
RATIO FORMATIONIS ORDINIS FRATRUM MINORUM CAPUCCINORUM

CHAPTER III

***The stages of Formation from a Capuchin
Franciscan perspective***

Formation for the consecrated life is a journey of discipleship guided by the Holy Spirit leading one progressively to assimilate the sentiments of Christ, the Son of the Father, and to shape one's life according to His obedient, poor, and chaste life (Const. 23, 1).

- To guide your reading -

1. The meaning of chapter III

The word *initiation* is at the heart of this third chapter. Chapter I aims to show that the dimensions presented in chapter II are grounded in our charism. It is now our task to introduce those dimensions into each and all of the stages that make up our journey of formation, in the form of a process of initiation.

Once again we remind the brothers that only the general principles that must be accepted in all geographical areas of the Order are presented here. Later on, in accordance with some guidelines for implementation which we are in the process of drafting, it will be up to each Circumscription to launch their own formation projects in the light of these general principles accepted by all.

2. Style, structure and methodology

To get the style of the document right is no easy task. A *Ratio Formationis* for the whole Order cannot be too prescriptive in its language. This is why we have deliberately tried to maintain a certain tension between prescription, exhortation, proposals and hopes, in a way that respects the natural tension between the general proposals found in a *Ratio* and the concrete norms of a *formation plan*.

The following elements are found in every stage of formation: **the nature** of each stage, the **objectives** it aims to achieve – marked by a strongly Christological tone –, **the dimensions** it presents – with particular emphasis on those proper to Franciscans –, the specific **times** and the **criteria** that are to be followed. We have thought it fitting to incorporate a number of themes or areas that are of particular interest for various reasons: **work**, reflecting the concerns of our Order as expressed in PCO VIII; **the economy**, because of the urgency for us to learn the skills by which we can manage money in a transparent and brotherly way; **justice, peace and ecology**, following the recommendations of Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, as well as the instructions outlined in the Order's manual of JPE; **the new information and communications technologies**, which are related to most of the anthropological changes now under way in our world.

Our intention is to start from actual practice. The text you now have in your hands is a draft, the fruit of shared reflection by the International Formation Council (IFC) at its last two meetings. At the meeting of the IFC in 2016, four of our brothers, coming from different cultural contexts, tried to illustrate the different formation stages on the basis

of their own experience (Br. Sergio dal Moro, ongoing formation; Br. Carmine Ranieri, the postulancy; Br. Próspero Arciniégas, the novitiate; Br. Gaudence Aikaruwa, the post-novitiate). On that occasion, after carefully listening to all our discussions, Br. Marioswaldo Florentino produced the first draft of a text, which was once again studied and discussed by the IFC in 2017. The draft that follows these notes is still incomplete; some areas, notably special formation, special initial formation and the educational and cultural institutions of the Order, are in need of further reflection. We would particularly welcome your contributions with regard to these subjects.

3. What we are aiming for

Rather than producing a document that tells people what to do, our concern is to provide a text that offers help and guidance in discerning the trends and susceptibilities that are current today in the area of formation, and to open up new ways so that we are authentic and relevant in the world of today.

This chapter tackles a number of pressing needs which call for deeper reflection and a real determination to take action: the composition of the formation fraternities and teams, the specific training of formators, criteria for vocational discernment, clericalism, personal accompaniment, the number of candidates/"formandi" in the fraternity, the systematic learning of our spirituality and the values of our charism. We are called to think, discuss and decide together.

4. How to read the text

The text can be read in two distinct yet complementary ways, especially the second part.

One way is to read through the stages continuously, starting with ongoing formation and ending with the post-novitiate stage. The second possibility is, we invite you to read the thematic contents as they appear throughout the text: in other words, choose a theme, for example, "work", and see how it has been developed progressively throughout each stage.

We encourage you to read the text fraternally, carefully and critically, and to make your own suggestions.

NB.

In order to make this draft text easier to read, we have omitted quotations, sources and bibliographical references. These will obviously be inserted into the final text.

OUR FORMATION: THE ART OF LEARNING TO BE LESSER BROTHERS

1. The new contexts, social, cultural and ecclesial

00. The fabric of the world is always dynamic. Changes are ever more complex, rapid and profound. Change occurs in what we do, and in our perception of what we are: change in how we relate to ourselves, with the planet and with life itself; new desires and needs, new sensitivities, even new forms of relationship, appear at breakneck speed. The Church and the Order, in the area of formation, feel compelled to take an active, critical and creative part in this process of personal, social, cultural and religious transformation.

01. The distinguishing marks of culture, today more than ever, are anthropological pluralism and the challenges of technology and the digital world (*cyber-anthropology*). Being permanently connected to the Internet influences the way in which we think, remember and communicate, and this in turn affects our understanding of freedom, as well as our capacity to reflect, to manage time, and the ways in which we express intimacy (*fluidity of affective relationships*). Technology, for all the positive possibilities it offers, also calls for careful examination: it is necessary to define our relationship with it, if we do not wish to lose our freedom.

02. In this context of change, it appears that intelligence is gradually becoming disconnected from conscience, just as the will parts company with desire. Emotion prevails over reason; self-referring subjectivism over the value of relationships, competition versus collaboration. The concerns of the individual have pride of place, while collective identity and a sense of belonging are fragmented and weakened. At the same time, however, values can be observed, such as respect for the law, for solidarity, social commitment and a growing interest in the environment.

03. Despite the fact that change appears to impose itself on us, we can nevertheless choose by what light we understand who we truly are, which components we wish to use to construct our identity, how we re-read our history and how we redirect our future. The key is there for us in the insights of the Gospel: we are committed to a different culture, where people encounter one another and have genuine relationships; where, in the face of consumerism, they rediscover the value of what is human; where they move from stagnation and boredom with life to a fresh discovery of itinerancy, a journey that strengthens self-esteem, reinforces personal security and fosters cultural openness and dialogue with others. We create spaces where surprise and admiration lead to reflection, increasing sensitivity to religious experience and openness to the transcendent. Faith is a fine thing, it generates hope and gives meaning to life.

04. We need a new model of social development, more rooted in justice and equity, more responsive to basic needs and universal rights: health, education, dignified housing, drinking water, clean air, renewable energy. Peace, an end to poverty, the elimination of inequality: all these are still possible, even in our day. It is our responsibility to design a world without frontiers, one that is more respectful of diversity, more secure and sustainable, where the priority is the promotion of social and global justice.

2. Constantly building our Capuchin-Franciscan identity today

05. The identity of God lies in the relationship of unconstrained and freely given love between the divine persons. God is not a being who is enclosed in himself. In Jesus, we have all been called to be part of this Family, to be sons in the Son. For this reason, the vocation of human beings lies in recognising the presence of this free love, freely given, in our own personal history, and accepting the responsibility of building our own identity in relationship with God, allowing ourselves to be led into His mystery of love.

06. Christ is for us the model of what it means to be human. He began His public life after an experience of silence in the desert. A gradual process of discernment and purification of His motives led Him to identify with the saving will of His Father. Never alone, always with His disciples, through gesture and word, He proclaimed the Good News: the freely-given, unconditional love of God, and its immediate consequence: inclusive, universal brotherhood. His commitment and fidelity brought Him to death on a cross, through which He expressed His free and freely given love for God and for us. The Father raised Him to life, thereby endorsing the Project of the Kingdom, which, through the Holy Spirit, remains alive in the midst of the Church.

07. It all began among the lepers. There, Francis becomes aware of the fact that God's mercy extends over the whole of his life. It was the start of an eventful *journey*, moving from the experience of his conversion at San Damiano, with its series of questions, to the climactic response of Mount La Verna, when the wounds of Christ were stamped upon his body. It was a movement from the encounter with lepers to conformity with the poor Christ, the summit of his spiritual experience. Francis loved Christ dearly, knew Him clearly and followed Him closely, and this is his greatest legacy.

08. In the light of our Capuchin tradition, our Constitutions and the most recent documents of the Order, there is a clear awareness among our brothers that the following values are central to our identity: living as brothers in minority; prayer, especially contemplation; the care and celebration of creation; attentive reading of the Word; presence and service among the poor and suffering. The implications of these values are: a search for essentials, simplicity of life, the cultivation of love, itinerancy and total availability. These values are to be adopted by every brother and every fraternity with *creative fidelity*, and should find appropriate expression, in a rich variety of forms, in the various cultures where our Order is called to be a joyful witness of the Gospel. To live these values day by day, and transmit them with passion in their entirety from one generation to the next, is one of today's greatest challenges.

3. Initiation: a gradual journey into Capuchin life, adapted to each person

09. Since 1968 our Constitutions have established that formation for our life must be carried out as a process of initiation, analogous with the Christian initiation of the early centuries. *This great insight of the Order needs to be properly understood and studied in sufficient depth, so that it can be put into practice faithfully and creatively.*

10. The process of initiation into Capuchin Franciscan life is a journey of growth – dynamic, adapted to the person, gradual, integral and continuous - which, while it is more intense in the first few years, lasts for the whole of life. It aims to accompany and

assist the candidate, enabling him to embark on a journey of genuine conversion. Starting from his life as it now is, using adequate tools of formation, he becomes a true disciple of Jesus, in the style of St Francis, with the elements proper to the Capuchin tradition, so that he may commit himself totally to the service of God and His Kingdom, freely and utterly.

11. Initiation into our life requires a gradual separation from anything in one's former way of life that does not fit in with our values, such as the assimilation of new values and incorporation into our Order. Therefore, the principal stress is placed upon the gradual transmission and apprenticeship of the new values and fundamental attitudes of the Capuchin Franciscan life: learning to listen with the heart to the beguiling appeal of the Word; looking at life with new eyes, and discovering in each person the presence of a brother/sister; learning at a new depth what it means to follow Christ, until, through a journey of increasing conformity to Him, one acquires His very sentiments. All in all, one discovers the joy of following Christ as a lesser brother.

12. The initiation process provides moments for handing on the contents of a sound formation, with reference to the human, Christian and Franciscan foundations of the values belonging to our charism. It also provides experiences, properly prepared and evaluated, which assist the deeper assimilation of these values. The process combines daily events with other specific and demanding experiences lasting for a determined length of time: various brotherly services, manual work, presence among the poor, missionary experiences, silence and contemplation, and other possible pastoral activities.

13. On the other hand, the initiation journey demands personalised accompaniment, since the manner in which the proposals are accepted and integrated into one's life will vary from one brother to another. This personalised aspect pays particular regard to formation in interpersonal relationships, and to the acquisition of skills which the brother in formation progressively incorporates into his participation in fraternity life. The journey of formation is personal, non-transferable and original, fostering the unfolding of the capacities that each brother possesses, which make him unique and unrepeatable and guide him in his following of Christ.

THE PRINCIPLES OF FORMATION

1. Brotherhood at the heart of the formation process

14. The spaces provided for searching, listening, dialogue and discernment make the fraternity a privileged place in which to encounter God, and for the formation and accompaniment of the brothers. By its nature and mission, the fraternity is also a place of welcome, of human and spiritual growth, and for handing on the values and experiences that flow from our charism. To be formed means to gradually acquire the "form" of a lesser brother, based on and lived in brotherhood, learning to establish horizontal relationships, living with the essentials, discovering the deep joy of following and proclaiming the Gospel through the witness of one's own life.

15. *The Lord gave me brothers* (Test, 4). Brotherhood is not an idea that occurred to Francis. Rather, it is God's own initiative, so that together we may follow in the footsteps of Our Lord Jesus Christ. We are formed in brotherhood, sharing in life's experiences. No-one is formed alone, nor can he be indifferent to formation : if you are not being formed, you are being de-formed.

16. Religious life, as we have already pointed out, bases its identity on the mystery of the Trinity, and is defined as *Confessio Trinitatis*. Planted in the heart of the universal Church, it is called to be *signum fraternitatis* and an expert in communion. The Holy Spirit, the quintessential source and giver of the different charisms, has given us the gift of *minority*, so that, living a simple life and with no cravings for power in our local fraternities, we may be creators and healers of genuine human relationships in the midst of our *common home*, proclaiming to all humanity the fraternal dimension of every creature.

2. Franciscan discernment

17. *Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me* (Mt 25,40). The hidden presence of Jesus in the poor becomes the central key for Christian discernment. The works of charity, also called works of justice and solidarity, together with the Beatitudes, (Mt 5, 1-13) set the standard for belonging to the Kingdom of Heaven: poverty in spirit, joy, mercy, peace-making, sincerity of heart, enduring misunderstanding and persecution.

18. *Who are You, and who am I?* Francis understood his life as a response to the Lord's gift. At the time of his conversion he composes a prayer that was to remain with him all his life: *Most High, glorious God*. From God, who is Light, he asks for faith to guide him; hope to sustain him in difficulty, and love, so that he excludes no-one. God guides him personally towards the ruins of san Damiano chapel, where Christ lives among the lepers. There, Francis finds the response to his first crises, and the help to keep going.

19. Franciscan discernment calls for sensitivity and the capacity to search, both individually and as a community. We decide nothing alone, but always with our brothers. A listening attitude, especially to the Word of God, is fundamental in order to be able to respond to whatever God truly expects of each one of us at this particular moment of our lives. The fundamental areas of Franciscan discernment, in addition to sacred scripture and the charismatic sources, are fraternity life, where we test our capacity to establish human relationships that are mature, free, and freely given; contemplation, where we purify our images of God through the experience of the God of Jesus Christ; and minority, where our capacity to commit our lives to that of the suffering and to the little ones of our world, is put to the test.

20. The genuine motives for our vocation need to be purified in a healthy ecclesial environment, which will help to protect our spiritual freedom from the risk of intimism – remaining on the level of inner feelings – and individualism. To be free means not to be dependent on the opinion of others, to possess a good level of interior security, not appropriating persons or things to ourselves, being able to integrate loneliness and being open to sharing both material and spiritual things.

21. In his Letter to a Minister – the Franciscan gospel of mercy – Saint Francis invites us to live in a constant state of discernment, always with the help of the Holy Spirit. Radical love, the criterion of discernment by definition, is shown when we consider any difficult situation as a *grace*, and turn it into a source of self-knowledge; when we renounce perfectionism, *and do not expect anyone to be better Christians*, in other words, when we refuse to see the other person in our own image and likeness; when we distinguish between the hermitage as a place we flee to, which feeds individualism and self-sufficiency, and the hermitage as a place of encounter with God in silence, which nourishes our sense of the importance of human relationships. This is only possible if our eyes, contemplating the gaze of the Merciful One, are charged with mercy, so that no brother is ever alienated from us, and we are able to draw all to the Lord by the way we look at them.

3. Franciscan accompaniment

22. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, has a personal, affective relationship with each one of us. He knows us by name, protects our freedom and offers us a life that is full of meaning. He is the one who takes the initiative and invites us to trust and to follow Him. Walking ahead of us, He not only shows us the way, but He Himself becomes the way, and our companion on life's journey.

23. The Word of God is always the first point of reference in the process of accompaniment. Listening to it in brotherhood, we learn to read our personal and communal history in the light of grace: experiences, dreams and desires, failures and difficulties, are situations in which the life of Christ Jesus is presented to us as the key by which to interpret whatever we propose in terms of formation.

24. The Letter of St. Francis to Brother Leo contains essential keys for Franciscan accompaniment: the journey turns into a place of encounter, where Francis puts himself on the same level as Leo by speaking of his own experience; he accompanies him with the tenderness of a mother, leaving him with total freedom and inviting him to discover his own way, creatively and responsibly. Francis does not demand perfection, but exhorts him to a shared responsibility, values the positive, avoids provoking a sense of guilt, points out the direction and helps Brother Leo in his constant desire to live according to the gospel form of life.

25. For Francis, the principle to be followed in accompaniment consists, on the one hand, in not extinguishing the spirit of prayer and devotion, and on the other, in drawing the brother to the Lord by means of mercy and love. He welcomes the brother with respect and without fear of correcting or admonishing him; yet strongly refusing those brothers whose motivations have nothing to do with the spirit of the Gospel.

26. All human beings are the subjects of their own history and responsible for their decisions, and called to construct their own being in freedom and openness to others. Formation is not an imposition. In fact, the priority in accompaniment is to help the subject grow in freedom by respecting the uniqueness and concrete reality of each brother. To accompany means to create spaces that make responsibility, trust and transparency possible in all areas of everyday life: affectivity, work, the use of money and of new technology, etc.

27. It is very appropriate to create a climate of accompaniment in all our locations, whether at the individual or institutional level. The very attitude of allowing oneself to be accompanied becomes a decisive criterion for discernment, even in the case of formators, who must have the capacity both to accompany others and to be accompanied themselves.

The protagonists of Formation

1. The Holy Spirit

28. The Holy Spirit, General Minister of the Fraternity, is the first formator. Capuchin life consists, to a great extent, in allowing oneself to be moulded and led by the Spirit, who pours into us the sentiments, emotions, affections and sensibilities of Christ, as well as the desire to be conformed to Him as the poor and crucified One. Brotherhood is born from and grows under the merciful hand of the Lord's Spirit, who stimulates us to seek and discern, always together, the ways He intends for each of the brothers and for the fraternity as a whole.

29. The formators are a channel throughout the formation process, and they must keep in mind that the work of formation is a matter for the Holy Spirit, who always points to the beautiful and stimulating horizon of the Gospel. To invoke and implore His presence is part and parcel of our formative style.

2. The candidate, the fundamental subject of formation

30. Every brother, under the action of the Holy Spirit, is the protagonist and agent of his formation, capable of taking responsibility for his own life. The process of initiation begins with work on oneself, and this requires openness, effort, sincere dialogue, a recognition of one's own limitations, the capacity to accept suggestions, and creativity. In the same way, the principle of active formation, to be authentic, presupposes the right motivation and a willingness to work with the formation that is proposed, always on the basis of responsibility and freedom.

3. The formation fraternity

31. In the initiation process, the formation fraternity is indispensable. It is the place where we experience and put into practice the demands of the values we have received, and where we deepen and strengthen the commitment of ourselves. All of this takes place in and through the world of fraternal relationships, which must be affective, flexible and healthy.

32. The Province is the first instance of formation. Responsibility for formation, beginning with the General Minister and the Provincial Minister or Custos, concerns all the brothers. The entire Province and each particular fraternity have a formative role,

with the responsibility of welcoming and forming new members in our way of life, because *responsibility for initiation involves the entire brotherhood, since the candidates are part of it (Const., 28, 2)*.

33. The specific formation fraternities are structured in the light of the formation stages they are to host. The brothers who are called to constitute these fraternities should freely join in with the Formation Plan, radiate the Capuchin charism and live out on a daily basis the values and essential aspects put forward during formation. The presence of a senior brother, as a significant point of reference endowed with moral authority and consistent in the example of his life, is desirable. The spiritual director and the confessor are also important members of the formation team.

34. The fraternity will periodically evaluate each of the candidates by means of life reviews, local chapters and assessments, which should take place at least each semester, to provide the director and the candidates themselves with the elements they need to work on.

35. So that the formation fraternity may be effective, each circumscription should decide, responsibly and honestly, the maximum and minimum number of brothers it will have. We suggest a minimum of between three and five, and a maximum of between twelve and fifteen. Only in this way will it be possible for personalised accompaniment to be real, and also for relationships to be solid enough to generate a formative atmosphere that is healthy and brotherly. Openness to collaboration between different circumscriptions and conferences of the Order is the only way to enable the necessary implementation in the area of formation.

4. The spiritual, charismatic and psychological profile of the Capuchin formator

36. The Capuchin formator is a brother and companion on the way who is convinced of the beauty of our form of life, lives his own vocation with pleasure and joy, shares his experience of his search for God, is free and docile to the Spirit, avoids the extremes of psychologism and devotionism, and is open to the Word.

37. Called to exercise true psychological and spiritual fatherhood, he does not supplant the brother in formation but accompanies him in the processes of learning to be free and authentic in life. He is able to foster the growth of the unique and unrepeatable gift that God has created in the life of each candidate, allowing him to take *personal initiatives*, so as to promote sincerity, creativity and responsibility.

38. The Capuchin formator is aware of his limitations and difficulties but is nonetheless endowed with human and Christian maturity. He demonstrates an ability to achieve positive personal integration; has a realistic self-image, good self-esteem and is emotionally balanced; he accepts calmly that he does not have all the answers or all the skills; he is open to working with others and allows the other brothers' qualities to complement his own; he is always ready to continue learning how to be an authentic lesser brother.

39. The Capuchin formator creates spaces for listening and dialogue with the brothers of the formation fraternity and with those in formation. He does not take on formation as an individual job, but is able to work as a member of a team and to ask for help; he has the skills to initiate and accompany processes; he offers the necessary

tools by which his charges are able to undertake the Franciscan way and understand our identity and our charism; he has a strong sense of belonging and is sensitive to situations of poverty and marginalisation.

5. The formation team

40. The formators are conscious that the Spirit of the Lord is the real formator of the lesser brothers. Their primary task is to walk alongside those in formation as they discern the authenticity of the call to our life, and to help the fraternity, in the person of the provincial Minister, to assess the capabilities of the candidates.

41. Formation is more of an open horizon than a specific goal, demanding respect for the mystery of God which inhabits the uniqueness of each person. The formation team specifies what is required of each candidate once the journey of formation has begun and clarifies the objectives and the means to achieve them. Taking as a starting point what has already been achieved in the previous stage of formation, they prepare the brothers for the next stage. In this way the necessary step-by-step nature of the process is respected.

42. The formation team shares the same criteria, avoiding any divergence in the actions of the formators who make up the team. None of them acts individually, but all work in a co-ordinated way and in harmony with the different formation instances of the circumscription: the Secretary and Council for Formation, the director of ongoing formation and the director of vocations promotion.

43. It is desirable that the formation teams be composed of formators who are conscious of our shared vocation to be brothers, living it in its different expressions: lay or clerical.

44. The training of formators is one of the Order's priorities. The criteria for the selection of formation personnel need to be updated, providing the necessary means to improve and enrich their training/formation in every dimension of their personality. The quality of formation depends on them to a large extent, since they are charged with passing on the elements of our charism, and with these the brothers in formation build their own identity as lesser brothers.

6. The poor

45. The poor are our teachers. Thanks to them, we are able to understand the Gospel and live it more effectively. When we touch the body of Christ in the wounded body of a poor person, we confirm the sacramental communion we receive in the Eucharist, and the miracle of His presence fills our lives with meaning and joy.

46. The Lord led Francis among the lepers, and he did not simply embrace them, but decided to stay with them. The primitive brotherhood used this experience as a school of mercy and freely given service, where bitterness is turned into spiritual and bodily sweetness, and where the eyes of those who gaze on Christ the Teacher are able to recognise and serve Him in the poor.

47. The experience of encountering someone who is suffering cannot be reduced to social work. The poor truly become our formators when we take the risk of viewing reality from their point of view and make their priorities our own. The fruits of this are immediately obvious: we focus our gaze on essentials; we live better with less; times of need and social injustice help us to live our faith with greater consistency; trust and abandonment to providence become real as we realise we are in God's hands and the concrete life choices we make become ever clearer.

THE STAGES OF FORMATION FROM A CAPUCHIN FRANCISCAN PERSPECTIVE

48. Now we present some possible guidelines, but only as examples, for the stages of our formation process. What is necessary is to move from an activity-based formation to one that promotes and accompanies processes that generate attitudes. Underlying the formulation of the nature, objectives, dimensions and criteria for each stage, is the intention to think of the formation journey in terms of an initiation. The assimilation of the theoretical aspects will have an effect on how deeply experiences are lived, and the achievement of the aims we set ourselves will depend on how genuine those experiences are. All the elements are intrinsically linked.

49. The general objective highlights the guiding purpose underpinning the whole of our formation journey: *Let all the brothers, with the help of God the Father and enlightened by the Holy Spirit, following in the footsteps of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the style of Francis and Clare, be truly free, living a life full of mature affective relationships and committed to building a more just world.* Free, capable of loving and committed to justice. No more, no less.

50. In order to *initiate* someone into a form of life, one has to *be initiated* oneself, and this is not acquired once and for all. As far as our formation is concerned, Ongoing Formation must have first place. Then, since we know that the initiation of the new candidates is the mission of the fraternity as a whole, it is necessary to guarantee that the same fraternity is in a state of continuous formation, renewing itself especially in the values of our charism, and that it feels profoundly motivated to ensure continuity to our form of life.

1. Ongoing formation

51. The gospel records the iconic episode of the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24,13-35). We are introduced to two disciples who, after the death of Jesus, leave Jerusalem and set out on the way. This reminds us that life consists precisely in this: in living, despite the weariness, the despondency, the disappointments. The wayfarer, once he opens his eyes wide, can discover the face of Jesus in the faces of those who approach him, It is in His words that we can read our history. If, by nightfall, He is still at our side, if we make a place for Him at our table, then His Words become the Bread of Life and will feed our desire to go back to Jerusalem, to keep going, to begin again.

52. The whole person is the subject of formation at every stage of life. It is a question of allowing oneself to be continually formed by the everyday nature of life. We are always on the way, which means that as long as we live we never reach a final

destination. Ongoing formation, as a dimension of life and as a never-ending process, is an intrinsic requirement of our vocation.

1.1. Nature

53. *Ongoing formation is a process of personal and community renewal and of harmonious adaptation of structures and activities, by which we are enabled to live our gospel vocation in actual everyday situations.* (Const. 41).

54. One can speak of two kinds of ongoing formation: the ordinary kind focuses on everyday living, and through it we assess the quality of our life. The extraordinary kind aims to accompany and cast light on our daily experiences at various levels: individual, local and provincial.

1.2. Objectives

55. Freedom is a victory that is never achieved as long as life lasts. Christian discipleship requires that we renew our freedom daily, so that our consecration to God and our service of humanity may be real and credible. Ongoing formation creates and protects areas of freedom, so that we may constantly learn from experience and strengthen our personal responsibility.

56. *If I have no love, I am nothing.* In the end, what counts is: did you love, and did you let yourself be loved? If we want to ensure that our life has meaning, we must take care of our affective life by building inter-personal relationships that are genuine, free and deep, and nourish the desire to continue to have the same sentiments as Christ.

57. A different world is possible, but only if we contribute to it. We profess a vocation that requires us to be more sensitive in the area of solidarity, and more committed to building justice, searching for peace initiatives and respecting the environment. Over time, we gradually acquire the ability to contemplate the world through God's eyes.

1.3. Dimensions

58. **Charismatic dimension**

- Live a more robust fraternal life, which will promote our commitment to live the Gospel in a Franciscan way.
- Give pride of place to active listening with the ears of the heart, which is one of the strong points of the relational style that flows from our charism, after the example of our questors and confessors.
- Look again at the Capuchin reform to rediscover the beauty of simplicity and living with few essentials.

59. **Spiritual dimension**

- Maintain an intimate relationship with God in everyday life that inspires us to think and act in accordance with the holy Gospel.
- Cultivate a spirituality of interior silence and listening to God's Word, leading us

to discover God in the midst of daily realities.

- Re-read our Franciscan charism in the light of the urgent needs and challenges of our time, in order to welcome the freshness of the Spirit and play our part in transforming reality by the power of the Gospel.

60. **Human dimension**

- Take care of our own vocation, managing responsibly our time and our formation, both individual and communal.
- Facing life's challenges creatively as time goes on, being aware at every moment of our limitations and the gifts we have received.
- Develop a stronger sense of interdependence and communion, valuing the other brothers and making more space for encounters and communication in our fraternities, so that we continue to discover the meaning of life.

61. **Intellectual dimension**

- Establish a Franciscan style of studying, thinking and taking decisions jointly, sharing experiences and acquired knowledge that help us grow in brotherhood.
- Take personal responsibility for ongoing formation, both individual and communal, in particular the pastoral-biblical dimension and that of our Franciscan and Capuchin charism.
Continually review our vision of the world, enriching it through openness to fraternal dialogue and in the light of the complementary perspectives of our time.

62. **Missionary-pastoral dimension**

- Evangelise by deeds and words, through the witness value of brotherly relationships. Proclamation of the Gospel is not enough – it must be proclaimed evangelically.
- Collaborate in the pastoral tasks of the Church, responding to the most urgent needs and excluding no-one from the service we give through our apostolates.
- Be aware that accompaniment, friendship and healthy brotherly relationships create social bonds that are also spiritually fruitful.

1.4. Means

63. In first place are the **ordinary local means**, since *the daily life of the fraternity greatly assists ongoing formation*.

- Liturgical life, lived intensely following the rhythm of the liturgical year, is an excellent school in which we are steeped in all the Christian and Franciscan values.
- Local chapters, lifestyle reviews and fraternal correction, sharing meals and recreation, help to create an atmosphere of healthy and open relationships.
- Times of meditation and personal reading are essential in order to keep alive the desire to delve ever more deeply.
- The critical and positive use of the social and communications media and the new technologies, as a fraternity and individually, can also be very helpful.

64. Similarly, there are **ordinary provincial means**, such as retreats and formation weeks on particular areas, meetings, seminars or celebrations of the circumscription such as professions, ordinations, jubilees and funerals.

65. **Extraordinary means** can be used, where possible and necessary: the study of some specific subject, courses in biblical and Franciscan spirituality, sabbaticals, etc.

1.5. Times

66. Pay attention to life's cycles and seasons, creating dynamic forces of fidelity, depending on the age, the vocational history and specific ministry of each brother, so that whatever stage of life they find ourselves in, the brothers are able to make a renewed synthesis of their life experiences, and embody our charism in new and intensified ways.

- First adult stage (30-55 years). A time typically marked by enthusiasm and full activity. A time to learn new ways of living our charism in the midst of apostolic responsibilities, being open to guidance and making the most of the resources of the fraternity.
- Middle adult years (55-75 years). Life gradually concentrates around the search for essentials, and through a process of interior growth, one attains vocational maturity. At the same time, because of limited pastoral results, disillusion and weariness can occur, as well as a strong tendency to self-sufficiency and individualism.
- Advanced age (from 75 years). A peak age, in which lived experiences become an invaluable gift for others. One has the responsibility to be generous in passing on life's lessons to the new generations. The brothers become aware that they are in the final cycle of life, and must learn to face it with Christian hope.

1.6. Priority areas in formation

67. **Work** is a grace that enables us to feel fulfilled, humanly and professionally. We must not forget that the brothers in ongoing formation witness to and reflect our charism for the brothers in initial formation. For that reason, both activism and individualism, as well as idleness and opting out, are to be avoided.

68. **The economy.** A sense of shared responsibility is to be fostered above everything else. All the brothers should be aware of how property is administered, the amount of material goods we have accumulated, how we use our assets and the money we have, and how we share them. Without transparent information there is no responsible formation.

69. **Justice, peace and ecology.** Franciscan spirituality offers practical guidance for confronting the ecological crisis, always in open dialogue with the world. As part of ongoing formation, we need to review our lifestyle, making sure that our consumption of resources is socially responsible and takes account of the needs of others. It is possible to live better with less. In addition, in all our fraternities and ministries, policies and practices must be put in place for the protection of minors and vulnerable adults.

70. **Communications media and new technologies.** It is becoming more and more necessary to acquire the knowledge and skills whereby we can make proper use of social networks and improve our knowledge of the digital media. Harnessed to the service of evangelization, they can help us build a more human and inclusive society; they enable us to communicate and to share knowledge and friendships, but we must never overlook the fact that they sometimes prevent real contact with the complexity of human experiences. Addiction to technology is a risk that must not be underestimated.

1.7. A culture of appraisal

71. As an exercise, appraisal aims to evaluate the practical effects of our reflections, the strength of the values we proclaim, the practices we have adopted in our personal and community life, and also the strategies we adopt to improve the processes of our human and spiritual growth.

72. It is for the local chapter to evaluate the ongoing formation plan of the fraternity. Regular assessments of the way the fraternity is going are advisable.

73. We suggest that as part of the events of the canonical visit, the provincial Minister or Custos should accompany, encourage and personally appraise with each brother his personal ongoing formation plan and that of the fraternity.

74. It may be appropriate to produce rules requiring adequate training to prepare brothers for ministerial and pastoral work. Anyone who is unwilling to update his formation should not exercise ministry in certain pastoral fields.

1.8. Other indications

75. It should be a priority for every circumscription to implement a creative ongoing formation plan that meets the real needs and capabilities of all its members.

76. The accompaniment provided during the first stage of ongoing formation needs to be urgently improved, i.e. by promoting in-service training activities for brothers who have completed between 5 and 10 years of perpetual profession.

77. It is the *primary ordinary duty [of the Ministers] to promote the ongoing formation of the brothers*, creating a favourable climate in the circumscription and providing concrete possibilities of ongoing formation for everyone. As the animator of the fraternity, the guardian, too, has a special mission with regard to ongoing formation.

78. Each circumscription should have a brother, or group of brothers, in charge of enabling this area of formation. There should be a variety of activities corresponding to different ages or types of pastoral work: for guardians, formators, directors of pastoral and social activities, bursars

79. The inter-provincial, international and general institutions of the Order should work together in the ongoing formation of the brothers, providing activities, courses and training which the circumscriptions are unable to provide by themselves.

INITIATION INTO OUR LIFE

80. Initial formation lays the foundations for dynamic growth in the identity of the consecrated person, and the process continues to strengthen throughout the whole of life.

2. The vocational stage

81. The iconic gospel encounter with the rich young man (Mk 10,17-30) introduces us to someone who has everything – even many fears that prevent him from living in peace. Suddenly, the challenge of a simple question reveals something which catches, seduces and captivates him, without needing to impose itself by force: the gaze of Jesus, who *looked at him and loved him*. Love always demands freedom, a readiness to leave everything, to walk unencumbered, to live without claiming anyone or anything as one's own, to recognise that all is gift, freely given. Whoever freely dares to follow the Lord is like the blind man Bartimeus: he finds the light that dispels every fear and gives meaning to everything.

82. Every vocation is a gift of the Holy Spirit, given to build up the Church and to serve the world. It is the task of the Christian community to arouse, welcome and cultivate vocations. We must foster a mindset that promotes the responsibility of all to create a fraternal culture of vocations.

2.1. Nature

83. *In His goodness God calls all the Christian faithful in the Church to the perfection of love through different states of life, so that the salvation of the world may be advanced by means of personal holiness.* (Const. 16, 1).

84. *Concern for vocations arises above all from the awareness that we ourselves are living and offering to others a way of life rich in human and gospel values, which, while offering genuine service to God and people, fosters personal growth* (Const. 17,1).

2.2. Objectives

85. To create an environment of discernment, enabling all those who are interested in our way of life to take vocational decisions with genuine human freedom and personal responsibility.

86. To propose programmes for emotional growth based on the style of Jesus' own relationships, which always awaken the desire for an encounter with God, inviting people to live by the logic of a total, free offering of their life.

87. To present a vision of the world based on the principles of Franciscan spirituality, helping people in their everyday lives to transform their passion for God into passion for the world, and vice versa.

2.3. Dimensions

88. The charismatic dimension

- Assist the person to listen to the profound desires of the heart, and discern the reasons for his interest in our way of life. *Whom do you wish to serve, the servant or the Master?*
- Make prayer become the fundamental space for vocational discernment: *Lord, what do you want of me?*
- Present the Capuchin life based on sound ecclesiology and a suitable theology of religious life, which values all vocations within the People of God.

89. The spiritual dimension

- Offer the necessary help so that the process of vocational discernment is the consequence of a personal choice driven by faith.
- Encourage prayer, the sacramental life and the daily reading of God's Word.
- Help the candidate, by tuning in to his inner vision, to discover a journey of openness to the transcendent, and the interconnectedness of all creatures.

90. The human dimension

- Capacity to express self-knowledge appropriate to one's age.
- Desire to be accompanied on the journey of vocational discernment.
- Evidence of a desire to belong to the group and good relational skills.

91. The intellectual dimension

- Present in a concise and organised way the principles and foundations of the Christian life experience.
- Offer a first critical approach to the Mystery of Christ.
- Begin an initial contact with the life of Saint Francis and Saint Clare, with a simple presentation of the values of the Franciscan charism.

92. The missionary-pastoral dimension

- If the candidate is involved in some pastoral activity, continue that involvement. If not, assess whether it is appropriate to suggest some pastoral task.
- Explain, in a general way, the pastoral and apostolic services carried out by the Order, and more concretely in the Province or Custody.
- Begin the reading of the Gospel, with special attention to those texts that present most clearly Christ's way of teaching and proclaiming the Kingdom of God.

2.4. Times

93. The time of discernment prior to entering is variable, but it must enable the candidate to get to know our way of life, and also enable those in charge of the accompaniment to discern signs of steadiness in his vocation.

2.5. Criteria for discernment

94. The following criteria refer to the totality of the person, understood in the light of faith:

- physical and psychological health
suitable maturity
- in particular, affective and relational maturity
- suitability for living in brotherhood
- an ability to reconcile ideals and reality
- flexibility at the level of knowledge and relationships
- a readiness to change
- trust in the formators,
- adherence to faith values.

95. Sociologically, persons between the age of 16 and 29 are considered young. Experience in vocations work shows that beyond the age of 35-40 it proves difficult to acquire habits, especially the openness which the religious life requires.

2.6. Other indications

96. Ensure that the candidate knows, even if only in broad outline, our specific identity within the Church, so that we avoid admitting candidates who only want to be priests, without any specific interest in our form of life.

97. Establish guidelines and specific criteria for accompanying teenagers, young people or adults who are considering a vocation, in accordance with their culture and with the real possibilities that are available to receive them. Where they exist in the Order, minor seminaries and centres of vocational guidance, as well as the experience of voluntary work, are good opportunities to experience our life.

98. Each fraternity should have a brother in charge of youth work and vocations promotion, duly trained to provide the systematic accompaniment of the candidates. In addition to this obvious way of promoting vocations, each circumscription should have a secretariat for Vocations Promotion.

1.

THE STAGES OF INITIAL FORMATION

3. The postulancy

99. The iconic gospel event of baptism (Mk 1,9-11) presents Jesus as the Son, in whom God is well pleased. The sacrament of baptism consists precisely in confirming our desire to be sons like the Son, and like Jesus, to enjoy a profound intimacy with God the Father. Jesus, being Son, became our brother, so that being brothers we might learn to be sons. Only through brotherhood can we discover that no-one is a slave. When we pray to God, our common Father, in whom we all recognise that we are

brothers, asking for *our* daily bread, we are reminded that the gift of sonship demands communion, solidarity and a depth of closeness to our brothers.

100. During postulancy the relationship with Jesus Christ is deepened and one acquires a greater awareness of what it means to follow Him, in the light of the values of our charism and identity, committing oneself to a process of vocational discernment in our religious family.

3.1. Nature

101. *During this period, the postulant comes to know our life and makes a further and more careful discernment of his vocation. For its part, the fraternity comes to know the postulant better and ascertains the growth of his human maturity, especially affective maturity, and his ability to discern his life and the signs of the times according to the Gospel. (Const, 30, 2).*

3.2. Objectives

102. To help the postulant acquire the necessary self-knowledge and autonomy to enable him to integrate in a mature way his own history and personal reality, with all its lights and shadows.

103. To deepen his relationship with Jesus Christ, contemplating His attitude of love for life, and His goodness, mercy and compassion for people.

104. To awaken interest in social issues relating to injustice, violence, poverty and the violation of human rights.

3.3. Dimensions

105. **The charismatic dimension**

- In silence and beauty, Francis seeks the meaning of life, always in the hope of finding something greater than himself.
- Docile to the Spirit, he is guided to San Damiano, where he would later discover that the secret lay in making oneself poor and little, giving up any kind of power.
- Only by staking one's own life can one read and understand the Gospel, and come to believe that it contains all the answers.

106. **The spiritual dimension**

- Aided by accompaniment, to compose a spiritual autobiography based on one's own history, and so become aware of God's call through events in the world.
- To introduce gradually practices that underpin our spiritual life: the Eucharist, reconciliation and contemplation.
- To introduce the different methods of contemplative prayer and the liturgy of the hours.

107. **The human dimension**

- Learning to understand and to manage one's emotions, paying special attention to affective aspects.
- Caring for oneself, physically and psychologically, to build up healthy self-esteem.
- To provide the components of a personal life-plan, taking the postulant's own biography as a starting point and progressively updating it in the light of successive evaluations.

108. **The intellectual dimension**

- To present the basic principles of the Catechism of the Catholic Church.
- To know the person of Jesus Christ through systematic study of the Gospel.
- To read and study one of the classic and modern biographies of Saint Francis and Saint Clare, together with the principles of Franciscan spirituality.

109. **The missionary-pastoral dimension**

- Through accompaniment, to show how faith-based principles can be put into practice in daily life.
- To make possible a first experience of the apostolate and of service to the poor, always as part of the fraternity.
- To promote mission awareness and a sense for social pastoral involvement and work for justice, by learning to read the signs of the times.

3.4. Time

110. Growth in maturity takes time, depending on the needs of the candidates. In recent years, due to social and cultural changes, and changes in the Church and families, there has been a tendency to prolong the postulancy in order to facilitate discernment and enable a greater human and Christian maturity. Our legislation sets a minimum of one year, but in most geographical regions of the Order this is extended to two years.

111. From the moment a candidate is received into the fraternity to begin the journey of initiation into our life, and not simply to live there for a time, he becomes a postulant, even though some circumscriptions give different names to each of the years preceding the novitiate.

3.5. Priority areas of formation

112. **Work.** During the time of postulancy it is important to modify any negative concepts of work, helping the brothers in formation to discover it as a grace, an opportunity to relate with others and to share the difficulties and dreams of the people. Readiness to perform simple tasks, including domestic chores, should be encouraged, to strengthen the sense of belonging to the local fraternity and to the circumscription.

113. **The economy.** From the beginning, the postulants are to be introduced to the principles of Franciscan spirituality which cast light on economic practice: the principle of gratuity and the logic of seeing all as gift; *you cannot serve God and money*. Capuchin life is centred precisely on the search for what is fundamental, and demands that we give up the culture of consumerism and exclusion.

114. **Justice, peace and ecology.** God entrusts us with the care of our common home. Those who choose our way of life commit themselves, among other things, to safeguard the environment and to co-operate creatively to find solutions to the problems affecting the planet. This is the moment to awaken in the brothers the need to look for the social causes of injustice, violence, poverty and other violations of human rights, by nourishing hope for a better world.

115. **Communications media and new technologies.** *The digital world* and the *new media* have created a culture that offers many opportunities to access information and to build relationships from a distance, but that also presents dangers such as cyber-bullying, gambling, pornography, entrapment via *chat rooms*, ideological manipulation, etc. It is right that candidates learn the skills to use the digital media safely and with awareness, taking as a starting point their own cultural context and policies for the safe use of the media. It is highly appropriate that postulants should not access the social media apart from the fraternity.

3.6. Criteria for discernment

116. The following criteria should be kept in mind when assessing a person's suitability:

- Psycho-physical balance (possible medical examination and psychological assessment)
- Absence of evident conditioning factors
- Capacity to take initiatives and share responsibility
- Proper use of freedom and time
- Readiness for service and work
- Capacity to make free and responsible choices
- Knowledge of Christian faith and evidence of its practice
- sufficient clarity regarding intentions and motivations
- receptivity to the role of formators
- aptitude for community life
- readiness to follow Christ in poverty, obedience and chastity

3.7. Other indications

117. It is preferable that during postulancy there should be no academic studies, precisely so that priority is given to other studies, courses or workshops that are in harmony with the aims of this stage of formation.

118. The place should foster integration into the fraternity, recollection and meditation; it should be simple, offer possibilities for manual work and contact with the poor. It is important that the *candidate is not removed from his cultural context*.

119. In order to make their personal accompaniment more profound and effective, it is advisable that the postulants live in the same fraternity and with the same director.

120. The postulancy marks the beginning of the journey of incorporation into the Order. It is the time when the first steps are taken towards belonging to the fraternity. It is also the moment when the question of belonging to other possible groups – family, groups of friends, ecclesial movements, political parties, ethnic groups, etc. – is clarified, so that the new identity acquired in our Capuchin family can become established.

121. At the end of the postulancy, a meeting between the postulant director and the novice-master is arranged: a detailed report on each of the postulants is presented, with special reference to the five dimensions.

4. The novitiate

122. The iconic gospel image of Bethany (Lk 10,38-42) introduces us to a house with open doors. Here we learn to listen like Mary and to serve like Martha. They are not different things. Listening always bears fruit in service, and there is no service unless it is born of listening. The point is, a long journey of apprenticeship is involved, in which Christ the Teacher continues to invite us to listen to His Word, alive in the Gospel, and to serve Him in our brothers and sisters, especially those in need. *Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it.* (Lk 11,27).

4.1. Nature

123. *The novitiate is a period of more intense initiation and more profound experience of the Capuchin Franciscan gospel life in its fundamental demands. It requires a free and mature decision to try out our form of religious life* (Const. 31, 1).

4.2. Objectives

124. To re-read one's own history in the light of grace and the freely-given gift of God's love and compassion, seeing it as place of salvation.

125. To reinforce with ever greater clarity the conviction that Christ is the centre of one's life, contemplating the mystery of His divine humanity and seeking to embody His sentiments and attitudes.

126. To delve more deeply into the consequences of following Christ, voluntarily placing oneself in opposition to a consumerist world from which more and more people are excluded; to learn the skills of communal dialogue so as to welcome diversity as an enrichment and be able to integrate other people's different ways of seeing, thinking and acting.

127. **The charismatic dimension**

- Brotherhood is not a theory. Only by being among brothers can one learn to be a brother.
- To discover that being a Capuchin lesser brother is our particular way of being Church, by building environments of welcome, encounter and tender-hearted love.
- To preserve and pass on with creative fidelity the values of the charism we have received: making brotherhood the environment where we experience the goodness of belonging to Christ.

128. **The spiritual dimension**

- To embrace as one's own the spiritual life of the Capuchin tradition, centred on the liturgy and especially on mental prayer, aided by *lectio divina* and the sound devotions of the Order.
- To acquire the habit of interior silence and contemplation, so as to reinforce one's consecration to God through a continuous process of purification of the motives for one's vocation.
- To delve more deeply into the theology of the vows through the contemplation of the person of Christ, poor, obedient and chaste, always seeking to be profoundly conformed to Him.

129. **The human dimension**

- To cultivate fraternal relationships, learning to share one's personal history in depth.
- To integrate sexual development into one's vocational journey by learning to establish relationships that are healthy, mature and fully self-giving.
- To practice personal and communal discernment as a means of tuning in to what God wants, both in important moments and in the ordinary circumstances of life.

130. **The intellectual dimension**

- To complement the study of the catechism by the theology of the religious life and the values proper to our life.
- To present a general and systematic introduction to the Bible and the Liturgy.
- To study thoroughly the contents and spirituality of the Rule, the Testament and the Constitutions of the Capuchin Friars Minor, the Plenary Councils and other documents of the Order.

131. **The missionary-pastoral dimension**

- To discover in the mission that flows from our charism a way of working with others to build a more evangelical and fraternal world.
- To plan meetings with the more significant brothers of the circumscription who embody in their own lives the mission of Jesus, from the perspective of our charism.

- To accompany the novices in some form of service among the poor and needy, to ensure that they have a genuine experience of our Capuchin charism.

4.4. Time

132. The Code of Canon Law (CIC) establishes that, for the novitiate to be valid, it must last for an uninterrupted period of twelve months spent in the novitiate house, and may not last longer than two years. Any absence of more than fifteen days must be made good, while an absence of more than three months invalidates the novitiate.

4.5. Priority areas of formation

133. **Work.** The experience of manual work is one of the values of our charism and is part of our spirituality. God places the work of creation in our hands, inviting us to take care of it and complete it. At the same time, work makes us feel the strong bond of interdependence among ourselves, through our freely chosen poverty.

134. **The economy.** Starting from the novitiate, living a life of simplicity, we place everything in common and use material goods in a manner inspired by the gospel: everything we receive belongs to the fraternity. As from this moment, a friar must be trained to be detached from money and material goods, remembering that one must become poor to enter the Kingdom of heaven.

135. **Justice, peace and ecology.** The novitiate is also a time to become aware of the reality of the world we live in, and of the consequences of radical discipleship. Subjects such as human rights, climate change and human trafficking require a response – mystical, prophetic and in solidarity - from those whose lives give witness to the good news of the Kingdom.

136. **The communications media and the new technologies.** The novitiate period requires particular distance from some realities, in order to create an atmosphere of reflection in which personal decisions can mature. The communal use of mobile phones and computers is recommended, and these should be in a public room. The life of a lesser brother, centred on essentials, protects us from being enslaved to the latest fashion or the last word in technological novelty.

4.6. Criteria for discernment

137. We offer a few criteria for discerning the suitability of a novice for first profession:

- A proportionate level of human and affective maturity and a capacity to form good interpersonal relationships
- A spirit of initiative, together with active and responsible participation in his own formation
- The capacity to accept differences in others and to live in brotherhood
- An evident sense of responsibility in responding to the grace of work
- The capacity to question and assess oneself in the light of the Word of God
- The ability to live a life of prayer and contemplation

- Flexibility and dialogue with formators
- A sense of belonging to the brotherhood and the Order
- Capacity to serve the least ones and those on the margins of society
- An understanding of the vows and a serious desire to live them with joy and serenity.
- Sufficient knowledge of the contents of formation, formation, especially of the Capuchin Franciscan charism and of the Sacred Scripture.

4.7. Other indications

138. The ideal number for a group of novices is at least 4 and no more than 10.

139. At the end of the novitiate there must be a handover between the novice-master and the post-novitiate director concerning the situation of each brother, the goals achieved and the main challenges he will have to face in the post-novitiate.

5. The post-novitiate

140. The iconic gospel image of Jesus on the Cross (Jn 19,30) helps us to understand that on the journey of life, nothing remains in our hands. Absolutely nothing. We have received everything as a free gift. The cross is the symbol of love that is both gift and surrender. Only one who empties himself totally is able, like God, to love to the end, because only someone who has surrendered everything has nothing to lose. Our hands and hearts are filled with poverty, liberty and the desire to give oneself freely. The mystery of the cross is the school of our consecration, because *a grain of wheat that falls into the earth and dies produces much fruit* (Jn 12,24).

141. The Church has instituted a time of consolidation of one's choice after the novitiate, in which the brother in temporary vows, continuing his process of initiation, meets new realities and challenges, tests the values he has already internalised and, with the help of his brothers, takes stock of the journey that still lies ahead.

5.1. Nature

142. *The post-novitiate, which begins with temporary profession and concludes with perpetual profession, is the third stage of initiation. During this period the brothers progress further in maturity and prepare themselves to make a definitive choice of the gospel life in our Order.* (Const. 32, 1)

143. *Because of its essential reference to religious consecration and to perpetual profession, the journey of formation undertaken in the post-novitiate must be the same for all the brothers. Since the gospel life in brotherhood holds the primary place in our vocation, it must also be given priority during this period.* (Const. 32, 2)

5.2. Objectives

144. To promote personal responsibility in all dimensions of life. Religious consecration acquires profound significance as an act of free, generous and disinterested offering of one's own life for the Kingdom.

145. To build up a style of affective relationships based on communication, mutual recognition, transparency and sharing in decision-making in all that affects the fraternity.

146. To stand side by side with those who are suffering, giving witness to solidarity, justice and truth based on our experience of God's goodness, and committing ourselves to live the values of freedom, equality and participation.

5.3. Dimensions

147. **The charismatic dimension**

- To become aware that discipleship is not without difficulties. The cross is our shared horizon: learning to love as He loves us, freely and without counting the cost.
- To construct an undivided identity, bearing in ourselves the marks of Jesus, being and acting like Him.
- To dare to interpret all reality in the light of the mystery of the cross, where love takes concrete form in dispossession, self-giving and freedom.

148. **The spiritual dimension**

- Reinforce the centrality of the consecration of one's life through deeper study of Sacred Scripture, and the celebration of the liturgy.
- Revitalise the life of prayer through awareness of the presence of God and of the constant action of the Spirit in one's own life and that of the fraternity.
- Learning to live the balance between action and contemplation in daily life, in a healthy tension both realistic and spiritual.

149. **The human dimension**

- Create affective structures which, by means of in-depth listening and communication, foster interdependence and help to overcome individualistic tendencies, so that the brother recognises himself as a valued gift to the fraternity.
- Achieve harmonious integration of spiritual, physical and affective needs, through accompaniment and honest facing of issues.
- Learn to plan one's time so that there is a healthy balance between service and personal and community needs.

150. **The intellectual dimension**

- Learning to reflect critically, and acquire the capacity to evaluate, discern and plan for the future.

- A deeper study of Sacred Scripture, theology, liturgy, the history and spirituality of the Order, providing all the brothers with a sufficient foundation for their life as consecrated men, whether cleric or lay, and to equip them to serve the Church.
- Sufficient knowledge of the history of the Order and of their own Province or Custody.

151. **The missionary-pastoral dimension**

- Learning to communicate, reflect on and evaluate pastoral experiences as a fraternity, with a view to strengthening our identity and charism.
- Arrange extended periods of missionary experience, in frontier situations, to enable us to live the Capuchin Franciscan ideal more intensely.
- Plan pastoral activities as a fraternity, seeking a balance between action, the spiritual life, the needs of fraternity life, and study.

5.4. Times

152. The post-novitiate lasts for at least three years, and can be extended by three more years. If a brother or those in charge of formation think it appropriate, and by way of exception, it can be extended up to a maximum of nine years.

153. The integration and consolidation of the values of our charism requires a patient, long and progressive journey. This implies abandoning the idea of having set times, pre-established and the same for all, or for blocks of brothers making their profession together. Here the principle of personalised formation applies.

5.5. Priority areas in formation

154. **Work.** The post-novitiate is an appropriate time to get to know and experience the different types of work that are possible in the Order. Discernment is a fundamental tool to become aware of the gifts and skills of each brother in formation, as well as the needs of the institution that cannot be overlooked. Neither the self-fulfilment of the individual nor the needs of the institution can be the ultimate criterion for discernment.

155. **The economy.** In this stage of formation, transparent, unified and ethical criteria for the use of our economic resources should be reinforced. This is the time to experience that work is our main source of support, living in solidarity with one another and with the poor, consuming resources responsibly, practising justice that promotes social change and administering property in a manner that is sensitive to social and ecological values. The brothers are to be involved in the process of drawing up, using and evaluating the fraternity budget.

156. **Justice, peace and ecology.** The experience of having been captivated by Christ leads the post-novice to embrace the cause of the Kingdom on behalf of the poorest and most vulnerable in society, as Jesus Himself did. Living a simple, plain lifestyle marked by solidarity, we must practice dialogue and respect and learn to value diversity, as a way of working together to build peace in the world.

157. **The communications media and the new technologies.** Conscious of the cultural challenges provoked by the digital world and technological innovations, in this stage it is necessary to develop a critical and positive sense in the face of the news and other content broadcast by the social communications media, especially the Internet. To foster the correct use of the media it is appropriate to organise specific courses and seminars on the subject of internet safety and security, how to draw up culturally appropriate norms and the possibility of creating and handling resources for pastoral work and evangelisation using the new technology.

5.6. Criteria for discernment

158. When assessing the suitability of a brother for perpetual profession, some of the criteria to be borne in mind are:

- Affective maturity
- Obvious signs of a proper personal relationship with God in prayer
- Personal initiative and responsibility for one's own religious life
- Ability to live and work with the fraternity
- Ability to adapt to the service of others, especially of the poorest
- A sense of justice, peace and respect for creation
- Capacity to make a final commitment and to live the evangelical counsels
- Sufficient interior freedom and practice of poverty
- A sense of belonging to the brotherhood, the Order and the Church

5.7. Other indications

159. It is fitting that the first three years of the post-novitiate should be lived in the same fraternity and with the same director, in order to foster accompaniment and the effective strengthening of our life.

160. Formation fraternities that are too large are to be avoided. As a general rule, large numbers hinder a truly personalised accompaniment. To consolidate the values of our life, the need is for real experiences of brotherhood that strengthen identity and the sense of belonging.

161. The process of initiation into our life culminates in perpetual profession. The serene and profound desire to feel that one is a Capuchin lesser brother must last throughout life. Once a brother has reached this point, he should be ready to continue his growth, in the conviction that formation is never finished. On its part, the fraternity experiences that the brother is a gift of God to our Order.

162. **Conclusion.** Mary, our Mother and Teacher, at each and every stage of her life, welcomed the Word, pondered it, kept it and put it into practice. She was the first disciple to follow the Way, and told us always to listen to the Master, to live by faith and transform love into service. The Almighty continues to do great things in each one of us. Today also, pupils in the school of Nazareth, we are still learning how to live in brotherhood, with joy and simplicity, in order to be untiring witnesses of the tender love and presence of God in our world.