboration*—so that each Conference and Circumscription of our Order in the Americas can easily put them into practice.

MISSION

The brothers discussed the topic of Mission in break-out working groups based on native language. As a result of these discussions, each of the groups presented their proposals which were developed in light of our charism, structures, mission “ad gentes”, collaboration and JPIC. The brothers discussed new ways of living as missionaries. Faithfulness to our charism requires dedication and recognition of the centrality of our life of prayer, fraternity and minority as the roots and foundational pillars of being a Capuchin missionary. We cannot be missionaries if we do not live our charism. The brothers asked the question whether it is possible to be a missionary *without changing the way we are currently living right now*.

The brothers insisted that what the Constitutions say must be lived and followed. God stirs up the missionary vocation in the hearts of the brothers. Ministers cannot refuse if a brother asks to go to mission territory. Nonetheless, these same ministers must evaluate whether the brother is suitable for the missions (cf. Const 178). Thus, with regards to this topic, the following action items were agreed upon:

1. Life in each of the circumscriptions must have a missionary conversion. This must be a priority in Chapters, triennial plans, initial and ongoing formation, as well as retreats. Each Circumscription is to make

a clear choice for the values of our charism by establishing well-constituted fraternities and with an authentic service to the poor, so that that our ministerial commitments may be assumed by the fraternities (i.e., less individualistic), since this is what makes our life attractive.

2. There needs to be formation for the missions, including the *ad gentes* mission throughout each stage of formation, from vocational ministry to ongoing formation, integrating significant missionary experiences as part of the formation program.
3. Each friar in initial formation must have an intercultural experience, both within his own circumscription and outside of its borders. Therefore, we propose that the fraternities in the triple border and other San Lorenzo de Brindisi fraternities may be utilized as a formative and hands-on settings for the mission.
4. Each circumscription must have a mission. When this is not possible, they should have suitable brothers on missions outside their territory, even if their members are few.
5. Establish, care for and animate intercultural and inter-circumscription fraternities that, from our charism, carry out their service to the Church. These brothers must take into account the missions “*Ad gentes*”, using the appropriate means available. Every mission must be carried out as a fraternal project.
6. Promote and carry out pastoral exchanges between circumscriptions to strengthen our presence in some key places and services. This type of joint work promotes collaboration and solidarity between circumscriptions. For these reasons, the study of the languages spoken in the Americas must be encouraged.
7. At least one St. Lawrence of Brindisi international fraternity must be established in each conference. This fraternity must take into account the closeness to the poor, the indigenous and the immigrants. Additionally, this fraternity must be open to all the circumscriptions of the Americas.
8. A Mission Secretariat is to be established in each circumscription. Its role will be to form, support and motivate the missionary life of the brothers.
9. Strengthen existing missionary presences.
10. Establish a commission with members of the three Conferences to prepare a manual with general guidelines that express our charism and how we should exercise our pastoral service considering the dimension of JPIC, in the various areas: missions, parishes, sanctuaries, schools, hospitals, etc. media etc.

FORMATION

Formation is a constant challenge in the life of the Order, since there are many concerns surrounding this reality. We live in a world of constant change, and thus much vigilance and attention is required so that our charismatic values may be safeguarded and we do not lose our identity.

Continuous dialogue, personalized accompaniment, formation of formators, formation in collaboration, and formation so that we are all brothers and for the mission of the Order are all topics that need to be considered. Formation is largely responsible for recognizing the primacy of our Capuchin Franciscan charism, and emphasizing its importance, both in initial formation and in ongoing formation. Thus, with regards to this topic, the following action items were agreed upon:

11. Establish a commission, in the spirit of the call for collaboration raised by the Pan American meeting, to develop a formation program for formators, which could combine virtual and face-to-face conferences. At the same time, each conference is to establish and organize a *Schola Fratrum* as a space for the formation for formators, and for other groups of brothers, putting into practice the principles of the *Ratio Formationis*. Each circumscription is responsible for providing both instructors and students.
12. Strengthen the present fraternal collaboration among friars in formation and formators of all circumscriptions in initial formation.
13. Adopt and participate in the various formation initiatives for formators that already exist in the conferences. Also, promote and disseminate academic publications on Franciscanism and the Capuchin tradition in the Americas.
14. Offer the same formation program for all brothers. This means that all brother candidates, whether lay or clerics, must receive similar training in Franciscan "values" and the necessary training in theology. The brothers in initial formation will discern with their formators the type of formation that will allow them to serve the Order in a way that is consistent with their individual aspirations and talents. Therefore, it would be extremely important to establish strong fraternities in the houses of formation.
15. Continue forming all the friars to participate in the life of the Order [beyond the local circumscriptions]. Therefore, during initial formation we recommend that each brother be able to participate in multiple experiences in the Order, beyond his particular circumscription. The conferences should continue the discussion about collaboration in their programs and experiences.
16. Always keep in mind in the formation programs of each circumscription that we are a missionary Order. Therefore, we must be formed for dialogue, interculturality and inculturation.
17. Establish in each conference a commission to study and recommend interprovincial and intercultural formation opportunities; one concrete way would be to assign the international fraternities of the triple border as part of the missionary formation program of the post novitiate.
18. Establish, in each circumscription, programs of transition between initial formation and permanent formation with accompaniment for the friars in the first five years of perpetual vows.
19. Disseminate, promote and strengthen the Franciscan courses that we have in the Americas so that all the brothers can, at some point in their ongoing formation, participate in one of them. Therefore, it is necessary to form more brothers in the field of Franciscan spirituality.
20. Permit the local chapters to become spaces for ongoing formation to strengthen fraternal bonds and insist on the values of our life based on the *Ratio Formationis*. Promote a revitalization of our consecration.

STRUCTURES

Our current structures in the Americas are a legacy of our history as an "Order on Mission". These were necessary for the implantation of the Church and the Order in a new reality—as tools to establish ourselves in a fruitful and useful way in the different places of this great continent. However, today we find ourselves

in a historical and pastoral context that is very different from that of our Capuchin ancestors. The flame of our charism in the Americas needs a new impetus. What was important and necessary then, may now weigh us down, which is why it is necessary that we rethink these realities since we are an Order constant reform. Thus, with regards to this topic, the following action items were agreed upon:

21. Constantly renew, in light of our charism, our physical (i.e., buildings), institutional, formative and mental structures. Teamwork must be a reality present in all our formation for fraternal life.
22. Boldly review all our structures. Those that today do not adjust to our charism must be abandoned, so our efforts, and our brothers, will no longer be drained or burnt out. Discernment needs to happen so that we can commit to no longer have a presence that is not a well constituted fraternity. Where a ministry may make fraternal life impossible, consideration should be given to whether or not that ministry should remain.
23. Constitute fraternities of at least three brothers. Therefore, we must not continue with houses with only one or two brothers (cf. Const. 118,8)
24. Evaluate the current fraternities in each circumscription and, if necessary, look for new places where our charism can be lived better and where we are closest to the poor.
25. Establish in each circumscription some fraternity that is not attached to a parish so that there is at least one ministry that is not based on parish ministry.

COLLABORATION

The theme of collaboration gradually grew in the Order, beginning with an initial request for

collaboration on an economic level to a broader reflection on fraternal collaboration. In our time, there is a renewed desire to awaken the sense of fraternal collaboration, which was originally caused by the decrease in the number of brothers. But from within this call, which was the result of experiencing a need, sprang forth the breath of the Spirit that impels us to overcome barriers, such as provincialism and nationalism, which for a long time has distanced us from one another. Today we share a new vision of the world, of the Church, and of the Order that is not fragmented; rather, this vision strives for wholeness, thus challenging not only the friars, but the entire human race towards interdependence and care for the common home. Thus, with regards to this topic, the following action items were agreed upon:

26. Make it possible, in order to facilitate collaboration between the Circumscriptions and Conferences of the Americas, for each brother to learn a second language. All the circumscriptions in the Americas must offer other possibilities for further studies and specialization.
27. Allow the brothers who feel called to a pastoral-missionary experience outside their Circumscription, after evaluating their suitability, to have adequate preparation for the local reality to which they will be sent (cf. Const. 178)
28. Establish temporary experiences of pastoral exchange and formation between the circumscriptions, taking into account the particular needs of each fraternity, in order to strengthen our presence in the Americas and foster cooperation and solidarity, thus helping us to overcome provincialism.
29. Strengthen collaboration in formation programs through common projects and formation teams made up of brothers from the different circumscriptions.

30. Create a communications team at the continental level, through which the missionary work in the Americas can be made visible. This team must develop a communication project for the Americas.
31. The Pan American Meeting (EPAN) is the meeting that now assumes the tasks that were previously carried out by the ALAC, with the addition of the NAPCC. The intent of the EPAN is the mutual knowledge, integration and collaboration of the Order in the Americas.

CONCLUSION

From the beginning of our work, we invoked the Holy Spirit. We wanted him to be the protagonist and guide throughout the journey of reflection that culminated in the first Pan-American Meeting of the Capuchin Order. These conclusions are the fruit of listening to the voices of our brothers and of the Gospel, speaking to us at this time in our history. Therefore, in faithfulness to our origins and accepting the challenges before us at this time, by obeying and carrying out these proposals we desire to be faithful to the voice of the Lord, who once again calls us to live the Gospel in the way of Francis of Assisi in these American lands.

Br. Roberto Genuin, in his homily at the conclusion of the Conference, reminded us of the centrality of Divine action in the life of Saint Francis, for whom everything was a gift from God: “The Lord gave me...” Francis repeats these words insistently in his Testament. Br. Roberto told us: “We must listen to the Lord. What have we just done [together] during these past years and days, with the participation of thousands of Capuchin brothers from America? We tried to hear His voice! Where should we go? What choices should we make? How to propose

such changes? How to rekindle the flame of our charism?”

Moreover, while reflecting on the Gospel of the Good Shepherd, [Br. Roberto] continued to share that “the Lord knows us, He knows each one of us. He knows our good will. He knows our limits and our resistances. He knows about the inconsistencies of our fraternities and of our Provinces and Custodies. He knows it and he doesn't care! because if we commit ourselves to listen to His voice and follow Him, He will be the one to guide us. This will become a reality for us, if, when returning to our homes, we make the effort to put into practice what we have heard together: this will be good for the future of each one of us, of each one of our brothers, of the entire Order”.

These commitments, which we have agreed upon, encourage us to take sure, concrete and firm steps to journey together in fidelity: to the Father who continues to call us, to the Rule that we have promised [to follow], to the churches in which we serve and to the holy people of God to which we belong. Thus, in this way, we will be able to receive the blessing of our Father Saint Francis who once again tells us: “and whoever keeps these things, may he be filled in heaven with the blessing of the Most High Father, and may he be filled on earth with the blessing of his beloved Son, with the most holy Spirit Paraclete and with all the virtues of heaven and with all the saints. And I, brother Francisco, your little servant, confirm to you as much as I can, interiorly and exteriorly, this most holy blessing” (Test 40-41). Amen.

ROME, 21 JULY 2022
FEAST OF ST. LAWRENCE OF BRINDISI