



# spirituality path

## FRATERNITY Gift and Task

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Translation: IFC-TOR

### I. Franciscan Foundation

#### 1.1 Fraternity - Sisterliness

Franciscan-Christian brotherliness/sisterliness is more than an enthusiastic feeling; nor is it an idealistic goal in unattainable distance. Rather, it is something very concrete: a relationship that connects people in a binding way, attention that seeks the good of others, concrete community that does not shy away from the everyday difficulties and conflicts, but endures them, withstands them - in the expectation that the Spirit of God will make living together possible and in the hope that the community will be experienced as the house of God.

One of the most important words in the language of St. Francis is "brother". He saw himself so much as a brother that they did not even find it necessary to mention Francis by name when speaking of him. They simply said, "*Brothers, thus says the Brother*". (*Jordan of Giano - Chronicle 17,3*)

Francis unequivocally calls the community he founded „fraternitas - brotherhood”, in order to emphasize that fraternity is a constitutive element of his alternative way of life. The fact that Francis turns the usual hierarchy upside down and calls the superiors „servants of the fraternity“ corresponds to that.

*„To all my reverend and dearly beloved brothers: to Brother A.,c the General Minister of the Order of Friars Minor, its lord, and the other general ministers who will come after him, and to the ministers, custodians, humble priests of this same brotherhood in Christ, and to all simple and obedient brothers, from the first to the last: 3Brother Francis, a worthless and weak man, your very little servant sends his greetings in Him Who has redeemed and washed us in His Rv 1:5 most precious blood. “*

*Letter to the Entire Order 2-3*

Worldly differences mean nothing to Francis: young and old, poor and rich, citizens and strangers, men and women, members of his community and outsiders, Christians and Muslims, good and evil, friends and enemies, people, animals and stones - everything is brother or sister to Francis.

Fraternity proves to be the central idea in the life and thought of St. Francis. Francis' idea was to overcome the social differences of the historically or otherwise defined classes. This is a revolutionary attitude at a time of class distinctions and hierarchical thinking.

## 1.2 Encountering Each Other as Brother - Sister<sup>1</sup>

For Francis, the Holy Spirit is not only the leader of the entire fraternity but of each individual brother. Francis did not want uniformity.

*“In whatever way it seems better to you to please the Lord God and to follow His foot-prints and poverty, do it with the blessing of the Lord God and my obedience.”*

*Letter to Brother Leo 3*

Since the first brothers were itinerant and had no permanent dwelling, mutual personal relationships were essential.

*„With heartfelt love they loved one another, and one cared for the other and cared for him like a mother for her only and beloved son. Such a strong love burned in them that it seemed easy to them to abandon their bodies to death, not only for the love of Christ, but also for the salvation of the soul or the body of their brothers“.*

*Legend of the Three Companions 41,8-9*

Francis wanted a family model for his brotherhood. This concern is also found in the Rule: each individual should discover his or her own personal vocation and charism.

*“And wherever brothers meet one another, let them act like members of a common family. And let them securely make their needs known to one another, for if a mother loves and cares for her carnal son, how much more should one love and care for his spiritual son? And if one of them should become ill, let the other brothers serve him as they themselves would like to be served.”*

*Regula Bullata 6,7-9*



Miniature from the Legenda Major

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## 1.3 Brotherly/Sisterly Togetherness

This draws our attention to the Franciscan Family that Francis and Clare founded at the beginning of the 13th century. They are united by a sincere and deep friendship. They are both committed to the same goal, God's Kingdom; both feel the wish to live the gospel radically and to pass it on to the people as a life-giving power. People are drawn to their way of life. Women and men from every social class want to join them, to live the gospel as they do. In barely ten years three strong branches grow from the small beginnings: 1210 the Brotherhood of the Friars Minor, 1212 the community of the Sisters Minor and, almost at the same time, a lay community.



Miniature from the Legenda Major

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Not Francis or Clare alone, but Francis and Clare together found a movement that still today is able to enthuse women and men, calling them to follow them. What is special about their charism is that sisters and brothers in the one Franciscan Family are dependent on one another. The Franciscan Family can only experience its wholeness in the fraternal coexistence of men and women. For this reason, despite the diversity of vocations, their unity and loving concern for one another should be a matter of course. It follows then that the various Franciscan Orders and communities should work together.

## 1.4 Living as Brothers and Sisters - Thoughts for Reflection

Francis knows that a true relationship with God must prove itself in unconditional love of neighbour. Lived fraternity, as an expression of the lived love for God and neighbour, has therefore also a special meaning for him.

Whoever wants to become a true brother or sister to others like Francis is invited to love „in spite of“. In the midst of conflicts, limitations and idiosyncrasies, I have the chance to accept friction as a challenge to „grow“ in love.

## “In spite of”

In the “in spite of” of loving, God can remove the boundaries of my limited love with which, in spite of all, I approach the other again, in spite of all forgive again, in spite of all give the other a chance, in spite of all respect the dignity of the other.

Thus every community has an aspect of suffering and an aspect of resurrection. Francis recognized that love alone is the real power that moves the world. What is meant is a love that can sometimes be pushed to its limits without giving up on the other.

## 2. CLARE OF ASSISI- an alternative, fraternal form of life

Sister Clare is a model for an alternative, fraternal way of life. She categorically rejects hierarchies in the sense of superiority and subordination for her women’s community. As leader Clare involves her fellow sisters in decisions; her special attention and consideration are given to weak and sick fellow sisters. During the process of canonization, her sisters testify to the loving manner she manifested throughout her life.

Clare understands fraternity as inclusive, not exclusive. As a women’s community situated in a separate location, her connection with the Franciscan Brother Movement remains a central concern. In remote San Damiano, the city of Assisi is close to her heart. Despite the enclosure, the sisters care for the sick and - at least in the early days - admit children into their convent.

Regardless of differences in content with church dignitaries, Clare always seeks dialogue. Physically tested by decades of serious illness and weakened by excessive fasting, her soul praises God on her deathbed for the wonderful gift of her life.

Clare of Assisi can help us to combine love of God and love of people, to live alternatively and to be a fraternal Church. She can teach us to accept what is unreconciled, to hide wounds, to endure tensions, to overcome misunderstandings, to respect limits and to find life in death. She is a model for non-violent resistance. She is a model for us that solidarity strengthens, heals and bears us along our own path. Only a few comrades-in-arms were sufficient for her to dare a new beginning and to keep her vision alive until death.



Panel of Clare, Maestro di S. Chiara, Assisi  
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## II. From Knowledge to Life

### A. Shaping Sisterly and Brotherly Life

**“For the Love of God”**: The love of Jesus has to be spelled out in the present time. This love for one another has to have a concrete face in our human actions. It must show itself in works, in practical action. This is evident in the path of love which the following lines show (as a kind of school of loving). It is the way of loving in common cooperation, especially when there is a „downward slope“: need (old age, illness ...), above - below, lack of orientation, lack of hope in life, lack of faith, darkness ..., there, where people need each other.

**“Mutual Love”**: Mutual love makes God’s love transparent; it is God’s love for the human person. Mutuality is not retaliatory, calculating, but opens up to each other, giving,... simply giving. Love can be measured according to the love of Jesus for us, for the people (of his time). He is orientation, inspiration. From him we can recognize how „loving“ acts.

**“Trusting”**: Trust is the fundamental attitude of a culture of love. It requires continuity, fidelity, trustworthiness. Lived love requires not only an appropriate atmosphere but constantly new confidence-building measures, the risk of ever new, unprejudiced effort in loving (concentration, absolute interest, patience and discipline).

**“Let the other(s) know your needs”**: Not blaming oneself or one another but sharing the distress of (self-) alienation and limitedness (brokenness). The need is determined in the first instance by the individual. What he or she experiences and subjectively perceives as a need, is a need. He or she lays it open and so it exists and must be taken seriously.

**“Accepted in Obedience”:** a (total) listener, listening with the heart. It requires a fundamental letting in and letting go with regard to the other. In this way what helps each to grow in their humanity and open up God’s space within them can be reciprocally given and bestowed (grace). Distress requires and needs encounter but encounter opens our own being, the personal centre.

**“Humbly ask forgiveness of one another”:** Openness to one another prevents an empty “asking for forgiveness”. The path of forgiveness and asking for forgiveness are a (lifelong) process of change, a path of rapprochement to one another, to one’s own personal reality, to communion and to God himself. It often takes time and many small steps, much patience and the courage to risk surrendering oneself to the other, to advance trust...

**„He should be admonished“** (correctio fraterna): It is about a loving reminder of their own path, their own life and human maturing. Love is the basis of the healing and liberating encounter. The basic attitude of togetherness makes me willing to be admonished, to be corrected. The loving affinity to the others freely accepts what the others mirror to me, what they see in me from the outside through their brotherly / sisterly critical gaze. Admonition encourages true humanity.

**“Show great mercy”:** Mercy restores the dignity of the other and guarantees their value. Through a merciful approach others experience their true freedom and identity, because mercy reminds them of their complete humanity in God, their value before God. And this mercy should be „great”.

## B. My Dream of a Fraternal Community

I do not wish for a perfect community but for one that is aware of its weaknesses and that draws strength from them to constantly begin anew.

I would like a community in which we can be mirrors to one another, in which our resemblance to you can be seen.

I would like a community where we can openly say what does us good or what our wishes are, where we try to fulfil these needs of one another.

I would like a community in which we respect and love each other as unique, distinctive people.

I would like a community where the virtue most practiced is forgiveness.

I would like a community in which everyone encourages each one to become and to be themselves.

I would like a community in which the inner voice of our heart points the way.

I would like a community where feelings are taken just as seriously as thoughts.

I would like a community that encourages and embraces, that mourns and celebrates, that shares and unites, and in which YOU God alone are the source, the breath, the pulsating blood, visible in your word, in your body and blood and in every single member of this community.

Sr. Gudrun Schellner SSM

Francis relates his experience:

*„And after the Lord had given me brethren, no one showed me what I should do, but the Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the form of the Holy Gospel.”*

*Testament 14*

Which experiences regarding fraternal community would I like to share with others? I