



THE CAPUCHINS IN EUROPE: THE DREAM OF THE FRATERNITY

A GUIDE FOR A LOCAL CHAPTER OF THE EUROPEAN FRATERNITIES IN PREPARATION FOR THE GATHERING AT CZĘSTOCHOWA (OCTOBER 11-16, 2021)

INTRODUCTION

From October 11 to 16, 2021 a gathering of the Provincial Ministers, Custodes and Delegates of Europe will take place at Czestochowa to explore together our future. In order for this meeting to be productive, it is our desire that all the fraternities, beginning now, become engaged in and prepare for its unfolding and development through prayer and reflection.

This document offers a guide for the celebration of a local Chapter in each of our fraternities. Relying on the fraternity and active participation of all the brothers, we would ask each fraternity to send, in writing, the fruits of its shared reflection to its respective Minister/Custos/Delegate **by June 15**. A summary of the various reflections will be further synthesized, proposed and sent to the secretariat of our Commission (europa2021@ofmcap.org).

Taking our cue from the letter of the General Minister (Prot. N. 00844/20), *A Letter to all the Friars of Europe*, we want to focus our attention on the essential points to be discussed during the gathering at Czestochowa.

OPENING PRAYER FOR THE LOCAL CHAPTER

Together

We adore you, O Lord Jesus Christ,
here and in all the churches of the world;
and we bless you, because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Reader 1

A Reading from the Acts of the Apostles 4:32-33

The entire group of believers was united in heart and soul. No one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles continued to witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was powerfully at work in them all.

Together

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, ^{Is 6:3}

who was, and is, and is to come. ^{Rev 4:8}

Give glory and eternal praise to God! ^{Dan 3:57}

You are worthy, our Lord and God, ^{Rev 4:11}

to receive power and honor,

glory and blessing. ^{Rev 5:12}

Give glory and eternal praise to God! ^{Dan 3:57}

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain
to receive power and divinity,
wisdom and strength,

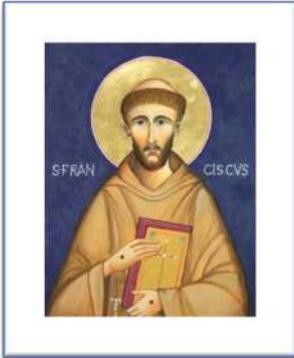
honor and glory and blessing. *Rev 5:12*

Give glory and eternal praise to God! *Dan 3:57*

Let us bless the Father and the Son with the Holy Spirit;

Give glory and eternal praise to God! *Dan 3:57* (*St. Francis, The Praises to be said at all the Hours*)

Reader 2



From the Sixth Admonition of St. Francis of Assisi

Brothers, let us fix our gaze on the Good Shepherd who, to save his sheep (see Jn 10:11; Heb 12:2), suffered the passion of the cross. The sheep followed their Lord through times of tribulation and persecution (see Jn 10:4) insult and hunger (see Rm 8:35), infirmity and temptation, and in similar circumstances. In exchange, they received from the Lord eternal life. It would be to our great shame, as servants of God, if we were to desire to receive glory and honor by merely recounting the things that the saints actually did!

THE LORD'S PRAYER...

SHARING...

The legal-structural organization [of our life] includes the capacity to live it in the spirit of faith and minority as understood by St. Francis and our Capuchin tradition. This requires us to enter into a more gospel-oriented logic. The more we know how to adopt this evangelical minority style, the more predisposed we will be to live, in a fraternal spirit, every kind of collaboration and reorganization.

The future of the Order does not depend solely on our strength nor on our ability to survive, but rather on the fraternal and minority witness of our evangelical proclamation.

- a. What do you think are the most important issues and challenges we face as Capuchins in Europe? Which are the most urgent ones?
- b. What decisions do you believe need to be made to remain faithful to our charism in Europe?

1. THE NEED TO UPDATE OUR EUROPEAN ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

This is a theme about which the General Chapter has already expressed itself, and which we intend to pursue.¹ Currently, Europe is divided into four Conferences (CIC: comprised of three Provinces whose numbers continue to dwindle; CIMPCAP: comprised of 17 Provinces, the number of which is expected to be reduced; CENOC: comprised of seven Provinces and two Delegations, that are also rapidly diminishing; CECOC: comprised of six Provinces, three Custodies, four Delegations plus a few Houses of Presence). With these, we also want to involve the Conference of ASMEN (comprised of three Custodies, two Delegations and one House of Presence). A dispassionate, objective look at the data and the consistent patterns that have emerged over the past few decades and those that can be reasonably expected into the future, requires us to revise and

¹ See *Let us give thanks to the Lord*, n.20ff.

lighten the structures that were designed under very different circumstances in order to establish Conferences that can more effectively carry out the role envisioned for them by our Constitutions. Besides the Conferences, we must also consider ways to best reform the Circumscriptions that do not have, or will soon lose, the vital requirements for remaining such (R. GENUIN, *Letter to the Friars of Europe*, 4.1).

- a. Besides identifying as a Capuchin friar of your particular Circumscription, can you identify as a European Capuchin friar? Do you envision yourself as a friar in Europe, open to other nations? When you think of the vocational problem, do you think of it in terms of the whole of Europe or only in terms of your own Province?
- b. In what way does this concern of the General Minister apply to your Circumscription (Province/Custody/Delegation)?
- c. If needed, what proposal would you make for a more effective presence of the Order?
- d. The more recent General Chapters have addressed the importance of reorganizing the Conferences. Keeping in mind that these structures are intended to animate, what proposals would you offer to make them more effective?

2. FORMATION

The first objective of our *Ratio Formationis* is to reinforce our charismatic identity in the context of cultural pluralism. At the heart of our charism lie goodness and gratuitous giving. We must give preference to models of formation that best help us to contemplate God as the Highest Good, to experience God's *goodness* in ourselves, to be grateful for the *good* that God works through our brothers, and to commit our lives to promoting and spreading that same *goodness*. This is what distinguishes us as Capuchin Franciscans in the Church.

Europe is changing, and with it so too are our lifestyles and our presences. It is both healthy and necessary to maintain a wise tension between identity and belonging. At times, however, we have lost a balance between the two by developing a Capuchin identity based more on our province's traditions and culture than on our authentic charismatic values. This leads to a certain provincialism, no? Why is it that our sense of identity feels so threatened and disoriented when confronted with the prospect of the restructuring or unification of provinces?

Without formation, there is no future. However, there is still time. This is the opportune time to update our formation structures, to insist of qualified training for our formation personnel, to improve how we go about discernment and accompaniment for our candidates, and to convey our charismatic values with greater passion. This is only possible if we open ourselves to collaboration among our European circumscriptions, and to cross-culturalism, that is, to a genuine acceptance that there are diverse ways of living the Capuchin charism in other non-Western continents and cultures (*Ratio* 302-304).

As a fraternity, let us pay heed to God's whisper and to the needs of our world! (J. Rey, *New Wine in new Wineskins. Paths of collaboration on the Old Continent*).

1. Have you had the opportunity to become acquainted with the new *Ratio formationis* of our Order?
2. Does your Circumscription collaborate with others in initial formation? If so, what are the benefits that need to be maintained, and what difficulties need to be resolved?

3. What perspectives would you suggest for the future of ongoing formation, especially with a view to fostering a sense of our common belonging to the Order in Europe?

3. THE ST. LAWRENCE OF BRINDISI PROJECT

Faced with the drastic decrease in vocations and the continuing closure of friaries and Capuchin presences in various European countries, in many locations we have asked ourselves how we might remedy this situation.

Initially, a solution was sought by facilitating the importation of friars from other continents. Thus was born *Solidarity of Personnel between Circumscriptions*. A good number of friars came from afar and were inserted into various European fraternities. We quickly realized, however, that it was not merely a matter of filling in for local friars, of replacing them, but of doing something new.

Faced with the decrease in our presence in Western Europe, we asked ourselves if, resigned to an inevitable destiny, we wanted to passively stand by and watch this progressive diminishment, or if it weren't an opportune moment to do something, albeit in a modest but decisive way, to renew the flame of our charism, renewing ourselves by placing the fraternal dimension at the center of our life: in our prayer life, in our work and in our apostolate. To create fraternities that can bring this about requires the availability and commitment not only of brothers moving here from other continents, but requires that European friars themselves must move, especially the younger ones. International fraternities, where our communion of life is at its core, are to be established. They are open to welcoming those who wish to participate in our prayer. They are intended to be centers that radiate a spirituality based on simplicity and consistency of life.

There will be fewer and fewer Capuchin presences, but at the same time, there is a growing network of fraternities comprised of friars from various backgrounds, capable of renewing the face of our presence in Europe. This is already happening at Clermont-Ferrand and Lourdes in France, at Antwerp in Belgium, Leon in Spain, Spello and the Celle of Cortona in Italy.

At the same time, our Latin American brothers have realized that secularization is also affecting their countries. And so they, too, are moving toward the establishment of fraternities composed of friars from various backgrounds, where a focus on fraternal life is at the core. Convinced that it will not fail to be productive, a process of raising awareness is underway. The expansion of this project has also required a name change and we no longer refer to it as *Project Europe*, but rather as *The St. Lawrence of Brindisi Project*.

- a. Are you aware of the *St. Lawrence of Brindisi Project* that the Order has been promoting for a number of years (you can find information at <https://europa2021.ofmcap.org>)
- b. Do you believe that the Fraternities of the *St. Lawrence Project*, and many others that live this type of lifestyle, can be a useful tool for your Circumscriptions?
- c. Are you convinced that, first and foremost, European Capuchins themselves must be committed to rekindling the flame of our Capuchin charism in Europe through St. Lawrence Fraternities and other particular initiatives?
- d. Are you aware, either in your own Circumscription or in another European Circumscription, of a reality that is inspired by or lives according to the *St. Lawrence Project*, dedicating itself to a specific activity?

4. VARIOUS POSSIBLE PROPOSALS

- a. What proposals would you make to animate the Capuchin Fraternity in Europe?
- b. What suggestions would you propose for the meeting of the Ministers, Custodes and Delegates at Częstochowa?



We pray to you, Immaculate Virgin,

Queen of consecrated persons:

turn your motherly eyes toward us.

On this European continent in ages past as in our day today,
you have shown your maternal presence in many ways.

Be with us Capuchin Friars of Europe today, we pray,
with a burst of renewed missionary zeal

after the manner of Francis of Assisi, your most devoted son.

Virgin-made-Church, rekindle the flame of our charism,

make us witnesses of your Son Jesus,

faithful to our vocation, and prophets of the Kingdom to come,

so that Europe may rediscover the joy of the Gospel

and the happiness reserved for your faithful.

Queen of the Franciscan Order, pray for us! Amen

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 Cappuccini in Europa - Il sogno della fraternità

 il_sogno_della_fraternita