

VIII Plenary Council of the Order  
The Grace of Working

*Instrumentum laboris*  
(Prot. N. 00392/15)

The Word of God

“**The** LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.

“**So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food**, and that it was a delight for the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened.

“**thorns and thistles [the earth] shall bring** forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. **In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread.**” (Genesis 2:15, 3:6-7, 18-19)

“**For God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Do all things** without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom **you shine as lights in the world.**” (Philippians 2: 13-15)

Listening to St. Francis

Those brothers to whom the Lord has given the grace of working may work faithfully and devotedly so that, while avoiding idleness, the enemy of the soul, they do not extinguish the Spirit of holy prayer and devotion to which all temporal things must contribute. In payment for their work they may receive whatever is necessary for the bodily support of themselves and their brothers, excepting coin or money, and let them do this humbly as is becoming for servants of God and followers of most holy poverty. (*Later Rule*, V)

And when we are not paid for our work, let us have recourse to the table of the Lord, begging alms from door to door. (*Testament*, 22)

And I worked with my hands, and I still desire to work; and I earnestly desire all brothers to give themselves to honest work. Let those who do not know how to work learn, not from desire to receive wages, but for example and to avoid idleness. (*Testament*, 20-21)

From the *Programmatic Letter* of the General Minister (February 2, 2013)

**“We consider paramount the convocation of a Plenary Council of the Order (PCO VIII) which will have the theme “the grace of working” (Later Rule, V). The Plenary Council will first of all foster open and constructive dialogue around work as a central value of our life. Perhaps some will find the theme banal, but we are convinced that it is something that regards all of the friars and that it is also very timely. It will be the first Plenary Council of the Order that will reflect on this aspect of our life. In practical terms, we will ask ourselves about manual work, the work of study, the many activities carried out by the friars, pastoral work, and even simple housework. We also believe that this theme should be addressed by placing it in relation with other aspects of our life: work as a source of support; work and fraternal life; work and the life of prayer; work and the sense of belonging; work and the temptation to individualism. These are some of the areas that we should explore as we approach this theme. Stopping to reflect will allow us to bring attention to one of the vital aspects of our fraternal life. Not in the least it will be an opportunity to find a new, common impetus to be responsible to each other in the living of poverty. After the usual time of preparation, the celebration of the Plenary Council of the Order will follow, which we foresee for 2015 in a place that we will determine in due time. A letter will be sent soon to indicate with greater detail the precise dates and ways to prepare ourselves to celebrate the VIII Plenary Council of the Order.”**

## SUMMARY

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## INTRODUCTION

In the Programmatic Letter for the 2012-2018 sexennium, the General Minister, with **his Council, announced the plan to convoke a PCO (the eighth) on the theme of “the grace of working.”**

In the letter that followed to call PCO VIII (November 1, 2013)<sup>1</sup> there was established a working group that would commit itself to the preparation of the same PCO.

The group met in Rome for some days, three times, to develop above all a questionnaire to send to all the friars of the Order and then to synthesize the responses that came, so as to then compose an *Instrumentum laboris* for the participants in the PCO.

The text that we are presenting, more than a document, is precisely a synthesis of the responses received. Its purpose is to give a voice to the friars, beginning with their feelings and their experience. These promptings, in fact, are many and varied and often have need of deeper study or of being contextualized, but we believe that they are near and incarnate in the realities in which we live.

In the text one can read, in fact, a certain continuity with the other PCOs, especially the last two on poverty and minority, in as much as work that makes for or expresses power or work that is simply for making money cannot be work for a Franciscan who is called to be minor and subject to all. Nor can it be an honest work as St. Francis intended.

If work is a grace, we can be grateful to the Lord for the tasks that he entrusts to us and, also by means of this tool, let us put ourselves to work.

*Rome, 21 April 2015*

*Memorial of St. Conrad of Parzham*

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<sup>1</sup> The letter of the General Minister, Br. Mauro Jöhri, is reproduced as an appendix.

## FOREWORD

*The Gospel presents Jesus as “the son of the carpenter” (Mt 13:55). He himself worked intensely in the vineyard of the Father, who is also always at work.*

*Francis, moved by the spirit and contemplating the humble life of Jesus, of his Mother and of the Apostles, worked intensely with his own hands, with, for, and as the poor and the last.*

*We too, Capuchin Lesser Brothers, are called to collaborate with the same creative Spirit, principally in the area of the fraternal life, to restore in ourselves and in the world the original beauty of the work of God, keeping the spirit of service, without falling into the temptations of interest, of prestige, of comfort, and of success.*

*Work does not constitute only a source of support for making a living, but is an active participation in the creative work of God. The human being as “created creator” is called to a profound respect for and protection of creation, respecting in this way his primary vocation as collaborator with God.*

*Keeping this dignity in mind, we believe that every type of work, for us Capuchin Lesser Brothers, can become a path to sanctification, a source of joy and of interior freedom, because by means of it, the human being can reach harmony between body and spirit, living in praise and in gratitude for the goods that have been received.*

## 1. WORK AS EXPRESSION OF OUR LIFE IN FRATERNITY

*None of us friars is an island lost in the ocean; therefore our work, by nature, must be an expression of the fraternal life. Each of us has received different gifts from God that are then the talents of the Gospel. Every time a brother shares the gift received with others, he witnesses to the attractive force of an evangelical fraternity made up of persons that, in mutual welcoming, become able to serve all, especially the poorest.*

*Every work carried out for the sake of or in the name of the fraternity becomes a sign of belonging and at the same time witnesses to the living presence of the Lord who calls us to welcome and to live the gift of fraternal communion.*

*When a friar wishes to live the grace of a particular type of work, he submits it willingly to the discernment of the local fraternity and of the minister, to whom the task pertains to evaluate whether the activity proposed can belong to the mission of the same fraternity. In this way the fraternity becomes the guardian of the gifts of the individual friar. The plan of life and activity of the fraternity must not be rigid, but must welcome and evaluate the requests and proposals of the*

*individual friar and therefore it is necessary to keep in mind the criteria contained in our Constitutions.*

*The plans of life and activity are to be checked on and evaluated periodically. When a proposal of an individual friar, for various reasons, cannot be received into the plan of the fraternity, he shall welcome this and fulfill the mission assigned to him by his Minister in a spirit of obedience.*

Our Constitutions...

**...speak to us of a planning that keeps in mind the pastoral needs of the local Church, of the demands of the territory and of the abilities of the friars.**

148, 1. Let us willingly engage in any kind of apostolate, even if it is a personal initiative, as the Lord inspires. The various apostolic activities shall be promoted and coordinated as an expression of the entire brotherhood, and conducted under obedience to the competent authority.

148, 3. It is the responsibility of the provincial chapter to adapt apostolic work to the needs of the times, while preserving our Capuchin Franciscan identity. But it is for the provincial minister with the consent of the council, to coordinate the apostolic resources of the province.

148, 4. After consulting the local chapter in matters of greater importance, the guardian shall allocate work, while taking into account the situations of the individual brothers, and keeping in mind the needs of the local church and the **pastoral directives of the Church's hierarchy.**

148, 5. For the good of the Church and according to need, the circumscriptions shall willingly cooperate among themselves in apostolic works and initiatives, to be carried out on the basis of prudent planning. Sustained by a sense of ecclesial communion, let us fraternally cooperate also with other institutes, especially those that are Franciscan.

Our Constitutions propose to us a high ideal, that of a strong communion to be **realized in all of our activities. These must be an expression of our fraternal living.** It's about an invitation to do and plan together the various activities. We need to sit around a table and talk to each other, communicate, discern, and then decide.

From time to time, with regularity, it is necessary to gather ourselves to evaluate where we are and what changes are demanded of us. Everything assumes a dynamic and

involving character. From the questionnaire sent to the various circumscriptions it is clear that there exists a serious obstacle on this path of evaluation and it is called ‘individualism.’

### **Let’s see what the friars all over the world say about this!**

About  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the fraternities, of the 77% that responded to our questionnaire, affirm that they have a *Project of life and activity* (PLA). The responses from individual circumscriptions should be all affirmative or negative, since one speaks of a Provincial/Custodial PLA. But it was not always so. Apparently, not all the friars know if there is or is not a PLA. Therefore it becomes a real challenge to ask ourselves about how it is that energies and pastoral commitments are coordinated, both at the circumscription and local levels.

A consoling response comes to us from the fact, revealed by the responses to the questionnaire, that the great majority, 95% of the fraternities, is open to discerning and to eventually including initiatives (work and ministry) proposed by individual friars.

Until now we have moved on the level of the principles and the ideals that serve and mark our existence. But it is necessary to take a closer look, with a healthy attitude of self-criticism, at the same realities of our daily life. Two things are asked of us: what are the elements that nourish individualism in our fraternities (*internal factors*) and what are the *external factors* that contribute to our individualism?

Let us first see what conditions us strongly within our fraternities, that by which individualism enters in, where most often we stumble on the path towards our ideal: **“May the work of each brother be an expression of the entire brotherhood and manifest communion in pursuit of its goals.”** (Const. 79, 3) We can subdivide the elements that feed into individualism in our fraternities between those that are caused by the individual friar and those that are linked to the action or inaction of the local fraternity as a whole.

Let us look now at the elements caused by the individual friar as we can deduce them from the responses to our questionnaire: affective and spiritual immaturity, an isolated life, indifference and self-sufficiency with few moments in common, little sense of belonging and a weak or skipped life of spirituality or of prayer, a personality type that is particularly individualist or narcissistic that seeks gratification and recognition, attention seeking and the spirit of competition, the preference for personal projects to which the heart attaches, **and the development of the habit of managing activity according to one’s own capacity, gifts, or criteria.**

Then one refuses the commitments of the community, preferring one's own, with an immobility that isn't just physical, demanded by the type of ministry (certain services, in fact, demand a high specialization or are entrusted to someone by the diocese) in which one cannot stand the discussion and discernment of the fraternity and in which one claims economic autonomy, the personal use of vehicles and the excessive use of social media.

Perhaps here the objection is made: "All these things, and others still, we are already know!" The problem is not knowledge or ignorance of the attitudes that have emerged and which are listed here. The real problem is *to recognize*, or better, *to recognize ourselves* as marked by a certain type of individualism.

Therefore let us see now how these and other aspects of individualism condition the life of the local fraternity or come to be tolerated or supported. One hears of the lack of a specific pastoral project for the individual fraternity, a lack of transparency, animation, and communication, dialogue, trust within the fraternity for example in the relationships of the friars among themselves and with the guardian.

Local chapters are often only formal and we do not dare have a debate and a common discernment. At times the guardian is very accommodating and sometimes the scarce number of friars, at times elderly, and the multiplicity of commitments that have been taken on do not allow him to feel his service as an expression and a mandate of the fraternity. Pushed into workaholism one falls easily into individualism. And this grows when the fraternity lets go and tends to an openness towards the private initiatives of the individual, to the concession of an excessive autonomy. How to break this vicious cycle?

There is then the element of formation, initial and ongoing: we are not formed and accustomed enough to working in a group. Because of the lack of a life of common prayer and of listening to the Word and common discussion of it, we appreciate doing over being.

These two aspects, individual and common, that generate and feed into individualism, can be distinguished only methodologically. In real life they form a single fabric. A fabric that always needs **to be washed anew, sometimes to be patched...in order** to follow the ideal of the Constitutions:

79.2 Therefore, let each of us make his God-given talents bear fruit. According to our age and state of health, let us expend our energies fully and joyfully for the good of the brotherhood and in the interest of solidarity with the poor, with whom we willingly share the fruits of our work.

79.3 May the work of each brother be an expression of the entire brotherhood and manifest communion in pursuit of its goals. Therefore, let the brothers take on and



carry out their activities after suitable communal discernment and with the blessing of obedience, so that the work is always done as a mandate from the fraternity.

In the desire to broaden the horizon, observing the world that surrounds us, in order to see what are the external factors that contribute to our individualism, we encounter a surprise. It is interesting to note how the majority of the responses try to put as external factors the things and the choices that directly regard the friars themselves under a common denominator.

In this category the priority of external activity enters again, along with the easy gratifications for the activities carried out, autonomy in management of commitments and self-management of (economic) life, **the right to one's own self-realization** with a prolonged stay in a territory and attachment to certain services, greater connection to **external persons (friends, benefactors, family members) than with one's own brothers, holding more important the needs of groups (movements) than one's own fraternity**, the inappropriate use of means of communication that allows an autonomy and a life that is parallel, individualist, also by means of the use of personal vehicles.

The external things that contribute objectively to individualism are truly few, always according to the indications of the responses given to the questionnaire: the consumerist, secularist, and individualistic mentalities proper to certain cultures, the lack of group activities, certain activities that demand specific specializations, the great distance between the fraternities and the place of ministry, many requests for pastoral work in some places.

The true difficulty is not the world, but the personal and common relationship that the brothers have with it!

Let us reread therefore some brief passages from our Constitutions to recall our ideal:

**81, 4. So that “the grace of working” may be more fruitful for ourselves and others,** let us take care to maintain a community character in the various things we do, ready to help one another by working together. In this way, we also grow in conversion of heart.

84, 2. But let the brothers remember the exhortation of Saint Francis to accept only those occupations which better exemplify our call to serve and our condition as men **“who are simple and subject to all,”** avoiding the pursuit of prestige and power.

The PCO will be called to study more deeply one of the very significant aspects of our vocation, namely how to promote a more fraternal world, also by means of our pastoral and other types of work.

Concretely this means fostering everywhere work in groups, collaboration, the valuing of the many talents that God has given to each. And this is an aspect that must be cultivated and developed from the very first years of initial formation and that will be returned to, over and over, at the level of the local and provincial chapter.

**It's not just about working together, but of promoting initiatives that encourage collaboration at all levels.**

## 2. MANUAL WORK IN OUR DAILY LIFE

*Brother Francis, after his conversion, began to work with his own hands (cf. Testament, 20). We, Capuchin Lesser Brothers, cannot allow ourselves to be served, but wish to serve like all poor people, earning for ourselves our daily bread. Therefore, also where pastoral work, or ministry, occupies much of the time of our day, we want to preserve the grace of working with our hands, serving one another.*

*We are aware that domestic work, shared by all in the fraternity, makes us equal and reinforces fraternal love. Furthermore, manual work, that carries within itself the grace of feeling ourselves in concrete solidarity with the marginalized, the small, and the last, constitutes an effective witness to the world. Domestic service and manual work for the care of our houses must be inserted into the plans of initial formation as an element that educates for service and for sharing, fostering in our young people the awareness that one realizes his life only if it is given.*

### Our reality

Manual work puts us in tangible contact with our reality. By means of concrete work—and manual work is concrete; it literally touches the reality of life—the person himself becomes more real, more frugal, more mature. Every human activity has transformation as a consequence. The primary sense of human work is not the perfecting of the world that surrounds us. The true sense of work is above all personal growth and development. In fact, by means of concrete work the human persons matures, grows, and develops himself.

Rightly Chapter V of our Constitutions, which speaks of the our way of working, **begins with the affirmation that the human being, participates “through work [and shares] in the enterprise of creation. Through work, men and women conform to the original plan**

of God, grow in *personal maturity*, help their neighbor and cooperate in the betterment of **society.**" (78, 1)

We now ask ourselves what are the characteristics of manual work that are better represented in our life, namely how they mark us and how in particular they make manual work grow among us. Summarizing the responses to the questionnaire we have singled out seven points that we list in a sort of classification, in the sense that work:

1. makes grow the sense of belonging and reinforces responsibility
2. helps to live poverty in a concrete way
3. develops the gifts of the individual and prepares him for the service/ministry he will carry out
- 4. allows one to live like the common people, getting one's hands dirty**
5. makes felt the duty to **earn one's daily bread**
- 6. helps in reflection on one's own vocation**
7. helps in discovering the value of essential things

In this way the brothers of the Order perceive the beneficial effects of manual work for their own growth, putting in the first place the sense of belonging followed by poverty **in the concrete and the opportunity to develop one's own gifts.**

Passing then to the care for the initial formation of the friars, we can list the most important values that could arouse manual work in them, we point out a '**classification**' of benefits that comes from manual work that is almost identical to the list above. The order of importance changes in only one case: the development of personal gifts and serving the preparation for ministry (3) gives way **to closeness to the common people, getting one's hands dirty with manual work (4).**

**"The future of the Order depends on formation,"** as our brother Lazzaro Iriarte (1913-1997) often said. So it is necessary to reflect seriously on the grace of working with **one's own hands as an indispensable means of formation for the new generations of the friars** that are called to give their lives to Christ, to the Church, and to the brothers.

Looking to the Constitutions

Regarding the role of work in the initial formation of the young friars, our Constitutions are very clear:

37, 6. The greatest care shall be taken to ensure that preparation for work and the apostolate is conducted in a true spirit of service compatible with religious consecration, and in harmony with the journey of initiation, ensuring the primacy of life in brotherhood.

In order to avoid the possible anomaly of abandoning manual and domestic work for our young friars in formation (an attitude and mentality that sometimes unfortunately prevails, especially where there are many young people in initial formation), the Constitutions remind us clearly that each of us must take part in domestic work, as an integral part of our life. In fact, much more is taught with example than with words.

83, 1. Our life of poverty and minority calls for everyone to take part, as far as possible, in domestic chores in a spirit of brotherly communion. Such participation fosters mutual dependence and support, distinguishes our brotherhood and confers credibility upon our life.

**83, 2. No brother's work dispenses him from** caring for the house and the daily services of the brotherhood. We accept them as an integral part of our ordinary life.

Concluding this part it is necessary to say that here there will always be a certain tension between the work that one does willingly and which permits him to give the best of himself, and monotonous and repetitive work, as domestic work can be at times. In the same way there will always be tension between the work carried out by the individual friar and that which is requested by the fraternity.

**Only by cultivating the spirit of service and the choice to be subject “to everyone in the world” (St. Francis, *A Salutation of the Virtues*, FA:ED I:165)** in imitation of Christ, will it be possible to renounce ourselves and to find profound and true joy in the journey of self-denial.

There are activities that are satisfying and this is a good thing, but one also runs the risk of letting himself be **dominated only by the emotional dimension: ‘this pleases me’ or ‘this doesn’t please me’** and the risk is the consequence of erasing from the horizon of our mind the dimension of our consecrated life's sense. In the last analysis it's about a dimension of faith.

### 3. THE RELATIONSHIP WITH OUR EMPLOYEES<sup>2</sup>

*Distributing the responsibilities and organizing well our time, it is possible (excepting sick or elderly friars, or other particular situations) to organize domestic work such that there is less need for employees. Thus the fraternal life is strengthened and the money saved can be put to other uses. PCO VII (n. 9) invites every brother to be minor and available also for domestic work. Thus we must avoid, as much as is possible, being served when we can work with our own hands. Manual work that supports the needs of the fraternity represents a valid witness to the people, who work for a living and who, ever more often, struggle to provide for the necessities of life with the salaries and wages that come from their employment.*

*What sort of fraternity do we want: one that is only formal, dedicating ourselves completely to pastoral work and other ministries, or an evangelical fraternity, in which brother serves brother? Let us humbly ask ourselves: ‘Can the poor have employees?’*

*In the case in which we must have recourse to employees, our relationship with them must be respectful and correct, consonant with the gospel spirit. Furthermore, we must absolutely respect the laws and norms of work that are in effect in the various countries in which our Order is present.*

#### **A ‘screening’ of our reality**

The information that emerged and was prioritized by the responses is that a large part of our fraternities, about 80%, are served by the service of employees. The most common number of employees for a fraternity varies from one to three. When the number of employees is very high (65 or even more than 100 in some circumscriptions) it is obvious that this is some work founded and run by the friars.

It is important to evaluate the presence of employees from various points of view, for example: how do we arrive at the decision to take them on? How is their presence in the fraternity perceived? Are they truly necessary? What type of contract is made with them? Etc.

Analyzing the responses one arrives at the following conclusions. In the large majority of cases, 95%, it is the fraternity and/or the provincial minister/custos who decides to take on employees. This is surely an important and decisive fact for the aspects involved.

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<sup>2</sup> The expression, ‘employees’ describes two ways of lay personnel being involved in our life and activity: some work *with us* in the various institutions founded and run by us friars (for example: various social works, schools, etc.) while others work *for us* in our fraternities (for example: working in the kitchen, cleaning, etc.). In the questionnaire this distinction was not expressed clearly. Thus also the responses remained at times unclear.

Therefore it seems that the presence of employees among us is perceived as mutually beneficial. **It's about, in large part,** a discreet presence; only in certain fraternities is it noted that the employees are overly present; in one case the employees themselves **feel marginalized. One doesn't know, in this last case, whether this can be attributed to friars or the employees themselves.**

Also in the evaluation of whether employees are truly necessary, self-criticism does not seem to be our virtue. More than 80% of the fraternities are convinced that they are necessary. And how do they justify this? The principal reasons taken up and supported in this need are: the advanced age of the friars, work in the kitchen, the care of the infirmary, the amount of pastoral commitments, the need to assure a good management of parochial and friary structures (for example: a retirement house), a way of giving work to people who have need of it. And a final aspect, at the margins of this topic, is the work contract.

85% of the fraternities affirm that they have a contract with their employees that fully respects the laws of the state; for the other 10% some are in partial compliance (only insurance is covered) and the rest do not respect the civil laws (the employees are taken on as volunteers or receive payment from time to time in cash.)

Observing this aspect of our life, in the specific area of recourse to employees, there are two extreme cases. In one fraternity of four friars, all absent from the house for the greater part of the day because of their commitments, there are four employees to take care of the kitchen, the cleaning, and the maintenance of the garden. In another province of about seventy friars there is only one employee! This shows that the friars of this province have taken seriously what our Constitutions say:

83, 4. Only when it is truly necessary, do we have recourse to outsiders to help with domestic work. The fraternity, as far as possible, takes part in their selection, guided by prudent principles. Let them be treated with respect, courtesy, fairness, and in accordance with the law.

#### 4. WORK AND/OR WORKAHOLISM

*In various parts of the world society imposes rhythms and commitments that risk making us fall into workaholism. We must absolutely avoid living our days as a string of events and commitments, not finding any more space for prayer, fraternal life, and rest. Our way of working cannot sacrifice the contemplative and fraternal aspects of our vocation and this necessity must be communicated with precision and clarity in all the stages of initial formation.*

The words of the Constitutions:

**38, 1. Let all the brothers remember that, while serving the Lord in minority, “they must desire above all else to have the Spirit of the Lord and his holy activity.”**

80, 1. Let us take care not to make work itself our final goal, nor to become **inordinately attached to it, so as “not to extinguish in ourselves the spirit of holy prayer and devotion, to which all time-bound things must contribute.”**

Despite these unmistakable guidelines, a third of the fraternities that responded recognize having fallen afoul of workaholism, that is into an unbalance between activities and commitments on the one hand and the life of fraternity, prayer, and rest on the other. Few of those who are aware of workaholism take warning of the probable danger of emptying out our life of witness: can one speak of God if he does not speak with God? Can one witness to universal fraternity if one does not live in commitment to it at the local level?

Gathering the proposals and the concrete experiences contained in the questionnaire, in order that the individual friars in communion with the fraternity might live better a balance between their activity and the internal life (fraternity, contemplation, rest), we arrive at the following synthetic summary:

The local chapter is the privileged place for:

- drafting a realistic schedule for the fraternity that includes prayer, ministerial work, and fraternal togetherness.
- taking on, planning, and distributing commitments, privileging those that assure a witness of sharing and fraternal collaboration.
- evaluating the impact of ministry on the fraternal and contemplative life in an open and courageous dialogue, helping each other also by fraternal correction. (This last element, as also foreseen in the Constitutions, will not always be possible in a common discussion and therefore, respecting the sensibility of the individual friar, the guardian shall use the tools of personal conversation and evaluation.)
- To cultivate personal and communal interest in the friar who returns from mission, welcoming and listening to him with attention.
- To care for, deepen, and keep vigil for the life of faith, of personal and communal prayer, lectio divina, sharing of the Word, monthly and annual retreats.
- Also when one is out of the fraternity for mission, to reserve the privileged seasons for prayer, believing and witnessing to the fact that the mission depends above all on God.

- To know how to choose, decide, and communicate to the people that we need our space and time in order to cultivate our relationships and to recover our physical and spiritual forces. To this end every fraternity shall have spaces so adapted that we can find ourselves alone. It could be necessary to promote a day of the week dedicated exclusively to fraternity.

The PCO will have to dedicate a precise space also to the area of rest, recreation, and holidays: The Constitutions say clearly:

86, 1-2. We recognize the **importance of rest. It too helps us to live “the grace of work.”** Each day let the brothers enjoy appropriate recreation in common to foster life as brothers and renew their energies. Let everyone have a period of time for himself. According to regional customs and possibilities, time for vacation should be provided and spent in a way consistent with our state as lesser brothers.

Finally there is the synthetic summary of the remedies for avoiding workaholism that we find in the Constitutions:

94, 3. As members of the same family, let all the brothers take an active part in the shared activities of the fraternity, above all in community prayer. Let them willingly give time to their brothers, arrange duties by common agreement and promote working together.

## 5. CLOSENESS TO THE POOR

*The Capuchin Lesser Brothers, from their origins, as a fruit of an intense contemplative life, were close to the poor and the marginalized, putting themselves at their service, meriting the title of ‘friars of the people.’ Also today let us take note of how we are at the service of the poor in various areas: peripheries, missions, soup kitchens, schools, hospitals, and in pastoral work. We are close to the poor but often our mentality and our lifestyles situate us as those who assist the poor and not as brothers who share the condition of the poor and the marginalized. Let us recall what St. Francis said to his brothers in the Rule of 1221: “They must rejoice when they live among people considered of little value and looked down upon, among the poor and the powerless, the sick and the lepers, and the beggars by the wayside.” (FA:ED I:70)*

What do we do for the people of God among whom we live?

Numerous responses to the questionnaire can be summarized in the following seven fields of work, characterized by pastoral work and service:



As a first aspect, the most present, there appears the personal welcome and listening to the needs of the people at the door of the friary. This indicates that our openness and consequently the trust of the people in their knowledge that among the friars there is always someone who waits for me, will welcome me, and will listen to me.

In the second place there is parochial ministry. In some places it is the only way of being present among the common people; one finds good examples of a fraternal model of running a parish; unfortunately one also finds realities in which the parish is seen as a thorn in the fabric of the local fraternity or even of an entire circumscription, as much as it is a **'property' or absolute priority** of an individual friar.

Social and charitable works follow as one of the strong aspects of our closeness to the poor. Our International Office of Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation has already gathered and continues to gather information on all that we Capuchin brothers are doing for the poor. Thanks be to God we are discovering a vast commitment, concrete and varied, in this field. All of this will be presented, in a summary fashion, during PCO VIII.

Teaching and spiritual activity in schools help young people very much to be able to escape from their difficult condition, especially given the current educational emergency. In this area, as well as in the preceding area of social and charitable works, it is necessary to invest much more in the formation and professional preparation of the friars.

There is need not only of friar directors of social works and schools, but also of friar nurses, doctors, teachers, etc.

The expression of charity *par excellence* is our closeness to the sick that is expressed **in the pastoral care of those suffering in hospitals and clinics: "I was sick and you visited me."** (Mt 25:36)

The activity in mission lands is very present. In the place of a long missionary presence that still gives good fruits, the recent missions need more enthusiasm; new mission horizons are opened also in places with a long Capuchin presence, places from which many missionaries once departed.

As a last aspect, but no less important, there is pastoral care in universities and in other institutions of education.

To these seven fields are added certain other activities, for example the biblical ministry, spiritual exercises, the means of social communication (press, radio, TV, internet), pastoral care in the great shrines (in a special way by confession), prison chaplaincies, accompaniment of migrants and of immigrants, assistance to ecclesial **movements and groups, pastoral care of nuns, pastoral help in parishes...**

Concluding this brief review of the various forms of our closeness to the poor, let us recall our inspiration, expressed in the Constitutions:

149, 7. All ministries undertaken for the people must be founded upon a life shaped by the Gospel. Remembering that the world listens more readily to witnesses than to teachers, let us live close to the people, conducting ourselves as true lesser brothers in our lifestyle and manner of speaking.

## 6. WORK – SOURCE OF OUR SUPPORT

*Due to changes in our society, which often values everything in terms of money and profit, also we friars can have the temptation to evaluate the utility of our apostolate/ministry and other work in terms of monetary benefits. One who announces the Gospel can welcome the offerings for the support of the community with a grateful heart. (cf. 1 Cor 9:14, Lk 10:7) The Franciscan charism asks us to commit ourselves daily in various ways to earn for ourselves our daily bread. Therefore the friars shall be ready to put to fruitful use the talents received for the service that they are called to fulfill. We are poor and minors when do not appropriate anything to ourselves and we 'return' to God, in service, what He has given to us. Thus we are able to entrust ourselves to the goodness and paternity of God who never leaves us lacking his Providence.*

Does this element, our support, always more real in our life, bring us closer to the poor?

Two things are asked of us: That we succeed in living from our own work and what concrete choices we have made for living a more simple life.

We must recognize that we are overly accustomed to receiving both from generous people and from the international economic solidarity among us Capuchin friars. And receiving enough in some cases we have lost even the sense of closeness to the poor. The General Minister in his letter *The Grace of Working* (November 1, 2013) says clearly that both these economic sources are rapidly diminishing. (cf. nn. 3-5) Will this challenge help us to seek again other solutions and to return to a more simple and frugal life?

In what situation do we find ourselves? About 70% of the fraternities that responded to the questionnaire succeed in covering the expenses of ordinary life. For extraordinary expenses they have recourse to the common funds of the province/custody. Among those fraternities that do not succeed in covering ordinary expenses there are almost always the houses of initial formation and provincial infirmaries. It is logical and right that the whole circumscription assumes responsibility for these houses. The

fraternities of a circumscription must depend on each other. But this must not make us irresponsible, but make us commit ourselves even more to being able to help others!

What then can we do at the level of the local fraternity in order to embrace a sustainable lifestyle? We see some proposals and concrete choices that help us to lead a frugal, essential life. Many see the need of a concrete renewal of fraternal sharing, giving new value to manual work and domestic service done by the friars. This would have at least two immediate consequences: a deepening of the sense of belonging and the reduction of personnel employed in our service.

The second point is the economic transparency that PCO VI spoke of. Certainly many steps have been taken in this direction; but there still remains much to do in order to grow in trust and fraternal sharing.

There follows the need to make concrete choices for a simple, frugal life, in food, in travel, by means of personal and communal renunciation of superfluous things. This too draws us closer to the poor at least a little. We are called to live with decisiveness what is proposed to us in the Constitutions:

62, 2. Poverty demands a frugal and simple lifestyle. Let us, therefore, strive to reduce our material needs to a minimum in order to live only on what is necessary, decisively rejecting consumerism in attitude and in practice.

75, 2. Transparency distinguishes our individual and fraternal life, and makes trust, sincerity and communion grow among us. It should also characterize our administration of resources at every level, and commit us to account for everything we receive and use.

**Into this area the famous question of ‘pocket money’ also enters in, as well as the sum of money that each of us has at our disposal for vacations. It is necessary to insist on a frugal and simple lifestyle that has to find adequate expression also in choices of this kind. The risk of falling into the mentality of a ‘trade union’ or of the demanding of rights is great. In the Statutes of the circumscription these things must be treated and clarified and must be the fruit of a consensus developed together in the setting of a chapter, whether it be ordinary or extraordinary.**

A particular accent on pastoral work as a source of support

From the responses received it is clear that pastoral work remains for the friars, in many parts of our Order, among the important sources of economic resources for and support and for our solidarity with the poor. In some places it reaches beyond 80% of the income, and nowhere does it seem insignificant. Regarding the trend of increase or

decrease of pastoral/ministerial work, more than half of the responses, about 55%, affirm that this income is constant; about 40% say that it is increasing and only 5% report a decrease. This could mean that in various parts of the world, in the near future, we can continue to count on pastoral and ministerial work and the economic resources that come from it.

**Despite the good resolutions: 'To welcome with humility and detachment the spontaneous offerings for the apostolate carried out,' 'to be freely available for serving the Gospel,' 'to work without thinking of remuneration because our work is for the glory of God and is a sacred ministry that administers the grace of God' etc., where pastoral ministry remains in first place and is an important source of economic resources, we must be continually careful that we do not exchange 'serving the Gospel' for 'being served by the Gospel.'**

The other danger to be avoided is the clericalization of the Order, seeking to involve also the lay brothers in pastoral work.

147, 2. The first apostolate of a lesser brother is to live the gospel life in the world in truth, simplicity and joy.

Other professions/types of work

We must be seriously attentive to the needs and gifts of the individual brothers. Beyond pastoral service, the Order seems to have a preference above all for the professions of socio-cultural, education-formation, health-medical types, not excluding however many manual or technical activities such as gardener, farmer, cook, tailor, mechanic, electrician, carpenter, construction worker, work in the area of communications, administration, factory and economic work, and the care of creation.

Still valid is what Pope Paul VI said in his speech to the General Chapter of 1968: "We have often asked ourselves why the sons of Saint Francis were not, as befits them, present amidst the working classes, preaching to them in homely language, sharing with them, as they are required by their Institute to do, the bread hardly earned by the sweat of their brow, and uplifting them to bear in a spirit of joy the heavy burdens of life. Of course we know that you are detained by many pressing occupations, and that your number is unequal to the increasing demands made upon you. This passing mention of ours will show you how highly we esteem the usefulness and efficacy of the works in which you are engaged all over the world."

We conclude with words taken from the Constitutions:

81, 1. There is a variety of kinds of work which suit people differently, according **to each one's capacity and the special gifts of God.**

81, 2. We undertake various forms of ministry and service in so far as they are compatible with our fraternal life and as the needs of the Church and society require.

81, 3. Works that more clearly manifest poverty, humility and brotherhood are especially fitting for us; but in fact, we do not consider any type of work of lesser dignity or value than another.

81, 5. Furthermore, may we always keep in mind our apostolic calling, so that in everything we do, we give witness to Christ before the people.

## 7. CONCLUSION

From the synthesis of the responses to the questionnaire, certain meaningful guidelines can be drawn that open paths for reflection and discussion. Many questions are deliberately left open because of the pluriformity of our Order, spread out in all the continents, such that it is not possible to define, in a homogeneous way, models of work that could be the expression of a true Capuchin brother.

It is certain, however, that work cannot become an end in itself, but an opportunity to play out what one is, convinced that he belongs to a fraternity that finds itself in diversity, building the kingdom of God and collaborating in creation, with the work of its own hands, with intelligence, and with the specific talents of the individual members.

We are aware that the Lord offers us many opportunities to give ourselves to his service as workers in his vineyard and each one can give his contribution, so that, as St. Francis says, *the spirit of holy prayer and devotion* is not extinguished.

The sense of the Order seems oriented toward taking up every possible work, from the most humble to the most prestigious, from that carried out within the domestic walls of a friary to that which is manifested in the diverse areas of pastoral care, including the merely manual sectors.

The objective of work remains, however, the construction of the fraternity, safeguarding the individual abilities of each and opening itself to the whole world. Perhaps it is this that remains the most problematic challenge and that which needs the most attention and reflection and which the PCO will have to discuss the most.

## APPENDIX

## THE GRACE OF WORKING

*Letter of Br. Mauro Jöhri, General Minister of the Friars Minor Capuchin to call the VIII Plenary Council of the Order*

To all the Friars Minor Capuchin  
To the Capuchin Poor Clares  
To the brothers and sisters of the O.F.S.

## 1. The VIII Plenary Council of the Order

Dear brothers and sisters,

In the programmatic letter that I sent to you on February 2 of this year, I announced that, together with the brother Definitors, we had decided to convene a Plenary Council of **the Order on the theme of “the grace of working.”** On that occasion I mentioned briefly the motivations that gave rise to the calling of this event. Writing now, I wish to propose the theme more deeply and I will do so by sharing with you some of the situations and facts that belong to my personal story. Before long I will thank to the Lord for the 50th anniversary of belonging to the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin and during this time I have witnessed many changes. I have lived most of my life in Europe and it is obvious that the eyes with which I look at facts and events are those of a European. I can affirm, however, that the knowledge of the Order gained in seven years of service as General Minister confirms that the many changes seen in Europe, because of the process of globalization, are expanding progressively to all the continents. I would also emphasize that the next PCO should trace a line of continuity with the two immediately preceding **that helped us to reflect of the themes of “Living Poverty in Brotherhood” and “Our Fraternal Life in Minority.”**

Reflection on work places before us the sources of our material support and the work we carry out must keep two central values of our life in mind: fraternity and minority. These aspects will be examined and developed during the preparation for the event, which I wish to be lived as an opportunity for dialogue and formation for the friars.

Dear brothers, with joy and living hope I convoke the VIII Plenary Council of the Order, with the theme The Grace of Working, at Assisi, at our friary “**Cristo Risorto**” from 26 October to 21 November, 2015.

## 2. Listening to St. Francis of Assisi

Those brothers to whom the Lord has given the grace of working may work faithfully and devotedly so that, while avoiding idleness, the enemy of the soul, they do not extinguish the Spirit of holy prayer and devotion to which all temporal things must contribute. In payment for their work they may receive whatever is necessary for the bodily support of themselves and their brothers, excepting coin or money, and let them do this humbly as is becoming for servants of God and followers of most holy poverty. (Later Rule, V)

And I worked with my hands, and I still desire to work; and I earnestly desire all brothers to give themselves to honest work. Let those who do not know how to work learn, not from desire to receive wages, but for example and to avoid idleness. (Test.)

And when we are not paid for our work, let us have recourse to the table of the Lord, begging alms from door to door. (Test.)

These simple and strong words that St. Francis has handed on to us in the Rule and Testament have accompanied whole generations of friars through the centuries and they continue to be a source of reflection and healthy challenge also for us. The words of our Seraphic Father come to us in a time and in a society where radical changes are taking place in the area of work, with consequences that demand a serious evaluation regarding our way of supporting ourselves. The processes of globalization and secularization have created a new way of conceiving the human being and his activity, and to this is added a progressive detachment from the Church and from what she announces on matters spiritual, ethical, and social. Of course these changes do not reach all the countries of the world with same intensity, but we must recognize that the change is very large and we can confirm its influences and consequences even in the religious life. These brief and concise reflections are the beginning of the proposal for experiencing a moment of strong reflection that I have placed within the theme of the Grace of Working. In this letter, knowing that I am neither a historian nor a sociologist, I will try to examine the considerations described above. I have chosen to share and narrate what I myself have lived and observed during the years of my life as a Capuchin friar.

### 3. Pastoral work is diminishing

**At the end of my report to the General Chapter of 2012, I observed: “We Capuchins, especially in countries of the southern world, are very involved in the pastoral apostolate. There are circumscriptions where the majority of the brothers are involved in parish work. Here and there, bishops are beginning to ask us to hand back the parishes which at one time were entrusted to the friars because they now have a good number of diocesan priests. Let this be an opportunity to diversify our service to the Church and to the People of God, opening ourselves to new forms of evangelizing presence and paying particular attention to those forms that promote peace and dialogue among different groups and peoples.” (382)**

This statement could seem to contradict the requests of some European and North American bishops who ask for the presence of our friars from the young circumscriptions rich with vocations in order to face the scarcity of priests in their dioceses. I am not against the friars of the young circumscriptions taking on pastoral commitments beyond the borders of the countries, but I honestly make them aware of the phenomenon of secularization which is eroding religious practice in a significant and rapid way. In the same way we can also see that the way people live in the northern hemisphere of the world is profoundly changed. Traditional pastoral action, centered principally on reaching as many people as possible with the sacraments, has undergone significant changes and each cultural and social setting presents its own characteristics that demand adaptations and innovations. Friars from the new circumscriptions who do not understand the changes taking place and who want to reproduce the pastoral action of their countries of origin risk, sooner or later, abandoning pastoral work and returning to the circumscriptions that they had left. Furthermore, the number of persons who renounce their belonging to the Church either tacitly or by public declaration is increasing constantly in the countries where until recently there was a very robust Catholic presence. I refer in a particular way to Northern Europe, but this is also valid for French-speaking Canada and also for other countries. We are aware that a major effort of new evangelization awaits us, but at the same time we note the steady decline of pastoral work. I refer in a particular way to that of the traditional sort for which we normally receive an offering. The possibilities for new pastoral activity are not lacking, but for many of these we cannot expect any compensation.

To continue the analysis, I present a situation that has been with the life of our Order for years: the diminishment of contributions to the central funds of the economic solidarity. The consequence of this decrease is the difficulty, ever more evident, in contributing to the numerous requests for subsidy presented by the young



Circumscriptions, those of Africa and Asia in particular. Many Provinces that in the past had generously shared with other circumscriptions of the Order a part of the offerings received and the proceeds from the work of the friars, today are not able to do so or are able to do so only in a very reduced way. What has happened? What are the reasons for this decrease?

Everyone affirms, and it is true, that the principal cause can be attributed to the economic crisis that has struck Europe and the other continents. We confirm that offerings are falling drastically and that also the revenue coming from the work of individual friars has undergone a significant reduction. We attribute this phenomenon also to the decrease in vocations affecting many Provinces and to the unprecedented downsizing of our presences. The average age of our centuries-old Provinces is constantly increasing; often the larger part of the income of the fraternity comes from the proceeds of retirement pensions and this money has to be used in large part for the care of the older friars. It is right that this is so, but in this way that excess of Providence—at one time shared with our friars living in very poor contexts where the people are not able to contribute economically for the work and ministry offered—comes to be lacking.

#### 4. “Pray for us!”

Beyond what is described above, I maintain that the reasons for the crisis are even more profound and can be attributed to certain changes in mentality taking place in our society. I want to give some examples, drawing on my experiences as a Capuchin friar. A few weeks after being invested with the Capuchin habit in the novitiate of Arco di Trento, I was sent with the other brother novices into the surrounding countryside to go questing for grapes. This allowed us to make good wine at no cost. During the course of the year it was up to the lay brothers of the fraternity above all to go out questing for oil, for potatoes, for firewood, and for other products. A brother went to town each day questing for bread. The large garden of the friary provided us with fruits and vegetables in abundance. Note that I’m not telling stories from the beginning of the 1800s; these go back to 1964, 50 years ago!

Returning to Switzerland to study theology, in spring and fall the studies were suspended for a week and we all left for questing in the surrounding villages. Normally the people gave us money and, with the rare exception, we were received with great cordiality. Why were the people generous with us instead of slamming the door in our face? I think I can say that between the people who gave and us friars there existed an agreement that was unwritten but respected with fidelity and forcefulness. Let me explain:

in the hearts and minds of the people we friars were perceived as those who had chosen to give their lives to God and who had a particular task: prayer and intercession for all the people who, with their offerings and their gifts, manifested the Providence of the Lord. Our life of prayer and renunciation completed and fulfilled that aspect of devotion that the majority of the faithful were not able to live, but which they felt was good and necessary. Stated in a succinct way, **the reasoning was this: “You friars pray and lead an austere life and the fruits of such a way of life before God will return also to our advantage. You fill up the measure of what we also are called to do, but for many passing reasons are not able to do, and thus you have the right to knock on our doors and ask for a contribution for your support. You pray for us and we are prepared to support you!”** In the eyes of the people our presence had a strong symbolic value. It carried something of reassurance and intercession in the relationship of each individual with God. We were considered men able to present persons and the situations they lived to the Lord and this intercession was **honored with great generosity. How many times we heard it said: “Pray for me!”** with the person saying it putting money in our hands. Many people continued to give us offerings even after the friars no longer went out questing. After the middle of the 60s, even though the standard of living in Europe and in North America was much improved, the Capuchin friars, because of their simple lifestyle and abundant missionary work, continued to enjoy the help of many people. There was a willingness to help, to share; to trust in us, sure that the offering would certainly arrive at the destination and would serve something good and useful.

## 5. The change

The social-religious context and the fabric of relationships that I have described so far and in which I have lived no longer exist, or better we find them in a marginal way. This tacit agreement between the people and the friars has become progressively fractured. Not infrequently it happened that, knocking on some door, the question was **put to us: “Sir, for what organization or work are you collecting funds?”** The weakening of our bond with the people finds its explanation both in relation to the transition from the peasant world to one that is industrial and then technological and in the strong influence that the process of secularization exercises on our way of living the Gospel and on the religious life. One of the consequences of this change is that our support no longer enjoys the sources that fed it in the past. This finding makes it urgent to reflect on our work, that we may make choices that help us to look forward with confidence in Him from whom we ask our daily bread.

The new generations of friars both in Europe and in other areas of the world have not known questing but surely they too have benefited from the generosity of the people toward us and thanks to the agreement described above. We have shared what we have received and a part of the fruit of our labor as well because we are aware of our belonging to one international fraternity. Sharing was made possible because the friars have tried to live without compromise what is affirmed **in our Constitutions: “All that the friars receive as remuneration for their work belongs to the fraternity and must therefore be handed over in full to the superior.” Each individual house passed ordinary surplus to the Province and the Province in turn transferred the money to the General Curia, which sought to meet the needs of those Circumscriptions that were not able to be self-sustaining.**

In the Church the Capuchins belong to the mendicant Orders. This classification, which continues to appear on the pages of the *Annuario Pontificio*, expresses the willingness to be itinerant, to live a poor and simple life that makes us owners of nothing. As poor people we are called to live from our work, knowing that the same pastoral ministry is undergoing a powerful change. One of the last signs of the agreement between us and the people that continues to exist, even if in a form ever more reduced, is the offerings that we receive for the celebration of Holy Mass; but also in this case the diminishment seems to be irreversible.

In the face of these changes we cannot remain passive with idle hands; in every part of the world we are called to ask ourselves how we intend to support ourselves. The fundamental criterion that must guide our reflection and that I wish to affirm here with force and clarity is this: the work of the individual friar must be in harmony with the primacy of the fraternal life. Will the inevitable specialization demanded by an occupation be able to safeguard this principle? What then follows from the choices we are called to make and to foster? And what sort of fraternal life do we intend to foster in a profoundly changed context?

## 6. What kind of fraternity?

Let us reflect now on another transformation that has taken place in our midst and that strongly affects our way of life. I refer to the personnel that we have taken on as our employees for various services internal to the fraternity. There are those that take care of the kitchen, who do the cleaning, who wash and iron our clothes, who answer the telephone and open the door to guests, who take care of our sick friars. Most of these people receive a salary for what they do. I reaffirm the moral duty of every one of our

fraternities toward employed personnel: to act always with justice, in full respect for the applicable laws of various countries, observing all the norms of remuneration and insurance. We take on people who serve us, and this is not an irrelevant fact, but I daresay that this practice has progressively changed the face and even the identity of our fraternities. The presence of paid staff has allowed us to be more free for pastoral work, it **has dispensed us from doing work, such as domestic work, that we don't consider to be** very gratifying, or not gratifying at all. In many cases the presence of employees has allowed us to procrastinate for a long time about the closure of certain houses, maintaining a very reduced number of friars in the place. These considerations highlight how the fraternal life has come to be conceived and structured principally as a function of pastoral activity. Our houses risk resembling more those of canons than friaries of brothers who live minority and poverty! This way of conceiving and living the fraternal life has greatly weakened its symbolic value and the consequences are the ease with which we descend to compromise: we dispense ourselves from common prayer, from meals taken in common, from recreation and from the celebration of local chapters. We have delegated the larger part of the manual work to third parties and now, because of diminishing income, we are forced to revise our practices and our choices.

Dear brothers, let us ask ourselves a question to open a reflection on our personal and fraternal experience: are we willing to make of the economic crisis, with all its relative consequences mentioned above, an opportunity to evaluate what quality of fraternal life we wish to live? The reaction that I often observe in the face of economic problems is that of running for cover in haste, evaluating the situations only from the technical or economic point of view. We are called to downsize and rethink our lifestyle. Is it so impossible that we take on ourselves and distribute among ourselves the various tasks and services proper to the fraternal life, proposing strongly this value from the very beginning of initial formation? (Const. 30,3) Are we willing to do this with great honesty, seeing in it a unique opportunity to verify the quality of our relationships in which we can experience the beauty and the **joy of serving one another? It isn't just about reappropriating manual labor** for ourselves, but about reappropriating certain original and living values of our fraternal life. In the future we will be called to diversify, in a significant way, what we do for work and we must do so privileging the principles that guide the fraternal-evangelical life. Is it **so unthinkable for us to live like many brothers and sisters or many families that can't** afford to have domestic servants or other employees and that have to maintain a sober and simple standard of living in order to make it to the end of the month? To the extent that each friar grows in the sense of belonging to the fraternity, this will help to eliminate the comparisons and the differences which are often the cause of suffering and misunderstanding: both the friar who has a well-paid ministry or profession and the one

dedicated for the most part to domestic work or to social service without some compensation contribute in equal measure to the good of the one fraternity. Let us ask that this awareness be strengthened more and more as a precious patrimony of our relationships.

## 7. The value of work for the individual friar

Work does not have value just as a means of support, but provides for a person a sense of his own life, contributing to the realization of his proper humanity. We witness with dismay the drama of those who remain out of work for a long time and we see the negative consequences that unemployment produces at the psychological, relational, and familial level. These situations, at times tragic, help us to understand why it makes sense to use the term Grace when we speak of work. Each of us would like to have a job that is as gratifying and creative as possible, that permits each individual to fully develop his skills and therefore realize himself according to his own aspirations. This is a legitimate desire but it can enter into conflict with the demands of fraternal life and mutual service. The choices involved in the ministerial and professional preparation offered to each individual friar cannot be made without keeping in mind the needs of the common good. It must be done while taking into account both the aptitudes of each and the needs of the fraternity, in particular those of the Province. Implementing this criterion can lead to the experience of moments of tension and sometimes the need to ask a friar to accept a **proposal that doesn't correspond to his expectations. Thank you, brothers, for all the times** you have accepted and will accept something not completely pleasing to you, grounding your yes on the Evangelical Counsel of obedience and on service to the fraternity. It is necessary that we ask the Lord for the Grace to make concrete and visible what we affirm and preach with regard to obedience, sacrifice, and willingness to serve even to the giving **of one's own life for the growth and advancement of others. To accept a proposal of a** work or a fraternal service calls upon the same dimension of our faith and requires continual learning in free self-giving.

I now share a situation that puzzles and raises questions for me. A good number of friars have had the opportunity for studies, completing them and thus obtaining the license or the doctorate. Unfortunately, I find that a good number of these friars do not put the knowledge acquired to service, sometimes because they are assigned to do something else, other times because they refuse to pass on what they have received. How is it that so many of our graduates, once the studies are finished, completely desert the paths of research and simply content themselves to keep repeating the same things?

## 8. Able to say ‘thank you’

Sometimes I have the impression that a sense of gratitude is lacking among us. **One isn’t able to say ‘thank you.’ When I visit the Provinces what often comes at me is an** endless series of demands: We want more computers, more means of transportation and other instruments that make us feel comfortable and trendy. On few occasions have I heard words of gratitude for all that we have, that in almost of all circumscriptions our standard of living is certainly superior to the average level of the people. The Order permits us to dedicate ourselves to full-time study, freeing us from preoccupation with money and from the obligations that so many citizens must observe (taxes, insurance, etc.). Gratitude is manifested in making fruitful what we have acquired over years of study, working in the fields of teaching and cultural animation. Thanks also become concrete in washing the dishes and in cleaning the toilets. Placing the fruit of our work in common allows us to live in a dignified way, even with a little, and to share with others a part of what Providence has put into our hands. This is a fundamental dimension of our life; its realization depends strongly on the sense of belonging to the Order and to the fraternity which we develop along the way of initial formation and that we cultivate with care throughout all of our existence.

**Our Constitutions permit the friars to “invest whatever money is really necessary for them in banks and similar institutions, even at a moderate rate of interest.” (66,3) In the** Order there are Circumscriptions that have rented their land or buildings to others and receive a regular income for them. Other Circumscriptions of recent foundation exert themselves to realize projects in view of self-support with the intent of producing a regular income. Up to what point can we go in this direction? The realization of projects, especially those linked to the agricultural exploitation of land, have proved extremely difficult and far from profitable. I believe that we cannot in any way think to finance ourselves only in this way. It would be against the vow of poverty and it distances us from **the people that the Constitutions call “of modest means” (66,3). I believe it makes sense** that a modest income produced from investments or from rented property could be used to finance in the first place the work of our friars committed to social works for the poor for which they do not receive a salary. But even these cases must not detract from the duty of charity and solidarity shared among us internally, which I summarize and hand over to the responsibility that each of us has before God and the brothers: I have received the grace of working and knowing the everything is gift I turn over my salary or the money I receive under the title of offering to my fraternity, happy to support the needs of my brothers, or to support the work of the one who works with the poor and least of the earth.

## 9. Conclusion

Dear brothers, the purpose of this letter is to initiate the reflection on our work and on the Grace that it represents. I wanted to point out certain situations without pretending to be exhaustive. We will work together in the various phase that will precede, accompany, and follow the celebration of the Plenary Council of the Order and now I have already asked your willingness to offer your generous cooperation. I wish to highlight above all that we are at a turning point regarding both fraternity and the individual friar and for this I want to get some of the friars started in preparing a contribution that touches on our history and our sources. It is necessary to pray, to reflect, to seek new paths, and to make innovative choices. For this reason it is important that the whole Order, that is all of you, let yourselves get involved in this type of reflection and communicate it to others.

To prepare the PCO we have set up a working group to further develop what I have drafted in this letter and to prepare a tool for reflection to be sent to all the friars. Your contributions will then allow the friars gathered for a month in Assisi to develop a series of propositions to be sent to the whole Order for the purpose of practical guidance on our way.

The brothers of the preparatory commission are:

**Br. Štefan Kožuh, General Vicar, president**

Br. Hugo Mejía Morales, General Definitor, vice president

Br. Francisco Lopes (PR Ceara Piauí, Brazil)

Members: Br. Giovanni Battista Urso (PR Calabria, Italy)

Br. Mark Joseph Costello (PR Calvary, United States)

Br. Moses Njoroge Mwangi (VG Kenya, Africa)

Br. Nithiya Sagayam (PR Tamil Nadu North, India)

Dear brothers, I carry in my heart the happy certainty that the Spirit of the Lord is already helping us to make essential, simple, and incisive choices and I desire that this beauty be recounted and made known among us. Let us support one another and remind one another that the Grace of the Lord supports and accompanies our life and our work. May each of us, with our gaze turned to Christ and to Francis, do his own part.

I want this letter to reach the hands of every friar of our Order, and so I ask the Provincial and Viceprovincial Ministers, the Custodes and the Delegates to make sure this happens as quickly as possible. Thank you.

I greet each of you with fraternal affection.

Br. Mauro Jöhri  
General Minister OFMCap.

Rome, 1 November 2013