



Circular Letter of the Minister General

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GOSPEL BROTHERHOOD IN A CHANGING WORLD

Circular Letter 20

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GOSPEL BROTHERHOOD IN A CHANGING WORLD:
IDENTITY, MISSION AND ANIMATION

“Make the church the home and the school of communion”

(Novo Millennio Ineunte, n. 43)

Prot. N. 00158/02

To all the brothers of the Order

Dear brothers:

May the Lord give you peace!

Evangelical fraternal life, the theme of Circular Letter 11 (February 2, 1997, Prot. no. 00085/97), was the focus for the animation of the Order during the past sexennium. The nucleus of this present letter centers on three specific themes, namely: a) the fraternal identity and structure of our Order, which found broad consensus at General Chapter 2000, b) Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Letter, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, which provides additional inspiration for deepening our understanding of our fundamental identity, and c) the expressed desire of the last general chapter to define our Franciscan fraternal life as a gospel response and leaven of evangelization in a changing world. These three elements, as well as a number of current initiatives for the animation of the Order, constitute the substance of this letter.

Introduction

1.1 Prior to the Second Vatican Council the church defined itself as a **perfect society leading souls to God** (see, for instance, Pius XI's Encyclical, *Mortalium Animos*, of January 6, 1928: "Christ our Lord instituted his church as a perfect society, which should carry on the work of the salvation of the human race."). Within this theological vision and the canonical constructs of the day, the Capuchin Order was regarded as a clerical institute dedicated to the salvation of souls because it was particularly through its clerical ministries that the Order fulfilled its ecclesial mandate.

The theology of Vatican II and the teaching of Pope Paul VI gave rise to a new ecclesiology. The church now describes itself as a **mystery of communion**: "the universal church is seen to be a people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" (*Lumen Gentium*, 4).

This change of perspective has been developed and deepened in the writings of Pope John Paul II, particularly in *Novo Millennio Ineunte* and recent synodal documents.

1.2 This new ecclesiology has had considerable impact on religious life. The 1994 document issued by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life [CIVCSVA] entitled, *Fraternal Life in Community* [*Congregavit nos in unum Christi amor*], states:

It is the development of ecclesiology which has affected the evolution of our understanding of religious community. Vatican II affirmed that religious life belongs "undeniably" to the life and holiness of the church and placed religious life at the very heart of the church's mystery of communion and holiness (n. 2).

The 1996 Apostolic Exhortation, *Consecrated Life* [*Vita Consecrata*], adds:

Fraternal life seeks to reflect the depth and richness of this mystery [church - communion], taking shape as a human community in which the Trinity dwells, in order to extend in history the gifts of communion proper to the three divine Persons (n. 41).

1.3 Reflection upon our Franciscan and Capuchin roots from this new perspective has given rise to a profound re-visioning of the Order's mission in the world. Gospel brotherhood is, indeed, the Franciscan incarnation of the theology of communion.

1.4 It can no longer authentically be asserted that the Order's principal role is to serve its various ministries, but rather:

Saint Francis founded the fraternity of the Order of Minors which would bear witness to the reign of God by a sharing of life and by preaching penance and peace through example and word (Const. 3.1).

Gospel Brotherhood in the Light of *Novo Millennio Ineunte*

2.1 Pope John Paul II has given us powerful visions for the local fraternity. In his letter addressed to our Order on September 18, 1996 (see *AOFMCap* 112 [1996] 565), the pope refers to the local fraternity as “a warmly human and welcoming point of reference for the poor and for those who sincerely search for God.” In *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, he affirms:

To make the church *the home and the school of communion*: that is the great challenge facing us in the millennium which is now beginning, if we wish to be faithful to God’s plan and respond to the world’s deepest yearnings (n. 43).

With these words, the pope offers us another image to describe our fraternity: ***a home and school of communion***.

“AND HIS FACE SHONE LIKE THE SUN” (MT 17:2)

2.2 Our fraternities will be *a home and school of communion* - “eloquent signs of ecclesial communion” (see *Consecrated Life*, n. 42) - when they truly become “schools of holiness.” The restructuring of provinces, as well as the strengthening of local fraternities - both numerically and relationally - is not sufficient. Only the holiness of God can purify our relationships and cause our fraternities to “reflect the light of Christ..[and] make his face shine” (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 16).

Fire is a symbol of the holiness of God. When Moses approached the burning bush the Lord told him: “Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground” (Ex 3:5). Fire is also a symbol of God’s purifying love: a burning coal from the altar of God purified the lips of the prophet Isaiah (see Is 6:6-7). The fire of God’s word purified the nation of Israel: “Elijah arose, a prophet like fire, and his word burned like a torch” (Sir 48:1). Using the imagery of fire, Saint Bonaventure described the holiness of Francis and the impact he had on the world by likening him to the prophet Elijah:

And like the rainbow shining among clouds of glory he made manifest in himself the sign of the Lord’s covenant. He preached to people the gospel of peace and

salvation...and filled with the spirit of prophecy,...lifted up on a fiery chariot,...he came in the spirit and power of Elijah.... If we consider the height of his extraordinary sanctity...[he was] an example for the perfect followers of Christ (St. Bonaventure, *The Major Legend of Saint Francis*, Prologue).

Just as the burning bush attracted Moses, so our fraternities must draw people to communion. This would not be possible “if we ourselves had not first contemplated his face” (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 16). *Consecrated Life* affirms: “Called to contemplate and bear witness to the transfigured face of Christ, consecrated men and women are also called to a >transfigured’ existence” (n. 35).

“THIS IS MY SON, THE BELOVED;...LISTEN TO HIM!” (MT 17:5)

2.3 Commenting on Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances to his disciples, Pope John Paul II states: “Regardless of how much his body was seen or touched, *only faith could fully enter the mystery of that face....* One can never really reach Jesus except by the path of faith” (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 19). An Order which professes to be a *brotherhood of gospel witness* must be rooted in a very concrete faith in the person and mystery of Christ:

A spirituality of communion [read, “brotherhood”] indicates above all the heart’s contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us, and whose light we must also be able to see shining on the face of the brothers and sisters around us (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 43).

In his Testament, Francis contemplates the face of Christ with emotion and interior resolve. That contemplation began at the foot of the Cross of San Damiano, was authenticated at the feet of the leper, and sealed by the experience of La Verna. Bearing in mind the words of the pope: “one can never really reach Jesus except by the path of faith” (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 19), it is clear from the Testament that Francis’ contemplation was the consequence of a determined **act of faith** which opened him to receive the gifts of God: “The Lord gave me...;” “The Lord himself led me among them...;” “The Lord gave me such faith in churches...;” “I see nothing corporally of the most high Son of God except his most holy Body and Blood...;” “After the Lord gave me some brothers....” If we are to transform our brotherhood into a **school of communion**, we will need both

the determination and the concreteness of Francis' faith.

“LORD, IT IS GOOD FOR US TO BE HERE.” (MT 17:4)

2.4 Faith is a gift of God. “We cannot come to the fullness of contemplation of the Lord’s face by our own efforts alone, but by allowing grace to take us by the hand” (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 20). The two most recent circular letters dwelt at length on the prayer of the brothers. “Mental prayer, *the spiritual teacher of the brothers* (Const. 52:6), has always been an essential dimension of our fidelity to our vocation as well as our service to God’s people” (Circular Letter 18, at 4.2). “When we begin with the conviction that our world can experience communion only through the power of the “God [who] gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist (Rm 4:17), we discover the crucial importance of the prayer of our local fraternities. This prayer gives focus to the work of faith in the world” (Circular Letter 19, at 6.1). These same points are highlighted by Pope John Paul II:

Learning [the] Trinitarian shape of Christian prayer and living it fully, above all in the liturgy, the summit and source of the church’s life, but also in personal experience, is the secret of a truly vital Christianity (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 32);

and,

The call to holiness is accepted and can be cultivated only *in the silence of adoration* before the infinite transcendence of God (*Consecrated Life*, n. 38).

With regard to the primacy of our call to holiness, we would like to recognize the positive value and meritorious mission of those brothers who “for reasons of age or infirmity...have had to abandon their specific apostolate” (*Consecrated Life*, n. 44), but continue to live their vocation in prayer and in the patient acceptance of God’s will, thereby contributing to the growth of the reign of God.

For all of us, the words of Pope Paul VI contain great wisdom:

Faithfulness to prayer, or its abandonment, are the test of the vitality or decadence of the religious life (*Evangelica Testificatio*, n. 42).

GOSPEL BROTHERHOOD IN A CHANGING WORLD

“The Rule and life of the Friars Minor is this: to observe the holy gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Later Rule 1, 1). As a witness to that gospel, our fraternities are called to be places of peace and justice which bring good news to the poor (see Const. 144.1). We are obedient to the Spirit of the Lord when we bring people “the gospel in deed and word” (Const. 144.4).

Urgently called to contribute to the new evangelization, we recall the words of the Apostolic Exhortation, *Consecrated Life*:

The specific contribution of consecrated persons...to evangelization is first of all the witness of a life given totally to God and to their brothers and sisters in imitation of the Savior who, out of love for humanity, made himself a servant (n. 76).

Our prophetic mission is exercised in a multi-ethnic world which is deeply conditioned by the global economy and dominated by a thirst for power and self-realization.

Evangelical Brotherhood in a Multi-ethnic World

4.1 Ethnic identity is one of the primary energies which has influenced and continues to shape the modern world. The effort to exert ethnic identity was a major contributing factor to the wars of the 20th century which fashioned modern Europe. The ethnic faces of Europe and America are constantly being reshaped by millions of new immigrants. Identification with one's ethnic group, as an extension of familial relationships, is a source of security for people. Unfortunately, it is also a source of contrast and division. Much of the passion which drives fundamentalism is rooted in the struggle for ethnic identity. Both positively and negatively, there is no doubt that ethnic identity releases enormous energy in our world.

4.2 Our Capuchin brotherhood, existing today in 95 nations and embracing hundreds of ethnic communities, has a particular vocation to be *a home and school of communion* (see *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 43; see also *Consecrated Life*, n. 51). Sociology and politics alone will never transform ethnic relationships. Change requires the power of God, for "to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, **not of blood** or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God" (Jn 1:12-13).

Only upon this foundation can we create authentic fraternities empowered to give witness to the fact that the water of baptism is stronger than blood! Baptism - and specifically, its expression through the bonds of Franciscan brotherhood - forges a solidarity, a unity and mutual dependence which is stronger and more effective than any ethnic bond. *Water is stronger than blood!* This conviction demands a profound conversion on our part. The conversion born of baptism and the conversion to Franciscan brotherhood must be demonstrated through decisions to act differently and to give concrete expression to what is envisioned in the Rule: If a mother loves and cares for her son according to the flesh, how much more diligently must someone love and care for his brother according to the Spirit? (Later Rule, VI, 8).

Evangelical Brotherhood within the Global Economy

5.1 The new economy spawned by high technology continues to transform relationships between peoples and nations. VI PCO - *Living Poverty in Brotherhood* - challenges us to make our fraternity *a home and school of communion* within this new energy shaping our world. The central intuition of VI PCO is this: **redeemed relationships with the people of the earth are the central objective of evangelical poverty - redeemed relationships with the goods of the earth are simply a means to that end.** This is the clear conclusion to Proposal 6, the linchpin of VI PCO:

Francis judged that greed and avarice disrupt relationships with God, just as ambition and competition damage the sense of brotherhood among people. In order to live the gospel ideal of love and brotherhood in its fulness, Francis and his first companions adopted a form of life that involved courageous choices of poverty for those times.

The times and economic circumstances of today's world are markedly different from those which led Francis to make the economic choices he made, nonetheless, **"we are still bound to be faithful to the profound intentions of St. Francis"** (Proposal 6), namely: *to live as lesser brothers* and, consequently, to withdraw ourselves from the world of greed, avarice and competition which destroy communion on the earth. This requires new and equally courageous economic choices on our part, such as "austerity of life and commitment in work; solidarity and mutual dependence; a life rooted in the experience of the people, particularly the poor; a correct use and administration of goods and property, and commitment to sustainable growth" (Proposal 6).

5.2 Lived courageously and intentionally, these fraternal economic choices will create a new *fraternal economy* which differs radically from the *global economy* of our day. The central objective of the global economy is to increase wealth. The central objective of a *fraternal economy* is to increase communion between people. The means which the *global economy* uses to achieve its end include cutthroat competition and the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few by the domination and control of financing, production and marketing. The means for achieving the purpose and end of a *fraternal economy* are solidarity and mutual dependence, participation, and protection of the

weakest. The principles of a *fraternal economy* will profoundly change our attitude toward the goods of the earth, work, the poor, as well as administration. This, in turn, will transform our relationships with one another and with the peoples of the earth. The *fraternal economy* will never replace or overthrow the *global economy*, but it will make our Order *a home and school of communion* in this newly emerging economic world.

5.3 The effects of VI PCO are slowly emerging within the Order. The most obvious sign is the growing sense of economic solidarity among circumscriptions of our Order. Many conferences and circumscriptions have conducted workshops and retreats on the spiritual vision and practical applications of the Sixth Plenary Council. However, the birth of a *fraternal economy* demands even more:

- We must carefully examine the structures of our ministries to ensure that the exercise of different responsibilities does not rupture the equity which ought to exist between all the brothers and lead to privilege within our fraternities regarding personal access to automobiles, vacations, travel, etc.
- Provinces must establish an effective solidarity between local fraternities. They must promote a fraternal administration which requires knowledge and participation of all the members of the local fraternity in the economic decisions of that fraternity. It demands, as well, transparency in the administration of the circumscription as such, and appropriate participation in its major financial undertakings. Structures of accountability must be clear and transparent.
- Establishing a *fraternal economy* is not limited to fraternal relations within and among the fraternities of the Order and its circumscriptions; it must be reflected as well beyond our fraternities, especially in our ministries. The social outreach of our Order needs clarification. Social works are aimed at bettering the lives of individuals or families in need. These social works must also build solidarity and communion between the peoples they serve. When decision making authority rests with an individual brother, the social works often create division between the very people the works were designed to serve. Social ministry can too easily become an exercise of power on the part of an individual brother; and the unrestricted exercise of power - even when exercised for a noble purpose - inevitably corrupts. VI PCO must transform our social ministries.

Gospel Brotherhood in a Social Milieu of Self-realization

6.1 The principle of self-determination, born of the French and American Revolutions, continues to release enormous energies into our world. It was the guiding principle for movements of national independence after the Second World War. Self-determination is closely associated with the struggle for ethnic identity. The right to self-realization spawned the social revolutions identified with the year 1968, including the feminist and gay liberation movements and numerous other human rights movements. Self-realization continues to shape our world and our fraternities both positively and negatively.

6.2 The mystery of the Incarnation and the mystery of the cross were central to the faith vision of St. Francis. In the mystery of the Incarnation, Francis contemplated the humility of God our Father. In the cross, Jesus embraced the same mystery of humble, self-emptying love. Desiring that his life and that of his brothers reveal this same self-giving love to the world, Francis chose the road of humility or minority: "I want this fraternity to be called the Order of **lesser brothers!**" (1C XV, 38).

6.3 Minority offers our Order the possibility of becoming *a home and school of communion* within the energy field of self-realization and the pursuit of power. Minority touches many important questions in the Order:

- How does minority effect the identity of the fraternity? Does minority give a specifically Franciscan dimension to ordained ministry?
- As a brotherhood, we must discuss our relationship to church authority both local and universal. How does the Order live these relationships in word and action?
- It was Francis' will that minority be the principle characteristic of the Franciscan fraternity as such. In the early stages of this new millennium we should critically examine the developments that occurred within our brotherhood during the past century. The Order began to accept institutional commitments within the church (e.g., vicariates, parishes, etc.) and society (e.g., schools, social works, etc.). This development has brought many blessings to our people, to the Order, and to the church we are committed to serve. However, it also raises important questions regarding the value of minority. Do we not have to ask how many institutional commitments within the church and society a province can administer without jeopardizing the essential Franciscan characteristic of minority?

- Minority provides a special Franciscan character to obedience.
- There is need for reflection on personal charisms in the light of self-realization and the Franciscan value of minority. VI PCO has given us one basis for such a reflection by stressing “the grace of working” (also see Later Rule V, 1).
- Collaboration between brothers and between fraternities must have a spiritual and theological basis; it cannot be sustained simply as a sociological tool. For this reason, we might explore the relationship between minority and collaboration in ministry.
- A reflection on minority is the proper locus to consider our relationships with other Christian churches and with other world religions. Does minority offer a key to a typically Franciscan approach toward fundamentalist movements throughout the world?

**Animation:
Structures and Initiatives**

STRUCTURES

7.1 To make our Order, provinces and local fraternities a *home and school of communion* which will be a source of communion for the world will require a coordinated and consistent ministry of animation. The Order has a number of structures which can be of great assistance.

7.2 Responding to the almost unanimous desire of the recent general chapter, the **General Office of Formation** has been reconstituted. Four brothers drawn from various cultural regions of the Order will offer full-time service to this office which is located at our friary in Frascati. The friary has been completely renovated as a center of ongoing formation of the Order. At the core of the initial priorities of this office is the study of the postnovitiate programs of the Order. Eventually during the sexennium, an international congress on the postnovitiate will be convoked. At the same time, the office will offer its expertise and services in support of the animation of our fraternal and gospel charism.

7.3 The general chapter discussions gave rise to the recommendation that the International Office for Justice, Peace and Respect for Creation be given greater substance. This office is in the process of being reorganized. A full-time director has been appointed. The general chapter embraced in a particular way the document of the African *cœtus* entitled, "The Cry of the Poor" (see *AOFM Cap* 116 [2000] 831) which outlined three major factors oppressing the poor of Africa: violence, the international debt and HIV/AIDS. The fact is, these same evils oppress the poor in many regions of our world.

Ethnic tension and strife are at the heart of much of the violence in our world. Social tensions rooted in ethnic diversity also touch our Order in various regions. The renewal of our ancient provinces of Western Europe will probably require the collaboration of provinces and brothers from Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America. By necessity this will create multi-ethnic fraternities which will offer occasion for mutual enrichment and integration. For these reasons, the general definitory has requested the Office of Justice, Peace and Respect for Creation to convene an international congress to treat ethnicity in the light of gospel and Franciscan values. We have suggested that this congress

be held in Africa. We believe that such a congress will assist our Order to assess and respond to the effects of ethnic diversity within our own fraternities and among the peoples we serve.

7.4 For more than 25 years the Franciscan Institute of Spirituality has assisted the Franciscan family in the research and study of our charism. The general definitory wishes to enter into a dialogue with the Institute, the *Antonianum*, and the general minister and definitory of the Friars Minor, to enable the Institute to more adequately train the formation personnel of our Order and to serve as a resource for research and reflection on the living of our Franciscan charism in the postmodern world.

7.5 A consensus was reached during General Chapter 2000 concerning the renovation of our International College of St. Lawrence of Brindisi. This work began at the start of March 2002. In addition, plans are being developed to create an ongoing formation center at our friary in Jerusalem.

CONSTITUTIONS

8. General Chapter 2000 mandated that a commission be established to undertake the work envisioned by the Code of Canon Law (specifically can. 587), namely, to prepare a legislative proposal in which fundamental norms approved by the Holy See and found in our Constitutions would be separated from lesser norms approved under the proper authority of the general chapter to be contained in a secondary code or “ordinances.”

A working group of canonists has already prepared a first draft proposal which distinguishes and separates what should properly be contained in our Constitutions from what would more appropriately be contained in a secondary code. Their proposal has now been submitted to the study of various brothers from diverse cultural areas of the Order. These brothers are experts in complementary disciplines such as theology, biblical studies, and spirituality. These brothers have been requested to evaluate the effects of the above mentioned proposal. Upon receiving their evaluation, the general definitory will decide upon other provisions and procedures in view of the next general chapter. This task is exceptionally delicate and demanding, requiring great care and broad consultation within the Order.

PLENARY COUNCIL

9. The Sixth Plenary Council stated emphatically:

The foundation and model of our gospel poverty is Jesus, the Word of God, who “emptied himself (*kenosis*), taking the form of a slave... even to the point of accepting death - death on a cross” (Phil 2:7) (Proposal 1).

Both poverty and minority are rooted in *kenosis*. In keeping with the consensus of General Chapter 2000, the general definitory believes that the work of the Sixth Plenary Council would not be comprehensive without a systematic reflection on minority. For this reason, the general definitory intends to convoke a seventh plenary council of the Order to study minority and itinerancy in light of the theology of communion. A plenary council would be an appropriate setting for the Order to reflect on what the church’s theology of communion contributes to our understanding of minority. It would also allow us to reflect on how our Franciscan tradition might enrich the church’s understanding of communion.

OTHER INITIATIVES

10.1 The general definitory wants to develop a plan of action to assist those provinces of our Order that are facing a crisis due to a lack of vocations, a situation which has endured for almost 30 years. The general definitory has published a reflection paper on the sharing of personnel between circumscriptions (see *AOFM Cap* 117 [2001] 403-404). The general definitory is ready and willing to collaborate with provinces facing such crises, offering whatever institutional support is necessary to preserve, consolidate and revitalize our charism. Likewise, the general definitory supports and encourages continued initiatives aimed at the eventual amalgamation of existing provinces.

10.2 In keeping with a proposal made at General Chapter 2000 (see Report of the General Minister, at 18.4), an annual meeting of newly-elected provincial and vice provincial ministers and regular superiors will be held each January. The first such meeting was held in January of 2002. These annual gatherings will help to provide newly-elected ministers with assistance in their critical role. A general chapter creates a common vision for the ministers of the entire Order. These annual meetings will help new ministers enter into that vision.

10.3 Some conferences sponsor special workshops to assist guardians in their important ministry of animation. The general definitory is asking the General Office of Formation to assist in these efforts by gathering information from the conferences with regard to these workshops, by compiling a list of resource persons, and, if requested, by organizing similar workshops for conferences unable to do so themselves.

10.4 A province is a network of local fraternities each of which must “reflect the light of Christ...[and] make his face shine” (see *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 16). It is urgent that our animation focus on the faith of the brothers, their personal prayer, and the liturgical prayer of each fraternity. The Constitutions open the way for such animation: “In order to renew our religious life continually, all the brothers should make an annual retreat and also have other occasional periods of recollection” (55.1). We suggest that provincial ministers and definitories discuss how annual retreats might give focus to the faith of the brothers. Perhaps retreat teams could be organized on the conference level. Likewise, a greater fidelity to days of recollection organized at the level of the local fraternity or regionally in the provinces, could advance the renewal of the personal prayer of the brothers, as well as the liturgical prayer of the fraternities.

10.5 The pastoral visitation of major superiors prescribed by the Rule and universal law contributes much to the vivacity of our life and to the renewal and unity of the brothers (Const. 161.1).

The pastoral visits of provincial ministers can be a lever to give added focus to the spirituality of brotherhood in the world. For its part, the general definitory will attempt to fulfil the directives indicated in the Constitutions:

During his term of office, the general minister should visit all the brothers either personally or through others, principally through the general definitors (161.2).

The general definitors will organize pastoral visits for their respective regions. The general minister will participate in these visitations whenever possible.

CONCLUSION

11. “We wish to see Jesus” (Jn 12:21). This request [was] addressed to the apostle Philip by some Greeks who had made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Passover,...the men and women of our own day - often perhaps unconsciously - ask believers not only to “speak” of Christ, but in a certain sense to “show” him to them (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 16).

To the extent that our fraternities become authentic *homes and schools of communion* - open to sharing and solidarity and able to mirror the face of Christ - will we begin to offer an adequate response to the deepest desire of the human heart:

The whole church greatly depends on the witness of communities filled “with joy and with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 13:52). It wishes to hold up before the world the example of communities in which solitude is overcome through concern for one another, in which communication inspires in everyone a sense of shared responsibility, and in which wounds are healed through forgiveness, and each person’s commitment to communion is strengthened. The nature of the charism in communities of this kind directs their energies, sustains their fidelity and directs the apostolic work of all toward the one mission. If the church is to reveal its true face to today’s world, it urgently needs such fraternal communities, which, by their very existence, contribute to the new evangelization, inasmuch as they disclose in a concrete way the fruitfulness of the “new commandment” (*Consecrated Life*, n. 45).

Dear brothers, this reflection has been developed in collaboration with the entire general definitory. With the support of the definitory, and in its name, I pass on to you the fruit of our work and reflection. I warmly invite you to make this the object of your personal reflection, as well as food for thought in your local and provincial chapters, assemblies and other fraternal gatherings. Together with the definitory, I ask that the major superiors and guardians promote and nurture these reflections in such a way that our brotherhood, inserted in the mystery of the church and incarnating a unique expression of that mystery, might become in reality *a home and school of communion*.

May the light of the Risen Christ transform your lives and make you a witness of

his love.

Fraternally,
Br. John Corriveau, OFM Cap.
General Minister

Br. Gandolf Wild, OFM Cap.
General Secretary

Rome, March 31, 2002
Solemnity of the Resurrection of the Lord

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