



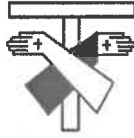
**ORDER OF FRIARS MINOR CONVENTUAL**

# **GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR THE PREPARATION OF PROVINCIAL OR CUSTODIAL DIRECTORIES ON THE USE OF NEW MEDIA**

***Implementation of Motion no. 7  
of the 2019 General Chapter***

**PROT. N. 751/2020  
ROME, OCTOBER 22, 2020**





MINISTER GENERALIS  
ORDINIS FRATRUM MINORUM CONVENTUALIUM

Prot. N. 751/2020

Rome, October 22, 2020

**Ministers Provincial and Custodes**

Dear Ministers Provincial and Custodes,  
May the Lord give you peace!

With this letter, we are sending you the General Guidelines for the Preparation of Provincial or Custodial Directories on the Use of New Media. This document was mandated by Motion No. 7 of the the 2019 General Chapter, which reads:

To facilitate the observance of the Constitutions, art. 66 §3, the Minister General with his Definitory, independently or by means of a special Committee, shall implement: a reflection on the new media used by the friars and establish guidelines (*CIC* can. 666), if possible, by the end of 2021, that can clearly and unequivocally guide the use of these instruments, providing for integration at the local level by the Provinces and Custodies, (*Const.* art. 66 §4), if possible, by the end of 2022, and continuous updating due to the ongoing evolution of this phenomenon.

To implement this mandate of the 2019 General Chapter, the Minister General set up a commission to prepare a first draft of the text. The draft was revised by the Coordinating Committee of the Six-Year Plan of the Order. Then it was reworked by the commission and was finally submitted to the General Definitory for its approval.

The General Definitory approved the text of the Guidelines during its session held July 23, 2020.

In keeping with this Chapter Motion, its implementation now passes to the local Jurisdictions. In fact, each Jurisdiction is required to prepare its own Directory on the Use of New Media, “by the end of 2022.” The General Guidelines must therefore be integrated with the local norms specific to each Province and Custody.

Provinces and Custodies which already have directories on the use of new media can use the General Guidelines as a necessary tool for revising their directories. In fact, the Chapter Motion reiterates this point, stating that these directories require “continuous updating due to the ongoing evolution of this phenomenon.”




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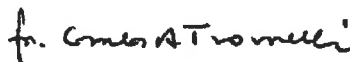
The Order's 2019-2025 Six-Year Plan reminds us that our goal is "Conforming Ourselves to the Gospel to Become a Missionary Fraternity". The Guidelines prepared in the Jurisdictions will take this direction as well. One aspect of conforming ourselves to the Gospel is being more humble and less exhibitionistic in order to become a fraternity, perhaps starting by turning off our cell phones during meals. Another aspect is missionary fraternity, for example, working as a community, rather than individually, to create outposts for preaching the Gospel online.

*Go, my dear brothers, two by two (as a missionary fraternity), through different parts of the world (and also through different parts of the Internet), announcing peace to the people and penance for the remission of sins (for example, through the Gospel!) (cf. 1 Cel 29; FF 366).*

Blessings,

  
Friar Tomasz SZYMCAK  
*Secretary General*



  
Friar Carlos A. TROVARELLI  
*Minister General*

## General Guidelines for the Preparation of Provincial or Custodial Directories on the Use of New Media

These *General Guidelines* for the Use of New Media were approved *ad experimentum* by the General Definitory at its meeting on July 23, 2020.

They are intended for provincial ministers and custodians and their content shall be binding for the formulation of *Provincial or Custodial Directories on the Use of New Media*. The Jurisdictions of the Order shall:

- (a) foster general reflection among the friars on “new media” and its importance and use, especially for evangelization (cf. *Constitutions*, art. 66 §3);
- (b) prepare and approve norms (cf. *Const.*, art. 66 §4) that take into account the local socio-cultural and ecclesial context and provide concrete operational indications<sup>1</sup>.

The content being offered is mainly concerned with “new media” (“*nuovi media*”, “*nuevos medios de comunicación*”, “*nowe media*”), although the text sometimes refers to traditional media in a general sense<sup>2</sup>. The text is divided into six sections: (I) Origin of the Document; (II) Definition of New Media; (III) Mission Statement; (IV) General Inspirational Norms; (V) Operational Guidelines; and (VI) Special Issues.

The drafting of this text was helped by the indications already implemented in some of the Conferences and Provinces, as well as by material published by other Orders.

### I. Why have this document?

- (a) It was requested by the 2019 General Chapter:

To facilitate the observance of the *Constitutions*, art. 66 §3, the Minister General with his Definitory, independently or by means of a special Committee, shall implement: a reflection on the new media used by the friars and establish guidelines (*CIC* can. 666), if possible, by the end of 2021, that can clearly and unequivocally guide the use of these instruments, providing for integration at the local level by the Provinces and Custodies, (*Const.*, art. 66 §4), if possible, by the end of 2022, and continuous updating due to the ongoing evolution of this phenomenon<sup>3</sup>.

- (b) This was suggested by the Church, which had already addressed the issue of new media in 2002, in a document of the Pontifical Council of Social Communications entitled, *The*

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<sup>1</sup>Starting from the *Guidelines* presented here, it is therefore up to each Jurisdiction to draft a specific “directory” (*Const.*, art. 66 §4) in which to outline a *modus operandi* regarding the presence of the friars on new media, whether it involves a personal account or institutional channels of communication.

<sup>2</sup> Traditional media are defined here as the press, cinema, television, radio, etc.

<sup>3</sup> THE 2019 GENERAL CHAPTER, *Motions Approved by the 2019 General Chapter*, Motion No. 7: *The Use of New Media: Guidelines*

*Church and Internet*. On that occasion, it offered some early recommendations and encouragement:

“It is important, too, that people at all levels of the Church use the Internet creatively to meet their responsibilities and help fulfill the Church’s mission”<sup>4</sup>.

Alternatively, general ecclesiastical norms on the issue are found in the *CIC*, cann. 822-832.

## II. Definition of New Media

“New media” refers to the complex of modern digital or Internet-based means of communication such as websites and e-mail. Among these means, social media are particularly important and provide opportunities for users to share information and content, such as photos, videos, experiences, and opinions, through the creation of social network platforms (social networks or communities). They are typically interactive, multimedia and can involve both public and private communication. By way of example, this would include personal blogs or vlogs, *YouTube*, *Instagram*, *Twitter*, *Facebook*, *Whatsapp*, *Telegram* and other platforms intended for these purposes.

## III. Mission Statement (Declaration of Intent)

The Rule, our charism and our history as an Order, exhort us to live the Gospel in obedience, without anything of our own and chastity. In addition, they invite us to constantly seek new ways and means to embody our mission and *our form of life*, being aware of cultural and ecclesial contexts and mindful of opportunities and methods, including technological ones, to witness and spread the good news. Therefore, we must continually update the way we evangelize, including establishing our presence on social networks and using new means of communication.

## IV. GENERAL INSPIRATIONAL NORMS

The following inspirational norms have been postulated for the members of the Order regarding the use of “new media”. These norms apply to the management of new media at the institutional level, namely, when officially representing the service-government structure of the Order. Moreover, they also apply to the management of new media by individual friars at the personal level.

- a. A Conventual Franciscan’s activities on the Internet, as in everyday real life, must be guided by the indications of the Gospel, the teachings of the Catholic Church and the Franciscan charism as it concerns his professed religious vows. Moreover, his activities should be guided by common sense, good will, prudence and technical competence. One should be aware that while the Internet can promote knowledge of our witness and charism, it can also involve some risk if it is used improperly. That is why mature use of the Internet requires wisdom, knowledge, skill and responsibility.
- b. The friars should present themselves on digital platforms in an identifiable way, one that is in consonance with their choice of Franciscan religious life and their mission. They should

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<sup>4</sup> PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS, *The Church and Internet*, no. 10, in: [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/pccs/documents/rc\\_pc\\_pccs\\_doc\\_20020228\\_church-internet\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_doc_20020228_church-internet_en.html)

pay particular attention to how their identity is conveyed through these means: in fact, someone viewing the profile of an individual Conventual Franciscan on a social network may find it difficult to distinguish between personal or institutional identity (in our case, the identity of the Order) or tell the difference between an opinion expressed in the apostolate versus one in private life. Thus, the way a friar is presented on a social network, as in any public place or setting, can either support or damage the image that other users associate with our lifestyle.

- c. Each individual friar shall be held legally and criminally responsible for the publications and activities he carries out on social networks/in social media.
- d. His presence and style, in both public and private communications, must respect the dignity of people, taking into account the interests and purposes of such communications while paying particular attention to the signs of the times and the needs of the cultures where we operate (cf. *Const.*, art. 96 §§3-4). This means that a friar must understand which means of communication, formal or informal, are more appropriate and better suited to the cultural contexts and the evangelical activities involved.
- e. The content and information which the friars publish or share should propagate, and not contradict, the teachings of the Church (cf. *CIC*, can. 823).
- f. The content which the friars publish or share should be in harmony with the charism and spirituality of the Order and with the Order's specific mission in the Church.
- g. Friars publishing materials shall respect copyrights and seek reliable sources and accurate information.
- h. In accordance with the right to privacy and the principle of prudence, political, religious or sexual opinions or statements that might cause confusion or scandal for being contrary to the Gospel shall not be disseminated through new media. The friars should be clear and unambiguous in the opinions they publish or share. They should be particularly careful to show respect to people and avoid provoking unnecessary arguments. If a conflict should arise, the friars shall maintain a mild disposition (cf. *Later Rule*, chapter III)<sup>5</sup>.
- i. The verification of media managed directly by a Jurisdiction (namely, when it is a Provincial or Custodial work or an institutional channel), according to the proper law of the Order, is the responsibility of the Major Superior with his Definitory or the Provincial or Custodial Chapter. (cf. *General Statutes*, no. 70).

## V. OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES

1. The General Government, in line with the Order's recent tradition of being engaged in the media, also encourages using "new media" to promote the Good News, the Franciscan charism, our mission and our presence in local cultures and Churches (cf. *CIC*, can. 822 §1).

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<sup>5</sup> "I counsel, admonish and exhort my brothers in the Lord Jesus Christ not to quarrel or argue or judge others when they go about in the world, but let them be meek, peaceful, modest, gentle, and humble, (cf. 2Tm 2:14 and Tt 3:2), speaking courteously to everyone, as is becoming."

## *The Jurisdictions*

2. In particular, each Jurisdiction shall establish:
  - a. some local norms, initially experimental, approved by the Major Superior with his Definitory, supplementing these *General Guidelines*, as required by the 2019 General Chapter and by the *Constitutions*, art. 66 §4.
  - b. It is strongly recommended that the Major Superior with his Definitory establish an Office of Communications at the level of the Jurisdiction, to promote, coordinate and verify the correct use of media in the Jurisdiction.
    - i. The head of this office shall be the Secretary of the Jurisdiction or another specifically appointed friar. If deemed necessary, he can be assisted by collaborators or consultants appointed by the Major Superior;
    - ii. A statute for the aforementioned office shall be prepared indicating its duties and its operational guidelines for publishing any newsletter or website of the Jurisdiction. Moreover, it shall provide indications for the supervision of sites which are managed personally by the friars of the Order and procedures for intervention in special cases;
    - iii. This office, or person, also plays a fraternal and paternal role in overseeing what is published, intervening when the contents divulged by a single friar cannot be shared by the Order (cf. *CIC* can. 823);
    - iv. It is desirable for the Provincial or Custodial Office of Communications to establish among its staff, the role of “Official Spokesperson”, someone to communicate with the press and new media for the Jurisdiction. In this case, a distinction between roles is necessary. The Spokesperson should never also be the Major Superior or a member of the Definitory, for reasons of legal expediency and to ensure freedom of denial on the part of the Superior;
    - v. This office shall also play a role in coordinating “Conventual” communications, namely, managing forms of communication within a Jurisdiction (such as supervising a “virtual cloister” established through a Jurisdiction’s *Whatsapp* group, or through some other social platform);
3. Each Jurisdiction’s Provincial or Custodial Statutes should define which Provincial works are characterized by the use of media (cf. *General Statutes*, no. 70 §§1-2) and should regulate the friars’ personal use of “new media”, taking into account the norms of the Church and these *General Guidelines* for the entire Order.

## *The Local Community*

4. In the annual planning of its House Chapters, each friary shall:
  - a. reflect upon and indicate ways of using new media to enrich the Community’s ministry and apostolate (cf. *Const.*, art. 56 §1);
  - b. establish ways of presenting the community and its activities, including on new media. It is desirable and encouraged that the blog sites of friaries or ministries which we author, should be supported by specific forms of interactive electronic communications.

- c. In order to promote the cloister, even in a virtual sense, a community should set up rules for sharing digital materials that come from outside and establish norms for protecting images, videos and community texts which are inappropriate for sharing externally (cf. *Const.*, art. 25 §3, 53 §1, and 66 §§1-3).
- d. In the case of broadcasting or webcasting liturgical celebrations from the churches of the Order or from others where the friars are presiding, fidelity to the liturgical norms should be observed, avoiding any personalism or eccentricity. Secondly, particular attention should be given to the homily, with the awareness that its words cannot be erased. Furthermore, one should make sure that the technical, audiovisual quality of the broadcast is as high as possible.
- e. The Community should review points 5a, b, and c annually, if possible.

### *Individual Friars*

- 5. For young men in initial formation (postulants, novices and temporarily professed):
  - a. Each Province or Custody is to regulate the use of media in its *Provincial (Custodial) Directory of Formation* (cf. *Const.*, art. 133, §2) and in the *Formation Guidelines for Houses of Formation* (cf. *Const.*, art. 133 §§3-4), duly taking into account the cultural and historical context as well as the specific needs at different stages of formation.
  - b. Some Jurisdictions find it useful to the formation experience to emphasize the transition from the world to the friary by establishing different usage of the Internet and social media, for example, limiting their use, especially during the novitiate.
  - c. One should remember, however, that the main need is to train friars to use new media in a way that is in keeping with our form of life, “*taking care that its use not impoverish relationships with friars*” (*Const.*, art. 66 §3).
- 6. During the period of temporary vows, there should be mandatory and systematic orientation courses on the use of new media, so that the friars “*use media maturely, responsibly, and moderately*” (*Const.*, art. 66 §3).
- 7. Solemnly professed friars also require some common reflection on the use of social networks. This reflection should be accompanied by formation which explains how even electronic means of communication can contribute “*to the work of evangelization*” (*Const.*, art. 66 §3). However, these means must be governed and managed in a manner that is consonant with religious life. From this perspective, each Jurisdiction should locally promote forms and formational periods for all the friars concerned.
- 8. a. Each Jurisdiction should establish norms (see *Const.*, art. 66 §4) for opening accounts on new media aimed at ministry, whether these accounts are personal or institutional (regarding institutional accounts, see *General Statutes*, no. 70 §1).
  - b. These norms should define whether one must ask permission from the Major Superior before opening a personal account aimed at evangelization or if it is sufficient just to inform him.
- 9. Much attention should be paid to issues regarding diverse cultural sensitivities, to the fact that what is being published on line may be justified, or considered culturally positive in parts of the world, while in others it may be inappropriate or even illegal.



## VI. SPECIAL ISSUES

### *Procedures for Managing Publications*

1. Some aspects and considerations that require special attention are briefly indicated:
  - a. It is difficult to separate the personal sphere from the public sphere on the Internet. The existence of so many different forms of media (webpages, social networks, blogs and various publications) makes it hard to judge if we are afforded an appropriate level of privacy. Our presence on the Internet and our communications on these media must therefore be open and transparent.
  - b. When sharing content on the Internet, whether it is content controlled by the friars or by others, the following indications and particular aspects should be taken into account:
    - i. The purpose of the publication. How does it serve the mission?
    - ii. The veracity of the material being disseminated. Before republishing a news item, one must learn to fact-check it, or debunk it, in order to avoid spreading *fake news*. If there is still any doubt, he should refrain from publishing it.
    - iii. The quality of the publication. One should strive for excellence in language and style. One should try to make good use of media and technology.
    - iv. The tone. In a world too oriented towards the use of offensive language (hate speech), and the expression of cutting opinions, the tone of our language should always be respectful and prudent.
    - v. If one has something pertinent to contribute, he should be careful in assessing when it is appropriate to intervene and when it is appropriate to remain silent.
    - vi. Quality discourse. When dealing with particularly sensitive or controversial issues, one should seek advice from experts on the subject before publishing something that could ultimately generate confusion and further controversy.
  - c. If an error is discovered after publication, one should take steps to correct it and apologize if necessary.
  - d. All published texts, videos and blogs should be saved whenever possible.

### *Norms regarding contact with minors and vulnerable adults*

2. The following indications of the Order regarding relationships with minors and vulnerable adults are to be applied to “social media” and electronic means of communication in general.
  - a. Communication with minors is to be limited to occasions that are part of a friar’s mission and ministry, avoiding contact of a personal nature.
  - b. The following must be avoided: aggressive, threatening or intimidating comments; any form of ambiguity regarding sexual content; and photographs or comments that have a sexual or morally inappropriate content.
  - c. Photographs in which minors appear, or details of activities with minors (other than those deriving from a friar’s mission and ministry) acquired at celebrations or in public settings, must not be published without the permission of parents (or guardians).

- d. Care must be taken to act with discretion in contacts with minors on social networks or in personal accounts, in full compliance with national civil regulations.

#### *Digital archiving*

3. Archiving takes place both in traditional paper and digital form. This concerns:
  - a. official acts, such as Chapter decisions, Definitorial decisions, civil acts such as property deeds, resolutions, communications, financial management and anything else considered “official” and “public”;
  - b. letters from Superiors to the friars;
  - c. The data and material regarding the *digital memory* of individual friars<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Regarding the data and material concerning the *digital memory* of individual friars, each Jurisdiction should make such preservation possible and establish norms to safeguard and save not only the paper letters, personal communications, diaries or other relevant writings of their deceased friars but also what the friars have on file in their personal computers and wish to preserve, respecting local laws on the matter.