

JPIC and Fraternal Ministries

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This theme examines forms of animation, in the area of JPIC, of brothers who have ministries at the service of the fraternity. In each Province or Entity there are a number of brothers who dedicate some, or all of their time to animate the life and service of the friars. I would like to focus in a particular way on the role that Provincials, Vicar-Provincials; members of the Definitory, Guardians, Bursars and Formators can play in the animation of JPIC.

It is clear that after several years work in JPIC there still exists in many friars, a difficulty or resistance towards accepting this area as an integral element of our Franciscan vocation. Others, while accepting the principle, remain simply indifferent to the practical consequences deriving from this affirmation. H. Schalück, in his report to the last General Chapter, stated that our "greatest challenge in fact resides in being signs of a new culture of communitarian life and of peace, which stands in contrast to the present tendencies of our society in which there prevails a culture of having, doing and consuming in haste (no. 148). He also affirmed "every effort in favor of peace, justice and the safeguarding of creation is in fact inseparable from the

quality of our life according to the Gospel. This involves, whether in initial formation or in ongoing formation, a serious effort to make visible the relationship between *a specific commitment to the world having life to the full and the daily fidelity to one's own vocation*" (149). The kernel of the question lies in achieving harmony between these two values.

Harmonising These Values

The difficulty lies very often in stressing the one to the exclusion of, or the minimal recognition of the other, or in saying that we must first live in peace and justice in our own lives and communities and only then can we preach these values to the world. Both values constitute simultaneous commitments and permanent challenges for each of us. We will never be fully in peace and harmony in our personal or our fraternal life. It is an ideal towards which we continually and often painfully strive. As followers of Christ and of Francis we cannot exonerate ourselves from an active part in the construction of a more just and peaceful world. Neither should we, as friars minor, dedicate all our time and energies to implementing the values of JPIC in society to the exclusion of life in fraternity. While it is not always easy, it is essential to have the proper understanding and articulation of these two values in our life and ministry. In this process the friars elected or named to fraternal ministries have an important role to play. How can we help them?

The JPIC Animator

The animator needs to clarify, for himself first of all, the demands of a commitment to JPIC arising from his identity as a friar minor and the daily fidelity to his vocation. This means continual reflection on the gospel life lived by Francis, and on the tradition of the Order, especially the documents of the last thirty years. With a clear awareness of his identity and imbued with a thoroughly Franciscan spirituality the animator will be better prepared to help the brothers grow in awareness of the link between the life of the friar minor and the commitment of JPIC. There is still a feeling among certain friars that this area is 'foreign' to our spirituality. As one struggling to live in daily fidelity to his vocation, the animator is expected to participate actively in the life of his own fraternity and Province. In this way his words and actions will have more credibility. If he remains on the margin, his chances of influencing the brothers are greatly reduced.

Working with Guardians

One of the most effective ways of reaching out to the friars is by working closely with the Guardians. They are the key persons to foment a renewed vision of the life and ministry of the fraternity. It is vital that the Guardian understands his role, not merely as an administrator of goods, activities and people, but as the one charged with animating the Fraternity to an ever fuller living of the Rule and Constitutions. His role is to promote con-

tinual growth in human, Christian and Franciscan values. He helps the friars to build up right relationships in community giving expression to values such as mutual respect, unity, dialogue, reconciliation, harmony, sharing and co-responsibility. It is his task to promote harmony between prayer and work, apostolate and formation, work and rest, as also to examine carefully the accumulation of goods, the use of cars, personal use of pensions, stipends bank accounts, and the distribution of common and domestic work. He should ensure the regular celebration of the local Chapter as an important moment for reflection, prayer and fraternity where the community project is elaborated and evaluated and where transparency in all areas is promoted. As the principal animator of ongoing formation the Guardian will encourage the friars to develop a critical spirit concerning mass media and be informed about the present situation of the world. The Plenary Council of the Order, in Bahia 1983 offers some practical suggestion that the Guardians could implement in their fraternities:

- To pray to be men at peace with God and all peoples, to make prayer and fasting part of our efforts for peace, to support movements which seek peace in our society, to be personally involved in such movements for peace and justice in the world.
- To refuse to buy or possess unnecessary goods in order to give prophetic witness against growing consumerism.
- To find ways to eliminate injustices among ourselves and, in spite of our

differences, to live in peace together in our friaries as witnesses of the peace of Christ.

To learn from the poor the spirit of solidarity and authentic fraternity which is frequently difficult for us in our friaries – often larger than needed and too comfortable.

To support non-violent efforts for peace, to offer support to conscientious objectors to war – especially nuclear war – to stand by those imprisoned for their convictions and efforts on behalf of justice and peace.

To involve friars full time for justice and peace where possible and support those friars already engaged in this work in Justice and Peace offices of the Order and Provinces (cf. CPO Bahia, 1983, nos. 31 and 38)

While supporting those friars engaged in this work, the Guardian should ensure that their work forms part of the project of the fraternity rather than the isolated activity of the single friar. He could also stimulate the fraternity to work in favor of the environment, by taking care of green areas, recycling of waste, etc.

It is obvious that the Guardians need help to carry out their responsibility adequately. Many entities are responding to this need by organizing periodic courses or meetings for Guardians at either a regional or Provincial level, or both. Regular input by the JPIC animator at these sessions would be a way of ensuring that this area becomes gradually part of the life of the fraternities of the Province. It

would also be useful for the JPIC animator to send material for reflection and prayer to the fraternities during the year and especially during the Lenten and Christmas periods.

The Provincial Definitory

The first article of the General Constitution describes the fundamental traits of our Franciscan life:

Living the gospel vision completely in the spirit of prayer and devotion and in brotherly sharing;

Giving witness to a life of penance and lowliness;

Bringing, with love for all, the gospel message to the whole world;

Proclaiming reconciliation, peace and justice by their works.

It is the task of the Provincial, with his Definitory, to promote the integral and harmonious living out of these different aspects. Each friar and each fraternity is called to live all of these elements, though individual friars may have a particular gift in one of these areas (contemplation, preaching, peace and justice). From this it derives that the Provincial and the Definitors have a duty to promote the values of Justice, Peace and respect for Creation as an integral part of the life of the Province. They do this first of all, by their personal and group witness, by the way they relate to the brothers, by their way of working together in leadership, by showing a spirit of minority and not domination, by their capacity to listen and to dialogue and by their concern that

the friars give prophetic witness to the gospel values in society. They carry out their mandate also in their visits to the fraternities, by verifying the commitment to JPIC in the community project, the efforts to live this in daily life and by encouraging the brothers towards an ever-greater commitment.

The animator should also work in close harmony with the Provincial Definitory to ensure that projects are assumed and supported. Some Provinces have a joint meeting each year of the Provincial Definitory with all the animators of the different commissions of the Province. These meetings would always have some input on JPIC. This can be a very effective way of promoting a clear vision of the Evangelical project of the Province and a means of working together, each in his own area, but without losing sight of the overall project.

JPIC and Formation

The animator should pay particular attention to ongoing formation by organizing days or weeks of awareness raising for the friars of the Province. These sessions could help foster the spirituality of JPIC, to study relevant themes and to develop a greater consciousness of the importance of environmental justice. The aim should be to help make friars more aware that the effort to build a world that is more just and fraternal forms an essential part of Franciscan life. It is not simply a question of the specific projects that we carry out, but of a spirit that ought to permeate

all aspects of our life and that enables us to contemplate and judge events and relations from a gospel perspective. It is the quality of gospel life that is the basis of our commitment. A JPIC spirituality could include the following elements: minority, service, option for the poor, non-violence, solidarity, respect for human dignity and creation, universal fraternity, reconciliation, and pardon.

The animator should work in close cooperation with the initial formation team to ensure that the content of the RF in this area is translated into concrete programs for the different stages. He may also collaborate in the organization of experiences for the candidates and by inviting speakers or witnesses to address those in formation.

Bursars

Both at Provincial and local level the JPIC animator can promote fundamental values in the way that we perceive, live and manage our economy. "The primary goal of the global economy is the increase of wealth. According to its logic, wealth is created when it is concentrated in the hands of the few, not when it is shared with the many! This is a denial of solidarity" (Solidarity and mutual Dependence, Circular Letter 15, Bro. John Corvival OF Cap, 1999). Our style of life is meant to be a direct contrast to this – to live in a sober fashion, to be content with what is necessary, avoiding what is superfluous and to promote mutual interdependence, communion, and brother-

hood. Gratuitousness, expropriation, restitution and solidarity are important words in the Franciscan vocabulary. It is contrary to the Franciscan vision that we have rich brothers and poor brothers, rich fraternities and poor fraternities, rich Provinces and poor Provinces. Unfortunately this is a reality.

The animator can illumine decisions at the Provincial and local level by reminding the friars of our options for

justice with relation to money, investments, employees, works, and obligations to the poor. He can remind the bursars that fraternal life requires transparency in local and provincial administration. He can promote the local chapter as the ideal occasion for preparing the fraternity budget and monitoring how money is spent. He can remind the friars of the value of solidarity in sharing resources with Entities in poorer parts of the world.