

EMBRACING THE EXCLUDED OF TODAY

Final Message of the Congress

We, the JPIC Animators from more than 40 countries, met in Uberlandia, Brazil, from the 30th January to the 8th February 2006 for our II International Congress at the express invitation of our Minister General, who has personally participated at our congress and to whom we express our sincere thanks.

We began to celebrate together “the grace of our origins” in this year 2006, dedicated to “discernment”. On returning to the beginning of our Order, we met Francis who embraced the leper and we understood, in a very profound way, the significance of this gesture also as we shared the life –however briefly—with the brothers and sisters of the landless movement in this region of Brazil. Francis himself recalled this embrace as a decisive element in his conversion to a new life. It was not the only element, but it was the decisive one, to the extent that this was the only one which he remembered at the end of his life, attributing the encounter itself to the initiative of God (Test 2).

We wish to address a request to all the Friars of the Order, expressed under the following points

- *Go out:* Jesus Christ was born outside the town, he lived on the road and died outside the city. Francis also met the leper outside Assisi. Our fraternities and Friars should be encouraged to go beyond the gates of their convents and structures in a prophetic manner so that it might be possible for them to meet the excluded.
- *Give priority:* The Order should give priority to the option for the excluded, so that it would characterise the beginning of our conversion, as it characterised the beginning of the conversion of Francis.
- *Prophetic sensitivity:* All the Friars and fraternities should awaken to a prophetic sensitivity which would allow them, not only to recognise the poor and the excluded, but also to identify the processes of impoverishment and exclusion (causes, agents, victims, mechanisms, means, consequences, etc.), because it is only on the basis of this sensitivity that we can make options coherent with our charism.
- *The option for the poor Christ:* In the same way that Francis wished not only to follow but to identify with Christ, who had made Himself poor, so also the Order should have its principal inspiration and motivation for the option for the excluded of today in the discipleship of the poor Christ.

But what does embracing the excluded of today mean? How can we do it? For Francis, the option for them had a gospel character and that was enough for him. We are asked for something more, not because we are better than him, but because our present-day reality is so much more different to that of Francis and our responsibilities, to which we are called by both the voice of the Spirit and the suffering of our brothers and sisters, are also different. We are also called to a kind of political choice, in the sense of placing ourselves totally on the side of the excluded and sharing in their process of liberation. It is not enough to be concerned for them, to help them or to support them, as the Order has been doing splendidly for centuries. It is a matter of sharing their life, in which the history of the Order is also rich, but limited to a few. Rather is it a question of analysing the causes of exclusion (even of exclusions, so numerous and diverse from one another)

and of entering into the movements which the excluded themselves create in order to construct together possible and dignified alternatives of life.

“Going out to-encounter-change”, this is the dynamic which we hold to be necessary to live our vocation at the present time and to celebrate the “grace of our origins”. It means “going out” of the habitual, leaving our security, comfort and every form of possession and separation; “encountering” the excluded brothers and sisters, allowing ourselves to be evangelized by them and creating, with them, spaces of hope and of being joyfully together; “changing”, being converted through a continuous search for that disposition of fidelity and service to the poor Christ, the sacrament of the presence of God.

In conclusion, we ask all the friars of the order to give “priority” to the embracing the excluded. This is the concrete proposal which we, the JPIC Animators, are making to all our brothers for the celebration of the VIII Centenary of the foundation of the Order.

PROPOSALS OF THE II INTERNATIONAL JPIC CONGRESS

EMBRACING THE EXCLUDED OF TODAY

1. The Excluded

- a) That as we mark the VIII Centenary of the foundation of the Order, as a concrete sign of solidarity with the “lepers” of our time, the Entities “give special attention the refugees, emigrants, ethnic minorities, people without land and the persecuted” (Sdp, proposal 39,c).
- b) That, looking to the celebration of the VIII Centenary of the foundation of the Order and as specified in the document *The Grace of Our Origins*, the Entities develop a process of **restitution** (physical space, time, money...) as a significant gesture of justice towards the excluded and oppressed of our time (Cf. Lgo 17, 19, 21).
- c) That all Entities and Fraternities conduct a **critical analysis of the social reality** in which they live to identify the excluded groups, and the processes and the causes of exclusion. In order to do this, they should use theological and sociological tools, such as the reading of the Bible from the theological and social place of the excluded.
- d) That the Entities encourage the friars to be more present in **places of social fracture** and work together with social movements.
- e) That the Entities **promote and revitalize** the existence of **inserted fraternities**, which can be inter-provincial, and evaluate their past experiences.
- f) That the friars commit themselves to the promotion of the culture of life in all its forms and aspects, from conception to natural death.

- g) That all friars and fraternities, in collaboration with JPIC, “examine our way of life and its impact on creation, assume conduct more responsible to the environment, and defend environmental justice” (Sdp, proposal 40).
- h) That the General Government and the government of the Entities, with the help of the JPIC Office, revise their **formation, organizational and economic** structures in order to eliminate internal inequalities between rich friars and poor friars; rich fraternities and poor fraternities; rich Entities and poor Entities; and between clerical brothers and lay brothers.

2. Formation of the Friars

- a) That the Entities ask the Secretariats for Formation and Studies and for Evangelization to include **an analysis of the causes** of exclusion as an integral part of the programs for on-going formation, for initial formation and for evangelization.
- b) That the local Fraternities offer opportunities for the friars, both in on-going and initial formation, to learn from the excluded by means of experience among them.
- c) That the formators accompany **the candidates** for Franciscan life so that they might conduct their vocational and missionary discernment among the excluded.
- d) That in all Entities, the simply professed, before making their solemn profession, spend at least a year of their formation living among the excluded.

Our Second Congress reaffirms the decisions of the General Chapter of 2003 and the proposals of the International JPIC Council meeting in South Africa in 2004, and insists on the following:

3. Chapter 2003 Decisions

- a) The International JPIC Council looks for adequate means to implement the **JPIC decisions** of the General Chapter of 2003, and that it evaluate the results.
- b) That the Councils for Economic Affairs on the General and Provincial levels, in collaboration with the JPIC Office, continue to prepare “ethical directives for the responsible use of our goods” (Sdp, proposal 40); and that the governments of the Order and Entities commit themselves to develop **alternative models** for an economy of solidarity.
- c) That the Entities, bases on the decisions of the General Chapter (Sdp 39-40) encourage the friars to “re-appropriate” the priority of being **men of peace**, nonviolent, heralds and witnesses of forgiveness and reconciliation. In order to do this, they should:
 - Promote a specific spirituality and formation in the area of **active nonviolence**;
 - Promote methods of **conflict resolution** at all levels: interpersonal, fraternal, social, political, economic, cultural and religious;
 - Form groups of friars who can help in conflict situations (Franciscans Peace Missions).

4. JPIC Animation

- a) That the JPIC Animators, in their service of animation at all levels of the Order, seek better coordination with the Secretariats for Formation and Study and for Evangelization.
- b) That the Conferences, with the help of the JPIC Office, establish in Asia, Africa, America and Europe JPIC **animation centers** for social, political and environmental issues, in order to collaborate with other social entities and with Franciscans International.
- c) That the Animators strengthen **communication** with the JPIC Office in Rome, with continental JPIC offices, and with the Conferences and Entities.
- d) That the JPIC Animators establish, on all levels, networks of **collaboration** with organizations of the Franciscan Family and the churches and within society and the social movements.
- e) That the Entities give the JPIC Commissions and Animators **the necessary resources** so that they can establish networks of solidarity and communication with the Entities and Conferences.
- f) That friars throughout the world encourage the Entities located in countries which are the centers of political, economic and military power (especially Europe and the United States) to influence decision-making processes in benefit of the excluded. These Entities should encourage capable friars to be trained in areas of study appropriate to this task.

Uberlândia, February 8, 2006