

2018-2021 NATIONAL PRIORITY
FRATERNITY LIFE



Pope Francis on “Fraternity”

*Address of Pope Francis to the General Chapter of the Order of Friars Minor Conventual
June 17, 2019*

Discussion Questions by Mary Bittner, OFS

The Gospel is for you, dear brothers, “rule and life” (Saint Francis, *Regula Bullata*, I, 1) and your mission is none other than that of being a living Gospel, “a living ‘exegesis’ of God’s word” as Benedict XVI said (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, 83). The Gospel must be your handbook. Always listen to it carefully; pray with it; and following the example of Mary, “Virgin made Church” (see Saint Francis, *Greeting to the Blessed Virgin Mary*, 1), meditate assiduously, so that, by assimilating it, you may conform your life to the life of Christ.

This way of following is characterized, first of all, by *fraternity*, which Francis considered a gift: “The Lord gave me brothers” (*Testament*, 14). Fraternity is a gift to be received with gratitude. It is a reality that is always “on the move”, under construction, and therefore asks for the contribution of all, without anyone excluding himself or being excluded; in which there are no “consumers” but only builders (see *General Constitution OFMConv*, 55,

5). A reality in which we can live out paths of continuous apprenticeship, of openness to the other, of mutual interchange; a welcoming reality, ready and willing to accompany; a reality in which it is possible to take a break from everyday life, to cultivate silence and the contemplative gaze and thus recognize in it the imprint of God; a reality in which you all consider yourself brothers, both ministers and other members of the fraternity; an experience in which everyone is called to love and nurture his brother, just as a mother loves and nurtures her own child (see Saint Francis, *Regula non Bullata*, IX, 11). I urge you to nurture your fraternity with the spirit of holy prayer and devotion “to which all other temporal things must serve” (Id., *Regula Bullata*, V, 2). In this way, your fraternal life in community becomes a form of prophecy in the Church and in the world; and it becomes a school of communion, to be exercised always, following the example of Francis, in a relationship of love and obedience with the Pastors.

- 1) Pope Francis is addressing First Order friars, but his thoughts on fraternity are also relevant to Secular Franciscans. He observes that Francis considered fraternity a gift. How is fraternity a gift to you?
- 2) The Holy Father lists a series of attributes which characterize the reality of fraternity. Which of these attributes apply to your local fraternity? What are some practical ways you could nurture them?
- 3) Pope Francis suggests that the outcome of fraternal life is community is a “form of prophecy in the Church and in the world, and a school of communion”. Which articles of the OFS Rule call us to a prophetic stance? To living in communion?
- 4) How visible is your fraternity in your local parish? Your community?

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