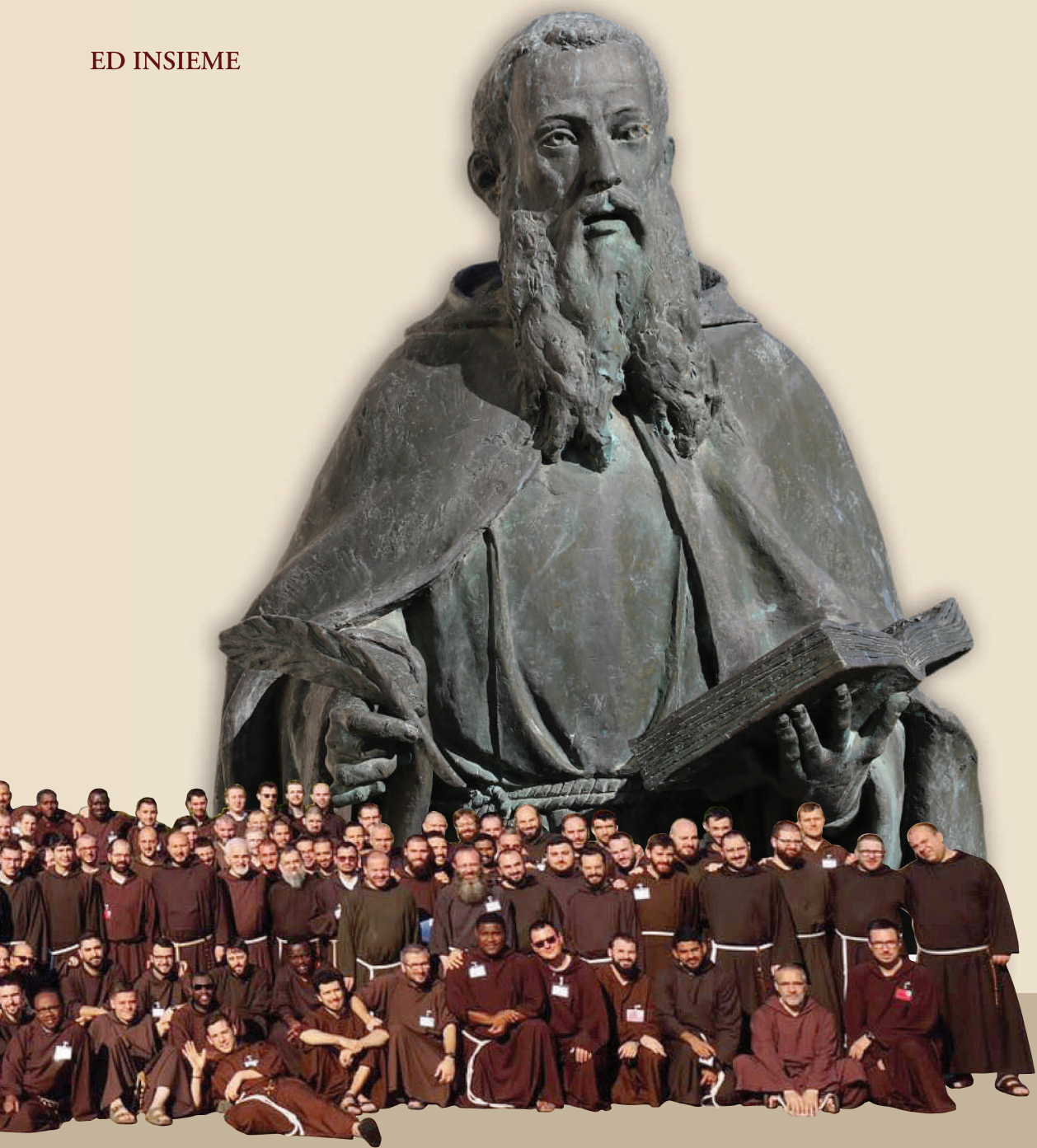


LET US FAN THE FLAME OF OUR CHARISM!

The St. Lawrence of Brindisi Project
of the Capuchin Friars Minor

ED INSIEME



GENERAL CURIA OF THE CAPUCHIN FRIARS MINOR

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*The St. Lawrence of Brindisi Project
of the Capuchin Friars Minor*

Text by
Br. Pio Murat and Br. Onofrio Farinola

ED INSIEME

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Br. José Ángel Torres Rivera

PREFACE

Br. Onofrio Farinola *Secretary of the Mediterranean Commission*

Once freed from the yoke of his earthly father, the first task blessed Francis undertook was to rebuild a temple to the Lord. He was not thinking of building a new one, but of restoring an old, dilapidated church, not of tearing out its foundation, but of building upon the existing one; thus, without realizing it, acknowledging the primacy of Christ. “For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 3:11). Having returned to the place previously mentioned where the Church of San Damiano had been built long ago, with the grace of God he very diligently repaired it within a short time. [...] Once he had put aside his secular clothes and restored the aforementioned church, the servant of God went to another location close to the city of Assisi and set about repairing a second church which had fallen into almost irreparable disrepair and, once the good work had begun, he did not stop until it was completely finished. Then he went to the place called the “Porziuncola” where there was an ancient church, abandoned and neglected, which had been built in honor of the Blessed Virgin, Mother of God. Seeing it in such a miserable state, and moved with compassion, especially since he had a great devotion to the Mother of all goodness, the Saint took up residence there and finished repairing it in the third year of his conversion. (*The First Life VIII:18; IX:21*)

This is how Thomas of Celano, in his first biography of Francis of Assisi, links three episodes that share a common characteristic of the seraphic father: that of restoring the Church. To use a Pauline image, we could

describe St. Francis as a “tentmaker” (see Acts 18:3). Thus Francis of Assisi is depicted as a maker of tents, a repairer of churches, a restorer of the Church.

Francis is “obsessed” with the Church – not as a new reality, but as the Church founded on Jesus Christ (see Col 1:18), understood as grounded in the context of community, animated by an evident spirit of brother/sisterhood; a body in which one experiences a sense of belonging, and where the involvement of each individual is essential to and advances the functioning of the entire body.

Francis felt so strongly about his role as a “builder” that it became a real mission. In the words of Pope Francis, and without exaggeration, one could easily place on the lips of the Saint of Assisi what is affirmed in Pope Francis’ *The Joy of the Gospel*: “I am a mission on this earth” (n. 273). The life of the seraphic father is defined in its essence as a living mission. What could it mean to build, to make or to repair the Church if not to express ecclesial missionary service?

In a unique way, the contemporary papal teaching of Pope Francis points us in this direction, helping our Capuchin brothers especially to review the experience of St. Francis from a missionary perspective.

As our current General Minister and his predecessor have pointed out to us, in the context of the world as we know it, driven by endless crisis, we Capuchin brothers are called to “fan the flame of our charism” in a spirit of “giving thanks to the Lord.” They are convinced that the Order is being called to assume a more missionary stance wherein our first mission extends from *intra Ordinis* to *extra Ordinis*. The mission *intra Ordinis* – meaning within the institutional network of the lesser brothers –, as the current *Ratio formationis* points out, must be done in a spirit of renewal, especially as regards “pastoral conversion” (*The Joy of the Gospel*, n. 25). The mission *extra Ordinis* – meaning beyond the confines of the Order, that is, on the highways and byways of the world –, from the Southern hemisphere to the North, from East to West, from the Amazon to the African forests, by our fraternal charism we bear witness to the beauty of a life permeated by the Gospel, of a Gospel that drives us to share concretely the life of the people: the poor, the young, seniors, families, the incarcerated, the sick.

It is within this missionary vision that the St. Lawrence of Brindisi

Project is situated. It is neither an isolated undertaking unconnected to our life and reality, nor is it an idealistic venture, but rather, an endeavor that fully embodies the beauty of our Capuchin charism lived *ad intra* and emanating *ad extra*.

I believe that the value of the St. Lawrence of Brindisi Project lies precisely in its strong missionary thrust which is both rooted in the spirit of our cherished past and looks to the future, as a springboard to help all of our fraternities rediscover this dimension which is inherent in the DNA of our charism. The publication of this text is important because it calls attention to these fraternities and empowers them to transmit the fire of our charism to all of our circumscriptions.

The fraternities that belong to the Project are not detached, semi-remote retreats, but are fully inserted into the context of the Order and the Church, responding to new social, cultural, economic, ecclesial and spiritual developments, in keeping with our age-old tradition.

If, for various reasons until some time ago, the Project involved only the European sector of the Order, today it has expanded elsewhere and now includes Latin America. Along these same lines, the first Pan-American Meeting of Capuchins will take place this year in St. Paul of Brazil from 2 to 9 May 2021. Additionally, within Europe itself, other Project-related proposals are being considered by the General Minister, his Council, and designated commissions, with a view to addressing and taking a fresh look at having a significant presence in the Mediterranean which is such a cultural crossroads embracing all parts of the world that it could be considered in a real sense universal. Furthermore, a meeting involving all of the European circumscriptions is scheduled for October of 2021 at Częstochowa to continue the process. In both the Pan-American and the European initiatives, the central theme will be that of “mission”. This is an issue that affects and involves the entire Order worldwide.

For us Capuchins, leaving traces of our journey by steering our present towards a vibrant future is more a matter of leaving a milestone rather than recording a memoir. In other words, it is something that makes present here and now the beauty and freshness of our charism. So this brochure is not meant as a self-congratulatory celebration of what we are doing, but rather, we hope that it serves as a

signpost that spurs us on to continue the journey to achieve reclaimed goals with an enthusiastic and confident spirit.

I wish to thank the General Minister for agreeing to publish this text. Initially, a brochure in two languages was envisioned, but Br. Roberto Genuin wanted it to be translated into other languages as well so that all the brothers would have the opportunity to read about it and to become aware of it, making an exposure to the realities of this project as widespread as possible.

I also wish to thank the General Vicar, Br. José Ángel Torres Rivera, for having shown enthusiastic interest in this publication, along with his desire to extend the experience already taking place in Europe to other parts of the world, particularly Latin America.

A special thanks to General Councilor, Br. Pio Murat, who carefully followed the drafting of the text, and imbued me with his own passion for and awareness of the various facets that make up the “St. Lawrence of Brindisi Project”, helping me to appreciate more personally the beauty of the fraternities involved in this Project.

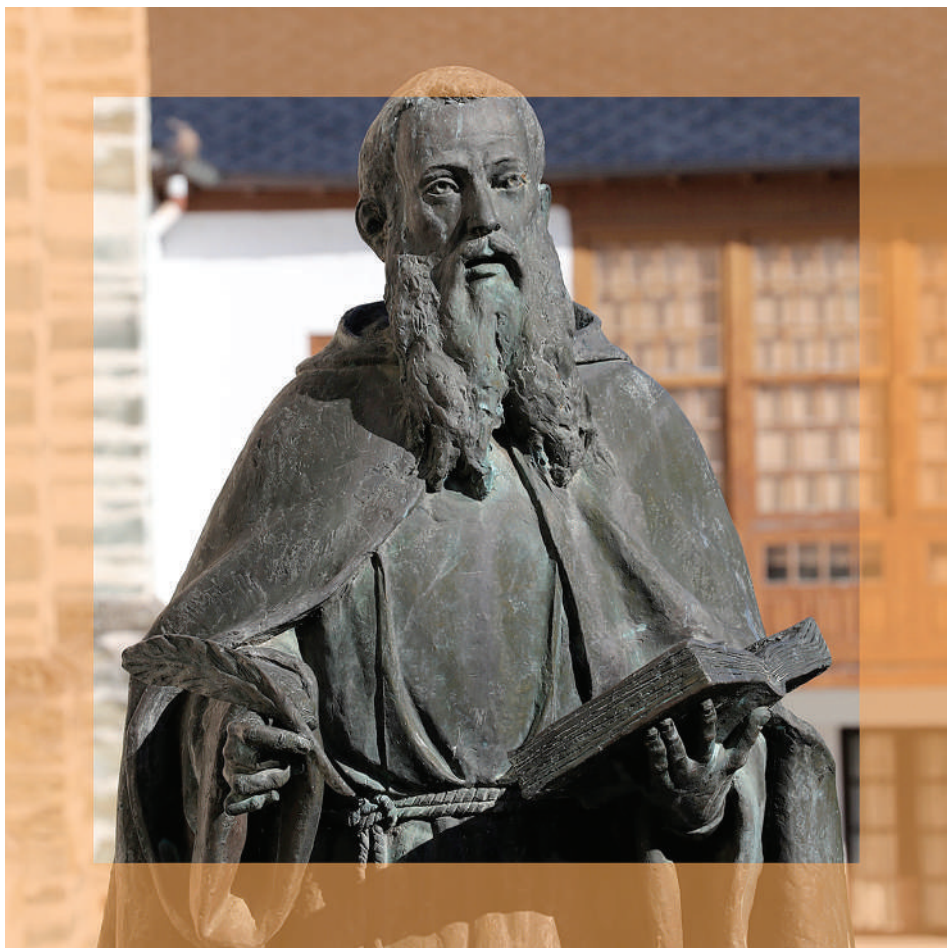
An even more particular thanks to the friars who adopted this Project for themselves and who, in each unique setting, live it fully and generously, placing themselves at the service of the Church, the Order and the people. They are truly a fascinating and inspirational example because they really are fanning the flame of our charism, helping us to look beyond our diminished numbers which can be quite discouraging.

May the prayer and witness of Francis of Assisi continue to impart to all of us the joy of living “according to the pattern of the holy Gospel” (Testament, 14), so that we, too, can be “builders of tents” – the tents of solidarity, peace, dialogue, encounter, prayer, mercy, brother/sisterhood, love, justice and hope.

May the Lord give you peace!



Lourdes, July 2017
Meeting of friars already at work on the project



St. Lawrence of Brindisi
Bronze sculpture; Villafranca del Bierzo



WHAT IS THE ST. LAWRENCE OF BRINDISI PROJECT?

Br. Pio Murat
General Councilor and Coordinator of the Project

THE STORY UNFOLDS

The birth and growth of the St. Lawrence of Brindisi Fraternities

The St. Lawrence of Brindisi Fraternities – which until recently were referred to as Project Europe – have a history. These fraternities did not come into being overnight, nor were they the result of some arbitrary decision handed down “from on high.” Rather, they were the result of meetings which produced in the brothers a growing desire to “fan – together – the flame of our charism.”

More than a decade ago, numerous factors contributed to the launching of this initiative. Undoubtedly first of all, should be mentioned the impact of the December 8, 2008 circular letter of Br. Mauro Jöhri, General Minister, entitled *Let us fan the flame of our charism!* Many gladly welcomed this strong appeal as an invitation to take up the challenge “in a spirit of fraternity and an atmosphere of communion”.¹ During that same period, other factors were pointing in the same direction as those mentioned by the General Minister. Allow me to call to mind the evolution of the project.

Noting the decrease in vocations and the aging of the brothers in the circumscriptions of northern Europe, CENOC (i.e., the Capuchin Conference of Northwestern Europe) questioned the future of our presences in a secularized and multi-ethnic world. Faced with the disappearance of so many of our houses –unimaginable only a few decades ago – we began to think of fraternities as being a sign value

¹ Br. MAURO JÖHRI, *Let us fan the flame of our charism*, 2008

in our efforts to place our charism at the service of the Church and the world.

During those years, the fraternity established at Palestrina by Br. Giacomo Bini, the former General Minister of the Friars Minor, aroused genuine interest even beyond Italy. More than just one of us was wondering about the experience of having a fraternity that stressed the fundamentals of Franciscan life while at the service of the new evangelization. Several Capuchins contacted, visited and spent some time at the fraternity of Palestrina.

For its part, the Secretariat for Formation insisted on only proposing fraternities in which the values taught during the period of initial formation were actually put into practice after the period of initial formation. This sentiment found resonance in the aforementioned letter of Br. Mauro Jöhri: “I am convinced that if we rekindle the flame of our own vocation, we will also be able to revamp our opinions about the initial formation program. Initial formation cannot be the sole prerogative of superiors and formation personnel. It affects everyone.”² In this regard, I still remember a brother in formation who, during a meeting, asked me: “Why is what we learn and how we live in the formation houses so difficult to find after initial formation?”

Along these same lines, in 2006, in order to help some young friars make the transition after initial formation, the Province of France reestablished the fraternity of Clermont-Ferrand. The initiative consisted simply of living a fraternal life inspired and structured according to our Constitutions and in offering our Capuchin charism as our contribution to evangelization, especially for youth ministry. Realizing the province’s limited resources in terms of personnel, very quickly brothers from other provinces who were interested in taking part in this project were asked to support our presence at Clermont-Ferrand. The Provinces of Genoa and Venice were the first to lend a hand. Today, the five friars who make up the fraternity all come from different countries and backgrounds. The witness of friars from diverse cultures living our life with enthusiasm is perceived very

² Ibid.

positively by people and makes a particularly strong impression on young people discerning a vocation.³

In his report to the General Chapter of 2012, Br. Mauro expressed his concern for some European circumscriptions. Rather quickly, the new council decided to convene all the ministers, provincials and custodes of the Old World to face together the challenges of secularization, evangelization and the future of our presences. The meeting, which was held at Fatima from December 1-5, 2014, expressed the willingness and desire to work together interprovincially. The notion that everyone is responsible for rekindling our charism and the desire to explore a new path with the emergence of international fraternities where “in light of the Gospel and our Constitutions the brothers live a life of prayer, fraternal life, and mission in an authentic and meaningful way”⁴ were held in common by all. The presidents of the other conferences of the Order were also invited to this meeting. I’d like to refer to a comment made by the president of the CCB (i.e., the Capuchin Conference of Brazil). Addressing the crisis in some European provinces he said, “no one can remain indifferent when a fire destroys a neighbor’s house because that same fire, at a moment you don’t expect, could also break out in our own house.”

In the aftermath of this meeting, the General Minister and his Council decided to form a commission to follow up on the creation of “international fraternities the type of which had been discussed at Fatima and that already existed concretely in France at Clermont-Ferrand.”⁵ Among other things, this commission – consisting of a general councilor and a provincial minister from each of the Conferences of Europe – was tasked with identifying friars and possible locations where such fraternities could be established, for proposing guidelines for the establishment of these presences, and

³ “If they fix their gaze on Christ present among them, interculturality will be a resource for the witness the brothers of diverse cultures can live, while giving of themselves and working together. We are convinced that the charism of Francis of Assisi can still be lived and witnessed to today.” Br. MAURO JÖHRI, Letter *Fraternity for Europe: Reflections and Recommendations following the Fatima Meeting*, 2015.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Br. MAURO JÖHRI; Letter to Members of the Commission: *Fraternities for Europe*, April 24, 2015.

then to consider what legal status was most appropriate for the smooth and efficient development of this project.

During the 2012-2018 sexennium, the General Minister and his Council were the main promoters of Project Europe. During visitations and assemblies of friars, the goal was explained, discussed and advanced. Most of the reactions were positive, especially among the younger brothers. Some brothers declared their availability to respond to the call. Constructive criticism and questions also contributed to the development of the project. Predictably, as in all such situations, there were also some negative reactions, and even worse, some indifference, but very little.

Following the establishment of Clermont-Ferrand, the Commission overseeing the Fraternities for Europe accompanied the establishment of fraternities in Kilkenny (Ireland), Spello (Italy), Lourdes (France), Antwerp (Belgium) and León (Spain). This entailed contacting the interested brothers and the respective provincial ministers (on both the sending and receiving ends), choosing sites and the actual formation of the fraternity. Since every beginning has challenges to face, it was necessary to accompany these brothers in their new adventure. Despite the good will and initial enthusiasm, all kinds of difficulties, including interpersonal relationships, differences of opinions about the project, as well as material and financial hurdles, had to be taken into consideration, dealt with and overcome.

In keeping with the mandate it had received, the Fraternities for Europe Commission adapted the pre-existing “agreement between the provinces for interprovincial collaboration” to the concrete situation of these fraternities. Among the important points to be underscored, was the determination that these fraternities and the brothers that belonged to them should be legally dependent on the provincial minister or custos of the circumscription in which they were located. The General Minister, with the help of the Commission, would assist and monitor these houses. This proposal, reviewed by the Procurator’s Office and submitted to the General Minister and his Council, was implemented *ad experimentum*.

At the same time, with the support of the General Minister and his Council, guidelines were drawn up to clarify what was being asked

of the brothers in these fraternities and to bring consistency to all of them. Deeply rooted in our Constitutions, the text was improved and refined in stages with input from the brothers who had expressed an interest in the project, from those who were already involved in the project, and from the Fraternities for Europe Commission. Finally, after a number of changes, corrections and improvements, during the September 2015 meeting of the General Council, the text of the guidelines was approved.

During this period, various events contributed to making the Fraternities for Europe Project better known and to enhance its development. The first took place in 2016 at the Guidecca Friary in Venice. About 60 friars from various provinces came together for a week of formation, information and dialogue. With the fundamentals of our charism as Capuchin brothers as their point of departure, the group envisaged promoting our charismatic presence with international fraternities in some key European locations. It was a very gratifying fraternal moment.

In July 2017, at Lourdes, the Commission proposed a meeting for the brothers already engaged in Fraternities for Europe and their respective ministers (both those sending brothers and those receiving them). Based on their experiences, the brothers had a rich exchange of many exciting and positive points, as well as of the difficulties and daily life concerns. It served as an initial assessment of the road traveled thus far and an opportunity to create a network among the brothers involved in the same project.

With a view to providing the European brothers with an opportunity for joint evangelization, a mission in Barcelona was arranged for May of 2018. Through street evangelization, a nighttime procession in the city center, preaching, and celebrations in the churches, the brothers experienced the joy of proclaiming the Gospel in the context of a large, secularized European metropolis. Through the joy that comes from bearing witness, proclaiming their shared, simple faith, in keeping with the Franciscan style, this missionary event served to encourage brothers from various provinces to meet and get to know one another.

In July of 2018, on the occasion of an international gathering of

the postnovitiate brothers of Europe at our International College in Rome, the program included a session on Fraternities for Europe, which consisted of input and firsthand accounts. The favorable reception on the part of brothers who are the future of the Order, served to reinforce our intuition that the message of St. Francis challenges our contemporaries, and that it is up to us to transmit that message through fraternities that truly radiate it.

At the end of his term, during his report to the 2018 General Chapter, the outgoing General Minister, Br. Mauro Jöhri, dedicated a lengthy paragraph to Fraternities for Europe, concluding the paragraph with a lively appeal based on the experience of his 12 years of service to the Order:

With the project of the Fraternities for Europe, we want to establish fraternities made up of brothers from the circumscription in which the fraternity is constituted, brothers from other European provinces and brothers from other continents. What do we ask these brothers? ... We need brothers who live together - and I insist on the word "together" - we need brothers who together live their faith in Jesus Christ, serenely and joyfully, and who are open and welcoming. We need brothers who develop a clear identity supported by a strong sense of belonging. We need brothers who proclaim the Gospel together with a deep sense of gratuitousness, living in a nonindulgent manner. What will be the outcome of all this? Using the secular criteria of gambling, you know that in a bet the odds of winning are no more than 50%. I apply other criteria: I see and feel that this attempt at renewal is like an act of faith. We must take a risk and allow ourselves to be led by trust and hope. We are called to evangelize, above all with our charism lived in fraternity and minority.⁶

After his election, the new General Minister, Br. Roberto Genuin, in a spirit of continuity with the previous administration, confirmed his desire to continue, sustain and advance the Fraternities for Europe Project. "Since the initiative has already produced such positive results, and with the backing of the General Chapter, we want to commit ourselves to supporting it even more."⁷

⁶ Br. MAURO JÖHRI, *End of Term Report at the 2018 General Chapter*, 4:3.

⁷ Br. ROBERTO GENUIN, Letter to the Order at the beginning of the new sexennium, *Let Us Give Thanks to the Lord!*, n. 33.

Along the same lines addressed by the General Minister, the new Council expressed its unanimous support. Noting that the challenge lies in promoting our charism and rekindling it even beyond the confines of Europe, it was decided to expand the initiative already begun outside the Old World, wherever necessary. The first indicator involved a change of name. Br. Roberto Genuin took the opportunity to explain the reasoning: "...to move beyond geographical designations and to take instead as its point of reference this jubilee year dedicated to St. Lawrence of Brindisi, – a man who marvelously combined lengthy periods of prayer, an immersion in the liberal arts, and an untiring commitment to spread and effectively develop the Order, – we thought of no longer calling the project Fraternities for Europe, but the St. Lawrence of Brindisi Fraternities."⁸ At the beginning of the sexennium, in his first letter, *Let us give thanks to the Lord!*, the General Minister, Br. Roberto Genuin, broadly disclosed his vision and expectations of St. Lawrence of Brindisi Fraternities.

The adventure continues ... In September of 2019, the fraternity at the Celle di Cortona was launched with the aim of offering the brothers of the Order an opportunity to deepen their appreciation of the worth of the sometimes neglected primacy of the life of prayer, in a place where we know the Poverello of Assisi passed through. The presence of three new friars, including the former General Minister, strengthened the existing fraternity, and looks promising for the future.

The adventure continues with other projects already underway through our presences around the world. And the adventure will continue with all the brothers who believe in the relevance of the message of St. Francis for the evangelization of our age and with all those who desire to contribute to rekindling the flame of our charism. The story has only begun; it has not ended.

⁸ Ibid., n. 51



Spello
Fraternity at prayer



THE FIRST STEPS: FANNING THE FLAME OF OUR CHARISM

FROM THE LETTER OF 2008, PROT. N. 00766/08

Br. Mauro Jöhri

FRATERNITIES FOR EUROPE: REFLECTIONS AND DIRECTIONS AFTER THE MEETING IN FATIMA

FROM THE LETTER OF JANUARY 28, 2015, PROT. N. 00119/15

To all the Brothers of the Order
and to the Capuchin Poor Clare Sisters

Dear Brothers
Dear Sisters
The Lord give you peace!

I am writing this letter to you a little over a month after the meeting at Fatima. In fact, as you well know, from December 1 to 5, 2014, the General Council, provincial ministers, custodes and the delegates of Europe gathered with the presidents of the conferences of our Order to talk about Europe. Everything took place in a very fraternal atmosphere, exquisitely hosted by our brothers from Portugal. With this letter, besides sharing some impressions, I want to propose to you how we intend to continue the journey by concretizing and implementing what emerged at Fatima.

ABOUT THE MEETING

In the December 16, 2013 letter addressed to the participants of the event, I wrote:

“The General Council considered it advantageous to convene a meeting of all the ministers and custodes of the circumscriptions of Europe. Besides offering an opportunity to share experiences (which is always undoubtedly needed and enriching), the objective of the meeting is to deal with some of the more urgent issues affecting our

life in Europe, such as the creation of international fraternities, fraternal collaboration between circumscriptions, the new evangelization in a secularized context, and the configuration of the conferences.” Subsequently, the Council, using the contribution of the presidents of the four European conferences, specified the purpose of the meeting by identifying the communication and organizational methods with which to carry it out. I will now briefly review what had transpired during the meeting.

On the morning of the first day, we listened to the input of the presidents of the four European conferences whom we had asked to report if there was any desire for renewal of our life and what experiences and attempts were underway. In the afternoon, drawing on my experience as General Minister, I spoke about the urgent need for us to get involved with the process of evangelization in Europe where secularization is advancing rapidly. As a way to achieve this, I suggested establishing intercultural fraternities committed to living our fraternal Capuchin charism in a simple and radical way.

During the morning of the second day, we listened to three experiences in progress. Sr. Rosella Baima of the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Mary (FMM) spoke about the positive points and the challenges of intercultural communities, emphasizing the formative aspects and community dynamics. Br. Jacopo Pozzerle, OFM, spoke to us of the experience of the Missionary Fraternity of Palestrina begun by Br. Giacomo Bini, former General Minister of the Friars Minor whom the Lord called to himself last year. Lastly, Br. Eric Bidot and Br. Raffaele Ruffo told us about the life as it is lived in the fraternity of Clermont-Ferrand in France. In the afternoon we listened to Professor Mauro Maggati, sociologist and professor at the Sacred Heart Catholic University in Milan, who described to us the changing situation taking place in Europe, and urged us to take the risk of following new avenues for becoming proactive and life-giving. His input zeroed-in on the problems our society is facing in a grim and worrying way, but at the same time highlighted that there are many possibilities we could take to try something new. Professor Magatti’s presentation, which was followed by a few brief remarks by his wife, Chiara, was very much appreciated by all those present. During each working day, ample time was given for the various language groups to meet, during which the contributions of the various speakers were reviewed in depth and compared.

On the third day, first in groups and then all together, we discussed the proposal of establishing multicultural evangelization fraternities in Europe, how individual European conferences might accept this proposal, and assessed the possibility of having brothers from other continents assume the pastoral care of parishes in Europe.

Early in the morning on the final day, as the sun was rising, we celebrated the Eucharist in the place of the apparitions and entrusted our future path to the Virgin Mary.

WITH FAITH AND HOPE WE PREPARE FOR THE FUTURE

Drawing upon my presentation during the proceedings and from what emerged in the dialogue and from the sharing, I'd like to bring to your attention some reflections and prospects for the future.

We are witnessing a very strong numerical decrease in our brothers and our presence in various provinces of Europe, and not only in the northern part. Since 2000, we have lost more than a thousand friars, and the average age in some circumscriptions has increased considerably to age 80. For years we have been experiencing a sharp decrease in vocations. In many provinces and fraternities, brothers are notably engaged in guaranteeing dignified care of the senior and sick brothers. To these brothers I send my warmest thoughts full of gratitude.

Alongside this situation within our Order, we are witnessing the advance of secularization in the countries of Northern Europe, as well as in Italy and Spain. The number of those abandoning the practice of religion is on the rise. The emergence and practice of a godless religion is finding support in many areas.

What is the situation I have described telling us? How does it challenge us? What emerged from the Fatima meeting, along with my own personal reflection and input from my Council, compels me to mention a way in which discussion and dialogue with all of you can remain open.

The circumscriptions that are experiencing aging and the decrease of friars and places of presence must be approached with attention and respect. I can think of many various provinces that have given so much to the Order, have evangelized with a strong investment of personnel and resources, and have developed charitable and social projects for the welfare of many poor people. Although we are very

grateful for what has been done, we must realize that these realities of our Order cannot be sustained at any cost. The fraternal collaboration some European provinces began has not solved the existing problems nor has it been able to generate new life. We want to try a new course of action by establishing intercultural fraternities which, in the light of the Gospel and our Constitutions, live prayer, fraternal life and mission in an authentic and meaningful way. Inter-cultural living is a resource that will bear witness that, if they look to Christ present among them, brothers from various cultures can live, serve and work together. The belief that sustains us is the charism of Francis of Assisi, when lived and born witness to, still has much to offer and say to the women and men of our time. We do not yet know the outcome of this journey, but with hope in our hearts, we want to take the first steps. On whom will these fraternities depend? Our Constitutions allow the establishment of fraternities directly dependent on the General Minister. On this premise we wish to proceed and explore.

I want to see the birth of fraternities that live a sincere and profound faith, where the quality of fraternal relationships stands as a witness to the love of God, places of welcome able to inspire others to follow the Lord Jesus. We want to evangelize by our daily life, and we want to do it in communion with the local churches and within the church settings where the Lord gives us the opportunity to be present. In the midst of those who deny or ignore God, we want to put God at the center of our life and quest, thus allowing the Lord to live in the midst of our praises (see Ps 22:3).

For the moment, we have identified the fraternity at Clermont-Ferrand as the first fraternity already living such a lifestyle, and which has recently been reinforced thanks to the arrival of two Italian brothers, one from the Province of Genoa and the other from that of Venice. We are talking with some provinces that are willing to welcome the fraternity project that I described above, and at the same time, we are knocking on a number of doors so that provinces which still have a good number of brothers might willingly offer brothers who feel drawn to this project. Dear ministers, if I knock at your door, open up willingly; and to the brothers who feel interested in the mission in Europe I say: do not hesitate to knock on mine! The smaller provinces should not feel excluded from this project. It will be our task to prepare and then accompany these fraternities.

Consistent with the desires expressed by some brothers at Fatima, there is nothing that prevents individual circumscriptions from initiating fraternal experiences marked by the characteristics noted above; to the contrary, it is highly recommended.

Dear brothers, thank you for your attention. I ask that all the ministers and custodes of the Order deliver this letter to each of their friars.

We remain confident, refusing to give in to pessimism and resignation. I ask that the Poor Clare Sisters accompany us with their prayers.

We entrust the continuation of what, by the grace of God, we began at Fatima, to the Virgin Mary who, in this very place, began a story of conversion and goodness: may she help us and support us.



Montserrat, May 2018
Pilgrimage of the Capuchins

FROM THE REPORT AT THE GENERAL CHAPTER

N. 4:3, AUGUST 28, 2018

THE FRATERNITIES FOR PROJECT EUROPE

Let us return to Western Europe, that part of our Order which, for many years now, has been experiencing a dramatic drop in the number of brothers. I want to clarify that, in December of 2014, the General Council met with the ministers and the conference presidents at Fatima, precisely to reflect on the future of our presence in Europe. How are we tackling this situation? I believe we need to distinguish between two levels of action.

First, on the institutional-geographical level, circumscriptions are merging and provinces are being reduced to custodies. This type of solution serves to safeguard certain aspects of fraternal life and supports our senior brothers in a dignified and fraternal way, but cannot produce clear signs of the renewal of our life. It is not enough to change the legal status in order to renew our life. I have found that many circumscriptions are struggling to develop and implement a plan to reduce the number of our presences in order to have larger fraternities which in turn have a greater capacity for bearing witness. Faced with this analysis which causes some pain and perhaps some bewilderment, I can tell you, in these six years, my Council and I have been guided by the belief that can be summed up in this statement: we will not resign ourselves to dying out without having explored, proposed and tried something new!

Now we come to the second level of action. As far as Northern Europe is concerned, I am thinking most of all about the fraternities

for Europe Project and of fraternal collaboration between circumscriptions. With the Fraternities for Europe Project, we intend to establish a number of fraternities composed of brothers from the local circumscription in which the fraternity is located, brothers from other European fraternities, and brothers from other continents. What are we asking of these brothers of ours?

- to witness genuine fraternal life;
- to lead a simple and nonindulgent lifestyle;
- to cultivate communal prayer, in particular, mental prayer;
- to do their own housework;
- to be open to hospitality;
- to be close to the poor;
- to be available to provide services requested by the local church; and
- to engage in the preaching ministry as a fraternity.

At present, albeit in different ways, the challenge has been accepted by the fraternities of Clermont-Ferrand and Lourdes in France, Kilkenny in Ireland, Antwerp in Belgium, León in Spain and Spello in Italy.

The inclusion of brothers from other areas of the Order, for example, brothers of the CCMSI (i.e., India) will require a great deal of flexibility on the part of the brothers who accept this type of mission. Why? As I have already mentioned above, without wishing to pass any judgment or make any comparisons, it seems to me that in many of the more recently established circumscriptions, during initial formation, great emphasis has been placed on ordinary pastoral work, while the fraternal and communal dimensions – which are the backbone of Project Europe – have been relegated to a secondary place. Brothers, let us ask ourselves this question: “How can we be relevant in our secularized and post-Christian societies?” My response is my personal conviction which has matured over these years of service to the Order. In short: we need brothers who together – and I insist on the word *together* – live their faith in Jesus Christ, serenely and joyfully, and who are open and welcoming; brothers who develop a clear identity supported by a strong sense of belonging; brothers who proclaim the Gospel together with a deep sense of gratuitousness, living in a nonindulgent manner. What will be the outcome of all this? Using the secular criteria of gambling, you know that in a bet

the odds of winning are no more than 50%. I apply other criteria: I see and feel that this attempt at renewal is like an act of faith. We must take a risk and allow ourselves to be led by trust and hope. We are called to evangelize, above all with our charism lived in fraternity and minority and, when they see that this pleases the Lord, they proclaim the Word of God that all may believe in God the almighty Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the creator of all things, and in the Son, the Redeemer and Savior.



Barcelona, May 2015
Evangelization in the city





Fraternities for Europe
Meeting of the European post-novices
The International College of St. Lawrence of Brindisi
(Rome), 2018



PROJECT UNDERWAY: LET US GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD

FROM THE FIRST LETTER OF THE 2018-2024 SEXENNium,
“LET US GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD”
LETTER DATED APRIL 14, 2019, PROT. N. 00380/19

Br. Roberto Genuin

II.

THE ORDER IN EUROPE

17. I believe that we are all well aware of the situation the Order is experiencing in the European context: a rapid numerical diminishment – with the exception of parts of Eastern Europe – from which no turnaround is seen. On the human level the facts can be sad, but if observed through the lens of faith – even if in an unusual way! – the situation calls us to a response based on the certainty that, in God’s plan, the charism and its future are solid.
18. In recent years the Order has already begun certain initiatives as an attempt to respond to new situations, and there are already small signs of renewed life and authenticity. These demand our attention and our accompaniment, that they may confirm for us that the Lord is still at work, that our charism continues to have many good opportunities to be present and give productive witness to the Gospel even in our secularized world. I would even say that this world ‘awaits’ us, if we are able to make ourselves available, living our vocation as lesser brothers with simplicity and honesty. It seems to me quite evident that the Lord is encouraging us strongly. Therefore, we must and can make ourselves available, because there is still much to do!
19. The new administration of the Order is committed to following up on, in ways we will seek out together, the repeated and unanimous requests of the General Chapter capitulars to proceed with the revision of the conferences and circumscriptions, together

with the development of both collaboration between circumscriptions and the Fraternities for Europe Project.

[...]

c) The Fraternities for Europe Project

32. Already for some years we have been asking ourselves what we can do so that our presence in the West may continue into the future. In 2014 the provincial ministers and custodes of Europe met in Fátima to discuss the question. Already by then there had been some small experiences (e.g. Clermont-Ferrand, France), but it was at that point that the Order was able to promote more decisively the Fraternities for Europe Project. Br. Mauro Jöhri described the project in these terms: “We wish to try a new path, putting together inter-cultural fraternities, which, in the light of the Gospel and our Constitutions, will live prayer, fraternal life, and mission in an authentic and coherent way. The resource of interculturality will witness to how brothers coming from different cultures, if they look to Christ present among them, can live, give of themselves, and work together. We are supported by the knowledge that the charism of Francis of Assisi, lived and witnessed to, still has much to say and communicate to the men and women of our time. We do not yet know what will be the result of taking this path, but with a hopeful heart we wish to begin to take the first steps.”⁹

33. The project was thus developed and currently there are six fraternities, each different in its own way. They are Clermont-Ferrand and Lourdes in France, Kilkenny in Ireland, Antwerp in Belgium, León in Spain, and Spello in Italy. Because this initiative has already given such positive fruit, and according to the mandate of the General Chapter, we wish to continue to support the project even further. For the time being, we are thinking and working toward establishing another two fraternities of this kind, at Meersel-Dreef in Belgium, near the border with the Netherlands, and at the shrine of Máriabesny, our ancient

⁹ Br. MAURO JÖHRI, *Fraternity for Europe: Reflections and Recommendations following the Fatima meeting*, *Analecta OFM Cap* 131 (2015), 50-52.

presence in Hungary. Then we also want to give this kind of value to Le Celle di Cortona. It is one of our 'Franciscan Places' par excellence, which we believe could be very helpful to many friars in their need to taste anew the roots of our spirituality, to return to the sources, and to experience for a brief or extended period a peaceful atmosphere of simplicity, prayer, and welcome.

34. Naturally, for all of these initiatives, we ask the willingness and enthusiasm of the brothers who wish to throw themselves into this beautiful adventure. Let them make known their desire to their provincial ministers and the general councilor of their area. They will know how to coordinate everything and respond in the best way, according to the hope that each cultivates within himself and the new opportunities for growth and witness that the Project offers.

III.

THE ORDER IN ASIA AND AFRICA

35. God has not withdrawn his hand from us; on the contrary he is making the Capuchins grow greatly in the regions of Asia and Africa.

It is a sign of God's love for the Order, and a great, ongoing blessing for us. How beautiful it is to know that almost everywhere in the world you can find brothers joyously committed to living this same blessed vocation! We need, then, to embrace this advantage and seek to help each other, so that the thriving tree that is growing in these regions –through inexhaustible divine goodness – may be abundant in the good sap of the values of our charism. The regions we are speaking of are vast and represent many cultures and different traditions. Nevertheless, because of our one charism, we can reflect on certain needs they have in common.

IV

THE ORDER IN THE AMERICAS

49. Many of the considerations already noted also go for the Americas. If, some decades ago, this seemed to be the area in which the Order was developing the most, with a shape of its own and with certain accents that seemed to express our charism well in the particular cultures, today we realize that the dynamic of growth has stopped. There are already even various circumscriptions, in the Spanish-speaking regions in particular and in some provinces of North America, that are suffering very much from a significant reduction in the number of friars. I believe this is the right moment to reflect together on what is going on.
50. Given the great strength the Order still has in the Americas, it is not the time to give in to discouragement, even if some places find themselves in great difficulty. It is rather the time to join forces, to see together the ways that will allow us to assist one another and to revitalize, as much as we can, the flame of our charism on this great continent.¹⁰ Above all, here too we must take decisively the path of collaboration between circumscriptions, which is already going strong in some areas and with real fruitfulness. We believe that this will be an effective response, giving value in a concrete way to our brotherhood especially in those places that are currently suffering.
51. Given the positive results and the mandate of the General Chapter, the General Council intends to look into the possibility of inter-cultural communities also in the Americas, similar to the Europe Project fraternities. We believe that circumscriptions beyond the Old World can also benefit from the new life that this particular initiative can bring. Therefore, in order to overcome the geographical designation and to mark this jubilee year dedicated to St. Lawrence of Brindisi – a man who knew how to unite in a marvelous way long periods of prayer, a cultured education, and a tireless commitment to implant and make vigorous the Order – we have thought to no longer call the project

¹⁰ Europeans consider all of the Americas to be one continent.

‘Fraternities for Europe’ but ‘St. Lawrence of Brindisi Fraternities.’

52. Because our brothers in the Americas themselves are the most directly involved in this journey, and have greater right to reflect on and choose the fitting steps and how to realize them, the General Council plans to call a Pan-American Summit of all the major superiors of the continent, to be celebrated from 2 to 9 May 2021. From this gathering we will develop the criteria for a greater mutual assistance, as well as suggestions for eventual changes to the structure of the circumscriptions (provinces into custodies, unions of provinces, new custodies, new definitions of the territories of circumscriptions, etc.).



Statue of St. Lawrence of Brindisi
Villafranca del Bierzo



The spirit of prayer in our fraternities



GUIDELINES: FANNING THE FLAME OF OUR CHARISM IN EUROPE

*The following text is the result of a sharing
on the part of our general superiors
together with the brothers involved in the initial steps of the project,
and by the commission of the same project,
which was then approved by the General Council
during its meeting of September, 2015.*

*The objective of these guidelines was to create
a consistent congruity for all the fraternities of the project,
while respecting the particular characteristics of each.*

FOREWORD

1. This project is intended to be a help to those who wish to implement the proposal of the General Minister in his letter, *Let Us Fan the Flame of Our Charism*. Where necessary, these fraternities must be established on an intercultural level.
2. These proposals correspond to what we consider to be the fundamental points for such a presence, keeping in mind the need to adapt them to places and individual projects.
3. In presenting our reflections, we have followed the order outlined in the Constitutions.

INTRODUCTION

1. Therefore, rooted in the invitation of the General Minister, in what emerged at the meeting of the provincial ministers and custodes of Europe and with the presidents of the conferences of the Order at Fatima, and in response to the desire of numerous brothers of the Order, we want to present this proposed project as a way to fan the flame of our charism and to make our contribution to evangelization in the Church.
2. In an age of secularization and evangelization, the meaning of religious symbols is important, giving greater visibility to the particular lifestyle of the Order.
3. Therefore, we want to live a process of *ongoing conversion* in fraternity, drawing inspiration from our origins as proposed again in the Constitutions, and responding to the milieu and times in which we live.
4. It is not primarily a question of saving our Capuchin presences, but of renewing our way of life.

5. A specific place is necessary to prepare each individual brother called for this mission.

OUR LIFE OF PRAYER

1. In light of this journey, offering the tools and means to deepen personal and liturgical prayer is essential.
2. As much as possible, we strive to celebrate the full Divine Office in fraternity.
3. In the spirit of our Constitutions (55:2), and according to genuine Capuchin tradition, the brothers are guaranteed an hour of mental prayer (i.e., meditation) in common each day.
4. As much as possible, the Eucharist is celebrated daily in common with all the brothers of the fraternity.
5. Once a week, in place of personal meditation, the brothers share their experience with each other, around the Word of God.
6. Devotions such as Eucharistic adoration, the rosary, and the Way of the Cross, are not neglected, but rather shared willingly with the people.
7. Times of silence are cultivated to foster a culture of listening/recollection and asceticism.

OUR FRATERNAL LIFE

1. The fraternity should have 5-7 brothers who share fully in the project.
2. Priority is given to activities done in common: prayer, meals in common, fraternal service, apostolate.
3. As St. Francis suggests in his writings, each is to have a fraternal/maternal disposition towards the others.
4. There is to be free time for appreciating and preserving the beauty of being together (e.g., a fraternity day).
5. Housework/manual labor is shared (as much as possible without hiring employees).
6. The local chapter is celebrated regularly and frequently as a means for sharing, organizing and reviewing our life, and for ongoing formation.
7. A spirit of welcome, availability and service is cultivated.
8. Knowledge and respect for others (interculturality) is promoted.
9. Relationships with the Franciscan family are to be promoted.

OUR LIFE IN POVERTY

1. As the criterion of poverty, the maxim of our Constitutions (71:3) is kept in mind: “the minimum necessary, not the maximum allowed.”
2. We choose economic self-sufficiency, the result of the work of the brothers.
3. Each brother is to contribute to the ordinary life of the fraternity by his manual labor.
4. A sincere and trusting economic transparency is to be developed both personally and in fraternity.
5. Nonindulgence, simplicity, austerity and moderation are to be rediscovered and pursued.
6. The use and purchase of things necessary for our life and apostolate are to be discerned in fraternity.
7. The fraternity is to remain always sensitive to, concretely open to and generous towards the poor: we strive to live as the poor, for the poor, and like the poor.
8. Respectful care is to be shown toward creation.

OUR MISSION

1. Fraternity lived in minority is, in itself, a Franciscan prophetic witness.
2. The apostolate must always be an expression of the fraternity which discerns the necessary balance between fraternal life and the apostolate itself.
3. In the spirit of minority and submission, the Church and its hierarchy is to be respected.
4. To promote our places of presence, especially our churches, as places of sharing, hospitality, and evangelization (well-planned celebrations of the Divine Office/Eucharist that are open to the laity, availability for confession and spiritual direction).
5. To offer an evangelization using the language of our time (e.g., the Ten Commandments, lesson on prayer for the laity).
6. As brothers of the people we have a preference for apostolates that serve the least (the imprisoned, the sick, etc.), taking risks by pursuing new paths.
7. To propose our Capuchin Franciscan vocation to young people without hesitation.



The friary of Giudecca, Venice; 2016
First European Meeting



THE FRATERNITIES OF THE PROJECT TODAY

C LERMONT-FERRAND (FRANCE) *The Challenge of Fraternity*

The fraternity at Clermont-Ferrand was the first to be part of the project which was then called Fraternities for Europe, and is today known as the St. Lawrence of Brindisi Project. It is marked by a classic style of Capuchin life which, since 2006, some French brothers had envisioned and started living together. Officially, it has been an international fraternity since 2014.

The fraternity is characterized by an effective blend of the three constitutive dimensions of consecrated life, according to our Capuchin Franciscan charism: prayer, fraternity and mission. To nourish and strengthen fraternal bonds, we gather on Saturday night to share reflections based on the Sunday Gospel. Every month we get together to celebrate the important event of the local chapter. It begins with a spiritual and personal sharing about some particular experience which might have come up during the previous month and would warrant discussion among the brothers.

As far as our mission goes, we can distinguish between what is *ad intra* and what is *ad extra*. Since our friary is located in the city center, the church is a real spiritual pole for many people not only from the city, but also from the region, especially young people looking to experience fraternal life.

Mass is celebrated daily (at 6 PM); a brother is available in the confessional (five afternoons and two mornings per week, and for over a half-hour after Mass); and there is adoration of the Blessed Sacrament every Friday (from 8 AM until 8:45 PM). Once a month the Padre Pio Prayer Group meets. For the past two years, the brothers

have offered a monthly journey into Franciscan spirituality. Several brothers serve as spiritual directors for a certain number of the faithful who have requested it.

In terms of our *ad intra* mission, for several years the brothers have joined with the association called *Welcome* created by the Jesuits of France to welcome immigrants who have applied for asylum and are waiting for a response or who were rejected, offering them a room to sleep and breakfast. And since our French friary is the focal point of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS), there is, naturally, no lack of spiritual assistance given to the OFS.

For our *ad extra* mission, the brothers are also engaged in service to the diocese: in prison chaplaincy, the pastoral care to the sick, parish life, assisting the Scouts, belonging to the *Equipe Notre Dame* project. In addition, there is no lack of requests for giving popular missions.

The fraternity offers a unique service with its *Caffè cristiano il Cappuccino* [literally, “Cappuccino, a Christian Coffee”] – a type of alternative coffee bar which serves as a place of hospitality and exchange. Located in the neighboring city of Chamalières is the last French monastery of the Capuchin Poor Clares, with whom the brothers have a close relationship, celebrating daily Eucharist and serving as confessors.

KILKENNY (IRELAND)

An Ongoing Challenge

The Kilkenny Fraternity was identified by the Province of Ireland as a significant presence to be an integral part of the Fraternities of St. Lawrence of Brindisi. Located in the city center, the friary is a magnet for those seeking Eucharistic celebrations and Reconciliation. Two brothers from Poland and one from Italy joined the Irish friars. The fraternity was also the novitiate house for the Provinces of Ireland and Great Britain. With the departure of one of the Polish brothers and the Italian brother, after continuing for a certain period, the project entered a stand-by phase. During the last provincial chapter, the Irish friars were made aware of the positive aspects of this experience, as well as the difficulties it faced along the way. And so, upon requesting the presence of a St. Lawrence of Brindisi Fraternity, the provincial minister and his council, together with the central

government of the Order, are assessing the location and most suitable conditions for continuing the experience.

SPELLO (ITALY)

The Challenge of a Life of Simplicity

The fraternity was born on November 1, 2016, in a friary that had not been used for about nine years. The new community immediately adopted a lifestyle along the lines of the St. Lawrence of Brindisi Project, returning to a properly Capuchin style, namely, the full celebration of the Divine Office in fraternity, a weekly sharing of the Word of God, a particular focus on things done in common, and manual work without employing external personnel (e.g., cooking, cleaning, maintaining the garden, etc.), and welcoming any brother who might want to spend some time at the friary, sharing the life of these brothers. In fact, the first group of young men came to the brothers on November 16, 2016, asking to spend a prolonged period of vocational discernment at the friary in Spello prior to their possible entrance into the postulancy program.

There is a friar in Spello who oversees vocation recruitment and organizes regular vocation discernment weekends available to the young men four times a year. The proximity of Assisi is a real plus for this endeavor, especially for the Provinces of Umbria, Rome and Abruzzo, who are now collaborating together. When the various levels of initial formation gather in nearby Assisi, the brothers at Spello offer their own contribution to the experience, by joining the young men as they visit the sites of St. Francis or by welcoming them individually.

Besides initial formation, the Spello community also plays a role in making its contribution to ongoing formation, to the extent possible. In the beginning, they tried using rooms next to the friary to host lay people or groups for periods of retreat or rest. Given the high demand, they eventually decided to limit this activity to the numerous brothers of the Order who ask to spend periods of time there. Of course, all the brothers just passing through are welcomed, according to their wants, such as the brothers from formation houses who desire to visit us, bringing with them both enthusiasm and curiosity (e.g., from the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, Belarus, Australia, etc.).

Located in the Diocese of Foligno, the fraternity participates in various gatherings and responds as best it can to requests for help, including the chaplaincy of the Augustinian nuns of St. Mary Magdalene, and assisting (including a Sunday Mass) at the church of Collepinio on the slopes of Mount Subasio. Such external activities are not particularly demanding, so they do not compromise the common life of the brothers. Depending on the time of year, we also try to satisfy requests made by the local pastor, such as the celebrations of anniversaries, weddings, funeral, house blessings, etc.

LOURDES (FRANCE)

The Challenge of Charity

Since March of 2017, Capuchins have also been present at Lourdes as part of the Fraternities of St. Lawrence of Brindisi. Lourdes is a place full of fascination and of intense grace, very significant for the Universal Church because here Mary revealed her name, “I am the Immaculate Conception,” a name of key importance in Franciscan history.

Highly visible, it evokes a real “existential periphery” where one can meet Christ in the suffering and in those in need, a place where the least and the sick are the focus, stirring us to charity while radically challenging selfishness and indifference, as well as offering us an opportunity to speak about our fraternal life, to rekindle our charism and to inspire new vocations. It is also a place conducive to ministering in the style of our Order and to participating in the missionary catalyst desired by Pope Francis who has spoken of these shrines as “driving forces of the new evangelization.”

Following the nature of our Capuchin charism, we are committed to taking care of our life of prayer and fraternal relationships. Naturally, the brothers are particularly active in the life of the Shrine, available to welcome and listen to people searching for God, assisting with liturgical services – which is “the source and summit of the Church’s life” – and also by serving in an assisted living facility for the mentally challenged.

LÉON (SPAIN)*The Challenge of Hospitality*

In January of 2018, a new fraternity of the Project was started in León, Spain consisting of five brothers from the Province of Spain and one brother from the province of Syracuse, Italy. The fraternity of León is located along the French pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela, where it serves pilgrims who arrive daily from all over the world (about 12,000 annually). Every afternoon the brothers meet the pilgrims, greet them and invite them to visit the church and the cloister of our friary. For those who want, the brothers are available for a give and take dialogue which typically centers around a pilgrimage or life experience. There is also the possibility of receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The Eucharist is celebrated in the evening, and at the end of Mass, the pilgrims receive a blessing before departing the following day to continue their pilgrimage.

The friars also assist the poor; every week, food and personal hygiene items are distributed to about 100 families at the friary. In addition, our church is a focal point for confessions, not only for people from the city and neighboring towns, and also for many priests and women and men religious of the diocese.

Finally, for 50 years the fraternity has been involved in a trade school. The bishop of that time asked the friars to start a social service to help young people learn a trade. The school is under the direct administration of a provincial councilor. Today, one of the brothers of the fraternity serves on the school board and works with the pastoral team.

ANVERSA (BELGIUM)*The Fraternity of Antwerp*

The fraternity of Antwerp currently consists of two Flemish-speaking Belgian brothers, two Polish brothers (Warsaw Province) and a Pakistani brother (Provincial Custody of the Belgian Province). In addition to this core group, there are also two student brothers pursuing specialized studies; one is from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the other from India.

Living the spirit of the St. Lawrence of Brindisi Fraternities, the brothers in Antwerp are essentially committed to the pastoral care of Christian communities of migrants. In fact, it was the bishop of the

diocese who, sensing the importance of multi-ethnic communities for the Belgian church, wanted to have the brothers involved in this endeavor. It is exciting to see how the brothers have become a focal point for many of these communities in Antwerp.

During the last provincial chapter, the brothers, invigorated by the experience that brought vitality to the province, expressed their desire to see another St. Lawrence of Brindisi Fraternity established at Meersel-Dreef, a pilgrimage site frequented by both Belgians and the Dutch. The process of establishing a fraternity there is in process.

CORTONA (ITALY)

The Challenge of the Life of Prayer

The fraternity was officially established on November 1, 2019. Among its members are the former General Minister, Br. Mauro Jöhri of the Provincial Custody of Ticino Switzerland, and former General Vicar, Br. Štefan Kožuh of the Province of Slovenia.

The simple lifestyle observed at our friary at the *Celle di Cortona* is based on three main pillars of our Capuchin Franciscan charism: spiritual life, fraternal life and prayer life. To address the very real crisis in spiritual life, it is essential and critical to find a new way of giving witness today in an atmosphere of a fraternal and simple life. Using our charism as a starting point, the fraternity feels called to propose again, in a new and exciting way, the beauty of the spiritual life.

With its international makeup, like all the Fraternities of the St. Lawrence of Brindisi, the *Celle di Cortona* aims to be a center for ongoing formation in the spiritual life, especially for the brothers of our own Order. The fraternity wants to offer its time and witness by welcoming all the brothers of the Order who ask to live an intensive period of ongoing spiritual formation in order to rekindle the flame of their vocation in light of our Capuchin charism.



Léon, Spain
Hospitality in the friary



The Celle of Cortona
Statue of St. Francis



CONCLUSION

Br. José Ángel Torres Rivera
General Vicar

“Therefore, let us journey throughout the world, ready to confront even the most difficult situations; living with simplicity the radical call of the Beatitudes, thirsting for the Absolute, who is God, and offering the silent testimony of brotherhood and minority.” (Const. 181:2)

At the end of the Gospel, we find Jesus’ message of “sending forth”. After several years of instruction, after a long journey, Jesus sends forth his disciples to share with others the gifts they received from God. It’s not about leaving the beauty of the journey behind, but of keeping the dynamism of faith in motion. I believe that, in the same way, our Constitutions compel us to maintain the vigor of our charism by always searching for new paths and facing new challenges. This is why our Constitutions conclude with the theme of ‘mission’, so that what we’ve inherited from Francis of Assisi and many other brothers, we might share and make present to our people today.

The project of the “*Saint Lawrence of Brindisi*” international fraternities is a proposal to reboot or revitalize some essential elements of our charism. This does not mean to imply that the Capuchin life is not at all being lived intensely – indeed it is, in many fraternities throughout the Order. But rather, the project is solely intended to be a stimulus, a way of rekindling *the flame of our charism* ... and little by little it is bearing fruit in Europe. Through feedback and various inquiries of the friars, it’s becoming quite clear that what’s being proposed here is not something tailored only for these international fraternities, but is something that we all must live. The simple fact

that we're asking these questions and recognizing the need to live these values in all our houses is certainly an excellent result of this initiative.

Europe was the first setting for establishing these international fraternities. Each site was selected to animate not only brothers of a circumscription, but friars from all over the European continent as well. There remains a great challenge, but we are convinced that the Capuchin Franciscan charism, when lived and witnessed with simplicity, will continue to bear fruit.

With the desire to broaden the horizons of this project and to embrace the opportunities it's been affording us, the General Minister, in his letter at the beginning of the sexennium, proposed opening some new international fraternities in the American continents. The increase of explicit secularism in the Americas, together with a strong decline in vocations, has resulted in a frailness of fraternal life and a difficulty of maintaining that dynamism that must characterize our very essence, as well as our service to the people of God. In many places, it's becoming hard to form authentic fraternities that live and testify to the grace of working together. The scarcity of vocations, the departure of many brothers, the advanced age of many, make us reflect on the sustainability of our presence in certain places and challenges us to respond to our vocation and our mission with a renewed enthusiasm.

Profiting from the attention that the Church has paid to the Amazon in recent years, firstly, with the Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'* on the care of creation, and recently with the celebration of a synod on the Amazon, the prospect came up of creating an international fraternity on the triple border between Brazil, Colombia and Peru. A place that would serve as a training ground for our missionaries and our post-novices, while serving the indigenous communities and acquiring a greater sensitivity for the love and care of the gifts God places in our midst. Pope Francis himself appreciates our charism and affirms it as an effective way of being present to and accompanying this portion of the people of God.

"I believe that Saint Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically. He is the patron saint of all who study and work in the area of ecology, and he is also much loved by non-Christians. He was particularly

concerned for God's creation and for the poor and outcast. He loved, and was deeply loved for his joy, his generous self-giving, his openheartedness. He was a mystic and a pilgrim who lived in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature and with himself. He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace." (Laudato si' No. 10).

The Amazon could be the first place for establishing an international fraternity in the New World, but it will certainly not be the only one. During his visits to various circumscriptions, the General Minister emphasizes the growing need to work together, to look beyond the limits of our circumscriptions and establish relations. Today it is necessary to create projects and presences that reflect the international character of our Order. Brothers of different cultural backgrounds living together the values of our charism in simplicity can establish a clear sign that revives our presence in the Americas.



The Celle
of Cortona

“

Br. Mauro Jöhri described such a project in these terms:

We want to try a new course of action
by establishing intercultural fraternities which,
in the light of the Gospel
and our Constitutions,
live prayer, fraternal life
and mission
in an authentic and meaningful way.

”

BR. ROBERTO GENUIN

