**IN A TIME OF CHANGE**

*Excerpts from a statement at the OFM General Chapter of 2021,*

*adapted to the entire Franciscan Family.*

We are in a time of change that affects everyone, and we believe that we too must be part of this climate of profound transforma­tion, finding new and positive paths. This is not only a challenge but also a gift of the times in which we live. The present challenges us, placing us in situations of survival and vulner­ability. It is a profound experience that calls us to walk in a better way and deep­en the lifestyle we have professed. We recog­nise that sometimes we forget and do not live according to the charismatic inspiration that calls us to be brothers and sisters. Experienc­ing ourselves as vulnerable, helps us recognise our personal and fraternal frailties and live among people with humility, simplicity, and joy.

To encourage and support us in hope in these times of change, fragility and vulnerabil­ity, a number of attitudes can help us:

1. Recognising and accepting our human fragility in our fraternity and the world around us.
2. Recognising the goodness, beauty, and jus­tice - values embedded in the hearts of the men and women of our time - to grow and rejoice as we accompany others to rejoice in what the Most High is doing in their lives, families, and communities, where they are living and work­ing.
3. Listening to the invitation to change to loving without fear, making paths of liberation, and going to the places of brokenness, where life suffers and cries out with all its strength. Those cries rise to heaven, and God hears them.

\* \* \*

In the context of the pandemic that we are facing as humanity, we are invited to try to read reality, history, culture, economy, and the Church, from where the poor, the defeated, and the marginalised live. In this way, with a new, deep, believing gaze, we can embrace and allow ourselves to be embraced by the poor and the defeated. Therefore, we need to purify and transform our vision in the manner of Jesus, and of the Poverel­lo of Assisi, and the thousands of brothers and sisters who stood on the other side of history with a genuinely Franciscan attitude during these eight hundred years.

As for St Francis, this opens the way to living as “pilgrims and strangers in this world” (Rb 6:2), free for mission and evangelisation, as contemplative fraternities in mission, with our eyes turned towards the future, directing our steps to the other shore, following the invitation of Jesus to his disci­ples. We must not be afraid to take new paths, responding to the needs of a rapidly changing world. We cannot be content to repeat what has always been done, with all respect for a history that has been great precisely because it has been able to renew itself constantly over eight centuries Letter from the Minister General and the Definitory for the feast of Saint Francis

Our times ask us in particular for specif­ic attention to our common home, in a vision of integral ecology, as Pope Francis teaches us. The newness of this outlook lies in the fact that it reads the whole of reality in an intercon­nected way, from the relationship with God to care for the environment to the commitment to justice and peace. We believe that it is a challenge of great urgency for all of us. If our lifestyle, in which there is also a certain desire for comfort, is not always consistent with this vision, we must recognise that we need pen­ance and conversion here, too. We must bear in mind the papal encyclicals *Fratelli tutti* and *Laudato Si’,* which inspire in us a willing­ness to set out on the journey, to study and to commit ourselves to the goodness of life. They are also a prophetic sign that shows that it is really possible to live and interact in the light of the Gospel and the practice of St Francis and St Clare, with the spirit that leads us to be good stewards and not owners, to share and not ac­cumulate.

Hope is reborn when we learn not to be afraid to start again as often as possible.

Let us all go forward together: behind us, there is a rich history, which in the coming years we will be celebrating through Francis­can centenaries, and ahead of us, there is a fu­ture that we are eager to welcome with hope. We want to offer a message of confidence and hope to our world, which needs it.

We invite all those inspired by St Francis to choose to be ever grateful to the One who shapes the life of each one of us and to all the people we meet in one way or another on the path of life and history. We are invited to participate responsibly in a culture of caring, ensuring that our fraternities are healthy and meaningful, where no one feels threatened in their life, in­tegrity and dignity.

We are invited to be builders of bridg­es, and of communication and dialogue. We want to take the side of those who feel abandoned by society, culture, and the Church, as well as those who are forced by economic and polit­ical realities to become migrants. We want to work together with so many men and women of goodwill, as well as with lay organisations that are dedicated to this end. Thus, our Fran­ciscan life will always be a life of incarnation and fraternal and political commitment with the blessed of the kingdom of God (Matthew 5,1-12: 25,31-46).