

ORDO FRATRUM SERVORUM BEATÆ MARLÆ VIRGINIS

CCXII CAPITULUM GENERALE
2007

And, leaving everything, they followed Him

Luke 5, 11

Romæ, Curia generalis O.S.M.

2007

ACRONYMS / ABBREVIATIONS

Ave + Maria

Prot. 535/2007

<i>Acta OSM</i>	<i>Acta Ordinis Servorum beatæ Mariæ Virginis</i> (General Curia O.S.M., Rome 1916f).
CIF	International Formation Community.
CLIOS	<i>Commissio Liturgica Internationalis Ordinis Servorum beatæ Mariæ Virginis</i> .
<i>Const.</i>	<i>Constitutions of the Order of Friar Servants of Mary. Rule of St. Augustine</i> (General Curia O.S.M., Rome 1987).
<i>Const. Ant.</i>	<i>Constitutiones antiquæ fratrum Servorum sanctæ Mariæ a S. Philippo Benitio anno circiter 1280 editæ: Monumenta OSM 1</i> (1897) 7-26 (introduction); 27-54 (text).
GC 1989	ORDER OF FRIAR SERVANTS OF MARY – GENERAL CHAPTER 1989 (General Curia O.S.M., Rome 1990).
GC 1995	ORDER OF FRIAR SERVANTS OF MARY – GENERAL CHAPTER 1995 (General Curia O.S.M., Rome 1996).
GC 2001	CCXI CAPITULUM GENERALE 2001, 2001 <i>General Chapter Texts</i> [approved by the General Council at its January 3, 2002 session (<i>cf.</i> <i>Const.</i> 264)] (General Curia O.S.M., Rome 2002).
LO	<i>Legenda de Origine Ordinis fratrum Servorum Virginis Mariæ</i> .
<i>Regula</i>	SAINT AUGUSTINE, <i>Rule for the Servants of God</i> .
RI	<i>Called to Serve in Love with Mary – “Ratio Institutionis” of the Order of the Friar Servants of St. Mary</i> (Curia Generalis O.S.M., Romae 2000), in: <i>Acta OSM</i> n.s. I,1 (2000) 251 p.
UNIFAS	International Union of the Servite Family.

1. Dear Brothers,

This present document is the General Council’s official publication of the texts approved at the CCXII General Chapter of the Order celebrated at Ariccia (Rome) October 8 to 30, 2007.

The text follows the order found in the Constitutions. This arrangement was recommended by the Post-capitular Commission for the publication of the final texts (Paolo M. Orlandini [president], Riccardo M. Casagrande and Camille M. Jacques).

The complete Acts will be eventually published in the Acta Ordinis Servorum Beatæ Mariæ Virginis.

2. *The 212th General Chapter was genuinely “general”; in other words the whole Order took part. In one way or another each of you had a “voice in the chapter.” Each friar and community had the opportunity to engage in dialogue with the Pre-chapter commission in these last two years of preparation before the Chapter. During the Chapter itself the preparatory documentation and ongoing diaries were available on the Order’s website and everyone had a chance to express his opinions and suggestions through the blog (interactive website) created specifically for this purpose. Now with the final texts available each friar and community is invited to support and carry out the Chapter’s decisions.*

The concept of evangelical poverty marks each section of these documents. Our Order has reflected on the Chapter’s principal theme: And, leaving everything, they followed Him (Luke 5,11). We have meditated on the concept of discipleship and found inspiration in the example of the Lord’s first disciples and our Seven Holy Fathers.

The Lord's first disciples

3. According to the Synoptic Gospels the first disciples, Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John (cf. Matthew 4, 18-22; Mark 1, 16-20; Luke 5, 1-11) were called without – we might say – any discussion. They were busy with their work as fishermen. Jesus approached them and said: Follow me and I will make you fishers of men (Matthew 4, 19; cf. Luke 5, 10). And, leaving everything, they followed him (Matthew 4, 22; Mark 1, 20). There were no compromises, no pre-conditions involved in their following the Master – all that was required was docility, availability and a free, prompt, positive response. The Order would like to rediscover the same docility and availability in its following of Christ: we would like to overcome whatever obstacles may arise (cf. nos. 7-20), encourage growth in our communities and individual members (cf. nos. 21-44) and to serve with apostolic zeal (cf. nos. 45-46) along with the members of the entire Servite Family (cf. nos. 78-82).

Our Seven First Fathers

4. Our Order was born more than 700 years ago in Tuscany, Italy. It was not a project launched by members of the Greater Society of St. Mary (Società Maggiore di Santa Maria) in Florence. Rather it resulted from the Will of God and the intervention of the Blessed Virgin Mary (cf. LO 24). Following God's Will they embraced Christ's evangelical counsel: "There is still one thing you lack. Sell everything you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." (Luke 18, 22). They left everything to follow Christ and to live the Gospel in fraternal communion and to serve His Mother, the Virgin Mary (LO 18). They chose to share everything in common following the example of the primitive Christian community (cf. Acts 4, 32; Regula 4-8). Our Order is now present on all five continents; it works in a wide variety of linguistic, cultural, social and economic milieux; it is very much aware of its "international" character; it realizes that it must streamline its structures (cf. nos. 47-55, 65-77) and promote greater collaboration and sharing of possessions among the various jurisdictions (cf. nos. 56-64).

Revising the Constitutions and the General Directory

5. During the next six years (2007-2013) the Constitutions will be revised and some of its articles may become part of a General Directory that is yet to be written. Some decrees (cf. nos. 51, 53, 54, 68) that have been approved by three consecutive General Chapters may be incorporated into the Constitutions (cf. Const. 312).

6. I wish you all a peaceful journey in the company of St. Mary, the Mother and Disciple of the Lord.

Rome, from our Priory of San Marcello

December 12, 2007, Commemoration of Our Lady of Guadalupe

Fra Ángel Maria Ruiz Garnica, O.S.M.
Prior General

Fra Camille M. Jacques, O.S.M.
Secretary of the Order

Leaving everything, they followed him.

(Luke 5, 11)

Our Seven First Fathers

*found the pearl of great price [...] and to possess it
they not only sold all their possessions and gave them to the poor,
as the Gospel counsels,*

*but they also dedicated themselves with joy and firmness
to the faithful service of God and Our Lady [...]*

*first of all they disengaged themselves from all their obligations
so that they could create the community they hoped for
without doing an injustice.*

*They made arrangements for their property and their families
providing them with all they needed;*

*the rest was given to the poor and to various churches
for the good of their souls.*

At the moment they came together

they kept absolutely nothing for themselves [...]

*They got rid of their expensive clothes
and put on simple grey tunics and cloaks*

*They replaced their fine linen shirts¹
with hair shirts next to their skin.*

*They ate and drank with sobriety
and only when necessary;*

they rejected all sensuality

and embraced perfect chastity;

they mastered their thoughts, words, feelings and actions;

they avoided excess and stinginess

seeking the just middle course;

they prayed both day and night

and learned how to please God alone;

they abandoned the noise of the world and the company of men.

They stayed in churches and solitary places of recollection

so that they could more freely devote themselves to contemplation.

(LO 17, 30)

TEXTS

¹ Cf. *Const. Ant.* Chapter 12.

I. EVANGELICAL POVERTY A RETURN TO BASICS: INSPIRATIONAL GUIDELINES

EVANGELICAL POVERTY AND RELIGIOUS LIFE

7. Religious life is passing through a period of trial and struggle. The culture of good living and consumerism has profoundly penetrated religious life. The most important result of the General Chapter is a realization throughout the Order that any solution to our current crisis necessarily involves a renewed and determined option for evangelical poverty. This option must inspire the use of possessions, the witness to faith and our discipleship of Christ.

The Order can see a future for itself but understands that such a future depends on our choice of poverty. The choice of poverty as the first step along a spiritual journey has marked monasticism in all times even before and outside Christianity.

Evangelical Poverty: a pre-existing condition and a choice

8. Poverty is a pre-existing condition for creatures whose selfhood is a gift from the hands of God: from God the creature receives support and in Him the creature discovers the meaning of life. The creature is aware that he is both a vessel *of gold* and a vessel *of clay* (cf. *II Timothy* 2, 20).

But for the friar Servant of Mary, poverty is also a choice that he is called to renew every day. It is a choice made not out of love of poverty in itself but out of love for Christ, for what He has and what He alone can give.

Leaving everything, they followed Him (Luke 5, 11). The important element in this sentence is not *leaving everything* but rather *they followed Him*. There is no sadness in leaving everything – but there is joy in discovering treasure in the field, a pearl of great price. They leave everything in order to possess everything. They leave the world in order to possess it in another fashion (*there is no one who has left house or*

brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields ... who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age – houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, cf. Mark 10, 29-30); to enjoy the beauty of things without the need to possess them. This is conversion. This conversion is not just achieved through good will, it is a gift and a grace; it is something we must constantly seek and keep alive through contemplation, familiarity with the Word of God, and the choices we make in life. It is a conversion that is re-born through the Word.

Poverty and Discipleship

9. Poverty as a way of following Christ demonstrates continuity with the 2001 General Chapter where the first priority was the search for and experience of God. In this General Chapter the One the Order is seeking was given a name: the God of Jesus; the prerequisite for finding Him is that we must “leave everything.” The Order is restless. The Order is seeking something. The Order is dissatisfied. It feels that what it has is not enough – and at the same time is possibly too much. Just as it was too much for David when he confronted the giant Goliath. King Saul made him wear his breastplate and bronze helmet. He gave him his sword to carry and David said: “*I cannot walk with these things... So David removed them ... (I Samuel 17, 39).*”

The Order can say the same thing today: “*I cannot walk with these things.*” And at the same time, the Order feels that *these things* are not enough. They do not satisfy its profound thirst. They are the illusions of one bereft of spirituality, love and God, and who tries to fill the void with possessions.

POVERTY AND FRATERNITY

10. In the Servite tradition, poverty means the sharing of goods (*Const. 57*). We have chosen poverty out of a love for fraternity. From the time of the very first Christian community (cf. *Acts 2, 44-45*), the sharing of goods has been an effective sign of communion. After leaving

possessions, houses and families our first Fathers signed an “Act of Poverty”² with which they were committed to possessing nothing that might separate them one from another –*naked, they followed the naked Lord* (D.M. Turollo).³

The very name our Fathers chose, “Servants”, was the declaration of an alternative life-style. It denoted service as opposed to power, poverty instead of riches, openness rather than domination. It indicated a life on society’s margins and not at its center: cultivating life rather than dominating it. The name “Servants of Mary” recalls the *anawim* – the poor in the Bible. Like Mary, the humble servant, the poor know they possess nothing by themselves and consequently place all their trust in Him with whom *nothing will be impossible* (*Luke 1, 37*).

Similarly, almost all the religious institutions founded at the same time as our Order chose names that reflect a new vision of faith and human relationships (*Friars Minor, the Humiliated (Umiliati), the Poor of Christ ...*). Our name itself sends a Gospel message; it is an echo and living memory of the One who called herself a *handmaid* (*Luke 1, 38*), of the one God looked upon because of her “poverty” (cf. *Luke 1, 48*).

Property and Communion

11. An overview of the different situations prevailing in the Order leads the General Chapter to see that some communities are committed to growth in communion, through sharing their possessions, while other communities seem less engaged. The call to communion is sometimes frustrated by the individual’s use of time and property.

The independence of friars who have personal bank accounts, their own car, a personal computer with internet connections in their room,

² See the Act of Poverty drawn up at Cafaggio by Fra Figliolo and the other friars on October 7, 1251. Cf. PROVINCIA VENETA DELL’ORDINE DEI SERVI DI MARIA. SEGRETARIATO COORDINAMENTO E ANIMAZIONE CULTURALE, *Sources for the History and Spirituality of the Servants of St. Mary I. from 1245 to 1348* (Servitium, Sotto il Monte – Bergamo 2000, p. 26).

³ D.M. TUROLLO, *Chiesa che canta*, vol. 7. *Feste del Signore, della Vergine e dei santi* (Dehoniane, Bologna 1982) p. 37.

cellular telephones or personal televisions undermines common life. Individuals place more importance on their own property, rather than on what is held in common (cf. *Regula* 31; *I Corinthians* 13, 5).

When these circumstances prevail, the individual friar spends less time with his brothers and shares less of himself. He takes little and infrequent part in community life. His growing separation from the brothers is camouflaged by a purely formal attendance at common prayer and meals.

Power and Fraternity

12. The General Chapter realizes that power and authority can be a form of riches; its improper exercise can foster differences and division.

Experience has taught us that the abuse of authority can make some brothers feel they are victims or outsiders. Wherever the abuse of authority has created division, suffering or resentment, there is urgent need for a radical change of attitude. The new attitude must promote full reconciliation and improved fraternal life.

For common life to be happy and life-giving, friars must be forgiving, humble and simple. They must get back to basics and allow for a healing of memories, if they are to grow in a genuine spirit of service.

Power and Service

13. The balanced and respectful use of authority is also necessary in our apostolic ministry. Our service must promote full participation of the lay faithful and use of their gifts and talents. If we follow Christ's example and are sparing in the use of power, the faithful will react generously, making their own talents available.

We must be attentive to the signs of the times and committed to a continual analysis of the rapidly changing world around us if we are to give a Christian response to help solve the problems of our environment and society (cf. *Const.* 116).

POVERTY FOR A GREAT ALLIANCE

14. We are affected by the world's great longing and have chosen poverty in an effort to overcome the many barriers that still divide one person from another (cf. *Const.* 74): without a passion for humanity, there is no poverty. Our fraternity spreads forth from our community; it is guided by the dream of bringing together everything that lives under the sun.

A community must look on the poor as a legacy from the Lord and specifically organize its possessions to assist them (cf. *Const.* 62, 289/c). Then it can say to the world, with the example of its own life, that good is not a question of greater profit but of growing and deeper communion: economic growth does not represent genuine progress – breaking down barriers does. Thus, poverty can also be seen as solidarity.

Christ, although he was rich, became poor (II Corinthians 8, 9). The poor person is the theological *locus* where the Son of Man shows himself to humanity. Christ *is still being crucified in his brothers and sisters (Const. 319)* who suffer and are oppressed. The path He has marked out to the kingdom passes through the Cross and poverty. We, however, have sometimes chosen other paths.

The General Chapter is grateful to and blesses those brothers who live as poor men with the poor, and who give their life to the service of the poor. But the Chapter feels that the commitment of only some of our brothers is not enough. The Chapter feels sadly that our practice of evangelical poverty has come up short. It feels too, that now is the time for a change of heart.

In the name of the Order, the Servite General Chapter asks forgiveness of God for this failure. We ask forgiveness of the poor for not listening to them; for remaining silent when we should have spoken in their defense; for ignoring them when, throughout the world, they sat at our doors – like Lazarus – begging for bread and fraternity. We ask pardon of the poor for the money we may have given them with neither love nor justice.

Alliance with Our World

15. The General Chapter has made frequent reference to the world-wide phenomenon of economic poverty and the unjust structures that widen the gap between rich and poor. We declare this growing gap unacceptable.

Pope Paul VI's warning in the Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (March 26, 1967) is still valid: we must build a human community where people enjoy *a truly human life* and *where the needy Lazarus can sit down with the rich man at the same banquet table* (no. 47). The sufferings of our brothers and sisters throughout the world call out to us.

We see the faces of many people: those caught in war; children who are victims of violence, hunger, abuse and abandonment; women who are raped, bought and sold; native people who have been deprived of land, culture and faith; refugees and migrants who are looking for survival and dignity; prisoners who crowd the world's countless prisons; the sick who show us our own fragility and who are often the victims of blind interests, epidemics or the pandemic of AIDS; the face of workers whose jobs are precarious and without guarantees and who have little hope for a better future; the faces of unborn babies.

A wounded humanity has thousands of other faces that demand our respect, people who have the right to live and share in building a new, more just and fraternal world.

In one way or another we must respond to these brothers and sisters, and to their cry.

Alliance with Creation

16. Similarly, we must respond to the very serious aggression the Earth endures through the savage exploitation of its resources. This exploitation puts the very existence of humanity at risk. Unbridled greed could risk the death of the whole planet. Painful examples of this tragedy include global warming, pollution, privatization of water resources, waste and the destruction of the Amazon Rainforest.

In the solitude of Monte Senario, our first Fathers respected nature and saw the environment as a gift of God (cf. *LO* 41). Today as well,

some Servites are promoting ecological responsibility; others are defending the earth's resources. All of our communities must join them and grow in love and respect for the environment. They can do this by embracing a sober life-style, being careful in their use of water and energy, and giving witness against consumerism.

An Urgent Project: the Amazon Rainforest

17. In the area of environmental concern, the General Chapter is adopting a project presented by our Brazilian friars and offering it to the whole Order: defense of the Amazon Rainforest – it will be our common project.⁴ We join the courageous voices and efforts of Servites already involved and the Latin-American Episcopate (*Aparecida Document*, May 2007).

The General Chapter invites all branches of the Servite Family to join in this project. It invites every jurisdiction to engage in educational and promotional activities in defense of the Rainforest – and if possible to involve National Conferences of Religious.

SERVITE POVERTY

18. Following monastic tradition, our Order has lived poverty in accord with the precept "*ora et labora*" [pray and work]. Our Constitutions describe poverty in these sober terms: *work, the sharing of goods and a moderate style of life* (cf. *Const.* 57), *the use of possessions with care and detachment* (cf. *Const.* 62). Servites are twice reminded that they must order their possessions to the service of the community, *the Order and the poor* (cf. *Const.* 62, 289/c).

It follows that if a community does not destine a substantial portion of its resources to the poor – and not only on rare occasions, but regularly – it is not observing the Constitutions and cannot be called a Servite community.

⁴ See the message sent to the President of Brazil (no. 99 in the appendices).

Evangelical Poverty, a Personal Choice

19. The poverty of a Servant of Mary is not a choice for individual perfection. But it does concern me personally: I do not live a poor lifestyle; my heart is not free from the desire for possessions; I lack nothing and have so many superfluous needs; I have turned the *Rule* of St. Augustine upside down: *For it is better to be able to make do with a little than to have plenty* (*Regula* 18). What things must I put aside? I have experienced the gap between the radical poverty of the Gospel and the poor progress I have made with so much effort; I keep looking for excuses and put off urgent decisions ...

The Gospel asks more of us. It demands a change of life. If all we do is affirm the ideal – it is harmful. If the Word is not incarnated in concrete choices, it is not only empty but dangerous. Our personal and common inconsistency is only reinforced.

Some Suggestions

20. Each friar must realize that his inobservance of evangelical poverty works to the detriment of the whole Order. The Order loses sight of its identity and founding values. The Order is, in fact, a humble tent for the Word, moved by the wind of the Spirit and *preserved by poverty* (LO 44).

For this purpose the General Chapter adopts and reaffirms the final text of the Pre-Chapter Commission on *Witness to Evangelical Poverty*.⁵ The text is a good point of departure for reflection and the Chapter urges each friar and each community to take to heart, simply and carefully, the suggestions offered and to make an effort to carry them out during the next six years. They call us to concrete choices that are humble and practical, and demonstrate a joyous passion for Christ and an exacting passion for humanity.

⁵ Cf. Preparatory Commission in *Acta OSM* n.s. VIII,11 (2007) pp. 514-520. In this document the text can be found in the appendix nos. 89-95.

II. THE COMMUNITY OF SERVANTS OF MARY

EQUALITY IN COMMUNITY

Declaration

21. The Constitutions are addressed, without distinction, to all friars who live their religious consecration with the intention of *achieving the perfect dignity and freedom of the children of God* (*Const.* 8) and of dedicating themselves to the service of others.

The General Chapter calls on us to express the same dignity and equality of all friars (cf. *Const.* 9, 10, 17) in every form of language and behavior and to eliminate from our communities anything that might divide or obscure fraternal life.

The Chapter further asks that at all levels (Councils, Provincial Chapters, Communities), out of profound respect for the identity of the Friar Servant of Mary, there be openness and encouragement for the vocation of lay friars. These friars who do not become priests should be prepared for other meaningful forms of service that reflect the charism of the Order. They should be given adequate professional training and a basic theological education (cf. *Const.* 159, 161).

POVERTY, PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AND COMMON LIFE

Declaration

22. The 2001 General Chapter asked the Order for a commitment *to renewing our communities so that they become places of listening and expectation, of seeking and experiencing the presence of God, schools of Divine and human service*.⁶ Our consecrated life is founded on the rock of radical faith and the experience of God; it has meaning and savor to the extent that it shows how one *strive first for the Kingdom of God and*

⁶ CCXI CAPITULUM GENERALE 2001, *2001 General Chapter Texts [approved by the General Council at its January 3, 2002 session (cfr. Const. 264)]* (General Curia O.S.M., Rome 2002) [=GC 2001], no. 8.

His righteousness (Matthew 6, 33). Through our profession of the three vows we embrace the following of Christ and, like our first Fathers, declare to the world our choice for the Kingdom (cf. *LO 17*).

23. The General Chapter reminds all our friars that throughout the history of the Church and religious life, evangelical poverty has had its greatest impact in three specific areas: personal poverty, community poverty and an option for the poor.

Each friar must realize and accept personal responsibility for the fact that his failures to observe evangelical poverty (immoderate use of possessions, communications, transportation, clothing, food, amenities, superfluous indulgence) work to the detriment of the Order.

Declaration

24. With reference to the articles on personal and community poverty in the *Rule* of St. Augustine (*Regula* nos. 4-6, 31) and the Servite Constitutions (*Const.* 57-70, 147) the General Chapter reaffirms the following:

- a) No friar may keep for himself money coming from pensions, stipends or offerings; nor can he have a personal bank account without the explicit permission of major superiors.
- b) Every friar and community should be made aware of prices and the cost of living and should avoid all waste and superfluous spending. Through his own work, attention and care, each friar should contribute to the economic welfare of the community; the sober and essential life-style of each friar should be an example to others. Friars should give themselves to others; their primary concern should be the welfare of others, not their own interests.
- c) Our relationship with our brothers in community and with the environment is a sign of poverty; we should avoid partisanship, individualism and the abuse of religious power. Genuine and sincere dialogue⁷ can help free us from self-absorption and create a

⁷ Cf. Prior General's Report, nos. 122-126 in: *Acta OSM* n.s. VIII,11 (2007) pp. 120-122.

collegial atmosphere in both our communities and our work with lay people (cf. *Const.* 107).

- d) Care for a friar who is sick, aged or difficult, along with the lack of vocations and personnel, present an occasion for us to devote ourselves to those who cannot look after themselves. Taking care of others, devoting time to them, providing company and support to the weak are ways to overcome the ego and *give our life for others* (cf. *John* 15, 13; 10, 11).
- e) We can express our poverty through compassion and reconciliation by being aware of human weakness and avoiding judgment or censure (cf. *Const.* 56).
- f) Already existing communities where radical evangelical poverty is practiced should welcome other friars who, with the permission of Major Superiors, desire to pursue the same life-style: living as poor men amongst the poor.

Declaration

25. The General Chapter proposes the following:

- a) At year's end, each community and province should determine how much money they will contribute to the Order and the poor (cf. *Const.* 62, 289c) and to projects of the General Council. This determination should be made in agreement with the Prior Provincial and his Council. Priors and Vicars Provincial should meet with the Prior General and his Council to determine how the moneys will be distributed. The Prior General and his Council should study ways of alleviating the enormous international debt that cripples so many nations in the world.
- b) In canonical visitations, the Prior General and the Prior Provincial should review and handle firmly the following situations: the use of money – how it is spent or saved; what sort of life-style prevails in the community; what care is devoted to the house and the environment.

- c) Through the community chapter, the conventual Prior should help the community realize the demands of poverty; he should be firm in denouncing abuse, inattention or indifference. The local chapter should determine the community's life-style and see that it is appropriate to the area where it is located. We must avoid a contradictory life-style (expensive possessions; showy personal property; the latest technology – computers, cameras, cell phones,⁸ vacations and holidays in expensive locations). All these are counterproductive to our witness.

26. A knowledge of the Order's history, tradition and spirituality, familiarity with the *Rule* of St. Augustine and the *Constitutions*, along with the example of our Seven Holy Fathers, constitute a rich historical and spiritual legacy and will help us in our increasingly earnest quest for evangelical poverty.

GENERAL HOUSES

Decree

27. Communities subject to the immediate jurisdiction of the Prior General serve the entire Order or render a special service on behalf of the whole Order to a specific local church (Eger).

Collaboration

a) To make up these communities and to guarantee the means needed for their specific service, all provinces and vicariates are bound to offer effective collaboration with the Prior General through the availability of personnel, money or other means.

⁸ Cf. *Acta OSM* n.s. VIII,11(2007) p. 517.

Annual Program

b) A General Councilor appointed by the Prior General will gather the priors of the General Houses to draw up an annual program and to carry out what the General Chapter requires for permanent formation and other projects that promote fraternal communion.

MONTE SENARIO

Declaration

28. The General Chapter declares once more that the sacred priory of Monte Senario is *a spiritual home for the entire Order*⁹ and remains therefore under the jurisdiction of the Prior General. The General Chapter asks:

- a) that the community be committed to an intense experience of spiritual and fraternal life; that it make provisions for practicing the contemplative life (cf. *Const.* 4); that it welcome sessions of permanent formation.
- b) that the General Council, in dialogue with the Regional Conference, study the possibility of establishing there a common novitiate for the European provinces.
- c) that the General Council and the Council of the Province of "Santissima Annunziata" update the contract for Monte Senario.

Declaration

29. The General Chapter believes article 78 of the Constitutions says all that needs be said for the "*Progetto comune*" [common plan] at Monte Senario (May 23-24, 2007)¹⁰ supported by the Monte Senario community.¹¹

⁹ Cf. Liturgy of the Hours OSM, September 22, Office of Readings, alternative reading; *GC* 1989, no. 64.

¹⁰ Cf. *Preparatory Documentation 5 [Documentation Supplement]* pp. 137-138.

¹¹ See *Atto del Capitolo conventuale* of August 17, 2007.

EGER

Decree

30. Before 2009, in dialogue with the Eger community and the whole Hungarian Servite Family, the General Council should review the 1998 “Hungary Project” (properties of the Hungarian Province, Eger Community, jurisdiction).

FAVORING HISTORICAL PRIORIES

Declaration

31. The term “favoring historical priories” refers to a commitment on the part of those legally responsible for these priories to see that they become centers of Servite life. This will benefit the friars and the whole Servite Family.

The General Chapter requires provinces to proceed carefully in preserving and renewing those “historical” priories that the Order considers of fundamental importance and significance for the following reasons:

- a) they date from the origin of the Order or the province;
- b) our Founders lived in them;
- c) for the historical events they witnessed which are recorded in our ancient *Legendae*;
- d) for elements of historical (even recent) and artistic (especially Marian) importance that enhance the Servite charism.

In the event that a particular jurisdiction is no longer able to support one of these priories, the General Council will consult the whole Order to find a positive way of preserving this part of our Servite heritage.

III. PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE SERVANT OF MARY

Declaration

32. The General Chapter believes it is of vital importance to reconsider the whole area of vocation recruitment, initial formation, training formation personnel and all related promotional activity from the perspective of poverty. We must reaffirm and encourage values and decisions that confront the challenges presented by the Church and today’s world to living evangelical poverty authentically.

The General Chapter’s suggestions find inspiration in the concept of communion of goods found in the Constitutions. This concept directs each friar to devote his energy, ability, time and the fruit of his labor to the service of the community and the men and women of our time (cf. *Const.* 57b).

Decree

33. The General Chapter reaffirms the validity and importance of the *Ratio Institutionis* [RI]¹² and urges all friars involved in vocation recruitment, initial formation and training formation personnel to observe and adapt its provisions to the regional situation and needs of the Order and the local churches.¹³

VOCAATION PROMOTION

Decree

34. In the area of vocation promotion, the General Chapter decrees the following:

¹² Cf. *Called to Serve in Love with Mary – “Ratio Institutionis” of the Order of the Friar Servants of St. Mary* (Curia Generalis O.S.M., Romae 2000) in: *Acta OSM* n.s. I,1 (2000) 251 pp. [=RI].

¹³ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 22 [English version, p. 17]: *This is a general document. In practice it must be adapted to the situations existing in local Churches and in the various regions in which the Order is present.*

- a) Realizing that each vocation is a gift from God, the General Chapter calls on each friar and each community to take responsibility for promoting vocations to the Order; this must be done with conviction, responsibility and hope; we must create a serious vocation program that reflects a coherent style of life (cf. *Const.* 127).
- b) Communities should pray to the Lord through the intercession of Mary, Our Lady, for the gift of new vocations to the family of her Servants (cf. *Const.* 30).
- c) Communities are the first contact for a young person interested in a Servite vocation and for this reason the General Chapter believes it important that:
 - each friar cultivate hope and confidence in the Order’s future in spite of present difficulties;
 - each friar be welcoming towards those who are in search of their vocation and be ready to display the appropriate openness and attention;
 - each community should appoint a friar in the community to be responsible for vocation discernment.
- d) We should avoid presenting only one side of Servite life – the priestly ministry.
- e) Communities should engage in encounters with young people for vocation recruitment (at camps, schools, retreats); communities should make known the Order’s traditions and works. Young people already in the Order’s formation programs should be involved in these encounters.
- f) There should be a provincial promoter of vocations who will coordinate and encourage those responsible for vocations in the local communities. Together with these local friars, the provincial promoter should plan and review vocation recruitment (cf. *Const.* 128).
- g) Those responsible for a jurisdiction should provide financial support for the vocational activities.
- h) The General Chapter believes that vocation recruitment is a priority for the Order. For this reason it has asked the General Council to appoint a General Coordinator of Vocation Promotion and to

determine his tasks and how he can work with the Secretariat for Formation and Studies. The Coordinator should not be a member of the General Council and need not reside in Rome.

INITIAL FORMATION

Decree

35. Formation should help a friar enter into communion with his brothers and share everything with everyone. He must use the means available in a way that edifies the community. For this reason the General Chapter asks that each friar, from the very beginning of his formation, learn how to use money responsibly and render a clear account of this use to whoever is responsible.

Evangelical poverty requires us to support ourselves through our own work (cf. *Const.* 118; *RI* 106, 108). This work is not limited to pastoral or liturgical responsibilities.

In the light of the *Ratio Institutionis*, no. 31, the General Chapter affirms:

- a) From the very beginning of their formation, young people should look upon study as work which requires daily and responsible commitment. The formation master should check periodically that each student friar is keeping up with his studies.
- b) Outside of school time, there should be programmed work experiences, either paid or voluntary. This is an integral part of the formation program and teaches that we earn our daily bread through our work (cf. *Const.* 59).

PERMANENT FORMATION

Decree

36. The General Chapter is well aware that evangelical poverty represents a significant perspective from which we can renew our identity (cf. *Const.*, Chapter I) and stimulate renewed vitality in the Order.

Each friar and every community should be conscious of his/its own poverty in relation to the spiritual life, the local church and the world in which we live.

The General Chapter reaffirms the validity of the 2001 General Chapter decrees (nos. 17-20) concerning personal and community programs and suggestions for permanent formation.¹⁴ The Chapter is moreover aware that *the demand for permanent formation coming from the whole Order*¹⁵ is still urgent.

General Secretariat for Permanent Formation

37. To promote permanent formation and foster unity throughout the communities of the Order, the General Chapter asks the General Council (cf. *Const.* 285b, 286) to establish a “General Secretariat for Permanent Formation.”

Make-up of the Secretariat

The individual in charge of the Secretariat should be a General Councilor or someone chosen by the General Council who will work in close collaboration with the Council. He will be assisted by a sufficient number of individuals (if possible, from all expressions of the Servite Family) who are all convinced of the need for permanent formation.

Tasks of the Secretariat

- a) Each year, to determine a topic and furnish material for discussion (e.g. notes) in all the branches of the Order. The topic should be discussed:
 - in conventual chapters, particularly during special liturgical times (Advent, Lent); religious and lay experts can be involved in these discussions (cf. *Const.* 39);
 - at meetings and non-elective chapters in each jurisdiction.

¹⁴ The text can be found in the Appendix: nos. 83-86.

¹⁵ Cf. *GC 2001*, no. 20.

For the next six years the topics for permanent formation are:

- Servite identity and spirituality;
 - Living evangelical poverty with Our Lady (cf. *Matthew* 5, 3) in the mendicant tradition;
 - Confronting the problems of justice and peace with Our Lady;
 - Cultivating environmental concerns with Our Lady;
 - Confronting – with Our Lady – the problems faced by women.
- b) To promote spiritual progress among friars of all ages and a clear understanding of the world we live in, the Secretariat will organize courses of updating (*aggiornamento*) for groups of friars in various areas of pastoral concern, with special emphasis on friars who have been solemnly professed for five years. The various jurisdictions should take advantage of the centers of study within the Order, as well as other facilities nearer to home (e.g. Monte Senario; Rome – Marianum; Brussels – Lumen Vitae; Chicago – Catholic Theological Union; India; Manila; Melbourne; etc.)
 - c) To make known within the Order and the Servite Family all significant activities currently in progress among the friars, sisters and lay members – especially when these activities relate to the year’s topic.

Review

- a) During meetings of priors in the provinces, vicariates and delegations, and during annual canonical visitations, the Prior Provincial and his Council should encourage communities to persist in their permanent formation projects according to the program prescribed by the Secretariat.
- b) The General Secretariat (by holding meetings) and the Prior General (during canonical visitations) should evaluate and promote this process in the jurisdictions.

TRAINING FORMATION PERSONNEL

Decree

38. On the training of formation personnel the General Chapter decrees the following:

- a) The Prior General, as the one primarily responsible for formation, must take care to see that formation personnel are prepared for their role.
- b) The General Chapter asks the Prior General and his Council to choose as Secretary for Formation and Studies a friar who knows and has long experience in formation.

The Secretary:

- should propose to individual formators appropriate personal programs and courses in formation;
 - should suggest that Masters of Temporary Professed determine which of their friars is best suited for work in formation and make it possible for them to pursue formation training courses;
 - should organize an international meeting of formators once during this six year term.
- c) The General Chapter asks that:
 - each Prior/Vicar Provincial designate and prepare (as soon as possible) friars for formation work– even in those jurisdictions where there are no candidates;
 - the formation community be made up of cooperative friars who are willing to work with the formation personnel to create a genuine formation community;
 - formators be encouraged to choose a man of God who is competent in the area of formation to help them in their own self-assessment and in their discernment and guidance of young candidates;
 - there should be an ongoing dialogue between formation personnel and the Priors/Vicars Provincial (cf. *RI* 53); in drawing up his reports on candidates for the Priors/Vicars Provincial, the formator should follow the guidelines laid out in the *Ratio Institutionis* and emphasize how the candidates live out the vows;

- formation personnel should have an overall view of the balanced and progressive process of formation for candidates at various levels; problems highlighted by previous masters should be taken into serious consideration.
- d) The General Chapter reaffirms that the Prior General, in dialogue with the Priors and Vicars Provincial, should promote an exchange of formation personnel through the appropriate agreements (contracts).
 - e) The General Chapter determines that, at least once a year, Regional Coordinators should organize a meeting for formation personnel with qualified experts in the field of formation. Within this six-year term, the General Secretary of Formation and Studies should attend at least one of these meetings to promote the study of some aspects of the *Ratio Institutionis* and help bring about a common understanding.

INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

Declaration

39. Noting the Order's expansion to different continents, the General Chapter asks that:

- a) young friars be formed in awareness and respect for diverse cultures; the Chapter would like to see the following skills developed during the period of initial formation:
 - the ability to listen to one another; this is a fundamental aspect of dialogue (cf. *Const.* 107);
 - the ability to engage in dialogue as we discussed in *Vailankanni*;¹⁶ it is the foundation of all growth in fraternity;
 - taking care not to stifle dialogue through the exclusive seeking of one's own interests and material welfare;
 - a careful striving to open one's self to Gospel values in one's own culture.

¹⁶ Cf. *Acta OSM* n.s. V,8 (2004) pp. 535-537.

- b) the subject of intercultural dialogue be adequately formulated in the *Ratio Institutionis* and related references in the *Ratio Studiorum*.

INTERNATIONAL FORMATION COMMUNITIES

Decree

40. In light of our theme of poverty and the *Constitutions* (art. 47 and 164), the General Chapter considers the International Formation Communities for professed (inter-jurisdictional) and Centers of Study to be the common patrimony of the Order.

- a) Out of a sense of responsibility towards future generations of friars and the future of the Order, the General Chapter intends to promote existing International Formation Communities [=CIF] and support the creation of new such communities.
- b) The General Chapter recommends the St. Alexis Falconieri International Formation Community as a special and meaningful place for training young people and reinforcing their identity as Servants of Mary. This community has shown proven value over the past 100 years (November 4, 1895) and since 1950 it has been closely linked to the Marianum Pontifical Theological Faculty.
- c) The General Chapter has decided that any jurisdiction that wants to open a new international formation community:
- must seriously determine in the provincial or vicarial council whether such a community is useful and important;
 - must discuss realistically whether there will be an appropriate number of professed students and formation personnel available;
 - must evaluate all the financial and logistical resources available;
 - must take into account the existence of nearby educational and specialization institutions of high quality;
 - must give consideration to the importance of solid training in Mariology and the history/spirituality of the Order.

- d) During the planning phase, the jurisdiction should discuss this project with the Regional Conferences and with the Prior General, who is *primarily responsible to the Order and the Church for formation and studies* (Const. 168). The Prior General should engage in dialogue to coordinate all such local projects (opening new CIFs) on the level of the whole Order.
- e) Establishing a CIF is the prerogative of the Provincial or Vicarial Chapter with the consent of the Prior General. How the Provincial/Vicarial Chapter is to make this decision will be determined by the Provincial/Vicarial Council in accordance with the Province's/Vicariate's directory.
- f) The General Secretary for Formation and Studies should assemble sufficient documentation on the problems the Order's existing CIFs face, as well as the problems of other religious families. This will provide guidance to a jurisdiction evaluating the pros and cons of such a community. The documentation should be made available by October 2008.
- g) To ensure the effective inclusion of young people in these communities (CIF) the General Chapter has decided the following:
- there should be a period of preparation before theological studies commence;
 - it is up to the Prior General or the Prior/Vicar Provincial to determine the establishment of such a preparatory period and its nature (place, length, program, responsible personnel ...); they will be assisted in this by the General Regent of Studies and the responsible CIF personnel.

CENTERS OF STUDY AND DOCUMENTATION

Declaration

41. The General Chapter wants to encourage the centers of study and documentation that already exist in the Order and hopes that:

- a) similar centers are established in regions of the Order where they do not already exist; they could be points of reference and collaboration for friars and other members of the Servite Family (cf. *Const.* 164); they would be devoted primarily to the study and spread of Mariology and the spirituality of the Order. The General Chapter would also advise such centers to seek eventual association with the Marianum Pontifical Theological Faculty.
- b) library material should be uploaded to the internet; the information should also include the historical archives of the Order in that particular region;
- c) in setting up such centers, the economic situation of the host region should be considered; with the help and advice of the General Treasurer, economically weaker regions can be helped by the Order's Formation Fund and those regions of the Order that are economically stronger.
- d) local centers should work with the Historical Archivist and Librarian of the Marian Pontifical Theological Faculty in an effort to preserve and protect this archival and library material. Friars should be trained professionally to work as competent archivists and librarians in the study and documentation centers.

MARIANUM PONTIFICAL THEOLOGICAL FACULTY

Declaration

42. Given the charism and mission of the Order, as well as the mandate of the Holy See, the General Chapter reaffirms the Marianum Pontifical Theological Faculty as a priority for the Order. To achieve the Faculty's goals the General Chapter hopes for the collaboration of the whole Order and the Servite Family.

Each jurisdiction should determine which of its friars has the necessary qualities to dedicate his life to study and teaching and should make of them a generous gift to the Order for service on the Faculty.

REGENTS OF STUDIES

Decree

43. The General Chapter:

- a) asks the General Regent of Studies to draw up a *Ratio Studiorum* (cf. *Const.* 169) within the next six years. This *Ratio* should take into account the organizational development of theological study in the Church.
- b) has decided that:
 - the office of Regent of Studies should be established in each province and vicariate. He should collaborate and coordinate his tasks (primarily promotion) with the General Regent. The tasks should be further described in the local Directory (cf. *Const.* 234/a);
 - each year the provincial/vicarial Regent should send a detailed report to the General Regent on what studies the friars of his region are pursuing or have completed;
 - in those jurisdictions where it is impossible to establish a Regent of Studies, a regional Coordinator of studies should be appointed who will be responsible for the work described above.

SERVITE INTERNATIONAL LITURGICAL COMMISSION (CLIOS)

Decree

44. The General Chapter decrees that the valuable service provided by the Servite International Liturgical Commission (CLIOS) should continue, especially work on the Order's liturgical books and the study aids for devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Saints and Blesseds of the Order and the Servite Family.

Consequently, the Chapter asks the General Council to ensure the translation of these texts into the principal languages spoken in the Order and to make them available to all our jurisdictions. The jurisdictions (along language lines) should provide for the distribution of these texts.

IV. APOSTOLIC SERVICE

GENERAL SECRETARIAT FOR THE EVANGELIZATION OF PEOPLES
AND JUSTICE AND PEACE*Decree*

45. The origin of our Order is linked to a return to the Gospel. Our first Seven Fathers, who were Florentine merchants, found *the pearl of great price and distributed all they had to the poor, selling everything as the Gospel dictates* (LO 17; cf. *Matthew* 19, 21; *Luke* 12, 33). Like the other mendicant orders, they shared the ideal of living amongst the poor, with the poor and for the poor. They wanted to instill the values of the Kingdom into the human experience. As the Lord commanded: “*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you*” (*Matthew* 28, 19-20).

Recognizing the signs of the times (secularized society, ...) in a world that knows only partially the Word of God, the General Chapter is aware that now at the beginning of the third millennium there is *a new spring-time for the Gospel*.¹⁷ The Chapter asks the General Council (cf. *Const.* 285b, 286) to unite the Secretariat for Justice and Peace with the General Secretariat of the Missions. The new body would be called the “General Secretariat for the Evangelization of People and Justice and Peace.”

*Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church’s mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.*¹⁸

¹⁷ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (December 7, 1990) no. 86; 210th SERVITE GENERAL CHAPTER (Mexico 1995), *Servants of the Magnificat*, no. 77.

¹⁸ THIRD SYNOD OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS, *Justice in the World* (November 30, 1971) no. 6. Text is online at: http://www.osjspm.org/majordoc_justicia_in_mundo_official_test.aspx.

Make-up of the Secretariat

The friar responsible for the Secretariat should be a General Councilor or some other friar chosen by the General Council. He will work in tandem with the council. He will have available as co-workers a sufficient number of individuals chosen, if possible, from all branches of the Servite Family. They will work as a team.

Tasks of the Secretariat

Among its tasks the Secretariat for the Evangelization of People and Justice and Peace will be responsible for:

- a) promoting, coordinating and integrating into the life of the Order the work of justice, peace, the defense of human rights, and recognition of Christ’s face in all people (especially the poor);
- b) since the 2001 General Chapter decree (no. 58)¹⁹ is still valid, continuing to help the Order’s communities to re-discover, through the light of the Gospel, those new forms of poverty prevalent in the post-modern society of their local church (ignorance of God, people on the fringes of the Church, the anonymity of the great cities, immigration, homelessness, human trafficking, lack of respect for women, concern for the environment, etc...) offering through our charism service that respects native cultures and their religious dimensions,²⁰ ever mindful of the Lord’s words in the synagogue of Nazareth: *The Spirit of the Lord [...] has anointed me to bring good news to the poor* (*Luke* 4, 18).
- c) making every effort to bridge the gap between ourselves and the world of young people, so that we can share with them the life-giving strength of Christ; encouraging each jurisdiction to establish a presence among young people (high schools, universities, volunteer work, movements, etc.);

¹⁹ The text can be found in the Appendix: no. 87.

²⁰ Cf. *GC 2001*, no. 57.

- d) sharing with all members of the Order and the various branches of the Servite Family the work of communities engaged in evangelization *ad gentes* (cf. *Const.* 98) through missionary promotion (cf. *Const.*, Chapter XIII) and the use of various forms of communication (internet, printed material, etc.);
- e) paying close attention to and making the Order aware of all that the Congregation for the Evangelization of People and the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace²¹ have to say.

Review

At least once every two years the Secretariat should review progress in the various jurisdictions.

NEW SERVITE FOUNDATIONS

Decree

46. In light of our multi-jurisdictional experience in Africa (Uganda and Kenya) and the possible need for similar projects in the new Servite foundations (Indonesia, Myanmar, etc...), the General Chapter has determined that the Prior General, in virtue of his service (cf. *Const.* 266) and his responsibility for formation (cf. *Const.* 168), together with his Council and in dialogue with the Priors and Vicars Provincial, will promote inter-jurisdictional collaboration through personnel and finances, in new Servite foundations (friars and sisters) located in mission areas considered of “initial evangelization”; the Prior General should pay special attention to the formation of new vocations from these areas.

The Prior General should seek to interest and promote the involvement of all branches of the Servite Family *that share the same ideal, commitment to the evangelical apostolic life and devotion to the Mother of God* (*Const.* 305).

²¹ For the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace see: http://www.just-pax.it/eng/home_eng.html

V. ORGANIZATION OF THE ORDER

RESTRUCTURING

Declaration

47. The reports of Priors and Vicars Provincial have provided an overview of the Order and the difficulties it faces. In the older jurisdictions, friars are aging and there are few new vocations. In the newer jurisdictions, there is no lack of vocations but financial resources are scarce. This overview permits the General Chapter to look at the future of the Order with faith and hope. The Chapter is well aware of the danger that any one of our communities can succumb to a worldly or middle-class life-style; this would undermine the great values of the consecrated life.

To achieve genuine communion based on the witness of poverty and sharing within the Order, the General Chapter entrusts a task to the Prior General and his Council: to support and encourage the process of restructuring and reorganization that has been going on for some years now.

REORGANIZATION OF ACTIVITIES

Criteria for Evaluating Communities²²

Decree

48. To evaluate our presence, the General Chapter thought it useful to list a series of criteria that could help determine if a specific community displays a genuine Servite identity and reason for existing as these are understood by the Constitutions.

²² Cf. GC 1989, no. 26.

- a) the friars pray and celebrate the Eucharist together regularly (*Const.* 28, 29);
- b) the community gathers together regularly in chapter to plan its common activities and the activities of individual friars (cf. *Const.* 20, 34, 37, 196);
- c) the community declares and shows itself capable of accepting candidates for admission to the Order for their first experience of community life (cf. *Const.* 127);
- d) the community can guarantee its members the time and means to pursue renewal (cf. *Const.* 31/a-b-c);
- e) in its engagement in apostolic service (parishes, sanctuaries, schools, etc.), the community displays the life-style and witness required by our *Constitutions* (cf. *Const.* 73, 75);
- f) the community directs its possessions to the service of its friars and the needs of the Province, the Order and the poor (cf. *Const.* 62);
- g) the community is made up of at least three solemn professed friars who are resident.

Ways to carry out this evaluation

*Decree*²³

49. In light of the criteria listed by the General Chapter, each community should hold a conventual chapter to evaluate its identity and reason for existing; there should be a preference for works carried out with other groups of the extended Servite Family in the same location.

During the canonical visitation, the Prior or Vicar Provincial should gather and reflect on the community's conclusions; during meetings of priors or provincial/vicarial chapters the results of these conventual chapters should be evaluated.

²³ Cf. *GC 2001*, no. 41. The first paragraph repeats *GC 1995*, no. 63.

On the possibility of juridically establishing a community with a new juridical profile: a community that depends on another canonically erected community

*Decree*²⁴

50. The Order's new Constitutions do not contemplate the juridical configuration of a *domus*; they affirm that all the communities of the Order enjoy the same dignity (cf. *Const.* 23/a).

In the process of restructuring and re-qualifying presences, the General Chapter seeks to strengthen community life and lists a series of criteria for evaluating a community's identity and reason for existing (*see above* no. 48).

The General Chapter has no intention of modifying existing legislation in this matter.

In the event that a provincial/vicarial council in the course of restructuring presences should believe it best to close a community without recalling the friars from the priory but rather linking them for a limited time with another canonically erected community based on geographic proximity:

- a) the council must guarantee the existence of regular community life;
- b) the council must clarify relations between the friars of the closed community and the friars of the other community to which they belong *de familia*.
- c) these arrangements should last no longer than three years;
- d) the council should review this arrangement annually;
- e) the council should explain the reasons that led to this arrangement to the General Council; they should seek the approval of the General Council.

²⁴ Cf. *GC 2001*, no. 42.

Powers of Provincial/Vicarial Councils with regard to suspension of a part of article 233/h of the Constitutions

*Decree*²⁵

51. The General Chapter, conscious of the mendicant nature of our Order (cf. *Const.* 3), for temporary reasons decrees that until the 2013 General Chapter, it is up to the provincial or vicarial council – in derogation of part of article 233/h of the *Constitutions* – not only to carry out, but to decide by collegial vote the opening and closing of religious houses – always respecting what is foreseen by article 282/a of the *Constitutions*.

In deciding to open or close a religious house, the provincial/vicarial councils should consult:

- a) the friars of the province (or delegation involved) or vicariate;
- b) the regional conference involved;
- c) the General Councilor for the jurisdiction in question.

PLANNING AT THE JURISDICTIONAL LEVEL

Priorities to be considered for keeping communities

*Decree*²⁶

52. The General Chapter asks every jurisdiction to give priority to:

- a) communities that are sufficiently numerous to permit a variety of diversified activities (such as a free-form apostolate) and which can support our aged brothers;
- b) communities that exercise a preferential option for young people or the poor (both old and new forms of poverty);
- c) communities that have a strong Marian character (shrines or Marian centers).

²⁵ Cf. *GC 2001*, no. 43. The first paragraph repeats *GC 1995*, no. 64.

²⁶ Cf. *GC 2001*, no. 45.

Powers of the General Council with regard to suspension of article 282/g of the Constitutions

*Decree*²⁷

53. The General Chapter delegates to the General Council the power to determine the erection, division or suppression of a province, the unification of provinces and the determination of new boundaries. Before carrying out such decisions, the General Council should consult all the friars of the province, the prior provincial and his council, the provincial chapter and the appropriate regional conference.

Regression of juridical status

*Decree*²⁸

54. Our *Constitutions* describe the process by which a foundation of the Order becomes a Delegation, Vicariate, and then a Province (cf. *Const.* 238/a, 240/a, 282/g). The reverse process is not considered.

To fill this lacuna in the *Constitutions*, the General Chapter establishes the following:

- a) The General Council can proceed to modify the juridical status of a province or vicariate when it considers such a modification urgent and serious reasons do not allow waiting until the next General Chapter is celebrated.
- b) To determine the urgency of such a decision, the General Council should observe the following criteria.²⁹ Analogous to what was said above about communities, the General Chapter believes that a province has no reason to exist when *the majority* of the following conditions cannot be met:
 1. the ability to provide formation for new candidates to the Order during those stages not covered by regional formation programs;

²⁷ Cf. *GC 2001*, no. 46. The first paragraph repeats *GC 1995*, no. 69.

²⁸ Cf. *GC 2001*, no. 47. Part a) repeats *GC 1989*, nos. 80-81; *GC 1995*, no. 70.

²⁹ Cf. *GC 2001*, no. 44; *GC 1989*, no. 33; *GC 1995*, no. 65.

2. the possibility of offering friars to work in other provinces or for the Order;
 3. self-sufficiency: having enough personnel to support existing communities and commitments;
 4. the flexibility to free friars for periods of renewal;
 5. the ability to spare friars for theological research, the study of our Marian charism, the history and spirituality of the Servite Order;
 6. the possibility of providing sufficient friars for the province and for its communities to exercise the offices foreseen by the *Constitutions* (cf. *Const.* 201, 234);
 7. the presence of communities of different forms (cf. *Const.* 4);
 8. the will and the ability to carry out the criteria for evaluating communities (*see above* no. 48).
- c) Before carrying out this modification, the General Council should consult all the friars of the province or vicariate, the prior or vicar provincial and their councils, the provincial or vicarial chapter and the regional conference.

REGIONAL COLLABORATION

Decree

55. In view of the various organizational changes that have taken place in recent years on the level of regional conferences (uniting or re-sizing jurisdictions), the General Chapter emphasizes the importance of continued collaboration, especially in the areas of initial formation (at least one common endeavor), permanent formation and collaboration with the Servite Family.

The regional conferences are: **Europe** (Santissima Annunziata, Piedmont-Romagna, Lombardy-Veneto, Spain, Tyrol, Isles, German Delegation, Franco-Belgian Delegation and the General Houses); **North America** (USA, Canada, Mexico); **South America** (Brazil, Andes); **Africa** (Zululand Delegation, East African Delegation and communities in Swaziland and Mozambique); **Australia-Asia** (Indian

Vicariate, Philippine Vicariate, Australian Delegation and communities in Indonesia).

The General Chapter has decided that eventual new foundations will be part of the regional jurisdiction in which they are located.

The General Council should promote the progress of the new regional conferences (Europe and Africa) and assemble the regional coordinators when it seems opportune.

COMMUNION AND THE ADMINISTRATION OF GOODS

Declaration

56. Grateful for the gifts of Providence to our Order and following the example of our first Seven Fathers, we the friar Servants of Mary hope to become better stewards of the many blessings God has granted to our Order.

While we are grateful for the resources and blessings we have received, we also feel the responsibility these gifts entail and the challenge to remain faithful to our vow of evangelical poverty. We are called to use our possessions in the most profitable way possible; to help each other to respond to the demands of ministry and the needs of our world and to provide prudently for the future.

The General Chapter appreciates the “Statistical and Demographic Forecast OSM” prepared by the commission established by the General Council. This document permits us an overview of the personnel and finances of the Order and their projection into the future. In all the jurisdictions of the Order we find both poverty and wealth. The General Chapter invites all friars at all levels to use, administer and share our resources *with prudence and wisdom in a spirit of service and solidarity* (*Const.* 288).

In view of the challenges this study presents to the whole Order, the General Chapter asks the Order to be mindful of the following principles:

- to draw up and put into practice plans for reducing expenses at all levels of the Order’s life;

- to find new ways to increase income;
- to promote increased solidarity within and outside the Order.

As a partial response to our real situation the General Chapter offers the following series of decrees:

STATISTICAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC FORECAST OSM³⁰

Decree

57. Each jurisdiction should examine this study and devise concrete proposals to meet the challenges it contains. These proposals should reflect the individual jurisdiction's particular situation and the common good of the whole Order.

SOLIDARITY

Decree

58. We recognize the already generous sharing of goods, personnel and resources which exists in the Order and in an effort to encourage this generous sharing in the future, the General Chapter proposes:

- a) Each jurisdiction should present the clearest, most accurate and detailed financial report possible to its respective chapter.
- b) The General Council should organize meetings of Priors and Vicars Provincial (and, if necessary, provincial delegates) every two years – 2008, 2010, 2012 – to plan and establish priorities for the sharing of goods, personnel, needs and resources in the Order. A report on the sharing that has taken place between jurisdictions in the previous period should be prepared and distributed for these meetings.
- c) To promote communication and the fair exchange of resources within the Order, each request for economic assistance between

³⁰ Cf. *Acta OSM* n.s. VIII, 11 (2007) pp. 539-554.

jurisdictions (except for the regular agreements and contracts between a province and its dependent jurisdictions) should be countersigned by the Prior General. Whatever economic assistance results from these requests must pass through the General Treasurer.

- d) To evaluate more critically the use of our resources and to expend them in the most prudent and responsible way possible, the Order must:
 - give priority to already existing entities that have not yet achieved financial independence before taking on new obligations;
 - promote projects that promise financial independence and avoid projects that will create a continuing financial dependence.
- e) Some new jurisdictions already have sufficient friars to become a province of the Order but they still lack the economic resources to achieve this status. The General Council can facilitate their progress towards economic independence by encouraging a creative exchange of personnel and financial resources in their favor.

RESPONSIBLE USE OF RESOURCES

Decree

59. Since the Order has limited financial resources it must reduce its expenses. To achieve this:

- a) The General Chapter calls on all communities and jurisdictions to draw up concrete proposals for reducing expenses.
- b) The Order's Financial Council should prepare concrete proposals for reducing expenses on the General level.

The questions listed in nos. 94-95 [*Acta OSM* n.s. VIII,11 (2007) pp. 516-519] can provide an outline of discussion for the friars regarding how they might put these regulations into effect.

NEW FORMS OF FINANCING

*Decree***60.** The General Chapter:

- a) asks the General Council to review and oversee the criteria governing the Order's financial investments; it should ensure that these investments are managed in an ethical and responsible way.
- b) invites the communities and jurisdictions of the Order to prepare concrete proposals for increasing income;
- c) asks the Order's Council of Administration to prepare concrete proposals for increasing income on the General level of the Order's administration.

COLLABORATION OF LAITY IN MINISTRY AND ADMINISTRATION

*Decree***61.** The General Chapter has decided:

- a) that where possible the Order on all levels should seek the collaboration of lay people in promoting the mission of the Order and in the just administration of our resources.
- b) Normally each jurisdiction of the Order should avail itself of the advice of experts who are competent in the area of investments, business and the administration of real estate.
- c) Each jurisdiction of the Order should have a Financial Council; every meeting with experts should include more than one member of this Council.
- d) We realize the need for formation in the area of financial administration. Friars and their collaborators should be trained and educated in all the obligations and requirements of their special service. The Constitutions of the Order, directories, as well as canon and civil law should all be scrupulously respected.

- e) We realize the need for justice in the area of finances. The General Chapter recommends that all lay people working for the friars should receive equitable remuneration and all the job benefits that correspond to local legislation.

MARIANUM PONTIFICAL THEOLOGICAL FACULTY

Decree

62. The General Chapter reaffirms that the Marianum Pontifical Theological Faculty is a priority for the entire Order, even from a financial point of view.³¹

The General Chapter

- in view of the Order's financial situation,
- in view of the foreseeable decrease in financial resources,
- in view of the need to decrease the expenses of the General Treasurer's Office,
- and in an effort to promote the work and economic survival of the Faculty,

sees the need to diminish the Faculty's burden on the finances of the Order and to take positive steps towards making the Faculty self-supporting.

Therefore, the General Chapter:

- a) requests the Prior General, as Grand Chancellor, along with the President of the Faculty:
 - to appoint a Promoter (cf. *Faculty Statutes*, no. 74) to find new financial resources outside the Order; the Promoter should explore every possible source of financial support for the Faculty, even at the international level,
 - to explore, possibly with the help of experts in this area, new forms of financial support, e.g. a foundation fund or sponsorships,

³¹ Cf. *GC 2001*, no. 81/4.

- to review annually, along with the General Treasurer, efforts in this area;
- b) requests that a report be made to the 2013 General Chapter on the activities described in the preceding paragraphs of this decree. The report should make clear what financial results have been achieved.

CAPITAL FUND

Increase of Capital Fund³²

Decree

63. The General Chapter recognizes the benefit of the Order's Capital Fund and is pleased to note its growth over the last six years. The General Chapter would like to promote further growth by the following means:

- a) in the sale of real estate, 10% of net profits should be devoted to increasing the Order's Capital Fund;
- b) 50% of the profits of the approved sale of precious or artistic objects – vestments, church furnishings, pictures, furniture, prints, books of artistic value but not directly linked to the history of the Order – should be devoted to increasing the Order's Capital Fund.

Use of the Capital Fund³³

Decree

64. The General Chapter decrees:

- a) Each year a maximum amount of 50% of the annual interest accruing to the Order's Capital Fund will be placed at the disposition of the General Council to meet financial priorities. This sum will be determined and proposed by the Financial Council during its annual meeting.

³² Cf. *GC 2001*, no. 82; *GC 1995*, no. 193.

³³ Cf. *GC 2001*, no. 83.

- b) Any unused portion of the annual amount placed at the disposition of the General Council will be returned to the Order's Capital Fund.
- c) In the event that particularly expensive projects have to be financed or paid for over several years, the amount available each year can be temporarily set aside.
- d) Those who receive benefit from the distribution of this money will report to the Order, through the General Treasurer's office, on how the money was used.

GENERAL DIRECTORY

PREPARING A GENERAL DIRECTORY

Declaration

65. The General Chapter thinks it is time to prepare a General Directory. Canon 587 of the *Code of Canon Law*, in paragraphs 1-2-3, states what the Constitutions of a Religious Institute must maintain, such as its unchangeable patrimony. Paragraph 4 of Canon 587 foresees the possibility that other norms (which are not fundamental or linked to canon 587), established by the competent authority of an institute, can be suitably collected in *other codes* and can be revised and adapted according to the needs of time and place.³⁴

Chapter XXXV of our *Constitutions*, entitled *The Directory*, provides for norms that reflect the needs of different places. There already are provincial and vicarial directories.

The distinction is the General Directory can only be modified with the approval of the General Chapter.

The distinction between the “unchangeable patrimony of the Order” and norms which, by their very nature, are changeable takes into account, on the one hand, the charism of the Order and, on the other, the changing situations within the Order and the demands of the Church and the world.

³⁴ Cf. *Acta OSM* n.s. VIII,11 (2007) pp. 554-568.

COMMISSION FOR A GENERAL DIRECTORY OF THE ORDER

Decree

66. The General Chapter entrusts to the General Council the task of setting up – as soon as possible – a post-chapter international commission to prepare a General Directory that conforms to canon 587, § 1-2-3-4, and that avails itself of the suggestions of the pre-chapter *Commission for a General Directory of the Order*.³⁵ There should be continual inter-action between this post-chapter commission and the General Council.

- a) There will be two texts as a result:
 - the *Constitutions*: the fundamental norms and inspiration of the Servite Order;
 - the *Directory*: juridical and working norms derived from the principles, inspiration and constituent elements of Servite tradition, extrapolating from the present text of the *Constitutions* those norms that are of their nature changeable (canon 587, § 4).
- b) The commission will present its work to the General Council for approval within the next three years.
- c) The General Chapter mandates the General Council to present the resulting texts (*Constitutions* and General Directory) to the Holy See for approval.
- d) Afterwards, taking into account the changeable situations in the Order, the most recent Church directives, and present world needs, the commission will consult the Order and prepare for the next General Chapter in 2013 specific proposals (along with reasons) for the eventual updating or modification of the Directory. The commission will also advise the General Council about new inclusions or modifications to the *Constitutions* which might be appropriate.

³⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 66.

OTHER JURIDICAL ASPECTS

67. The organization of the Order is not merely a legal entity; it is a means to promote the common good, facilitate communion amongst all its members and pay special attention to brothers with special needs.

ELECTION OF THE PRIOR PROVINCIAL IN CHAPTER

Decree

68. The General Chapter decrees that until the General Chapter of 2013:

- a) In those cases where the provincial chapter of elections is about to begin and the ballots have not resulted in the election of a Prior Provincial, the right to elect the Prior Provincial is transferred to the chapter of elections.
- b) In such circumstances, only those friars present at the Chapter and on the list drawn up in conformity with the *Constitutions* (cf. *Const.* 207-209) and the Provincial Directory have the right of active voice for the election of the Prior Provincial.
- c) The election of the Prior Provincial is to be done with six ballots (following the procedure described in nos. 4-7 of the *Regulations* in the *Constitutions*) and will begin with the first ballot in the Provincial Chapter of Elections.
- d) If for any reason during the Provincial Chapter of Elections the office of Prior Provincial should become vacant, a new Prior Provincial should be elected by the Chapter itself according to the method described in this decree.

GENERAL COUNCILORS

Declaration

69. The General Chapter has no intention of changing the *Constitutions* of the Order with regard to the election and residence of the General Councilors.

It is up to the General Council to determine how it will serve the provinces, vicariates and general secretariats of the Order (cf. *Const.* 279).

CENTRALIZATION – DECENTRALIZATION

Declaration

70. Articles 5 and 23b of the *Constitutions* describe the relations between communities, vicariates, provinces and the Order and provide all the friars and those responsible for governance with guidelines for facing the problems of centralization or decentralization in the Order.

There must therefore be dialogue and ongoing communication between the Prior General and the Priors/Vicars Provincial either directly or through the responsible Councilor. This is especially true for matters of initial formation, centers of study, new foundations and communion of goods. To discuss these matters the Prior General should, if necessary, set up joint meetings of the General Council with the Provincial Council involved.

NUMBER OF MEMBERS ON THE PROVINCIAL/VICARIAL COUNCIL

Decree

71. In derogation of the first part of article 231 of the *Constitutions* (for provinces) and article 249/a (for vicariates) the General Chapter decides to reduce by one the number of members of provincial/ vicarial councils.

The provisions of the second part of article 231 (for provinces) and the second part of article 249/c (for vicariates) remain unchanged.

ORGANISM FOR CONSULTATION

Decree

72. The General Chapter:

- a) is aware that the Order finds it necessary to reflect upon and make decisions regarding various subjects, such as:
 - carrying out the General Chapter;
 - overall plan for communities;
 - restructuring;
 - initial formation, training formation personnel, and centers of study;
 - the status of new foundations, those already in existence and possible new communities of the Order in the world;
 - distribution of economic resources;
 - centralization-decentralization in the Order.
- b) The Chapter therefore asks the Prior General and the General Council to organize meetings of Priors/Vicars Provincial to discuss the above mentioned subjects.
- c) The agenda for these meetings can be prepared through letters of study, dialogue, consultation, analysis and proposals. The Prior General should send these letters to the Priors/Vicars Provincial and their respective councils and ask for contributions that reflect their thoughts, experience and proposals so that the Order can come up with specific proposals in these various areas.

LENGTH OF TERM FOR PRIORS/VICARS AND ASSOCIATED OFFICES
(PRIORS, PASTORS, OFFICIALS)*Decree*

73. In derogation of articles 204a, 225a, 232, 241, 249c, 254b of the *Constitutions*, the General Chapter decrees that the provincial and vicarial chapters of the Order's jurisdictions will be celebrated every four years; consequently the terms of Priors/Vicars Provincial and all associated offices (priors, pastors, officials) will be prolonged.

The Prior/Vicar Provincial will be elected for a four-year term and can be re-elected for one consecutive four-year term. Postulation is excluded.

The General Chapter has decided that this derogation will enter into effect with the provincial/vicarial chapters of election to be celebrated in 2012.

GENERAL SECRETARIATS AND OFFICIALS

Declaration

74. Since the city of Rome is a singular point of convergence for friars and members of the Servite Family and consequently for the business of the General Secretariats, the General Chapter would like each General Councilor to take over the responsibilities of one or more of the General Secretariats. Those taking over the Secretariats should maintain relations with their predecessors.

2013 GENERAL CHAPTER OF ELECTIONS

Preparation for the 2013 General Chapter of Elections

Declaration

75. The General Chapter declares that preparation for the 2013 General Chapter of Elections should proceed as follows.

Two years before the elective General Chapter, the General Council or a commission appointed for this purpose should survey the whole Order. The results of this survey should be organized and distributed to all our communities. In conformity with article 256 of the *Constitutions* the General Council should send all the documentation along with the Chapter agenda to all those who will take part in the Chapter. To maximize the benefits of the Chapter, the Council should prepare – or have someone else prepare – position papers on the most important subjects to be included in the chapter documentation. In devising *Regulations for the General Chapter* the Council should study ways to conduct the Chapter which allow for more dynamic participation by the Chapter members.

Decree

76. The deadlines prescribed in articles 255 and 256 of the *Constitutions* are too tight to allow adequate preparation for the General Chapter.

Therefore the General Chapter, in derogation of the prescriptions of articles 255 and 256 about prescribed times, decrees:

- a) The General Council will establish a timetable for preparation with more generous deadlines than those prescribed in the articles cited above;
- b) In derogation of part of article 18 of the *Regulations* (“confirmation of *Rules of Procedure* approved in the previous General Chapter”) the General Chapter entrusts to the General Council the task of preparing new *Rules of Procedure* to be approved by the 2013 General Chapter.

Delegates to the General Chapter

Decree

77. In application of what is set forth in the *Constitutions*, article 257/b, the General Chapter decrees that Delegates to the next General Chapter will be elected according to the following proportional criteria:

- a) priories directly dependent on the Prior General will elect two delegates;
- b) each province will elect two delegates; those provinces with at least fifty solemn professed friars will elect a third delegate; provinces with at least one hundred solemn professed friars will elect a fourth delegate ...;
- c) each vicariate will elect one delegate; vicariates with at least thirty solemn professed friars will elect a second delegate;
- d) provincial delegations with at least ten solemn professed friars will elect one delegate.

VI. COMMUNION IN THE SERVITE FAMILY

THE SERVITE FAMILY

The Friar Servants of Mary, continuing an ancient and living tradition, constitute a single family with the women religious and with the members of secular institutes, the Secular Order and lay groups that share the same ideal, commitment to the evangelical apostolic life and devotion to the Mother of God (Const. 305).

A united family sows hope

Declaration

78. The General Chapter is convinced that the foundation of authentic communion in the Servite Family can only exist if there is a common acceptance of the values of collegiality, sharing and reciprocity. These values derive from our common vocation to follow Christ through witness to the Gospel and service to God and all people, drawing abiding inspiration from Mary (cf. *Const.* 1).

Evangelical poverty and service to the poor are the style and sign common to all branches of the Servite Family. Our common inspiration from Mary instills a special love in our service of the poor. From the Mother's participation in the redemptive mission of her Son, Servants of Mary are led to an understanding of human suffering (cf. *Const.* 6). With her, they stand at the foot of those countless crosses to bring comfort and redemptive cooperation (cf. *Const.* 319).

The General Chapter echoes the words of Fra Ángel M. Ruiz Garnica's Chapter Report: *The family dimension will surely grow in importance and strength in coming decades especially since the number of religious communities in the western world will decrease ... Undoubtedly the call to greater inter-relationships, reciprocity and complementarity will*

*increase - not just out of necessity but out of the growing awareness that working on our own will be ever less effective.*³⁶

The Servite Family is a part of contemporary society and is aware of "old" forms of poverty and injustice; it is equally aware of "new" forms of poverty: abuse of women and children, violence, drug trafficking, obstacles to justice and peace, disregard for the environment.

In this situation, the Servite Family is called to be a visible sign of healing, hope and mercy.

Fidelity and the witness of evangelical poverty facilitate our realization of common projects, the consolidation of similar initiatives and collaboration through personnel and finances.

"Sensus Familiae"

Working Principles

79. The *sensus familiae* [sense of family] in the last three General Chapters was noted as a precious and concrete expansion of the *sensus Ordinis*. The General Chapter is convinced that common projects can only arise from frequent and patient dialogue and shared prayer. For this reason, the Chapter strongly urges friars to be committed to a growth in communion and collaboration within the Servite Family.

Therefore the Chapter suggests the following:

- a) That communities and friars apply to the fullest extent all the suggestions in this area found in the *Constitutions* (cf. *Const.* 5, 101, 305, 306, 307, 308, 310, 319).
- b) Community priors in the same location should promote planning and review meetings with representatives of all branches of the Servite Family; they should address the following topics and areas of service:
 - missions and evangelization

³⁶ Cf. *Relazione del Priore generale* [Prior General's Report], no. 136, in *Acta OSM* n.s. VIII,11 (2007) pp. 125-126.

- Servite youth and vocation work
 - Marian devotion
 - Servite formation (charism, history, liturgy)
 - common prayer, celebrations and retreats
 - justice and peace
 - solidarity and the ministry of compassion.
- c) Promote the inclusion of members of the Servite Family in General Secretariats (cf. *Const.* 285) and, when appropriate, provincial and vicarial secretariats as well:
- Communications' Center: the *COSMO* newsletter and the Servite website (in addition to what is prescribed in nos. 81 and 82);
 - Servite International Liturgical Commission (CLIOS);
 - Historical Institute;
 - Secretariat for the Evangelization of People and Justice and Peace: missionary promotion, planning new foundations or communities, common campaigns of consciousness raising and forecasting, documentation and support for the mission periodicals;
 - Secretariat for Vocation Promotion, Formation and Studies: common meetings for men and women involved in formation as well as those going through formation;
 - Postulation: work with the Postulator in individual causes (beatification and canonization);
 - Secretariat for the Secular Order and Lay Groups: promotion, organizing meetings, preparing study aids and other materials.
- d) In the Servite spirit of collegiality collaboration between Servite men and women in education should be encouraged. In this way Servite spirituality will come to be known and shared: teachers, students and their family members can accomplish this through educational school programs.
- e) Bearing in mind what is already going on in many areas, priors and vicars provincial, in dialogue with those responsible for various branches of the Servite Family, should promote common projects in the area of human welfare, solidarity, and the ministry of mercy.

- f) If the UNIFAS³⁷ Assembly thinks it helpful, it should revise its bylaws to strengthen UNIFAS interaction on the local, area, regional and international levels within the Servite Family. It should establish – where necessary – permanent councils on various levels made up of members of the Servite Family.
- g) The next six years should be devoted to developing the Servite Family, especially on the local level.³⁸
- h) In dialogue with the priors/vicars provincial and the regional coordinators, the Prior General should promote the revitalization of the Servite Family's national and international organization. He should pay special attention to seeing that the prescriptions of paragraphs a) and b) above are carried out.³⁹

Collaboration

Declaration

80. The General Chapter recognizes that communion in the Servite Family, expressed in the various levels of UNIFAS, is not the property of the friars alone, even though the Prior General is recognized as president by common accord, insofar as he is the guide of the whole Order (cf. *Const.* 266). It is a communion in which various institutions of the Servite Family freely take part; a communion to which they all consent as they consent to its existing statutes; a communion whose existence is assured by their promise when joining. This sort of communion allows for the launching of common projects, the convergence of parallel efforts and collaboration in personnel and means.

³⁷ The International Union of the Servite Family foreseen by the 1983 General Chapter (cf. *Acta OSM* 47/189 (1983) pp. 322-3232) was established in the Santa Marinella Assembly on May 4, 1987. It is made up of the Prior General, the Prioresses General of the Servite Sisters and others in charge of various branches of the Servite Family.

³⁸ Cf. Preparatory Commission in *Acta OSM* n.s. VIII,11 (2007) p. 524, no. 8.

³⁹ Cf. *GC 2001*, no. 85.

Every part of the Servite Family finds its place in the life of the Church and society according to its own history and spirituality, with its own Constitutions and Chapter documents and its own personal witness of life and thought. Coming to know and make known our individual characters is an essential element in promoting communion.

We share a joyful and unequalled patrimony: we draw inspiration from Mary, give witness to the Gospel and serve others. This a patrimony to be preserved and shared in the communion of the Servite Family.

COMMUNICATIONS

Declaration

81. Communication involves careful listening and the mutual exchange of news, experiences and hope.

Communication achieves perfection in that love which makes us one heart and one soul in God. As Servants of Mary and disciples of Christ, we are called to live out this love with everyone in the joy of mutual giving and the celebration of liberating encounter.

Our community life, in all its forms, is the framework *par excellence* for communication. The ability to listen, exchange news, experiences and aspirations, silence and interiority, openness and hospitality – all these elements are necessary means for self-discovery, our own growth, and the growth of others. In all our encounters, we seek truth and mutual understanding; we strive through discussion to overcome all prejudice. We respect the nature of encounter and the technical rules that permit it to function.⁴⁰

- a) Faced with the danger of ideological pollution and the dissipation of exteriority (today's world is overwhelmed with images), the General Chapter asks every friar to exercise discipline and critical judgment in his access to the press, radio, television and the other means of communication. These things should be used

to arouse interest and understanding of the needs of mankind; they should make our prayer more lively and our commitment more active.

- b) The General Chapter urges us to cultivate rigorous self-discipline in the use of modern communications technology. These instruments should only be used to build up and promote fraternal life; technology should contribute to overcoming social and financial injustice; it should promote human, cultural and religious development.
- c) The General Chapter is aware of the need to help friars and communities use modern technology wisely and intelligently, avoiding dissipation, isolation, and the finding of refuge and alienation in virtual reality (communication that is not real). The Chapter moreover explicitly asks conventual and provincial priors at all levels to oversee carefully the correct application of article 60 of our *Constitutions*. This article assigns to communities, not individual friars, the task of providing *each friar – to the extent possible – the means necessary for his work*.

Working Principles

82. Communication is certainly one way of overcoming the limitations imposed by distance and cultural diversity. It can promote and reinforce the unity of the Order.

- a) The General Chapter asks the Center for Communications to become more energetic and to provide information about important events in the life of the Order and the Servite Family in a more timely fashion. We would ask every community to provide the Center with an e-mail address. With present day technology, it is possible to transmit information rapidly to all the provincial/vicarial offices and communities of the Order at little expense. This will contribute to a greater awareness and, consequently, greater communion among the various parts of the Order.

⁴⁰ Cf. *GC 2001*, no. 87.

- b) The COSMO bulletin provides precious information and documentation for our whole family. May it continue to exist and offer ever more information that is detailed and easily saved. In this way, the bulletin could appear at three or four month intervals.
- c) Among the tasks that fall to the Center for Communications, information on service in the various areas of poverty and the promotion of peace and justice is a priority. The Center could provide a further service by pointing out publications and other types of communication available.
This will guarantee effective exchange of information, lively interest, sharing at every level and growth in communion.

APPENDICES

FROM THE 2001 GENERAL CHAPTER

WITH MARY IN THE QUEST FOR AND EXPERIENCE OF GOD⁴¹*Decree*

83. The General Chapter invites every friar and every community to reach the perfect stature of Christ (cf. *Const.* 319) and to center his personal and community life on the primacy of God as part of His plan of salvation. The Servant of Mary, in imitation of Mary is called to become a man of listening and prayer, of fraternity and commitment.

To achieve this objective the General Chapter recommends certain concrete means.

Personal Plan

84. Each friar will draw up a personal program based on his own human and spiritual needs that favors certain elements from the Constitutions (three or four). He will commit himself to live this program in a creative way. Among the elements found in the Constitutions, we would mention:

- personal prayer (cf. *Const.* 31/a);
- meditation on the Word of God (cf. *Const.* 31/a);
- study and personal *aggiornamento* (cf. *Const.* 31/a);
- days of recollection (cf. *Const.* 31/b);
- the Sacrament of Reconciliation (cf. *Const.* 72);
- a modest life-style (cf. *Const.* 57/c);
- recovering the habit of silence (cf. *Const.* 72);
- moderation in the use of the media (cf. *Const.* 16/b);
- others.

⁴¹ *GC 2001*, nos. 17-20.

The General Chapter encourages every friar to renew this program every year, to share it in community, possibly to evaluate it during the canonical visitation, with the goal of deepening our experience of fraternity.

Community Plan

85. Likewise each community shall draw up an annual program of growth with clear objectives in dialogue with the actual situation of the Church and society in which it exists. The program should include the following elements from the Constitutions:

- community prayer and Eucharist (cf. *Const.* 24/a);
- the conventual chapter (cf. *Const.*, Chapter IV);
- some chapters during the year should be devoted to sharing the experience of our own spiritual journeys;
- *Lectio Divina* (cf. *Const.* 24/b);
- community retreats (cf. *Const.* 31/b);
- determining times and places that favor a climate of silence and prayer (cf. *Const.* 16).

Suggestions for permanent formation

86. In response to the demand for permanent formation coming from the whole Order, the General Chapter suggests a variety of initiatives on different levels:

- a) To make our experience of God a reality and a liberation, each community shall devote certain chapters during the year to analyzing the situation of the local church and society. We must reflect and attempt to respond to those challenges the world presents (cf. *Const.* 36). In the context of our search for God, these chapters will be an occasion to examine our commitment to evangelical poverty and our preferential option for the poor.
- b) The General Chapter is aware of the importance of the prior's role in promoting the renewal of spiritual life (cf. *Const.* 43) and asks provincial/vicarial councils to call regular meetings of priors in an

effort to extend collegiality and to engage in renewal/updating (*aggiornamento*) and permanent formation, with the possible goal of establishing a Council of Priors. Moreover it suggests that learning the art of community dialogue be included among the subjects discussed. Priors are free to seek the assistance of experts in this field.

- c) Collaborative permanent formation meetings involving provinces, vicariates and regions should be organized. They should make use of already existing occasions (annual meetings and chapters, courses and get-togethers of various types). These meetings can be aimed at specific apostolates (parish priests, sanctuary rectors, etc.) or age groups. Priors and Vicars Provincial are primarily responsible for friars taking part in these initiatives.

JUSTICE AND PEACE⁴²

Decree

87. The New Evangelization must acquire world dimensions and ecumenical relevance in our hearts and apostolic work. To achieve this we must – with all humility and realism – feel that we are part of the great movements that promote justice and peace and defend and liberate men and women wherever their rights are attacked.

- a) As detailed in the reports of the priors/vicars provincial and regional coordinators, there is no country in the world in which injustice and threats to peace cannot be found. Among these problems are:
 - the growing gap between rich and poor;
 - hunger;
 - ethnic/religious wars;
 - violence among fundamentalists of various sorts and the tragedy of international terrorism;
 - exploitation of women and children;

⁴² Cf. *GC 2001*, no. 58.

- problems of native populations;
 - the plight of immigrants and refugees;
 - old and new forms of poverty;
 - destruction of the environment, etc.
- b) The Chapter realizes that responsibility for building a peace based on justice (equitable distribution of natural, cultural and spiritual resources among all the countries of the world) and concern for old and new forms of poverty constitute the heart of the Gospel message and the charism of our Order. The Chapter calls on every community to take this responsibility to heart. It realizes that this principle is included in the guidelines for initial formation⁴³ and must be constantly felt and lived in Gospel fashion. It is an obligation for individual friars and communities. Specifically the Chapter emphasizes the importance of active engagement in apostolates based on the ministry of compassion.
- c) To keep the Order and Servite Family aware of and working against the injustices and wars that bathe the world in blood, the Chapter has decided the following:
1. The General Secretary for Justice and Peace should be included among the General Officials (cf. *Const.* 285/a-b) and the General Council should determine his responsibilities. The Secretary is not obliged to reside in Rome and need not be a General Councilor. He will do the following:
 - promote and coordinate the work of communities and friars involved in justice and peace work, defending human rights and the environment;
 - make the Servite Family aware of this activity through COSMO and other forms of communication;
 - launch projects whenever there are new crises of injustice in the world or threats to peace.
 2. The various jurisdictions of the Order:
 - should establish, where possible, Justice and Peace Commissions or appoint someone to be responsible for this;

⁴³ Cf. *RI*, nos. 32, 82-83, 108-109.

- maintain contact and collaborate with national and regional Justice and Peace Commissions; work with the local church and take positions on injustices, defense of individuals, the environment and institutions;
- transmit information, documentation and requests for solidarity to the General Secretary for Justice and Peace.

COMMUNION AND SOLIDARITY⁴⁴

Declaration

88. Our Constitutions remind us that the goods we possess are to be administered with a view to bringing about an *authentic spirit of poverty and sharing* (*Const.* 288). In line with previous General Chapters, this General Chapter wants to re-emphasize this commitment to solidarity which binds the Order and each of its friars to all forms of poverty and suffering in the world – especially among those people with whom we minister. We are committed to standing with Mary *at the foot of those countless crosses on which the Son of Man is still being crucified in his brothers and sisters* (*Const.* 319).

While recognizing the commitment of friars and communities to various kinds of sharing and service to the poor, the suffering and victims of modern society, the Chapter notes that in a world divided by material and cultural riches (cf. *Const.* 74), we often find ourselves on the side of the rich and powerful of this world.

The Chapter asks both friars and communities to examine themselves and reflect on the meaning of the vow of poverty today (in a society where the few are rich but the majority are destitute). The Chapter asks friars and communities to seek appropriate ways of becoming one with Christ the Poor Man, who can be found among the great company of crucified people on this planet.

⁴⁴ *GC 2001*, no. 78.

II

WITNESS OF EVANGELICAL POVERTY⁴⁵

Preparatory Commission For the CCXII General Chapter O.S.M.
(Rome, October 27, 2006)

89. The reflection of recent years has led the Order to perceive that it is important to go back to the central theme of every religious vocation: the search for and experience of God.⁴⁶ In order to give concrete shape to this inspiration, the question now turns to evangelical poverty⁴⁷: indeed, the following of Christ starts with the charism of abandonment: “... and, leaving everything, they followed him” (cf. *Luke* 5, 11). Our first fathers did the same (cf. *LO* 17), and so too every religious person who takes up the path of conversion and a radical way of life has always got rid of all his possessions.

To live poverty is to follow Christ, to be conformed to him (cf. *Matthew* 7, 5), accepting the challenge of the Beatitudes, living among those on whom the gaze of God dwells with love as on the lowliness of Mary (cf. *Luke* 1, 48) and entering into communion with our brothers, to share everything with others (cf. *Const.* 147).

POVERTY AS FREEDOM TO FOLLOW CHRIST

90. Poverty is, above all, an offer of freedom:

- It frees us from the idols of today, of the temptation to place our security and our happiness in things and goods, in the values and the mentality of this world.

⁴⁵ *Arch Gen. OSM*, Prot. 504/2006 (27.10.2006). Cf. Commissione preparatoria, in *Acta OSM* n.s. VIII, 11 (2007) pp. 514-520.

⁴⁶ Cf. *GC 2001*, nos. 9-20 [With Mary in the Search for and Experience of God].

⁴⁷ Cf. *GC 2001*, nos. 78 [Communion and Solidarity], 81 [Poverty and Sharing Possessions].

- It frees us for contemplation, teaching us to limit our requirements, convinced that it is better to have fewer needs than to possess more things (cf. *Regula* 18), in order to seek first the Kingdom and its righteousness (cf. *Matthew* 6, 33).
- It frees us from the need to possess in our relationship with things, so that we discover that we can love and use them without needing to own them.
- It frees us for service to God and mankind, which is the real aim of the one who is poor and who belongs not to himself but to a project that is larger than he is, thereby inviting us to travel lightly, in accordance with evangelical itinerancy and without superfluous baggage, ready to go where our service impels us (cf. *Const.* 3), belonging to the Kingdom and not to our own plans.
- It frees us from worry about the top places, and invites us to value the evangelical dimension of lowliness, humility, weakness, to become like little children, the least and the servants of all.
- It frees us from transient attractions, calling us to a sober, essential lifestyle of radical simplicity.
- It frees us from the risk of compensating unhappiness with the illusion of possessions and the accumulation of material goods.
- It frees us from cares, reminding us that God provides for all our needs, that our task is to seek his face. Thus it recalls us to faithfulness to our origins, to our founding mendicant and contemplative inspiration.

POVERTY AS FREEDOM FOR FRATERNITY

91. Poverty means having something and offering it as a gift, making all that we are and all that we possess an instrument of communion. So it frees us from the logic of competition and allows us to enter into that of relationship and free gift.

- It frees us, reminding us that goods are gifts received. Things do not belong to us, but to God and others. As we have received them, so others should receive them from us. It reminds us that

that the community grows and develops through the sharing of charisms, the exchange of material and spiritual gifts, the communion of goods, putting everything at the service of our vocation to love, not thinking of ourselves but rather of our brothers.⁴⁸

- It frees us from attitudes of autonomy and self-sufficiency so that we discover that the strength of fraternity lies in reciprocal dependence.
- It frees us by calling us to account for everything in community, with open transparency and responsibility.
- It frees us from empty theories, calling upon us to fulfil the Constitutions in the concrete practicalities of everyday life.
- The choice of poverty allows us, by living by the fruits of our work (*Const.* 59) to share the lot of the men and women of our day, their experience of precariousness and hard work.
- It reminds us to see ourselves as part of a wider fraternity, the human family, requiring of us a moderate style in all aspects of our life (cf. *Const.* 57).

POVERTY AS FREEDOM FOR SOLIDARITY

92. Many friars consider that the new name for poverty is solidarity. Poverty calls on us to identify with the poor and be spokespersons for them in society.

- It frees us from the false values suggested by the general mentality, making us a prophetic voice about many modern economic realities: consumerism, neo-liberalism, exploitation, globalization, impoverishment of the planet, consumption of the sources of energy, etc.
- It frees us from the illusion that we can live on our own, developing a social conscience and sensitivity towards justice and peace problems in the world.

⁴⁸ Cf. *GC 2001*, no. 81.2.

- It calls us to insist on an analysis of the real situation in order guide and direct our responses to people's needs (cf. *Const.* 76c).
- The choice of poverty makes us free to take up new forms of service to the most needy people in the contemporary world.

93. While recognising that our friars are already living many of these things, the Order sets itself the aim for the next six years of taking further concrete steps along the path of poverty, in communion and solidarity with the many victims of contemporary society (cf. *Const.* 319).

We here present some proposals for further study of the evangelical value of poverty and personal growth in understanding. These come from listening to the Order and our reflection.

Important Questions

94. In order to study the theme in more depth, and for personal and community study, it might be useful not to forget some important questions. For example:

- Am I poor?
- Is my witness to following the poor Christ evident to those around me?
- Does my attachment (which is against poverty) to friends, the place where I live, the role and work I have, leave me interiorly free and willing towards obedience?
- Is it possible to live in economic insecurity and be happy?
- Am I afraid of poverty? Am I defensive about its demands?
- Why is a personal and community verification of poverty difficult?
- In which social class would I place my community: poor, middle-class, comfortably off, higher middle class? Is this the right evangelical place? The 2001 General Chapter reminded us that generally we find ourselves in institutions that are on the side of rich and powerful of this world (no. 78).⁴⁹

⁴⁹ The text can be found in the Appendices at paragraph 88.

- Does my community live in a total and loyal communion of goods among its members?
- How much of its resources does it devolve to the poor (*Const.* 62)? Is that enough?

Practical Decisions

95. So that reflection and understanding can lead to concrete steps and more coherent choices, it may be of use to take some practical decisions, such as to:

At the personal and community level

1. Adopt a more sober, essential and simple style of living
2. Adopt a modest style of life that is evidenced by the house, diet, means of transport and communication. Cut down on demands and do not seek out the latest technological innovations.
3. Live in a joyful and complete communion of goods among the members of the community, with full confidence in the community itself.
4. Do not keep any kind of personal accumulation or bank account that is not shared in the community.
5. Carry out a periodic revision in chapter concerning fidelity to the commitment of personal and community poverty.
6. Earn one's keep by remunerated employment, according to each friar's ability and education, so that apostolic service is as far as possible free.
7. Do the manual work of the house, avoiding or reducing paid staff.
8. Take care of the maintenance and beauty of the houses where we live.
9. Learn how to make a periodic analysis of the social, economic, cultural and ecclesial situation, so that our responses are modern and pertinent. Ask the aid of experts in this.

10. Live the ministry of reconciliation and of compassion for the sick as forms of solidarity with people suffering in body and spirit.
11. Courageously support, with the community's resources, the projects for the promotion of social groups that are at greater risk promoted by the Order or other ecclesial or civil organizations.
12. Encourage the acquisition of educational books and magazines for community rather than individual use.
13. Make a commitment to reduce expenditure and consumption by the community by a percentage agreed on in chapter (e.g., 10%).
14. Devolve a percentage (e.g. 50%) of the annual surplus of each community and jurisdiction to solidarity projects.
15. *In formation:* prepare candidates for manual work.
16. Educate them in an awareness of the cost of living.
17. Value and transmit the mendicant tradition.
18. Teach them the financial administration of a community.
19. Teach them a sober lifestyle rather than the automatic satisfaction of all needs.
20. Educate them to use the means at their disposal for the edification of the community. Goods are not for ourselves alone; they are instruments whereby to do something for others.
21. *For apostolic service:* be near to people through openness, listening, sharing their conditions of living, with an attitude of thankfulness and service.
22. Be a neighbour to all, accepting them for who they are and not for what they possess, excluding no one and working particularly in the inter-faith and multicultural spheres.
23. Abandon roles of power and self-affirmation, giving preference to collaboration, especially with laypeople.
24. Adopt collegiality at all levels as our specific form of service.
25. Use poor means, evangelising by means of this method of apostolate.
26. Exercise poverty through apostolic service carried out as a community, sharing weaknesses and gifts.
27. Adopt a project of radical poverty as a form of closeness and solidarity with the poorest realities.

At the Provincial Level

28. Put in common not only the resources but also the necessities and needs of the communities, so as to tackle them together.
29. Some social projects of the communities can be shared and supported at provincial level.
30. Put in common the surplus of every community for the support of the poorer fraternities, formation and projects of solidarity.
31. Every jurisdiction should analyse its economic situation, with projections of possible future scenarios, with attention to the social reality where it is living and in consideration of the decrease, dramatic in some places, in Mass offerings and stole fees.
32. The young jurisdictions should make a greater effort to achieve economic self-sufficiency, in the awareness that the flow of assistance will lessen as the resources of the 'old' jurisdictions diminish.
33. Encourage and accompany communities making a radical choice of poverty.
34. Every jurisdiction should make an effort to have at least one community in an area of poverty.
35. Every Province, or all the Order, should promote a large-scale common social project, such as, for example, in defence of the Amazon forest in Bolivia, Brazil and Peru, or in defence of the resources of water in Aysén, Chile.
36. The provinces with more resources can offer scholarships for study to friars from the poorer jurisdictions by guaranteeing them hospitality in a community or granting financial support towards their academic fees.

At the level of the Order

37. The Provinces must consider themselves committed to supporting generously the communities at the service of the Order.
38. Create a fund of solidarity through the participation, in different degrees, of all jurisdictions.

39. Define the forms for developing sharing between the jurisdictions having greater resources and those who are poorer.
40. Establish a Solidarity Day at Order level (e.g., the Commemoration of All Saints of the Order).
41. Increase taxation on the sale of goods to benefit the Order.
42. Use empty premises for the needs of immigrants.
43. Promote, co-ordinate, integrate more into the life of the Order the work for "Justice and Peace" and the defence of human rights, arriving at the creation of a General Secretariat.
44. Become committed to the weaker groups in society, the rights of women, the Aids drama in Africa, the situation in Sudan, etc.
45. Be vigilant that investments and the management of our resources are carried out in an ethical and responsible way.
46. Support fair trade schemes and ethical banks where they exist.
47. Wars create conditions of huge suffering and poverty. The Order must commit itself strongly to the theme of peace.
48. Nourish in the Order awareness and commitment in the sphere of ecology and the defence of natural resources.
49. Consider a document from the Order on Marian spirituality and social engagement.

III

ALLOCUTIONS OF THE PRIOR GENERAL

PRIOR GENERAL'S HOMILY AT THE MASS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT
WHICH OPENED THE CHAPTER
(October 9, 2007)

96. "You are worried and distracted by many things ..."
(*Jonah* 3, 1-10; *Luke* 10, 38-42)

1. We have much to learn at the school of God. God has His own ways of teaching.

2. *This word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time* (*Jonah* 3, 1). For the second time the Lord asked Jonah to perform a service: to call the inhabitants of Nineveh, a pagan city, to conversion. The first time the Lord said to him: *Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before me* (*Jonah* 1, 2) but Jonah refused to follow the Lord's command. He did not agree with the Lord: why should I care about pagans? Why waste my energy trying to convert uncircumcised people? Jonah did not do what the Lord asked and went in the opposite direction; he tried to flee by sea to Tarsus – away from the presence of the Lord (*Jonah* 1, 3), but the Lord – and we all know the story – unleashed a storm on the sea and Jonah was forced to return to where he had started.

Then *the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, 'Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you'* (*Jonah* 3, 1-2). This time Jonah obeyed: *Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord and cried out, 'Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown'* (*Jonah* 3, 4). The people of Nineveh reacted with surprising speed: they believed God and started a fast, they put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least (cf. *Jonah* 3, 5-6). All of Nineveh converted. Who could have imagined it? The Lord's vision outreaches our own.

We are beginning the General Chapter. The Lord has so much to say to us – we may be surprised. Are we ready to listen, to discover His will, His thought? Are we ready – like Jonah when the Lord called him a second time – to put aside our own way of thinking, to look at the world, the Church and the Order with God's eyes?

3. We are all familiar with the Gospel account of Martha and Mary (cf. *Luke* 10, 38-42) and its trope on the active and contemplative life. *The primacy of contemplation must never be lost sight of – its opposite is not action but distraction* (RI 15d). Jesus' reproof *Martha, Martha you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing* (*Luke* 10, 41-42) is telling us to avoid distraction and to make listening to Jesus' Word a priority: *Mary sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying* (*Luke* 10, 39) while *Martha was distracted by her many tasks* (*Luke* 10, 40). In the early Church the twelve apostles established "deacons" precisely to emphasize the importance of the Word of God: *It is not right that we neglect the Word of God in order to wait at tables* (*Acts* 6, 2).

Here at the General Chapter we sit together at Jesus' feet and listen to Him in moments of prayer, reflection and sharing; we must let ourselves be taught by Him and discover what He would do if He were alive today in our midst.

4. *There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her* (*Luke* 10, 42). Jesus asks us to focus on what is essential and as He says elsewhere: *And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and to drink, and do not keep worrying. For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.* (*Luke* 12, 29-31). Perhaps Martha wanted to do more than was necessary, preparing an elaborate meal for the Lord while only one thing was really necessary: welcoming Jesus and listening to Him. In this General Chapter we must think about what is essential and remember the attitude of Jesus' first disciples: *Leaving everything, they followed Him* (*Luke* 5, 11). We must remember the example of our Seven first Fathers: to possess the *pearl of great price* – the Order foreseen

by God – they gave up their business as merchants and their concern for things that pass away. In joy and freedom they followed Jesus.

5. In this Eucharist we give thanks to God for whose service we live and to whose Kingdom we devote our lives, always drawing inspiration from Mary, Our Lady. Let us pray that during these days we will live in careful attention to His Word and that we will make His thoughts our own. Let us ask for the light and gifts of the Holy Spirit so that we can more closely follow our Master, Jesus, and give witness to His Gospel. Amen.

PRIOR GENERAL'S HOMILY AT MASS
CLOSING DAY OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER
(October 30, 2007)

97. The mustard seed
(*Romans* 8, 18-25, *Luke* 13, 18-21)

1. Brothers, the Apostle Paul tells us that *the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God*; it nourishes the hope of being *set free from its bondage to decay. The whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now* (*Romans* 8, 19. 21. 22).

Pollution and disrespect for the environment makes creation groan; its suffering and irritation find expression in climate change.

Our globalized world attempts to flee from the hands of its Creator; our economy becomes ever stronger and the gap between the rich and poor grows; there is an unbridled recourse to violence in the search for justice and mankind sighs and suffers: the wealthy because they have preferred riches over life's true values and the poor because they lack life's necessities.

2. During this General Chapter we have listened to the voice of creation, the voice of the world in communion with the whole Church, Christ's Body. We have heard an echo of Christ Crucified in the voice of creation, the world. Christ is crying out to His Father: *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* (*Matthew* 27, 46; cf. *Psalm* 22 [21], 2). Christ who was rich made himself poor (cf. *II Corinthians* 8, 9) he came amongst us and became the least of all. We have experienced and continue to experience the feeling that we stand with the Mother next to her son Jesus who is crucified again in his brothers and sisters; we, the servants of the Mother of Jesus are with her at the foot of the Cross *to bring comfort and redemptive cooperation* (*Const.* 319). We are mindful of the Son of Man's words: *I was hungry and you gave me food me ... I was naked and you gave me clothing* (*Matthew* 25, 35. 36).

3. But how can we *bring comfort and redemptive cooperation* (*Const.* 319) to Christ who is being crucified again in those who suffer today? We know our own poverty; we know our own limitations. Dreaming of the future, moved by the Holy Spirit and nourished by hope for a new world we have decided upon certain guidelines together. They will free us from what binds us and slows down our journey towards the Kingdom; they will speed us along the narrow path of the Gospel.

4. Certainly even if our plans work they will seem trivial in the context of creation and the world; they will seem almost nothing – a drop in the ocean. But Jesus assures us that the Kingdom of God is like *a mustard seed* that is sown in the earth and becomes a great and leafy tree; it is like *yeast* that mixed with dough will transform the whole loaf of bread.

Let us trust in Jesus. Let us have faith in Him. Let us take to heart the decisions of this Chapter for the sake of the Kingdom of God, the dream of God, ourselves and the whole world. Amen.

IV

MESSAGES

TELEGRAM FROM TARCISIO CARDINAL BERTONE,
SECRETARY OF STATE OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

98. Most Reverend Father Ángel M. Ruiz Garnica
Prior General of the Order of Servants of Mary
Piazza San Marcello 5
00187 Rome

On the occasion of the General Chapter of the Order of Servants of Mary the Supreme Pontiff sends his cordial greetings and expresses his hope that this important assembly will bring about renewed adhesion to the poor, chaste and obedient Christ, ever more generous plans for the future and fidelity to the charism of your holy Founders. Through the intercession of the Mother of the Redeemer he invokes from the Lord an outpouring of heavenly light and sends to the members of the Chapter and to the whole religious family the Apostolic Blessing you asked for.

Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone Secretary of State for His Holiness

MESSAGE TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE FEDERATED REPUBLIC OF BRAZIL

99. To His Excellency, Mr. Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva
President of the Federated Republic of Brazil
Brasília DF, Brazil

The General Chapter of the Servants of Mary gathered here in Ariccia (Rome) greets you and thanks you for all the Brazilian Government has done for your vast country, Brazil, and the whole planet.

Defense of the Amazon Rainforest and its inhabitants has always been part of the work of the Friar Servants of Mary in Acre since 1920,

when they were sent by Pope Benedict XV. Overcoming all opposition and resistance and ignoring all threats, the Servants of Mary have gone forward with the work as prophets for our times, crying, preaching, proclaiming and denouncing.

This year the Church in Brazil has highlighted the problem of the Amazon and has launched a Campaign of Brotherhood. On May 10, 2007 in the stadium of Pacaembù (São Paulo) before 20,000 young people the Pope himself, Benedict XVI, called attention to the destruction of the rainforest and the threat to the dignity of its inhabitants.

Pope John Paul II also referred to "... the threat to the flora and fauna of our continent by the world's melting glaciers: global warming is causing great Arctic glaciers to break away and this ice covering of the Arctic continent regulates the world's climate."

On April 4, 1987 at Punta Arenas (southernmost part of the American continent) the same Pope John Paul II said prophetically: "I appeal to all those with responsibility for our planet to protect and preserve the nature God has created: not to allow our world to be continually degraded."

Yes, Mr. President, let us not allow the Amazon Rainforest to die. Let the blood of Chico Mendes and so many other martyrs in Amazonia not have been shed in vain. This is a worldwide cry that rises up from our planet: "Let us save our home," the home of our children.

We ask God, Our Father, to bestow peace and health on you and all persons of good will, in the name of our 212th General Chapter and on behalf of all Servants of Mary in Brazil and in thirty-four other countries in the world.

Fra Ángel M. Ruiz Garnica O.S.M.
Prior General of the Order of Servants of Mary

Rome, October 30, 2007

This document was signed by all members of the Chapter.

MESSAGE TO MSGR. CHARLES BO, ARCHBISHOP OF YANGON, MYANMAR

100. To Msgr. Charles Bo, Archbishop of Yangon, Myanmar

Dear Archbishop Bo,

We the Friar Servants of Mary gathered here in Ariccia (Rome) to celebrate our General Chapter would like to express to you fraternal greetings. We have prayed for you and for your country asking the Holy Spirit to touch the hearts of all so that peace may reign in your land.

Our newspapers carry many reports about the recent economic and political difficulties millions of your citizens are facing. We are praying for your tranquility: may the Lord bless you and all the people you care for and serve as a bishop.

We recognize the friendship and care you have shown to the friars of our Order and we are very grateful.

Fraternally,

Fra Ángel M. Ruiz Garnica, O.S.M.
Prior General

Rome, October 30, 2007

This document was signed by all members of the Chapter.

MESSAGE TO FRA MARIA SOOSAI, MYANMAR

101. To Fra Maria Soosai, OSM, Myanmar

Dear Fra Maria Soosai,

We your brothers in the Order gathered here at Ariccia, Italy to celebrate our General Chapter would like to send you our fraternal greetings. We have been thinking about you and your country in these days. Our newspapers carry many reports on the economic and political difficulties occurring in your land.

We are praying for you and for a peaceful solution to the present crisis. Know that your brothers in the Order remember you and ask the Lord, through the intercession of Our Lady, to send the spirit of peace to all.

Fraternally,

Fra Ángel M. Ruiz Garnica, O.S.M.
Prior General

Rome, October 30, 2007

This document was signed by all members of the Chapter.

MESSAGE TO THE SISTER SERVANTS OF THE MOTHER OF SORROWS OF
INDIA, MYANMAR

102. To the Sister Servants of the Sorrowful Mother, Yangon, Myanmar

Dear Servite Sisters,

The Friar Servants of Mary gathered here in Ariccia, Italy to celebrate the General Chapter greet you with their whole heart and thank God for the gift of the Servite Family of which Sister Servants of Mary are a part. The Chapter has remembered you in its prayers and is well aware of what is going on in your country. We pray for your well-being and for a peaceful and just solution to the present difficult situation.

Our Chapter has had as its theme “Evangelical Poverty”, as described in the Gospel “*Leaving everything, they followed Him*” (Luke 5, 11). We realize how economic and political reality can impose enormous burdens on the millions of hungry people in this world. We salute you who work to serve the poor people of your country. May the Lord bless you and all you do.

May Mary, Our Lady, protect you under her mantle. May our prayers and fraternal communion encourage and support you.

Fraternally,

Fra Ángel M. Ruiz Garnica, O.S.M.
Prior General

Rome, October 30, 2007

This document was signed by all members of the Chapter.

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