**COMMUNICATION**

*Br. Francis Bongajum Dor, OFMCap*

**Introduction:** The Church is the mystical body of Christ of which Jesus is the head; “*We were all baptized in one Spirit to form one body.*” (1Cor 12:13). The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council clarify this when they write that: “*participating really in the body of the Lord in the breaking of Eucharistic bread, we are raised in communion with him and between us*.”[[1]](#footnote-1) For us to grow in communion between us, we have to keep in touch. This is communication.

1. **Historical Developments**
* **Communication as a priority for the OFS**: At the last General Elective Chapter of the OFS, held in Assisi in November 2014, improvement of communication was one of the priorities set for the Order for the next six years. We can read the following in the Chapter Conclusions:

Work groups concurred on the importance of having good communication at all levels. This demands an effort, not only in the publication of formation material, documents and Circulars on the part of the CIOFS Presidency, but also in creating a well-structured communication network reaching out to brothers and sisters at local Fraternities. Translating documents has always been a very important challenge for the CIOFS Presidency. Strong communication efforts will also reinforce vocation outreach.

The Chapter recommends that:

1. The CIOFS Presidency establish a team to work on getting brothers and sisters with translation skills to help with this important task.

2. The CIOFS Presidency develop an official form, which would serve as a template for the annual report National Councils have to present. This will make it much easier for the National Councils and improve the likelihood of the completion of the report.

3. The CIOFS Presidency assess the possibility of producing an international magazine.

4. The CIOFS website be dynamic. This would be accomplished by:

**●** establishing parameters to manage the web page and social media

**●** updating the webpage more frequently

**●** including prayer intentions on the website

5. Secular Franciscans use social media to improve communication at all levels: Internet, Skype, Facebook, etc., mindful of their high responsibility, as members of the OFS, to be watchful for the content that they publicize on behalf of the Order, (cf. *Can*. 823.1)

6. Communication among National Fraternities be strengthened by:

● Better communication among International Councillors

● Promoting activities among National Fraternities from the same geographic area to build stronger relationships among them

* Producing a Directory of National Ministers and Formators, and International Councillors
* Twinning: Sharing the diverse gifts and talents of our fraternities

The above conclusions and recommendations of the general chapter are a clear expression of the universal feeling that there is need to promote and improve communication within the OFS.

* **Nature of OFS** : Up until 1978, the different branches of the OFS were directly dependent on the respective General Curia of the Friars, under the guidance of the Director for the Tertiaries. With the present Rule and the establishment of a united OFS with an international Council and a General Minister to guide and animate the Order, OFS has to manage its own affairs at all levels. OFS “*is divided into fraternities at various levels – local, regional, national and international*”, (Rule 20). OFS “*is formed by the organic union of all Catholic fraternities*” (GGCC art 1,3). These fraternities are supposed to be linked together by a good communication network if they will function as one body, so as to promote, in an orderly way, “*the union and mutual collaboration among the brothers and sisters and their active and communal presence in both the local and the universal Church*” (GGCC 28,2).
1. **Practical Applications**

The chapter demanded that:

* *The CIOFS Presidency establish a team to work on getting brothers and sisters with translation skills to help with this important task*. To accomplish this, the CIOFS Presidency needs the assistance of each linguistic group. A person or group of persons who can translate official documents well from one of the four official languages (English, Italian, Spanish, French) to another language will facilitate communication between the Presidency and the fraternities belonging to that language group.
* *The CIOFS Presidency develop an official form, which would serve as a template for the annual report National Councils have to present*. This will soon be provided in a reviewed format. But the National Fraternities need to fill them in and to send the information to the CIOFS Presidency.
* The CIOFS website be dynamic. The present CIOFS website is [www.ciofs.org](http://www.ciofs.org). For a website to be dynamic, material must be provided and uploaded regularly. For example: monthly prayer intentions have been included as requested by the Chapter. From the part of the Presidency, something is being done.
* *Secular Franciscans use social media to improve communication at all levels: Internet, Skype, Facebook, etc., mindful of their high responsibility, as members of the OFS, to be watchful for the content that they publicize on behalf of the Order*, (cf. *Can*. 823.1). Communication is a matter of keeping in touch. Social media provides a fast way of keeping in touch with brothers and sisters the world over almost in a permanent way, though these cannot totally replace fraternal moments of visits, meetings, chapters, prayer etc where there is physical contact.
* Communication among national fraternities be strengthened by:

● Better communication among International Councillors

● Promoting activities among National Fraternities from the same geographic area to build stronger relationships among them

* Producing a Directory of National Ministers and Formators, and International Councillors

● Twinning: Sharing the diverse gifts and talents of our fraternities

What the General Chapter recommended of the CIOFS Presidency shall also apply, with the necessary and practical adaptations, to Councils at all levels. For this to serve the OFS, Councils at all levels are to put in place the necessary platforms and watch over their use. As far as possible, members in the same Fraternity should be in contact with one another also on social media. Regional Ministers could be in touch with Ministers of all local Fraternities in their regions, and National Ministers could be in touch with Ministers of all local and/or Regional Fraternities in the nation.

1. **Theological Aspects**

Good communication is a matter of love, communion, service and evangelization. It is a matter of love, “*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life*” (Jn **3:16).** Jesus came into this world not to condemn it but that all may have life through him. He reveals the greatness of the love of God, again, as Pope Francis says: “*Jesus is the face of the mercy of God*”.[[2]](#footnote-2) The Church and every Christian remains in the world as a sacrament – sign and instrument – of this love of God that shines through the face of Christ Jesus. Secular Franciscans “*have been made living members of the Church by being buried and raised with Christ in Baptism; they have been united more intimately with the Church by profession. Therefore, they should go forth as witnesses and instruments of her mission among all people, proclaiming Christ by their life and words*” (OFS Rule 6).“*A sign of love will be the concern to give the truth and to bring people into unity. Another sign of love will be a devotion to the proclamation of Jesus Christ, without reservation or turning back.*”[[3]](#footnote-3)

It is a matter of communion because communication builds communion such that, in the words of the Apostle, “*If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honoured, all the members share its joy*” (1 Cor 12:26).

It is a matter of service and evangelization: “*As you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world*” (Jn 17:18). It is with good communication that those in authority can guide and animate the fraternities. But for communication to be complete, even those who are guided must also give their feedback. Furthermore, communication will not be limited to the Order alone, but will aim at rebuilding the Church of Christ in conformity with the Franciscan charism and evangelization that is the mission of the whole Church. Pope Paul VI taught that “*There is … a profound link between Christ, the Church and evangelization. During the period of the Church that we are living in, it is she who has the task of evangelizing.”[[4]](#footnote-4)* Furthermore, "*The conditions of the society in which we live oblige all of us therefore to revise methods, to seek by every means to study how we can bring the Christian message to modern man*."[[5]](#footnote-5) These methods include the use of social communication; “*the Church judges that it is part of her duty to proclaim the message of salvation with the help of the means of social communication, and to teach people the good use of these means*.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

We read in the OFS General Constitutions that “*The preparation of the brothers and sisters for spreading the Gospel message ‘in the ordinary circumstances of the world’ and for collaboration in the catechesis within the ecclesial communities should be promoted in the fraternities*.” (OFS GGCC art. 17:2).

1. **Some best practices around the world**

St. Francis of Assisi was a man of communication. He wrote a lot in his days (about thirty writings are attributed to him) and he recommended that some of these be copied and sent out to others: “*And all those who will receive this and understand it with a good heart, and will send copies to others, if they persevere in them to the end, they are blessed by the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit*” (Second Letter to all the Faithful, 88).

The Vatican Radio exists since 1931 and it reaches out to the world.

The CIOFS Presidency and some National Councils now operate websites and other forms of social media.

The CIOFS Presidency, in addition, has also created a Whatsapp group that keeps the members in an almost constant state of communication for brief notices.

The National Fraternity of the USA has a website with a lot of details on the present state of their National Fraternity and all levels.

The Minister of a local Fraternity gives a ring to all those who are absent for an event.

Some fraternities in Asia have established Intranet.

**Conclusion**

Let us note strongly that good communication is a matter of love, communion, of service and of evangelization. As such, technology cannot totally replace physical contact which is indispensable for the life and mission of OFS in particular and of the universal Church. Nevertheless, good and regular communication will promote charity and strengthen communion within the Order. It is necessary for guidance and animation of the Order at all levels. Modern means of social communication offer new opportunities of meeting, collaboration and evangelization even with people whom we might otherwise never come in touch with. In our use of these tools, just as for any other tool that God has given us either naturally or by means of technology, we will be guided by the Gospel principle of Love in Truth.

1. Vatican II, Lumen Gentium 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Pope Francis, *Misericordiae vultus*, 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii nuntiandi* 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Paul VI*, Evangelii Nuntiandi* 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Paul VI*, Evangelii nuntiandi* 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Vatican II, Decree, *Inter mirifica* 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)