

**AN OPEN LETTER TO ALL THE FRATERNITIES OF THE ORDER FROM  
THE FRIARS GATHERED AT THE 2018 EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL CHAPTER  
FOR THE REVISION OF THE CONSTITUTIONS**

*“And after the Lord gave me some brothers,  
no one showed me what I had to do,  
but the Most High Himself revealed to me  
that I should live according to the pattern of the Holy Gospel”  
(Testament No. 14 FF 116).*

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

We friars called to the 201<sup>st</sup> Extraordinary General Chapter for the revision of the Constitutions, having come to the end of this experience (July 24 - August 26), now wish to send our greetings and our message to each of the 604 friaries of the Order around the world. We are 112 friars from 64 countries. 83 of us have voice, while the remaining friars are engaged in work for the secretariat as translators, interpreters and liturgical animators. This intensive experience has been taking place at the “*Ad gentes*” Center of the Divine Word Missionaries in Nemi, Italy. The Center is blessed with providential evening breezes and is surrounded by the beautiful scenery of the Roman Hills, mirrored in the volcanic lakes of Nemi and Albano. It lies about thirty kilometers [nineteen miles] south of Rome.

At first we wondered what we would do for five long weeks here in Nemi, and then slowly, the awareness of being part of a “historic” Chapter grew. We have seen firsthand that the Constitutions we are revising are a precious instrument. They speak about our Franciscan identity and can promote the renewal of our life. This clear perception has engaged our total commitment in listening, dialoguing and discerning, a practice our confrere Bishop Friar Roberto Carboni encouraged us to follow during the retreat he gave us, a practice sustained above all by our community prayer, which has been regular and abundant and multilingual, and includes the proposed recitation of the Rosary and Eucharistic Adoration each evening at 9:00 p.m. In the chapel and the Chapter auditorium we spoke with two voices of the Church, drawing on the wealth of its Eastern and Western traditions. We experienced the grace of fraternity which daily enhanced our meetings, work and celebrations. During meals, in the Chapter auditorium, during recreation and fraternal outings, we experienced diversity as a treasure in the Order and came to see ourselves as a “laboratory” for international fraternity.

The intensive work we have done was initiated by a group of friars who were chosen by the 2007 Ordinary General Chapter to revise the Constitutions. Since then, they have labored to reflect upon and draft the *Instrumentum laboris* prepared for this Chapter. Credit goes to the CERC (Executive Committee for the Revision of the Constitutions) which drafted the 620 paragraphs of the *Instrumentum*, drawing upon, in turn, the appreciated contributions from all our communities around the world and from the CIRC (International Commission for the Revision of the Constitutions). The Minister General, Friar Marco Tasca, with his Definitory, guided this long process. The eleven years it took for this painstaking work – especially for the CERC – was a huge effort; many thanks to these confreres.

Our contribution to the Extraordinary Chapter consisted in reviewing the 620 paragraphs of the *Instrumentum* with the following *modus procedendi*: “reading-reflecting-discussing-voting”–on every

single paragraph, with the option to propose modifications to the text (*iuxta modum*). The smooth running of the Chapter was made possible by various commissions who met almost daily. There was the Central Commission, which read and scrutinized every proposed text; the Juridical Commission, which provided legal expertise; and, as the Steering Committee, the Council of the Presidency, which drove the whole process.

There was no shortage of tension in the Chapter auditorium, especially around paragraphs which became representative of the sensitivities and culture of a particular Jurisdiction. For this we exercised our skills in listening, dialoguing and searching for common ground, and putting our charism above our personal and national views.

Sustained by the good, fraternal atmosphere that has gradually been created here in Nemi, we would now like to tell you about some of the things that have served us well here at the Chapter.

First of all, we have rediscovered that *fraternity*, as a specific concept, comes from our willingness to *meet* and *listen* to our brother, to hear about his history, his vocation, his culture, and his profound feelings. Fraternity also arises from our common *discernment* of how we want to live our Franciscan charism today, remembering with gratitude while looking ahead. It arises from our listening, discerning and finally, *making decisions* together about the path we must take in order to *embody the Gospel now, with the heart of Francis* and our saints, in the light of the tradition of our Order. This is what we have been called to the Chapter to do, and you brothers have delegated us to grasp what is “constitutive” of our vocation, beyond the latitudes and longitudes of our Jurisdictions. We have repeatedly stated the importance of communicating, of bringing together the sometimes strong differences that exist between us, without denying them; of listening without wanting to convince the other, of having an open heart. We have mentioned the importance of real, everyday life – ours and the people’s – as the place to put the decisions we make into practice. We said, with a smile, that we are not rewriting the Gospel, or even the Constitutions (that has already been done!), we are revising them, with a hopeful eye towards the present and the future. Above all, we are looking forward with immense faith in the Lord Jesus, the Lord of History.

In particular, living together with more than one hundred friars from over sixty countries around the world and looking at the geography of our Order and the “global village” in which we are living, we feel called to move *from multiculturalism*, which is self-evident and external, *to interculturalism*, the encounter that brings together the differences and gifts of each culture, in the name of the Gospel and in our common Franciscan vocation, so that we might be *inculturated*, here and now, wherever obedience places us. Our secure foundation comes from our communion with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, from which the Church was born. Moreover, from the womb of the Church came the *fraternitas* of our father St. Francis. This awareness brings a continual provocation to *re-form* ourselves, that is, to give a new form to our life, with creative fidelity to our Franciscan identity.

How do we travel this path? In the new Constitutions you will notice the continuous reference to the Writings of the Seraphic Father and to the Franciscan sources. We have “recovered” *the personal experience of Brother Francis with his friars*, because it contains his path of conversion, of being a disciple, of being a universal brother, in love with the Lord Jesus “made flesh” and “passionate” for our love. It contains our vocation, what has led us to this adventure of discipleship. It contains, above all, the beauty of our chaste-poor-obedient life, like that of Jesus and Francis; it has the freshness of the Gospel, the joy of fraternity, the anxiety of missionary proclamation. It has the joy of living the charism over adhering to the law, of living life over following rules (which also exist and must exist, but which must spring from a personal experience with the Lord who has called us!). There is the provocation to grow, not to stop,

through ongoing formation, starting from our first steps in this form of life, until "sister death" leads us to embrace our "almighty, eternal, just and merciful" Father (See FF 233). This is our wonderful journey of *following*, in the footsteps of Friar Francis, to the gradual *conformitas* with Jesus, our only Lord!

Despite the goodness of this place, and the fraternity here, we cannot deny that it has been tiring spending the whole month in Chapter, following an intense and often repetitive program, far from our Provinces, being deprived of vacation time (something which the rest of you have not envied us). Still, our awareness of how much we have tried to do, with the help of the Holy Spirit for the good of the Order, for its re-forming, has always sustained and encouraged us. We are guided by a vision of the Order, dreamed of here, which will last for the next fifty years. We are guided by the prophetic vision of a renewed life, of flying forth on wings of hope, and not just being the conservers of our holy roots. The text of the Constitutions that you will have in your hands is certainly not perfect, perhaps not even in proper form, because it bears the marks of our reflections, discussions and even tensions. However, we hope that you can perceive some important values, in view of the re-forming of our life, which can help renew it: there is the centrality of the fraternity that lives the Gospel with fidelity to the Charism received. There is the prophetic creativity that goes forth on mission, that prefers the poor and welcomes the challenges of our world in the style of *minoritas* and the gift of oneself, a gift which does not close in on itself for its own well-being (Conventual and Provincial particularism) but opens up to the needs of the wider fraternity and the Church, and perceives the Order as our family in the "village" of the world (interculturality and inculturation, solidarity and cooperation).

It was here in Nemi, right next to the house of our hosts, the Divine Word Missionaries, here where one's view extends from the lake to a village-dotted plain stretching to the sea; it was here that the Commission worked which produced the "*Ad gentes*" decree during the Second Vatican Council. This decree, on the missionary activity of the Church (December 7, 1965), was a courageous impetus for the Church to go forth to the streets of the world to proclaim the Gospel.

As an Order, we hope that our new Constitutions, born in the same place during this Extraordinary General Chapter, may nudge all our fraternities to be "ad gentes", to "go forth", "to the existential peripheries," in the "common house" that is creation, as Pope Francis urges us. Above all, we hope the new Constitutions will re-form our life, so that our adhesion to the Lord Jesus, our service to the Church and to the world as Friars Minor Conventual, may be ever more authentic. For this reason, we friars of the Chapter ask you to take these new Constitutions into your own hands and make them an occasion for reflection and, above all, for generating proposals of new life.

Merciful Father, grant, that by the incandescent power of the Holy Spirit, we may follow in the footsteps of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, as Brother Francis and his fraternity did, renewing and making authentic our passion of discipleship. Grant that we may thank you and serve you with great humility, every day and in every place, so that, conformed to your Son, we may finally make our way to you, Most High, all-powerful and good, to give you thanks forever (see FF 233. 263).

Guide us again, *sancte pater Francisce*, on the pathways of time, so that we may live the Gospel today as Friars Minor Conventual!

Nemi-Rome, August 26, 2018

*The friars of the 201<sup>st</sup> Extraordinary General Chapter*