



MINISTER GENERALIS
ORDINIS FRATRUM MINORUM CONVENTUALIUM

Prot. N. 057/2020

Rome, February 2, 2020

**To the Ministers Provincial,
Provincial and General Custodes,
Presidents of the Federations,
and all the friars
*At Their Sees***

**Motion No. 9 of the 202nd Ordinary General Chapter of 2019
“New Wineskins for New Wine”**

Dear brothers,

Peace and All Good!

As the General Definitory, we take our commitment to complete the “Chapter Mandate” as seriously as possible, that is, to fulfill the Motions and indications that we, as a General Chapter, have given ourselves for this sexenium.

In studying the Motions and after hearing the experiential voices of so many friars, we thought it appropriate to compose and send this letter to the whole Order as an aid to interpret Motion No. 9 (Attachment 1) ***“Promoting Community Initiatives for a Life More Faithful to Our Charism: New Wineskins for New Wine”*** in view of its implementation (cf. *Constitutions*, art. 7, § 3). I ask all the friars of the Order, especially the Ministers Provincial and the Provincial and General Custodes with their Definitories, to read and consider the material I present here, which results from the reflection of the General Definitory.

A Message and a Challenge for Us All

The first and fundamental idea is this: **the text of Motion No. 9 goes from the particular to the general, but its meaning is addressed to the “general”, that is, to all of the friars, to each of the communities and to the whole Order.** The Chapter calls us to promote community initiatives for a life that is more faithful to our charism. These initiatives may be totally “new” (new communities or new styles of evangelization), but they are always aimed at the whole, that is, these new inspirations can become

evangelical “leaven” for the whole Order. We must therefore interpret Motion No. 9 in a broader sense, understanding that it is addressed to everyone. **All of the communities are encouraged to renew themselves in their vocation**, that is, in their life of prayer, fraternity and evangelization. In any event, the Order looks hopefully and favorably on the prospect of friars and their superiors working together to promote and evaluate the possibility of starting new presences or evangelization initiatives, ones which are inspired by the charismatic elements of the Order, as a sign of ever greater evangelical radicality.

With the Simplicity of Our Constitutions

On the other hand, there is a second idea which focuses on the uniqueness of the new initiatives, that is, the distinctive traits that form a part of these initiatives or have given rise to some of them. The Motion recognizes that there are already **communities that have committed themselves to a renewal aimed at improving the clarity of the charism** (“recognizing the emergence of new local fraternities and experiences in the Order”). Moreover, it calls for open-mindedness at all levels (General Definitory, Provincial and Custodial Definitories, Chapters, etc.) to discern these new initiatives and possibly support and guide them.

The sense is that we should not consider some friars or communities as being “major league” and others “minor league”. Rather, we should recognize and support those who, out of concern and commitment, want to avoid stagnation in our lifestyle and want to recover exactly those aspects of our charism which have often been forgotten or even abandoned. Nobody should feel superior or inferior to anyone else. On the contrary, experience tells us that it is possible to have communities that are engaged, at *different speeds and with different creative approaches*, in the life of prayer, in ongoing formation, in “goofing off” during fraternal free time, in prophetic witness and in the challenge of undertaking new and “*Franciscan*” ways of evangelizing.

New initiatives should not be eliminated or magnified. Instead, they should be *charismatic beacons* that can enlighten the entire fraternity of the Jurisdiction, Federation or Order; ones that can promote new services and update the charism. A healthy “charismatic epidemic” especially in the life of the fraternity, will benefit everyone. The General Chapter calls us to keep alive the dream of an evangelically crystal-clear life, but **with the simplicity by which the Constitutions of the Order present the traits of our charism**.

Finally, it must be said that in carrying out new initiatives, it will be important to hear from those communities and projects already underway (in our Order or in the Franciscan Family), to learn from their experience and arrive at a style that is more faithful to true evangelical innovation.

Faithfully Executing a “Conventual” Methodology

A very important indication (I would say *sine qua non*) is about our way of working, that is, the **methodology** we use in discerning and establishing any new community initiative. This methodology must always be “Conventual”. On several occasions, we have stated that our charismatic traits, such as fraternity and community, do not refer to some fixed or preset program, but to a **cross-cutting style**. Therefore, even if inspirations are “personal” (individual), their discernment and planning must be communal. Indeed, the Motion presents a challenge to the governments of the Jurisdictions, which, in order to guide new initiatives, must ensure that procedures are followed and appropriate consents are obtained. Discernment takes time, and following procedure requires the development of a plan with concrete steps.

A Community with an Ecclesial “Atmosphere”

A look at the current landscape reveals that interpretations of the “new” can often lead to confusion in the places where we live and work. We humbly believe that the return to the sources of our charism should not be identified with a nostalgic return to the forms, styles or aesthetics of anachronistic traditionalism, nor to egregious or extravagant styles or forms. We always want to breathe in the fresh air of the Second Vatican Council and let ourselves be enlightened by serious reflections of contemporary Franciscanism.

In some very credible sees, a problem has already been noted with friars or communities who want to present “the old” as if it were “the latest innovation,” often masking personal or ideological interests. The same could happen in other ways when setting up “new communities or methods of evangelization,” if these were built on strictly ideological grounds. Healthy tension between identity, innovation and tradition is found within the context of the action of the Holy Spirit, of fraternity, of community discernment and in referring to Church teaching.

Indeed, the Motion in question encourages us “in undertaking new initiatives of life and mission, moved by the desire to live the Gospel in the courageous practice of the Rule and the Constitutions of the Order.” The current ecclesial atmosphere invites us to free ourselves from our “intimist” mindset, to open ourselves up, *to go forth*, to “get our hands dirty” doing active pastoral ministry, paying special attention to the simple and believing People of God, to the poor, the suffering and the marginalized. We must rely on our creativity in order to combine our life of prayer and fraternity with active evangelization in the community.

It might be helpful to further explain the biblical text which inspires Motion No. 9: “New Wineskins for New Wine.” It comes from Matthew 9:16-17. The evangelist presents these verses in the context of a provocative question that John’s disciples ask about fasting,

with regard to the newness of the Gospel lived and proclaimed by the Lord Jesus: a newness of the Gospel which was not meant to deny or forget tradition, which at the time, however, was often fossilized in empty or external forms. Rather, it was meant to bring tradition to its fullness and perfection in the new life of the Kingdom, which revolves around love and the generous offering of oneself.

Conclusion

Everything we have said so far, in addition to being our essay, is meant to provide some guidelines, which we as the General Definitory offer for the interpretation of Motion No. 9 of the 202nd Ordinary General Chapter of 2019. We enclose an operational text - Attachment 2, with the hope that it will be particularly helpful to the Definitories of the Jurisdictions and to friars who are interested in the renewal of our life and mission.

If you would like to report any new or renewed community projects that you have realized, and offer us your reflection on them, the results of your project, as experienced at different levels (Provinces, Custodies, Delegations, Missions, Definitories, etc.), we would be happy to hear from you. We are sure that by drawing on the wisdom of the great fraternity of the Order, we can further enrich our reflection and thereby increase our opportunities for renewal. Reports can be sent to the Assistants General or directly to the Secretary General (segrgen@ofmconv.net).

I wish each of you a fruitful journey, filled with the same hope with which the last General Chapter looked upon the future of the Order.



fr. Carlo A. Trovarelli
Friar Carlos A. Trovarelli
Minister General

ATTACHMENT 1

Text of Motion No. 9

Promoting Community Initiatives for a Life More Faithful to Our Charism: “New Wineskins for New Wine”

Recognizing the emergence of new local fraternities and experiences in the Order in which the friars care deeply about a more profound life of prayer, more authentic fraternity and bold evangelization and seek to interpret our charism in light of the signs of the times, the General Chapter looks to the future of our Order with hope. At the same time, it encourages the Minister General with his Definitory, Provincial and Custodial Chapters and Ministers Provincial and Custodes, together with their Definitors, to seriously discern and support the heartfelt inspirations of the friars in undertaking new initiatives of life and mission, moved by the desire to live the Gospel in the courageous practice of the Rule and the Constitutions of the Order. All of this, if carefully guided and verified, can become a leaven for new vocations, encouragement for those who already realize their vocation and an answer with which the Order can address the challenges of the New Evangelization (Cf. *Constitutions*, Art. 59 §1-2).

ATTACHMENT 2

Operational Guidelines

In the letter, we mentioned the experience of existing communities. In this sense, we offer some operational guidelines, which also derive from our own experiential observations.

- 1) **Ongoing Formation:** In reality, renewal is not confined to new experiences alone. These may serve as a leaven, but we should always be pushing towards a style that is more faithful to our charism. This should be the subject of all our formation programs, especially those focused on reinforcing and rediscovering the riches of the House Chapter.
- 2) **Procedure:** As already stated in the letter, it will be vitally important that after accepting an inspiration or a request, the Provincial or Custodial Definitory helps the experience of a new community or a renewed community to get started by assisting those involved in drawing up a program with a specific procedure, one that develops step by step and is appropriately certified.

- 3) **A Temporary Component of the Members of the New Communities or of the Community Itself:** The appeal to guide the emergence of new communities is associated with listening to the “signs of the times”, and therefore these new communities, or these new styles, must necessarily have a “temporary” component. Experience shows, in fact, that the members of various “alternative” communities (new or renewed) should themselves also be renewed (replaced) after a certain time. This prevents the experience from becoming “exclusive and excluding,” and at the same time, allows the experience to become “inclusive and including”. Furthermore, when an “innovation” becomes “eternalized”, it effectively loses its identity.
- 4) **A Style That Is Sober but Not Rigid:** This is certainly a signpost of the evangelical, but one that many of us often forget. Therefore, when drafting the plans for new communities, it will be necessary to specify the criteria for sobriety, in order to prevent those standards from being transformed into principles so rigid that the vast majority of the friars would be refused entry.
- 5) **An Old Structure or a New One? In the Middle of the Forest or in the Midst of the People?:** Discernment should lead to a decision about whether the community should live in an old pre-existing friary, or whether it should operate from a small, simple apartment in the peripheries. In any case, it should not be a community in the middle of a forest or at the top of a mountain. It is important for the friars to be accessible and for the community to have a certain “visibility” (not exhibitionistic, of course). Being friars in the mountains for a population of 433, where there is little traffic, is all very nice. However, it is better to be where people’s lives are buzzing, where people are always passing by, and where people can reach you.
- 6) **Self-sustainability:** Fraternal and economic self-sustainability is a fundamental yardstick for discerning the reliability of a new inspiration. Experience tells us that new communities, or new and renewed styles, should not be built on the shoulders of large structures, or on economically unsustainable projects, or on unattainable goals. Novelty, even if it is prophetic and profound, must be combined with simplicity, discretion, and “normality.” Moreover, it must offer the possibility of supporting oneself with one’s own work.
- 7) **Welcome:** The General Chapter drafted a special Motion on youth ministry and vocational promotion and discernment (Motion No. 8). We find it fitting that new or renewed communities, in their efforts to make our charism visible, should be especially welcoming to young people. Furthermore, this offer of hospitality, far

from being made from any “intimist” mindset, could be enriched with concrete proposals: catechesis, formation, an experience of New Evangelization, sharing testimony, etc. In any case, the living tradition of the Order shows that our communities have always grown in the midst of the people, of society, in direct contact with the world and have always borne witness (“visibility”). It is crucial that the members of the community demonstrate a capacity for fraternal welcome towards all, and that the structure has physical spaces for hospitality and for sharing life.

- 8) **Ecclesial Criteria – Catholic and “Communional”:** The new or renewed communities shall be Catholic, in harmony with the local and universal Church and with all instances of the Order (especially with the local and general governments). The new communities shall be established “in a network” with the rest of the Jurisdiction, whose Definitory will be responsible for creating, in an intelligent way, connections, opportunities for meeting, etc.
- 9) **Conventual Community:** The new communities must maintain the criteria of Conventuality. Therefore, even if these communities are the fruit of friars with similar sensitivities, it is only right that they be communities not only of “friends” but of confreres.

ATTACHMENT 3

Biblical Text: Matthew 9:14-17

Then the disciples of John approached him and said, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast [much], but your disciples do not fast?”

Jesus answered them, “Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.

No one patches an old cloak with a piece of unshrunk cloth, for its fullness pulls away from the cloak and the tear gets worse.

People do not put new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise the skins burst, the wine spills out, and the skins are ruined. Rather, they pour new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved.”