

FRIARS MEET IN ASSISI

30 April 2004

Capuchin friars from all over the world met in Assisi for the Seventh Plenary Council of the Order.



(Br. Paul Hanbridge, - visiting Assisi at the time), (Br Joseph Nacua - Definitor General), (Br Julian Messina Provincial Minister – Australia)

*The responsibility of the Plenary Council is:
to foster communication between the General Definitory and the Conferences... in bringing about an
updated renewal of the Order and to care for the growth of the Order and the formation of the brothers.*

Capuchin Constitutions 123:5

The Minister General and his Definitory, together with secretaries and translators and other technical staff and 143 friar delegates from all over the world were welcomed to Assisi for the Seventh Plenary Council by two inches of snow, reminding the friars that the weather in Italy is not all sunshine and flowers and St Francis' story about "perfect joy" was grounded in reality.

In fact Br Paul Hanbridge who could have warned them, sent this rather wintry picture taken on the 29 February 2004 from La Verna, the mountain in Tuscany 1123m high, where St Francis in 1224 received the stigmata. Paul looks pretty calm despite the fact that it was -4°C. In Assisi the next day,

delegates from Africa and Brazil and other places, who had never seen snow in their lives were thrilled and no doubt a little chilled as well by their blanket of snow.

There have already been six Plenary Councils before this one they were:

- 1971 I **QUITO - Ecuador**
 "Our Life in Poverty and Fraternity"
- 1973 II **TAIZE - France**
 "Our Life and Practice of Prayer"
- 1978 III **MATTLI - Switzerland**
 "Our Missionary Life and Activity"
- 1981 IV **ROME - Italy**
 "Formation Guidelines"
- 1986 V **GARIBALDI - Brazil**
 "Our Prophetic Presence in the World:
 Apostolic Life and Activity"
- 1998 VI **ASSISI - Italy**
 "Living Poverty in Brotherhood"

On the first day of this Seventh Plenary Council (PCO) our General Minister Br John Corriveau recalled that in very strong ways, PCO-7 on our "Fraternal life in Minority" is a completion of PCO-6 on our "Fraternal life in Poverty". Members of that earlier PCO recommended that the theme be continued in this way, and the General Definitory and preparatory commissions confirmed that process.

Br John quoted Pope John Paul II from "*Novo millennio*" and also the Pope's quotation from "*Lumen gentium*" (LG 4) at Vatican II about the church as communion. This vision has strong ties to our distinctive Franciscan charism within the church. We are a model of this vision. In reflecting upon poverty, PCO-6 did not take the easy route of describing the poor individual friar. Rather, it reflected on living poverty in community. Perhaps the core proposition to come out of PCO-6 is #6, that Evangelical poverty builds positive relationships among people. In other words, the object of evangelical poverty is to redeem relationships in the world. That involves building a participatory economy where no one is left out and viewing work as a grace.

PCO-7 furthers and completes this reflection by considering how to exercise power and authority in ways that touch vast areas of our life. This reflection must address our internal life as an order, but also our ministries, including the way we exercise priesthood. Minority is the primary adjective that describes our fraternity: we are friars minor. LG 4 notes that the heart of communion among us is the mystery of the Trinity. God in Trinity is defined as relationship. We are made in the image of the Triune God, i.e., in relationship.

Francis described himself as brother, not as a title, but describing his relationship to others and all creatures in the image of God. This attitude speaks strongly in a world culture that increasingly prizes individualism and autonomous rights. Franciscans are a sign of contradiction. Minority defines our work in pursuit of justice. By building justice on earth, we build and redeem relationships. To build a more just world, we need to build a world of relationships, of brothers and sisters.

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For the first time in history the friars around the world in 95 countries will be able to follow the work of the Plenary Council through a special website set up for this purpose and also a constant flow of emails from the council chronicling the highlights of daily proceedings. In fact friars have been invited to make comments through emails if they wish to do so and these will be made available to the delegates. Although that may confuse many of us, we know happily that the Holy Spirit will not be confused.

Be sure to check out <http://www.ofmcap.org/en/index.htm>

Taking as their theme, "Our Fraternal Life in Minority" the friar delegates, from all over the world, representing over 64 countries, met in Assisi from the 1st to the 27th of March 2004.



The Seventh Plenary Council (CPOVII) follows on from the Sixth Plenary Council (CPO VI) which was on the theme of "Living Poverty in Brotherhood". The Sixth Plenary Council emphasised:

Following Jesus in Gospel fraternity; the principals of solidarity and sharing; the principal of equity and transparency of all the brothers in financial matters.



The Seventh Plenary Council deepened these themes by focusing on:

The Trinity as the foundational relationship and pattern of fraternal unity; humility as the basic prerequisite for participation in this fraternal communion; calling the friars to make choices for a more fraternal world; of using the local chapter as a means of sharing responsibility and animation for fraternal living; those in authority seeing their role as a service to the fraternity; itinerancy as flexibility in mind as well as willingness to move on; the need for formation in minority and itinerancy; the need to redeem relationships so that there is a better world of Justice and peace; respect for the integrity and value of every person; the need to care for our world environment; movement towards a civilization of love.





The dynamics of Plenary Councils of the Order may seem chaotic to those who are participating, with meeting so many new friars coming from such varying cultures, the constant need for documents and ideas expressed to be translated into the various languages. A great deal of gratitude must go to those friars, in the background, who are translators both of the spoken words and also of the proposals that are presented back and forth. They and others, work long hours at night into the early morning to have everything prepared for the delegates each day.

Perhaps only after the proposals are finished and published, can we see the true wisdom of the Holy Spirit at work in such meetings.

Established on fidelity to the Gospel,
fraternal evangelical life draws us
into the intimate relationship of the Trinity.

CPO7 Proposition 1b