



Letter of the General Minister
fra Mauro Jöhri OFMCap

TOWARD A RATIO FORMATIONIS

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TOWARD A RATIO FORMATIONIS

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*If you would be perfect,
go, sell what you possess
and give to the poor,
and come, follow me.
(Mt 19:21)*

*Dear Brothers,
May the Lord give you peace!*

I. INTRODUCTION

1. On October 4, 2013, the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life approved and confirmed the revised text of our Constitutions. This represented the culmination of an intense and fruitful work that occupied the attention of the whole Order in the last sexennium. A little more than two weeks ago the seventy-four proposals formulated by PCO VIII on *The grace of working* were published, which was the fruit of a reflection in common carried out during the first part of this sexennium. Today, at the closing of the Year of Consecrated Life, we are beginning the work of another important task which has already been mentioned in the Programmatic Letter for this sexennium: the development of the *Ratio formationis* (RF).

2. It is not difficult to grasp that the *identity of our charism* constitutes the element of connection between these important moments. On the one hand, the revision of the Constitutions helped us to be more aware of our own proper identity, and, on the other hand, PCO VIII pushed us such that our work would manifest ever more clearly our identity as *brothers* and *minors*. I am certain that the work of developing the RF will help us to strengthen even more our unique charismatic identity, without losing sight of the plurality of different cultural contexts in which we Capuchin friars are called to live.

3. Formation has been one of the central themes of my efforts of animation as General Minister. At the beginning of the last sexennium, together with the whole General Council, we asked ourselves: "What does the Order need at this moment? The answer was unanimous: formation." Today, without any doubt, my response would be the same. During the whole of this time I have written five letters: *Let us fan the flame of our charism* (2008) on initial formation; *Mission at the heart of the Order* (2009); *Get up and walk* (2010) on ongoing formation; *Friars Minor Capuchin: their identity and sense of belonging* (2014); and *The indispensable gift of Lay Brothers for our Order* (2015), on the occasion of the centenaries of St. Felix of Cantalice and St. Felix of Nicosia. By means of these letters I shared with you my experiences, my concerns, my wishes, and my leanings.

II. WITHOUT FORMATION THERE IS NO FUTURE

4. The speed of social and cultural change is one of the main characteristics of our time. The ways of understanding relationships, work, communication, time, and space are all changing...this is about profound changes that demand our discernment and new skills; this is not possible without an updated and demanding formation that will make us ready to live the fullness of our religious consecration and, as a consequence, our service to the Church and to the world.

5. Whether we like it or not, we are part of the so-called *liquid society*, characterized by, among other things, the need for immediate satisfaction, a relativistic character of thought, and a transitory and volatile style of relationships. Individualism, consumerism, and boredom are also part of our life, and, little by little, erode our identity and sense of belonging.

6. The task for all: to watch over, protect, and strengthen the essential elements of our common identity. In my letters I have insisted on the priority that we have to give to the fraternal life: only a life rich in mature relationships can face up to the cancer of individualism. The weakening of the sense of our life as consecrated persons and as brothers often flows from a consumerism that, in the end, takes from us the joy and freedom and that are proper to our charism. The demand that we search for what is essential is always arising anew for us, a search that unquestionably demands a meeting in *silence* with the Lord Jesus (contemplation) and the meeting with *the poor* (minority). My dear brothers, it is in *contemplation* that the fruits of *compassion* are produced, and it is precisely there that we can recover anew the sense of our life.

7. A reforming spirit is one of the identifying signs of the Capuchin reform, which is translated into an existential attitude of *continuous renewal*. It is precisely in this that we find the basis of our plan of ongoing formation, the objective of which is nothing else than consecration to God, in which all of our relationships are harmonized and integrated. We have to make a deeper investigation into the theology of consecration: to give oneself totally, joyously, and selflessly according to way of Jesus. I never tire of insisting – as I have already done in the letter on *The indispensable gift of Lay Brothers for our Order* – that the consecrated life is a complete life to which nothing is lacking. Life is only for being given. Our brother Francis always warns us about the temptation of appropriating either persons or things, reminding us, instead, that every gift is to be given back to the Giver of all gifts.

8. In the letter to the whole Order on initial formation, *Let us fan the flame of our charism*, I dedicated ample space to explaining how the term *initiation* should indicate that in the formative journey the principal accents are put on the transmission and progressive learning of the values and fundamental attitudes of our life. I think – and this brings me joy – that our RF will give greater attention and further development to the practice of initiation as an integrating element of the different stages of formation. A greater value must be given to the practice of *accompaniment*, inherent in the journey of initiation, which assures an integration of all the stages of the formation process and avoids the danger of fragmentation. Let us remember that the reference of every and each stage of formation is religious consecration and not the ministry of priestly orders.

III. OUR RATIO FORMATIONIS

9. *A time of opportunity.* The best time is always the present. At this time when we have available a renewed version of the Constitutions, the work of the RF offers us the opportunity to take them in hand anew. The Constitutions are an unquestionable point of reference. Formation is a task that concerns all the friars. To share experiences and reflections, to review together and dialogue, must foster a climate of communion in our fraternities. Let us let the tools of the local chapter help us. Let us make the most of this opportunity to check on the values that we profess and the way we transmit them, how formation is going in the circumscriptions, how our own process of human and spiritual growth is going, what we have to maintain and what we have to change in our structures and models of formation.

10. *To motivate, to animate, and to accompany.* Many friars tell me that they are already tired of theoretical documents that end up on the shelves in our libraries without being read by anybody. The only way that we have to avoid this situation is that of trying, with all possible means, to involve the greatest number of friars in this process. The International Formation Council has been working for more than two years on the RF and its members, together with the presidents of the conferences, the provincial ministers, the custodes, and the guardians of fraternities, have the primary responsibility of animation. Our Constitutions in n. 25,8 emphasize the importance and the need for every circumscription to have a formation secretariat. I ask the major superiors to make sure they do indeed have one in their circumscription, and to depend on it for the good of formation. It is up to the provincial secretaries of formation to animate the guardians of the local fraternities, and, in a special way, those responsible for the houses of formation. The secret consists in maintaining a fluid communication in this chain of animation. Today more than ever it's a question of good will. We have at our disposal all the modern means of communication.

11. *Where we want to arrive.* We need a common frame of reference that will reinforce, during the formation process, the transmission of the values of the charism and, at the same time, will foster creativity and flexibility at the moment of incarnating such values in the different cultural contexts. I sincerely hope that the effort of developing the RF gives a new energy and updating to the formation processes of every circumscription, contributing to the creation of a new *culture* of formation in our Order. That all this does not remain on the level of a nice theory depends on all of us. As I have already emphasized above in this letter, the final end of all of our formation process is consecration: to give all that we have received, without holding back anything for ourselves. This is something that can always be verified in our personal willingness. Let us not forget: to be a Capuchin means *to be ready to go where nobody wants to go*. This is our goal.

12. *The first step: sending the questionnaire.* This letter accompanies a questionnaire. It's a very simple tool for facilitating reflection and participation, not only at the personal level, but also at the fraternal level. After the distribution of the questionnaire to every friar, a fraternal meeting is proposed, a local chapter for example, in order to share experiences and reflections regarding formation. The guardians shall gather the questionnaires and, in a sealed envelope, send them to the provincial secretaries of formation, who will check and evaluate the questionnaires and send them to the International Councilor of Formation of his Conference. The International Councilors of Formation will make a synthesis and send this to the General Secretariat of Formation at the General Curia. The SGF will make a synthesis of the results of the Conferences and will point out the next steps to take.

13. *The calendar*

2016

2 February: World Day of Consecrated Life: sending of the questionnaire.

- by **March 27:** send the results from the fraternities to the provincial secretary of formation.
- - by **May 1:** send the results to the International Councilor of Formation of each Conference.
- - by **June 1:** send the results of the General Secretariat of Formation at the General Curia.

27 March: Solemnity of Easter: sending the draft of the **first chapter of RF.**

4 October: Solemnity of St. Francis: sending the draft of the **second chapter of RF.**

2017

24 June: Solemnity of the Nativity of John the Baptist: sending the draft of the **third chapter of RF.**

The **appendices** will be discussed in the continental meetings.

2018

From January to June: work on the final version.

August: presentation of the definitive text to the General Chapter.

IV CONCLUSION

14. I invite you to live with all of your energies the beauty and newness of the totality of our charism, the heart of which is always *the gospel*: silence and encounter, tenderness and suffering, sadness and joy, weakness and mercy, failure and hope, the Kingdom and its 'utopias'...all is grace. All is gospel.

15. At the end of this year dedicated to consecrated life, as Pope Francis recalled in his apostolic letter to all consecrated men and women, we must continue to look to the past with gratitude, to the present with passion, and to the future with hope. According to the way of our father St. Francis, model of all Minors, we are called to be witnesses to authentic joy and prophets of mercy wherever we find ourselves.

16. May Mary, Mother and Disciple, blessed because she heard the Word and put it into practice, accompany us in the following of Jesus, our one Teacher.

Br. Mauro Jöhri
General Minister OFM Cap.

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World Day for Consecrated Life

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