



Letter of the General Minister
fra **Mauro Jöhri OFMCap**

**FRATERNITY FOR EUROPE:
REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
FOLLOWING THE FATIMA MEETING**

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(Prot. N. 00119/15)

**TO ALL THE FRIARS OF THE ORDER AND
TO THE CAPUCHIN POOR CLARES**

Dear brothers

Dear sisters

May the Lord give you peace

I write to you, a little more than a month since the meeting in Fatima. In fact, as you well know, from December 1 to 5, 2014, the General Council, the Provincial Ministers, Custodes, and the Delegates of Europe, together with the Presidents of the Conferences of our Order, met to “speak of Europe.” Everything took place in a very fraternal climate in the excellent hospitality of our confreres of Portugal. With this letter, beyond sharing some impressions, I wish to propose to you how we intend to follow up on this path, making concrete and operative what emerged at Fatima.

THE STORY OF THE MEETING

In the letter of December 16, 2013, addressed to those invited to the event, I wrote:

“The General Council believes it opportune to call a meeting of all the Ministers and Custodes of the circumscriptions of Europe. The purpose of the meeting, beyond the certainly necessary and enriching exchange of experiences, is to treat certain of the most urgent themes for our life in Europe, such as the creation of international fraternities, fraternal collaboration between circumscriptions, the new evangelization in a secularized context, and the composition of the conferences.” Following this the Council, with the contributions of the Presidents of the four European Conferences, made more precise the purpose of the meeting, singling out the means of communication and organization and how to realize them. I will now go over in a synthetic way what we experienced during the meeting.

On the morning of the first day we heard the reports of the Presidents of the four European Conferences, of whom we had asked to point out whether there exists the desire for the renewal of our life and what have been the experiences and the attempts in place for this. In the afternoon, drawing on my service as General Minister, I spoke of the urgency of inserting ourselves into the process of evangelization in Europe where secularization is advancing quickly. As a way to do this I indicated the establishment of intercultural fraternities that commit themselves to live our fraternal Capuchin charism with simplicity and radicality.

On the morning of the second day we heard of three ongoing experiences: Sr. Rosella Baima of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary (FMM) presented on the beauty and challenge of intercultural fraternity, insisting on the formative content and on the community dynamics. Br. Jacopo Pozzerle, OFM, spoke to us of the experience of the Missionary Fraternity of Palestrina begun by Br. Giacomo Bini, the former General Minister of the OFM that the Lord called to himself last year. Finally, Br. Eric Bidot and Br. Raffaele Ruffo spoke to us of how they live in the fraternity of Clermont-Ferrand in France. In the afternoon we heard from Mauro Magatti, a sociologist, professor at the “*Sacro Cuore*” Catholic University in Milan, who described to us the situation of the current changes in Europe, and who asked us to be daring in taking new paths in order to become intentional and “generative.” His talk raised, in a raw and worrying way, the problems of our society, but at the same time highlighted that there exist many possibilities for action that we can take up in order to try to be something new. The talk of Professor Magatti, which was followed by brief presentation by his wife Chiara, was much appreciated by all those present. During each day of work ample space was given for meetings of the various language groups, within which the content furnished by the various presenters was examined and discussed.

On the third day, first in groups and then in the whole assembly, we asked ourselves about the proposal of establishing intercultural fraternities of evangelization in Europe and we shared on how the individual European Conferences felt about this proposal and we evaluated the possibility of friars from other continents taking on the pastoral care of parishes in Europe.

On the last day, early in the morning while the sun was rising, we celebrated the Eucharist in the place of the apparitions and we entrusted the future path to the Virgin Mary.

LET US PREPARE THE FUTURE WITH FAITH AND HOPE

Drawing on my talk during the work and from what emerged in the dialogue and sharing, I propose for your attention some reflections and recommendations for the future.

We are witnessing a very strong numerical decrease of our friars and of our presences in various Provinces of Europe and not only in the northern part. Since the year 2000 and following we have been reduced by more than one thousand friars; the median age of some circumscriptions has increased remarkably, all the way into the eighties. For years we have taken note of a strong decrease in vocations; in many Provinces and fraternities guaranteeing a dignified accompaniment for elderly and sick friars takes up significant time for the friars: full of gratitude, we remember these friars with fondness.

Along with this situation within our Order we are witnessing the process of secularization in the countries of northern Europe, but also in Italy and Spain. The number of those who distance themselves from religious practice is growing. From many sources there are claims of the coming and practice of a religion without God.

The situation that I have described, what does it say to us, how does it move us? What came out in the Fatima meeting and my personal reflection shared with my Council urge me to point out a path for which discussion and dialogue with all of you remains open.

The Circumscriptions that are experiencing ageing and the diminishment of friars and of presences must be accompanied with attention and respect. I think of various Provinces that have given much to the Order, have evangelized with a strong commitment of persons and means, have developed charitable and social projects for the care of so many of the poor. With

much gratitude for what has been done, we have to be aware that these works of our Order cannot be kept alive at all costs. The collaboration of personnel that was initiated in some European Provinces did not resolve the existing problems and was not able to generate new life. We want to try a new path, establishing intercultural fraternities that in the light of the Gospel and of our Constitutions will live prayer, fraternal life, and mission in an authentic and coherent way. The resource of interculturality will be the witness, that the brothers coming from different cultures, if they look to Christ present among them, can live, giving of themselves and working together. Sustaining us will be the awareness that the charism of Francis of Assisi, lived and witnessed to, still has much to say and communicate to the men and women of our time. We don't yet know where this path will go; but with hope in our hearts we want to begin to make the first steps. On whom will these fraternities depend? Our Constitutions permit the establishment of fraternities that are directly dependent on the General Minister and on this idea we want to work and reflect.

I want to see the rise of fraternities that will live a straightforward and profound faith, where the quality of the fraternal relations becomes a witness to the Love of God, and that are places of welcome able to inspire the following of the Lord Jesus. We want to evangelize our daily life and we want to do it in communion with the local churches and with the ecclesial realities where the Lord grants us to be present. Before those who deny or ignore God, we want to place him at the center of our life and our searching, allowing him to live in our praises (cf. Psalm 22).

For the moment we have identified in the fraternity of Clermont-Ferrand a first fraternity that already lives such a style of life and has recently been reinforced thanks to the arrival of two Italian brothers, one of the Province of Genoa and the other from Venice. We are in dialogue with certain Provinces that are ready to welcome the project of fraternities as I have described above and at the same time, we are knocking on various doors that the Provinces that still have a good number of friars should willingly give the brothers that feel attracted by this project. Dear Ministers, if I should knock on your door, open it willingly; and may the friars who feel interested in "Mission: Europe" knock willingly on mine! The smallest Provinces are not automatically excluded from this project. It will be our task to prepare and then accompany these fraternities. In line with the desire that some brothers expressed at Fatima, nothing prevents—and indeed it is strongly recommended—that fraternal experiences with the characteristics described above should begin even in the individual Circumscriptions.

Dear brothers, thank you for your attention. I ask all the Ministers and Custodes of the Order to give this letter to every friar.

We want to be confident, without giving in to pessimism or resignation. I ask the Capuchin Poor Clares to accompany us with prayer.

We entrust to the Virgin Mary the continuation of what, by the gift of God, we have begun at Fatima, that in this place a story of conversion and goodness has begun: May she help and sustain us.

Br. Mauro Jöhri
General Minister OFMCap.

Rome, 28 January 2015
Memorial of St. Thomas Aquinas

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