

The centrality of fraternal life in our identity:

ideals and challenges

(Assisi, September 5, 2023, Br. Raffaele Ruffo)

There is a saying in Italy that goes, "Better alone than badly accompanied!" In truth, I think it is better to be well accompanied than alone. It is the wisdom of the Bible that says it, in the book of Qohelet: "Better to be two than one, for two have a better reward in toil. For if they come to fall, the one will lift up the other. Woe, on the other hand, to the one who is alone: if he falls, he has no one to lift him up. Moreover, if two sleep together, they can warm themselves; but how does one alone warm himself? If one attacks, two can resist him, and a three-pronged rope does not break so soon" (Qo 4:9-12).

This is why carabineers go in pairs. To defend themselves and help each other in case of need or danger.

1. Fraternal life: a gift

Fraternal life, for us religious, is not primarily a necessity (as for carabineers), but a "gift". St. Francis did not seek out brothers. He had consecrated himself to follow the poor and humble Jesus. For three years he lived as a hermit. One day Bernard goes looking for him and becomes his first "brother." In the Testament Francis will acknowledge that it was the Lord who gave him brothers.

In vocational discernment this means that if a person has not yet met Christ, has not allowed himself to be loved and conquered by him, he is not ready for fraternal life. He will not be able to receive it as a gift. When you choose Christ, or rather, after he chooses you and you say yes, he himself will introduce you to brothers with whom you can share a life project.

When as a young man I was looking for meaning in my existence, I met the Lord through the mediation of a Capuchin friar, who became my spiritual guide. Later, the Lord gave me the gift of living in a community of Capuchin friars, who welcomed me as a brother, and whom I, in turn, welcomed as brothers.

It is important to recognize this dimension of the "gift" of brothers and of life in fraternity: "As brothers given to one another by the Lord and endowed with different gifts, let us welcome one another with a grateful heart" (Const. 89:1). In this regard, I like to recall Francis' joy when Bernard decided to join him: "The coming and conversion of such a pious man filled Francis with an extraordinary joy: it seemed to him that the Lord cared for him, giving him the companion [socium] that everyone needs and a faithful friend.".¹

¹ 1Cor 24.

Evidently not all Capuchin friars would become "friends." But certainly some will...

The document *Fraternal Life in Community* recommends the need to welcome the brother with a contemplative gaze: "Promote a contemplative attitude before the wisdom of God, who sent certain brothers so that they might be a gift to one another. Praise Him for what each brother conveys of the presence and word of Christ".²

We do not choose the brothers with whom we share life. Someone Else chooses for us, using human mediations: provincial or general minister. Each brother, thanks to his spiritual qualities and gifts, contributes to forming the portrait of the "good" friar minor, according to the famous discourse of Francis in the *Mirror of Perfection*: "He would be a good friar minor who would unite in himself the life and attitudes of the following holy friars...".³ Bernard was first on the list....

2. In the image of the Trinity

Fraternal life à a gift from Above: "One cannot understand religious community without starting from its being a gift from Above, from its mystery, from its being rooted in the very heart of the Trinity.".⁴

The document *Consecrated Life* has admirably shown and deepened the essential link of fraternal life with the Trinitarian mystery: "Fraternal life intends to reflect the depth and richness of that mystery, configuring itself as a human space inhabited by the Trinity, which thus extends in history the gifts of communion proper to the three divine Persons".⁵

Fraternal life is configured as a "human space inhabited by the Trinity" and a "confessio trinitatis." Concretely this means - as John Corriveau wrote in one of his letters addressed to the Capuchin Poor Clares - that: "Every monastery must be an image of Trinitarian relations".⁶

Because of the principle of communicating vessels and the unity-complementarity of the Franciscan charism, what applies to Capuchin Poor Clares also applies to Capuchin friars: every monastery must be an image of Trinitarian relationships.

When someone comes to visit our fraternity he should see in our style of life and relationship the spiritual traits of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit: "Look at that friar, he reminds me of the merciful attitude of the Father. Look at that other one, he reminds me of the Son's humility and sense of service. And that other one, the consoling action of the Holy Spirit [...] Look at that friar

² CONGREGAZIONE PER GLI ISTITUTI DI VITA CONSACRATA E LE SOCIETÀ DI VITA APOSTOLICA, *La vita fraterna in comunità* (1994), n. 40.
Da qui VF.

³ Cfr. SP 85.

⁴ VF 8.

⁵ GIOVANNI PAOLO II, *La Vita consacrata e la sua missione nella Chiesa e nel mondo* (1996), n. 41. Cfr. Cost. n. 88.

⁶ JOHN CORRIVEAU, *Immagine della sua stessa divinità* (2006), p. 2.

how he cares for his brother. Look, how they hold everything in common. No one says: this car is only for me to use, or this money is mine because it is the fruit of my labor...."

The unity and diversity of the Trinity should be the model of our fraternal life. As sound dogmatics states, within the Trinity there is a community of nature and a distinction of persons: three persons distinct in relationship but equal in substance.

In our fraternity we are unique persons, distinct in relationship, but equal in substance in our common Capuchin baptismal and religious vocation.

Let me remind you that Duns Scotus's ultimate *solitudo* or incommunicable existence does not mean that in order to realize one's vocation each person must live solitary, closed in his own corner, without communicating with others. Scotus means that each of us ultimately has a personal trait so unique and original that it cannot be put in "common" with others. Beyond this last proper and personal uncommon trait, the rest, on the other hand, we should strive to share it with the brothers and sisters whom the Lord has placed beside us....

For the Trinity works because the three persons always put everything in common: "The Father is all in the Son, all in the Holy Spirit; the Son is all in the Father, all in the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit is all in the Father, all in the Son. None precedes the other for eternity, or surpasses him in greatness, or exceeds him in power" (Council of Florence).⁷

What for the three persons of the Trinity is "natural," for us is a journey of personal and communal conversion. Fraternal Life in Community reminds us that religious life is where the daily patient transition from "I" to "we" takes place. Our car, our money, our work, our apostolate....

In the description of the early Jerusalem community in the Acts of the Apostles, the brothers and sisters put everything in common. Not without some difficulties. See the example of Ananias and Sapphira. Building fraternity involves a "struggle" between the Trinitarian ideal of ~~comune~~, that is, of putting in common ~~comune~~ (comune), and its opposing force, the ~~particolar~~, that is, the own, the particular, the private. I like to point out that in Latin *communio* (*cum-munus*), which translates the Greek ~~comune~~, means "to accomplish one's task together with others." Here is the ideal of fraternal life... ~~comune~~

3. The change in the Order's identity after the Council

In his letter Identity and Belonging, Br. Mauro Jöhri recalled the transition that took place in the Order immediately after the Council. If for centuries the Capuchin identity charism was one of material poverty and austerity of life (for centuries the Capuchin Order was considered the most austere in the Church), what distinguishes the Capuchin charism today is the centrality of fraternal

⁷ DS 1331.

life.⁸ After this change we hope that today Capuchins will be recognized as the most "fraternal" in the Church....

Parallel à this identity shift in the Order, in the post-conciliar period there has also been a change in the conception of religious life. That is, there was a shift from "community" life to "fraternal" life.

In the old Code of Canon Law (1917) it was stated that: "In every religion the vita communis must be strictly observed by all, even in matters of food, clothing and furniture".⁹ The focus was on doing things in common. Indeed, there was talk of regular observance, of doing common acts and practices....

Instead, the new Code of Canon Law (1984) speaks of "fraternal life in community": "A religious institute is a society whose members, according to their own law, make public vows, perpetual or temporary to be renewed when due, and lead fraternal life in community".¹⁰

It will be the document Fraternal Life in Community that will deepen this new dimension. Life in common is the most "visible" element of religious life: fidelity to norms, participation in common acts, collaboration in common services. Fraternal life is the most "spiritual" element: it is about creating a communion of life, made up of interpersonal relationships. Life in common is at the service of fraternal life; it aims to "intensely foster fraternal life".¹¹

It is not just about doing practices together (praying, eating, working...), but living them in a fabric of authentic fraternal relationships, in order to realize each person's vocation.

This is what the Code of Canon Law affirms: "The fraternal life, proper to each institute, by which all members are gathered in Christ as one peculiar family, be defined in such a way that it succeeds for all as a mutual help in realizing the vocation proper to each one".¹²

4. Fraternal life "center" of our Capuchin identity

If by community is meant a "life shared within the horizon of a common purpose that constitutes the reason for their being together",¹³ the "common end" that unites Capuchin brothers is fraternal life: "Living together among ourselves as lesser brothers is the primordial element of the Franciscan vocation" (Const. 24:7). The centrality of fraternal life we find it expressed and declined in each of the twelve chapters of our Constitutions. For this reason, fraternal life "must always and everywhere be a fundamental requirement of the formation process" (Const. 24:7).

⁸ MAURO JÖHRI, *Identità e appartenenza dei frati minori cappuccini* (2014), pp. 5-7.

⁹ «In quavis religione vita communis accurate ab omnibus servetur etiam in iis quae ad victimum, ad vestitum et ad suppellectilem pertinetur» (CIC 1917, n. 594,1).

¹⁰ CIC n. 607,2.

¹¹ VF 3.

¹² CIC n. 602.

¹³ R. MANCINI, *L'uomo e la comunità*, Qiqajon, 2004, p. 107.

Fraternal life, together with minority, is the qualifying element that shapes every dimension of our Capuchin life: "Fraternity and minority are original aspects of the charism the Spirit has given us; they also inform the contemplative and apostolic dimension of our vocation" (Const. 4:2).

An example of this fraternal dimension touching prayer is the Capuchin tradition of doing mental prayer in common. Why do Capuchin friars do mental prayer in common? Answer: because it is part of their tradition. Couldn't one pray better alone, perhaps in his own room? Perhaps. But, we are not Jesuits, we are Capuchins, so we live mental prayer together, at the same time and in the same place.¹⁴

Also in the apostolate of the Capuchin friar, fraternal life has its importance. In fact, the Constitutions say that every kind of apostolate should be promoted, coordinated and lived as "an expression of the whole fraternity" (Const. 148.1).

What does expression of the whole fraternity mean? We find the answer in the chapter devoted to work: "Let the work of individual brothers be an expression of the whole fraternity and manifest its communion of purpose. Therefore, the brothers should take on and carry out activities after proper community discernment and with the blessing of obedience, so that the work is always carried out as a mandate of the fraternity. The brothers should not take possession of their work, but devote themselves to it with openness to the needs of the local fraternity, the circumscription and the Order, and always be available for itinerancy" (Const. 79:3-4).

Work or apostolate as an "expression" of the whole fraternity means that you do not choose it for yourself, that it is ultimately entrusted to you by the obedience of your superior, that you exercise it in the name of your fraternity, that you do not appropriate it to the point of making your identity as a friar dependent on it, that you do not alienate or isolate yourself from your fraternity...

5. The ideal of fraternal life

I like to recall at this point the ideal of Franciscan fraternal life. We find it particularly in the Rule and in Thomas de Celano's description of the primitive Franciscan fraternity. Chapter Six of the Rule gives us two principles and models of action, taken from St. Paul¹⁵ and the Gospel¹⁶: maternal care and the golden rule, of doing to others what you would want them to do to you if you were in their place: "And wherever they are and will meet, let them show themselves familiar with one another. And let each manifest to the other his needs, for if the mother nurtures and loves her carnal child,

¹⁴ «I Capitoli provinciali e locali provvedano che tutti i frati abbiano ogni giorno il tempo necessario per l'orazione mentale da farsi in comune e in privato» (Cost 55,3).

¹⁵ «Siamo stati amorevoli in mezzo a voi, come una madre che ha cura dei propri figli» (1Ts 2,7).

¹⁶ «Tutto quanto volete che gli uomini facciano a voi, anche voi fatelo a loro: questa infatti è la Legge e i Profeti» (Mt 7,12).

how much more thoughtfully should one love and nurture his spiritual brother? And if any one falls ill, the other brothers should serve him as they would like to be served themselves.". ¹⁷

Thomas of Celano left us an idyllic picture of fraternal life. Beautiful as an ideal reference to be desired and lived. We know, however, that alongside the lights there are also shadows, as several other texts in early Franciscan biographies show. It is somewhat like the two inspirational pictures in the Acts of the Apostles. If you then continue the book of Acts and read the letters of Paul and the other apostles, you see that there were also a lot of problems, disagreements and contrasts between the members of the different Christian communities.

I think it doesn't hurt, in order to reawaken the ideal and also to recognize how we lived and still live this ideal in our fraternities, to listen again to the words that describe the portrait of life and relationships among the first Friars Minor: "How ardent was the brotherly love of the new disciples of Christ! How strong in them was the love for their religious family! Whenever in some place or on the street, as it could happen, they met, it was a veritable explosion of their spiritual affection [...] And they were [...] delicate sentiments [...] courteous talk, polite replies, full unanimity in their ideal, ready reverence and untiring mutual service [...] They poured all the affection of their hearts into the bosom of the community, sought with all their efforts to give even themselves to meet the needs of the brothers. They were happy when they could reunite, happier when they were together; but it was heavy for all to live apart, bitter to part, painful at the moment of farewell [...] Jealousy, malice, resentment, quarrels, suspicion, bitterness found no place in them, but only great concord, constant serenity, actions of thanks and praise.". ¹⁸

6. To become brothers it is necessary to know each other

To get to live these beautiful fraternal relationships made up of respect, attention, mutual service and deep affection, one must first learn to know oneself. Classical philosophy tells us that one cannot love what one does not know. To love the brothers in my fraternity, one must first know them. It is not just a matter of knowing their name, date of birth and place of origin. It is about knowing their biography. When making a new fraternity, or when a new member joins, I find it important for brothers to introduce themselves by telling a bit of their personal story. Since I have been in Clermont, virtually every year there are changes in the fraternity. At the beginning of the new fraternal year we devote part of the first local chapters to introducing the brothers.

The document Fraternal Life in Community devotes a lot of space to the importance of fraternal knowledge: "The lack and poverty of communication usually generates the weakening of the fraternity, due to the non-knowledge of the experience of others that makes the brother a stranger and the relationship anonymous.". ¹⁹

¹⁷ Rb VI,7-9.

¹⁸ 1Cel 38-41.

¹⁹ VF 32.

Knowledge of the brother is developed in the daily commitment to enter into relationship with him. Starting from the gaze. Looking at the brother. A simple gesture, but at the same time important, because the gaze is the first vector of communication: "With the gaze we can transform a person, destroy him or rebuild him, extinguish him or revive him, make him weep or console him, express hatred or indifference or love, tell him that for us he is nothing or tell him that for us he is everything".²⁰

After looking, there is listening. Bonhoeffer said that: "The first service one owes one's neighbor is to listen to him. Just as the love of God begins with listening to his Word, so the beginning of love for one's brother lies in learning to listen to him".²¹ Bonhoeffer speaks of true listening, not impatient, distracted or à "half ear," convinced that we already know what the other person has to say. The risk of half-hearted listening can arise when one has lived together for several years and has the same conversations (the same risk as married couples...).

One may live many years together, do many things together, but one may not necessarily know each other deeply. I want to read in this connection an evocative account by M. Buber: "The rabbi of Sasson narrated, How men should love I learned from a farmer. He stood with other peasants in a tavern and drank. He stood for a long time silent with the others; but when his heart was moved by the wine, turning to a companion who sat beside him, he asked: Say, do you love me or not? The other replied, I love you very much. And the peasant: You say you love me, yet you do not know what I need. If you really loved me you would know. The friend did not dare to retort, and the peasant who had questioned him fell silent again. I understood, however: to love men is to try to know their needs and suffer their pains."²²

Without sincere dialogue and deep listening there is a risk of leading juxtaposed or parallel existences, which is far from the ideal of fraternal life.

Look, listen and share. It is not only about the "quantity" of time spent in looking, listening and speaking, but above all about the "quality" of all these attitudes. It is about transforming *chrónos* (physical time) into *kairós* (lived time): living the relationship with the brother as an uplifting event, in the sense that it builds and strengthens fraternal life.

It is not just a matter of dialoguing about the material things of everyday life or the events that pass in the world. It is about sharing in depth, about our spiritual life, about the things that are the foundation of our vocation and consecration: "Communion arises precisely from the sharing of the goods of the Spirit, a sharing of faith and in faith, where the bond of fraternity is all the stronger the more central and vital that which is put in common".²³

²⁰ G. COLOMERO, *Dalla convivenza alla fraternità*, San Paolo, 2001.

²¹ D. BONHOEFFER, *La vita comune*.

²² M. BUBER, *Leggenda del Baal Šem*.

²³ VF 32.

The document *Fraternal Life in Community* notes the fact that religious rarely share what is vital and central to their journey of consecration. In order to foster spiritual communication, it recalls the traditional forms and "places" of this fraternal exchange: sharing the Word, sharing the experience of God, community discernment, community project, fraternal correction and review of life.

I like to recall in this regard the example of Jesus and Francis. The former expressed his desire to share the most difficult moment of his life (the agony in Gethsemane) with three of his dearest disciples. Francis, too, had the habit of sharing with his brothers what the Lord revealed to him and caused him to experience (see, for example, the genesis of the Canticle of Brother Sun and the Praises of God Most High).

An important moment to increase the spiritual communion of the fraternity is the concelebration of the Eucharist: "It is around the Eucharist, celebrated and adored, the summit and source of all the activity of the Church, that communion of souls is built, the premise for all growth in the fraternity. It is here that every kind of education in the spirit of community must find its origin.". ²⁴

Our Constitutions recall that the Eucharist is the "spiritual center" of the fraternity. This is why the celebration of daily Mass in fraternity is recommended: "To make it more evident that, by breaking the Eucharistic bread, we are raised to communion with Christ and with each other, a community Mass should be celebrated daily in our fraternities. Where this is not possible daily, it should be celebrated at least periodically and with the participation of all the brothers" (Const. 48).

7. Two "obstacles" to fraternal life

Today it seems to me that there are two dangers or obstacles that hinder the building of fraternal life. The first has been known for decades now: individualism. *Fraternal Life in Community* considers it to be a "spoiled" fruit of the proper valuing of respect for the person: "Respect for the person, recommended by the Council and subsequent documents, has had a positive influence in community practice. At the same time, however, individualism has also spread.". ²⁵

Individualism is first of all a strong change taking place in society. Just think of the individualism of the telephone, the computer, the bank account, the exaggerated right to privacy, all the dozens of personal passwords each of us has to invent when we enter into relationships on the Web. Western society is built on the individual, not on fraternity. One day when I was at the doctor's, I asked him how an elderly fraternity brother of mine, who was being treated by him, was doing. The doctor did not answer me. He couldn't do that. It would have violated my brother's right to medical privacy. For the doctor, the fact that I am his guardian, legally speaking, means nothing. If I want to know how my confrere is doing, I have to ask him... It's a small example, which I don't think is only from French society....

²⁴ VF 14.

²⁵ VF 39.

Pope Francis in *Brothers All* reminds us that: "Individualism does not make us freer, more equal, more brothers. The mere sum of individual interests is incapable of generating a better world for all humanity".²⁶

Fraternal Life in Community identifies the signs of individualism in religious life. The need for protagonism, the exaggerated insistence on one's physical, mental and professional well-being, the preference given to self-employment, perhaps prestigious, the absolute priority given to one's personal aspirations and individual path without regard for others and without reference to community.

In *Ravviviamo la fiamma del nostro carisma* (Let us fan the flame of our charism), Mauro Jöhri spoke of the tendency to seek in Capuchin religious life one's own self-realization, rather than a giving of oneself and putting oneself at the service of the Order and the Church: "The danger is that each one brings in his own personal project to be realized without taking into account that of the fraternity. Thus it happens that the personal aspect is exaggerated and accentuated in a totally individualistic and narcissistic way." The path he pointed to was entrustment to the fraternity, pronounced at the time of religious profession, the need for a "path of decentralization, a shift from my personal project to the fraternal one".²⁷

The solution is thus to pursue the right balance-not always easy to achieve-between the two poles in question: the individual friar and the fraternity. It will then be necessary to find agreement between respect for his person and the common good, between his needs and those of the fraternity, between personal charisms and the apostolic project of the fraternity in which he is inserted. Our *Ratio formationis* considers fraternal life as an antidote to individualism: "Fraternity does not deny personal identity, on the contrary, it protects it from individualism; it does not destroy the person, but enriches him by giving him a wider space. Our identity as brothers is built only from relationship".²⁸

The second danger I see today is the fall into pessimism and defeatism. Disappointed perhaps by the fact that the real life of the fraternity in which we live is several miles away from the Franciscan ideal of Thomas of Celano and the Rule of Francis. Paraphrasing the expression of the Constitutions regarding the use of goods and money, I would say that we are content to live the "minimum necessary" and not the "maximum allowed" of fraternal life.

We limit ourselves to doing things out of duty or necessity, without momentum and without soul. We close in on ourselves, attached to our role, our service or apostolate, without trying to build a fraternal project. A life without demands, but also without more expectations....

²⁶ FRANCESCO, *Fratelli tutti*, Lettera enciclica sulla fraternità e l'amicizia sociale (2020), n. 105.

²⁷ MAURO JÖHRI, *Ravviviamo la fiamma del nostro carisma!* (2006), n. 9.

²⁸ *Ratio formationis OFMCap*, n. 35.

The document Fraternal Life in Community reminds us that our religious vocation is to be "builders and not just consumers of fraternity". Pope Francis urges Christians to overcome sterile pessimism, looking to the future with a renewed gaze of faith: "The evils of our world - and those of the Church - should not be excuses to reduce our commitment and fervor. Let us consider them as challenges to grow".

I would say that the St. Lawrence of Brindisi project is a response to the temptation of individualism and defeatism, to renew our life in fraternity.

8. The St. Lawrence project: "Our fraternal life."

In the guidelines of the project, which you have all undoubtedly read, in the first part dealing with fraternal life, nine points are given.

◊ first point: "The fraternity has from 5-7 brothers who fully share this project." On the number of brothers, I do not pause. It is clear that a congruent number of brothers is essential to have a meaningful fraternal life. In the St. Lawrence fraternities it is a goal. At ours à Clermont we went from a minimum of five to a maximum of seven friars.

From the beginning of the project it was clear that the goal was not to "save" particular friaries, places or apostolates, but to form fraternities united by the desire to live a common life project. The full sharing of the project seems to me the most successful and provocative characteristic of the St. Lawrence fraternities. It is this starting agreement that can guarantee its success. If all the brothers do not share the lines of the project, the St. Lawrence fraternity cannot work. Unfortunately, several experiences have shown us this.

◊ second point: "Priority of common acts: prayer, meals in common, fraternal services, apostolate." This priority should be the daily bread of every Capuchin fraternity. In my experience in Clermont, if they ask us for an apostolic service in our prayer times, unless necessary, we say no. For example, on Monday evening, recreation night (we play Uno) and Saturday evening (sharing the Sunday Gospel) we do not make other commitments. We all try to be present at the daily conventual Mass. We also try to have apostolates shared by several friars: confessions, the Capuchin, parish missions. So that people see that the friars also share some apostolates (where this is possible...).

◊ third point: "Since St. Francis suggests this in his writings have a fraternal, maternal attitude toward one another." This maternal attitude means paying attention to our brother, taking care of him, and also preventing his needs or desires. I remember the nice gesture of an elderly French brother who having heard that I liked Nutella, without telling me anything began à buy it for me (he was the convent bursar). And so I began to eat Nutella for breakfast....

◊ fourth point: "Having free times of fraternity: appreciating and caring for the beauty of being together." Covid allowed us to be together more. To play Molkky, badminton or bocce ball in the

garden. A few times in the year we are invited by some mutual friends to have lunch at their home. We all go there together. It's a beautiful testimony of fraternal life for those who host us, but also for us, who come together outside the walls of our convent.

◊ fifth point: "Shared domestic/manual work (as much as possible without hired staff)." In Clermont we experienced the transition of the cook who retired after 25 years of work. To follow the project lines, we did not consider hiring another person. We decided for five days a week to take lunch from an outside company. For the rest, we do it ourselves. Cooking in shifts allows everyone to express their cooking skills and others to adapt to different styles. One day I was struck by the fact that a French brother had prepared a salad as the Malagasy friar usually does (in fact, I was convinced that he had made it). A fine example of cultural-culinary exchange and accretion....

◊ sixth point: "Regular and frequent celebration of the local chapter as a place for sharing, life review formation and planning." Each month we celebrate the local chapter, which we always begin with a time of personal sharing about the past month. Each person can share to the other brothers an experience, an important moment that he has lived. Then we share on all aspects of fraternal, conventional and apostolic life.

◊ Seventh point: "Create a spirit of welcome, availability and service." I am always impressed when I see a friar who without asking him takes the initiative to do a job or service. It means that each person really feels at home. I also appreciate the extreme willingness to take over for the service of Masses or confessions when a friar cannot. Everything happens in a natural and normal way....

◊ eighth point: "Learning and fostering knowledge and respect for the other (interculturality)." Internationality is a characteristic element of FSLBs. A richness that also involves some hard work: the time of insertion, learning the language and culture of the country. It takes patience for both the foreign friars welcomed and the local friars who welcome. One year à Clermont we were five friars of five different nationalities: France, Italy, Slovenia, Benin, Madagascar. If each friar has reached a certain maturity and fully shares the project, the fact that they belong to different nationalities does not create big problems. The problem was seen when a friar did not fully share the lifestyle, showing in practice that he did not want to embrace it...

◊ ninth and final point: "We try to prioritize relationships with the Franciscan family." In Clermont, we are fortunate to have two SFO fraternities, one of which meets in our convent and a community of Capuchin Poor Clare nuns (the only monastery left in France). In this sense we are privileged. We try to meet all three Orders several times during the year... A beautiful richness!