

**THE MALTESE CAPUCHINS  
AND  
SURET IL-BNIEDEM**

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“... I was a stranger and  
you welcomed me...”

Jesus, the Christ  
Incarnate Son of God

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## 2. ABBREVIATIONS

### *Church Documents*

- PP *Populorum progressio*, “On the Development of Peoples” (1967), Paul VI  
SRS *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, “On Social Concern” (1987), John Paul II

### *Franciscan Sources*

- 1 Cel The Life of Saint Francis by Thomas of Celano  
2 Cel The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul

### *Writings of Saint Francis of Assisi*

- Adm The Admonitions  
ER The Earlier Rule  
LR The Later Rule  
Test The Testament

### *Capuchin Documents*

- I PCO First Plenary Council of the Order on  
*Our Life in Fraternity and Poverty*  
IV PCO Fourth Plenary Council of the Order on *Formation Guidelines*  
V PCO Fifth Plenary Council of the Order on  
*Our Prophetic Presence in the World: Apostolic Life and Activity*  
VI PCO Sixth Plenary Council of the Order on *Living Poverty in Brotherhood*  
Const Constitutions of the Capuchin Friars Minor (1990)  
CL 11 Circular Letter 11 (1997), *Evangelical Brotherhood*, John Corriveau  
CL 12 Circular Letter 12 (1997), *On Compassion*, John Corriveau  
CL 13 Circular Letter 13 (1998), *Living Poverty in Fraternity*, John Corriveau  
CL 16 Circular Letter 16 (1999), *The Poor – Our Teachers*, John Corriveau  
CL 17 Circular Letter 17 (2000), *The Grace of Working*, John Corriveau  
PPP Pjan Pastoralni Provincjali: 1998 – 2003, (Malta)

### *Other Documents*

- HHENMS *Homelessness and Housing Exclusion in the New Member States:  
Draft synthesis report based on national reports submitted to  
FEANTSA*  
NAPPSE *National Action Plan on Poverty and Social Exclusion 2004-2006*

### 3. INTRODUCTION

The Church's mission of evangelization is such that its ministry transcends that of the proclamation of the word alone since this needs to be complimented by the Church's commitment to *diakonia* and justice. This implies that the Christian community should discern the signs of the time and listen to God's own cry in the cry of the poor so that it can respond to it – not alone but together with other people of good will. Such has been the response of the Franciscan Capuchin province in Malta in responding to the needs of homeless people.

### 4. HOMELESS AND HOUSING EXCLUSION IN MALTA AS A NEW MEMBER STATE IN THE EUROPEAN UNION



Figure 1: The European Union

## 4.1 FEANSTA

Ten countries, including Malta, from Central and Eastern Europe joined the European Union on 1 May 2004; two more will become Member States in 2007. FEANSTA<sup>1</sup> has intensified its attempts to learn more about the scope and nature of the homeless sector in the Accession Countries. It has asked a service provider in the ten Accession countries (Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Malta, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia) to prepare a report on the nature of service provision for the homeless. A synthesis of these reports has been published as *Homelessness and Housing Exclusion in the New Member States: Draft synthesis report based on national reports submitted to FEANTSA (HHENMS)*.<sup>2</sup> It is within this context that I would like to present the social problem of homelessness in Malta and the Franciscan Capuchin ministry in this area.

## 4.2 Defining Homelessness

In trying to give a legal definition of “homelessness”, the HHENMS – when referring to Malta - states that, definitions that may suit other countries do not take into account the peculiarities of this problem in the island, but doesn't offer a definition of its own.<sup>3</sup> This is so because in Malta, along with Cyprus, homelessness “is not believed to be an issue of any political importance”.<sup>4</sup>

The HHENMS does not give a definition of homelessness. Indeed, it concludes that:

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<sup>1</sup> *Feansta* is a European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless, was established in 1989 as a European non-governmental organisation (in French, FEANTSA stands for *la Fédération Européenne d'Associations Nationales Travaillant avec les Sans-Abri*). The more than 90 member organisations of FEANTSA come from 29 European countries, including all 25 Member States of the European Union. Members are non-governmental organisations that provide a wide range of services to homeless people including accommodation and social support. Most of the members of FEANTSA are national or regional umbrella organisations of service providers. They often work in close co-operation with public authorities, social housing providers and other relevant actors. FEANTSA is the only major European network that focuses exclusively on homelessness at European level. FEANTSA receives financial support from the European Commission for the implementation of its activities. FEANTSA works closely with the EU institutions, and has consultative status at the Council of Europe and at the United Nations. Cf. <http://www.feansta.org>

<sup>2</sup> Cf. <http://www.feansta.org> Research in the ten new countries has proven particularly difficult since there is little data available. The creation of services for the homeless is a relatively new phenomenon. However the NGOs providing these services are well placed to give insightful information on homelessness in these countries. The social structure and political background in the new member states is very different from that of EU15. Cf. HHENMS, 5.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. HHENMS, 7.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

The acceptance by NGOs and governments of a comprehensive definition of homelessness is a key priority in the new Member States of the EU. A national definition could contribute to the acknowledgement and recognition of the multi-faceted nature of housing exclusion, which also involves factors related to social service provision, access to employment, education, health services and cultural provisions. This will also contribute to a better understanding as to the meaning of adequate and secure housing, which are the two basic elements of housing exclusion definitions.<sup>5</sup>

#### 4.2.1 FEANTSA Conceptual Definition of Homelessness

The definition of homelessness adopted by FEANTSA provides a simple but robust definition of housing vulnerability as persons experiencing one of the following situations:<sup>6</sup>

<b>Rooflessness</b>	This is defined as rough sleeping, is the most visible form of homelessness. People with chaotic lifestyles or unsettled ways of living may be disproportionately represented among the roofless population. Successful resettlement for rough sleepers may be contingent as much on the availability of appropriate support as on the availability of temporary and permanent housing.
<b>Houselessness</b>	This refers to situations where, despite access to emergency shelter or long term institutions, individuals may still be classed as <i>homeless</i> due to a lack of appropriate support aimed at facilitating social re-integration. People who are forced to live in institutions because there is inadequate accommodation (with support) in the community to meet their needs are thus regarded as homeless. In this context, <i>homelessness</i> refers as much to the lack housing as it does to the lack of social networks.
<b>Living in insecure accommodation</b>	Understood as insecure tenure or temporary accommodation, it may be a consequence of the inaccessibility of permanent housing. It may equally reflect the need for support to enable people to successfully hold a tenancy. The provision of appropriate support can be critical in helping people into permanent housing under their own tenancy. This classification also includes people who are involuntary sharing in unreasonable circumstances and people whose security is threatened by violence or threats of violence (e.g. women at risk of domestic abuse, racial violence or harassment).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. BILL EDGAR – JOE DOHERTY – HENK MEERT, *Review of Statistics of Homelessness in Europe*, November 2003, <http://www.feansta.org>

<b>Living in inadequate accommodation</b>	This includes people whose accommodation is unfit for habitation or is overcrowded (based on national or statutory standards) as well as those whose accommodation is a caravan or boat.
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### 4.3 Main Causes and Origins of Homelessness

The pathway that leads to homeless is multidimensional in the new EU countries. There are some ‘causes’, which, according to the NGO reports, seem to have more of an impact in the new Member States than in the old EU15. Unemployment as a key factor, as well as the high number of home owners who find themselves unable to maintain their housing due to the high cost of maintenance and utilities, are perhaps less known in the EU15.

There is important overlap, however, and many of the key processes are the same and include: the inability to pay the rent due to low salaries or unemployment; expulsion; change of social status; mental health problems, substance addiction; deviant behaviour that reinforces social stigmatisation. This process is different in Cyprus and Malta, where the numbers of visibly homeless people is very low. NGOs in these countries cite the break of social ties as the beginning of the process.<sup>7</sup>

In considering structural causes for homelessness, the HHENMS states that “in Malta there are no Housing Associations; the State is the sole provider of social housing, while the private sector considers housing to be one of the most profitable and safest forms of investment”.<sup>8</sup> When it comes to individual causes HHENMS generally affirms that “access to health care for homeless people is a key issue in the new Member States”.<sup>9</sup>

Joe Gerada emphasizes that the problem of homelessness in Malta is not to be perceived, as elsewhere, in terms of persons living in cardboard boxes, situated near main roads, begging for money.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the HHENMS explains that the Maltese

<sup>7</sup> Cf. HHENMS, 11-12.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. JOE GERADA, “Yes there are homeless Maltese people”, in *Suret il-Bniedem* 1 (May 2003) 3.

homeless are distinguished by invisibility, as there is an element of shame in displaying homelessness. Unlike other countries, the homeless are not found loitering in the cities. Quoting the YMCA Valetta report it states that “The notion of homelessness has been imported from social settings that are very different from the Maltese context, where homelessness finds expression in more visible forms”.<sup>11</sup>

Gerada suggests that homelessness in Malta is manifested differently from elsewhere for two reasons. In Malta there are shelter facilities for these individuals which are amongst the best in Europe and therefore offer good service in terms of accessibility and fast response.<sup>12</sup> He also brings to attention that in Malta, there are other shelters which while they prevent people from staying in the street, target a specific client group, such as victims of domestic violence. They are efficient shelters and make an effective contribution.<sup>13</sup>

Another reason that Gerada puts forward why there are no homeless people on the street is that Mt Carmel Hospital has followed for many years the policy of accommodating individuals who may be discharged from hospital but cannot do so for reasons that they have no place to call home.<sup>14</sup>

Hence, although Malta in HHENMS is reported as one of those “countries that deny that homelessness is a problem at all”,<sup>15</sup> Gerada insists that: “we should not illude ourselves and put our minds at rest that there is no such thing as homelessness problem in Malta”.<sup>16</sup>

The Maltese *National Action Plan on Poverty and Social Exclusion 2004-2006* (NAPPSE) states, the “major problem is that homelessness is usually coupled with unemployment and often stems from families with difficulties”.<sup>17</sup> This leads one to conclude that “a strategic approach to the problem” is needed in which “there is room

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<sup>11</sup> HHENMS, 7 footnote 5.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. JOE GERADA, “Yes there are homeless Maltese people”, 3.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> HHENMS, 14.

<sup>16</sup> JOE GERADA, “Yes there are homeless Maltese people”, 3.

<sup>17</sup> NAPPSE, 22.

for further networking and wider use of resources”<sup>18</sup> to achieve satisfactory results. In this perspective, the NAPPSE suggests that homelessness should be tackled together with those proposals involving the Housing Authority and the Employment and Training Corporation.<sup>19</sup>

#### **4.4 The Profile of the Homeless People and Risk Groups**

When considering the profiles of homeless peoples and risk groups, Malta and Cyprus “do not have statistics on the number of homeless people, nor research on the profile and nature of the problem”.<sup>20</sup> Whilst this is true, Gerada’s experience does offer some insights in forming a profile of the homeless people and risk groups.

Gerada explains that this profile emerges in the light of the complexity of human rights and on the perception one has on his lifestyle depending on one’s resources e.g. financial, upbringing, education, housing, health, work and stable relationships. However, these resources are denied to some persons, especially in their childhood, for various sociological, cultural and historical reasons that transcend the persons in question. He insists that 15% of the Maltese population is at the risk of poverty. These people constitute the profile of the homeless and risks groups in Malta since homelessness is a multi-dimensional issue.<sup>21</sup>

According to the NAPPSE, the main client groups that make use of the maltese shelter services include refugees, persons with mental health problems and persons with a history of drug abuse.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> HHENMS, 20.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. JOE GERADA, “*Min huma l-homeless?*”, in *Suret il-Bniedem 2* (September 2003), 3.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. NAPPSE, 26-27.

## 5. THE FRANCISCAN CAPUCHIN MINISTRY TO THE HOMELESS IN MALTA

The NAPPSE recognizes that the only two NGO in Malta that cater for the homeless are the YMCA and *Suret il-Bniedem*. Both NGOs are partially funded by the Government and they provide shelter to a number of individuals who would otherwise remain homeless.<sup>23</sup> In this section I intend to show the Franciscan Capuchin ministry to the homeless in Malta with particular reference to *Dar Leopoldo* in the light of the Franciscan Capuchin charism of evangelical fraternity.<sup>24</sup> In doing so, I will also make some considerations in the light of Catholic Social Teaching especially the Church's preferential option for the poor.

### 5.1 The Franciscan Capuchin Charism of Evangelical Fraternity

Francis' life, vision and activity were formed by his personal experience of God which found its climax in his experience of the Crucified One.<sup>25</sup> This changed his perception of the world and that of his religio-socio-political situation.<sup>26</sup> As the present Minister General, Br. John Corriveau, explains, "Jesus, pierced and hanging on the cross, became for him the lens which gave him insight into a new way of relating to the world. Jesus crucified was now the focus, the centre of all creation, including the human family".<sup>27</sup> Consequently, for Francis, every person was no longer simply a fellow human being in need, but a sacrament of Christ's presence.

This vision of God, humanity and the world impelled Francis to relate to people, to animals, and to things, as to brothers and sisters, members of the same family, respectfully and gratuitously.

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> I felt the need to tackle quite extensively the issue of the Franciscan charism with respect to the Maltese Capuchin ministry to the homeless because this lies at the bases of this ministry which is considered as an NGO by the state. Hence, in my opinion, in evaluating *Suret il-Bniedem* – and in particular *Dar Leopoldo* – one should not only tackle only its institutional and professional dimension but should also consider whether it is indeed an expression of the Franciscan Charism. Since our credit is *Theology, Human Rights and Public Policy*, I wanted to bring out the nexus between public policy and theology too.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. 2 Cel 10.

<sup>26</sup> The outstanding political character of the historical setting into which Francis was born was one of constant conflict expressed in an uncompromising struggle and rivalry between the temporal aims and aspirations of the feudal lords, knights and landowners that gave rise to struggles between classes and wars between cities. He himself was engaged in such wars before his conversion. Cf. LAZARO IRIARTE OFMCAP, *Storia del Francescanesimo*, Napoli 1982, 55-58.

<sup>27</sup> CL 12, 2.2.1.

### **5.1.1 The Franciscan Charism**

This leads to an evaluation of what the Franciscan charism is: evangelical fraternity.<sup>28</sup> This is “the primary and essential element of our Franciscan life”.<sup>29</sup> Since this brotherhood, for Francis, embraced the whole of creation, it might be called a “cosmic fraternity”.<sup>30</sup> The essential elements of the Franciscan fraternity are the following:<sup>31</sup>

- A fraternity of lesser brothers – servants to the world
- A contemplative fraternity
- A fraternity inserted among the poor
- A fraternity dedicated to justice, peace and respect for nature
- A fraternity filled with human warmth

### **5.1.2 Francis’ Theology of Solidarity and Mutual Dependence**

Integral to Francis’ evangelical poverty, which is rooted in the concept of solidarity, is adopting the viewpoint of the poor. Hence, evangelical poverty, for Francis, is not simply an ascetic value whereby one is freed from material attachments so as to be united in with God. Rather it is a manifestation and a sharing in Christ’s own kenosis that lead him to become dependent on the human condition. Hence, to be poor for Francis, necessarily meant to become also one with the poor, and in certain circumstances, earned his living like the poor of his time who were dependent on others. This can be seen from the Pauline text he uses for such an inspiration: “For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (2 Cor 8:9).

In Chapter 9 of the Earlier Rule, he develops this solidarity, as a “theology of mutual dependence” understood as a new way in which people can relate economically to one another. This theology stands at the root of Francis’ concept of begging. In a world dominated by autonomy and control over all aspects of one’s personal and economic life, Francis declared that there is neither weakness nor shame in being dependent upon other people:

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. PPP, 1.1

<sup>29</sup> I PCO 30.

<sup>30</sup> CL 12, 2.2.3.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. CL 11, 1.3; Const 4.

When people shame them and refuse them alms, let them thank God nonetheless, since by just such humiliations will they receive great honour before the tribunal of our Lord Jesus Christ. Be assured that it is not the victims of such abuse who are shamed, but those who inflict it.<sup>32</sup>

The emphasis here is not on giving charity but on the fact that one depends on the other. The form of begging was simply peculiar to the medieval society when Francis lived but interdependence and solidarity can be expressed in other ways. Indeed, an important Franciscan expression of this solidarity in mutual relationships is that of work<sup>33</sup> which for Francis was the first means of earning a living: “Those brothers to whom the Lord has given the grace of working may work faithfully and devotedly”.<sup>34</sup> This has to be understood in the light of what the VI PCO has proposed:

Solidarity is not primarily about giving things to others. It is, rather, mutual interdependence and brotherhood. The culture of solidarity and interdependence creates a new ways of understanding and living relationships with others.<sup>35</sup>

Francis declared that such dependence is a consequence of being human and redeemed, and is therefore a right: “Alms are a legacy and something to which the poor have every right because our Lord Jesus Christ acquired that right for us”.<sup>36</sup> To embrace this interdependence requires the theological gift of love: “the brothers who work to receive alms will themselves be greatly enriched, and at the same time those who give the alms will be enriched as well”.<sup>37</sup> Francis then concludes: “So, confidently make known your needs to the other, so that the other might find what you need and give it to you”.<sup>38</sup>

Corriveau has stated that this coincides with what John Paul II said of the moral and Christian virtue of solidarity in *Sollicitudo rei socialis*.<sup>39</sup> As a moral virtue, solidarity “is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good”<sup>40</sup>. This moral virtue “helps us to see the ‘other’ – whether a person, people or nation - ...

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<sup>32</sup> ER IX, 6-7.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. CL 17,4.1.

<sup>34</sup> LR V,1.

<sup>35</sup> VI PCO, Proposal 22.

<sup>36</sup> ER IX, 8.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. CL 13, 5.2.

<sup>40</sup> SRS, 38.

on a par with ourselves, in the banquet of life to which all are equally invited by God”.<sup>41</sup> As a Christian virtue, solidarity sees that “one’s neighbour is... the living image of God... [who] must be loved... with the same love with which the Lord loves him or her”.<sup>42</sup> Francis possessed that consciousness:

Be conscious... of the wondrous state in which the Lord has placed you, for he created you and formed you to the image of his beloved Son according to the body, and to his likeness according to the spirit.<sup>43</sup>

### 5.1.3 The Capuchin’s solidarity with the Poor

John Paul II emphasizes “the option or love of preference for the poor”.<sup>44</sup> This is his own way of referring to the preferential option for the poor advocated by liberation theology<sup>45</sup> for which they present biblical,<sup>46</sup> Christological<sup>47</sup> and epistemological roots.<sup>48</sup> In agreement with this commitment, the VI PCO insists on “a life rooted in the experience of the people, particularly the poor”.<sup>49</sup> This *preferential option for the poor* was articulated in the V PCO stating that:

Our vocation as Capuchins, living according to the life and rule of Saint Francis, implies that our existential condition should be that of poor men, and as such it is in itself a witness and a prophetic sign. Therefore, let us concern ourselves by preference with the poor, the needy and the suffering in every state of life, in a spirit of sharing and participation, in the condition of minority proper to the Order.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 39

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>43</sup> Adm V, 1.

<sup>44</sup> SRS 42.

<sup>45</sup> There can be no doubt that Catholic Social Teaching has learned from liberation theology. Yet, the Vatican has been critical of some aspects of liberation theology, such as the reliance on Marxism and politicization of faith brought about by a loss of transcendence and future eschatology. Cf. CHARLES E. CURRAN, *Catholic Social Teaching. A Historical, Theological and Ethical Analysis*, Washington 2002, 185.

<sup>46</sup> In the Bible God is seen as having a special care for the poor. He is constantly hearing the cry of the poor so as to liberate them.

<sup>47</sup> Jesus was a victim unjustly put to death on the cross and thus identifying himself with victims of marginalization, poverty and injustice as part of his kenotic activity.

<sup>48</sup> Critical of the Western “objective” mode of looking at reality, liberation theology asserts that even God is biased in favor of poor people. They make of this a theological method. The primacy of praxis in liberation theology maintains that truth is obtained through reflection on liberating praxis. The option for the poor is the first step for theological method. Cf. REBECCA S. CHOPP, *Latin America Liberation Theology*, in D. FORD, *The Modern Theologians*, Oxford 1997, 409-25. This differs radically from the theological method Catholic Social Teaching that has a universal theoretical approach that is addressed to a general worldwide audience, including all people of good will. Cf. CURRAN, 185-6.

<sup>49</sup> VI PCO, Proposal 6.

<sup>50</sup> V PCO 29.

Solidarity with the poor continues to be expressed in the Capuchin missionary activity by works of social development and compassion through fraternities inserted among the poor and a dedication to the eradication of the structural causes of poverty and human suffering.<sup>51</sup> This choice is not at the discretion of the individual brother but challenges the fraternity as a whole.<sup>52</sup> Hence, “a Capuchin must be both poor and a man of the poor, while the Capuchin fraternity must lead the brothers to embrace the poor”.<sup>53</sup>

Corriveau emphasizes that the option of the poor, made as fraternity, must be marked by *compassion* understood as “a spiritual consciousness of the personal tragedy of another and a selfless tenderness directed toward it”.<sup>54</sup> This was also Francis point of departure: the deep compassion for the lepers at his time<sup>55</sup> that lead him to his option of a poor life understood in terms of freedom for compassion: “by becoming poor, Francis emptied himself so that his heart could be free for and full of compassion”.<sup>56</sup>

Consequently, in contrast to the contemporary society that envisages the poor as cases whose needs are determined by others, Corriveau encourages the brothers to be involved in a ministry of *compassionate listening*. Only in this way can the poor be encouraged to express their deepest needs and claim the freedom and dignity that belongs to them.<sup>57</sup>

This choice “must be visibly shown: by living with the poor... by serving them, preferably with our own hands; by sharing bread with them, and defending their rights”.<sup>58</sup> In the missionary activity, this can be best achieved by following the

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<sup>51</sup> This Capuchin commitment, as part of the Franciscan “mission of peace”, stands in conformity to what Paul VI had stated, “Development is the new name for peace”. He writes, “excessive economic, social and cultural inequalities... are a danger to peace”. Cf. PP 76.

<sup>52</sup> VI PCO, Proposal 9.

<sup>53</sup> CL 16, 2.1.

<sup>54</sup> CL 12, 4.3.1.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Test 2.

<sup>56</sup> CL 12, 4.3.1.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. CL 16, 2.2.

<sup>58</sup> VI PCO, Proposal 9. Br. Corriveau recognizes that in the past the Capuchin Fraternity was moved by compassion to serve the poor with their own hands. However, he tends to be critical of the fact that in many circumstances, “as ministries become institutionalized, there is always a tendency for the brothers to be taken up with the administrative aspects of the work, and direct service of the poor often becomes the duty of paid employees”. Cf. CL 12, 4.3.2. In the spirit of Francis, who “hoped always to start over again, wishing to go back to serving lepers”, he invites the friars to engage themselves in direct service to the poor. Cf. 1 Cel 103.

proposals of the VI PCO emphasizing the need of having *fraternities inserted among the poor*.<sup>59</sup> “being poor with the poor and becoming their brothers is part and parcel of our Franciscan charism and of our tradition as ‘brothers of the people’”.<sup>60</sup> This echoes the I PCO saying that: “a special fraternal presence on our part is called for among those who suffer want and loneliness, such as those who live in the poorer suburbs of cities and towns, and those who are neglected in rural areas”.<sup>61</sup> A special emphasis had been placed on “the life of our missionaries among indigenous peoples [which] must be considered a true Franciscan presence among the poor”.<sup>62</sup> This is also seen “as an expression of minority”.<sup>63</sup>

Br. Carlos Bazzara has pointed out to the Order that in these insertion fraternities,

we could conceivably divest ourselves of all our goods and live an austere lifestyle, but that would not suffice. We would still need to go beyond the privations and assimilate the aspirations of the poor. This is never fully achievable, but it is possible to enter into a historical process which, without making us identical to the poor, will put us in *fraternal communion*. The challenge is to become brothers of the poor, rather than identifying with them in the strict sense.<sup>64</sup>

An important reason for such insertion fraternities is the cause of justice: “we believe that solidarity with those on the edge of society is one of the prime responses against the injustice of our times”.<sup>65</sup> Hence, these insertion experiences determine and form the perspectives from which the Capuchin Order can judge and respond to the structural causes of poverty and human suffering in its missionary activity, and thus work for justice:

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<sup>59</sup> It is emphasized that it is the fraternity as such which is inserted among the poor and that the experience of insertion does not lead to the isolation of the brothers within the context of the provincial fraternity. Cf. CL 16, 2.4. For this reason VI PCO calls for a careful selection of such fraternities and the formation of the brothers who are their members. Cf. VI PCO, Proposal 10.

<sup>60</sup> VI PCO, Proposal 9. Being present among the poor goes back to the closeness of God to the Chosen People and culminates in the Incarnation of the Word. Salvation history also shows that the concept of being “present among” is not just a passing mode but the key category of redemption. “Quod non est assumptum, non est sanatum”, the Church Fathers would say.

<sup>61</sup> I PCO 6.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 9b.

<sup>64</sup> CARLOS BAZARRA, *Brothers of the Poor among the Poor: A Characteristic Particularly our Own, Analecta OFM Cap 3* (1998), 622. Bazzara also insists that the theology behind insertion among the poor presupposes three biblical components. These mark the way that must be followed by those who have made the physical and spiritual shift towards the poor: knowledge of the people in their reality (Ex 3:7; Phil 2:7), the need to listen to the people (Ex 3:7) and readiness to take on the task of liberating the people (Ex 3:8; Lk 4:18). Cf. BAZARRA, 623.

<sup>65</sup> VI PCO, Proposal 9.

Rooted in the experience of compassion, we can as individuals and fraternities, bring our spiritual and intellectual resources to the cause of the poor and oppressed. With the help of the social sciences we can assist the poor and all the people of good will to see that human inequalities are not the result of the will of God but of human evil which must yield to change and conversion... The new name for poverty is often “social exclusion”. In the name of the gospel, we should not fear to ask why it is that in otherwise affluent societies, some are excluded from the benefits of that society’s wealth in its many forms (e.g. food, housing, education, health, etc...).<sup>66</sup>

#### 5.1.4 The Poor – Our Teachers

These insertion experiences are also fruitful for the Franciscan life itself: “the oppressed and outcasts will be our brothers and sisters. They will also be our teachers”.<sup>67</sup> Such a presence calls for “the structure of our fraternities to be adapted in regard to our special presence with and among the poor”.<sup>68</sup> Besides, the fraternities established among the poor are also considered as method of initial and ongoing formation: “Experience of living among the people is useful in providing a real possibility of conversion and renewal of one’s life and vocation”.<sup>69</sup>

A step forward in this direction was then made in the affirmation that: “we recognize that closeness to the culture of the poor enriches us from a human point of view and is a necessary hermeneutical tool with which to reach the heart of our Franciscan heritage”,<sup>70</sup> namely evangelical poverty. This *hermeneutical tool* is not optional but an obligatory one for an effective gospel witnesses. Failure to do so is a failure to understand “our own poverty and thus remain at a superficial level of our heritage”.<sup>71</sup> This approach differs a little bit from the present Pope’s assertion that the option of the poor is an expression of Christian love. Here it is something more.

The culture of the poor teaches to embrace an austere lifestyle that is a characteristic of the Capuchin way of life. For the Capuchin fraternity, Jesus is the model of

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<sup>66</sup> CL 12, 4.3.5.

<sup>67</sup> V PCO 91. Bazarra has explained this concept writing: “all genuine evangelization is a two-way process: from the evangelizer to the people, and from the people to the evangelizer”. Cf. BAZARRA, 623.

<sup>68</sup> I PCO 31.

<sup>69</sup> IV PCO 48.

<sup>70</sup> VI PCO, Proposal 10.

<sup>71</sup> CL 16, 1.4.

poverty and austerity.<sup>72</sup> Imitating his austerity means to identify with the outcasts and the poor, to build communion with them and “to take on what is valid in their way of believing, loving and hoping”.<sup>73</sup>

A simple lifestyle taught by the poor also embraces the area of *evangelization*: “we should be more ready to learn from the poor and to place our trust in God alone”.<sup>74</sup> Basing himself of Matthew’s Gospel, this was the attitude Francis adopted in his evangelization. “For Francis, this way of being and living, powerless and totally defenceless, was not a method or condition of evangelization, but was already in itself a proclamation of the Gospel... Consequently, we must seek to implement models of evangelization that are less bound up with the power and security that derives from having many expensive resources”.<sup>75</sup>

## **5. 2 The Franciscan Maltese Capuchin’s Ministry: *Suret il-Bniedem* Foundation<sup>76</sup>**

The Foundation was set up in 1992 by the initiative of the Franciscan Capuchin Order. One of its pioneers was Fr. Leopoldo Tabone OFMCap, who worked wholeheartedly to assist homeless men. Previously, the setting offered accommodation to inmates, who had served their sentence, to help them to re-integrate into the community. Later on, the home opened its services to a wider client group and eventually, larger premises were required. Thus, from the former residence *Welcome Home* at Fgura, the foundation moved its services to Gzira in 2000. The latter was a convent donated by the Augustinian nuns and it was named *Dar Leopoldo* for the founder of the Foundation. *Dar Leopoldo* is run by the foundation *Suret il-Bniedem* which also

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<sup>72</sup> Corriveau notes that Jesus is not the most austere evangelical model. John the Baptist was more austere than Jesus. His austerity, unlike that of Jesus, lead him outside human society. Cf. CL 16, 4.1.

<sup>73</sup> VI PCO, Proposal 9.

<sup>74</sup> VI PCO, Proposal 11.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., Proposal 11. An example which Br. John Corriveau tackles is that of transportation. He emphasizes that the means of transport should be used which keeps us closest to the people. The perspective of the norm is not simply financial. Takes into consideration that “Capuchin tradition teaches us that the evangelical values of our fraternal way of life proclaim the gospel of Christ more effectively than all our instruments”. Cf. CL 16, 5.3.

<sup>76</sup> Otherwise stated, all the information in this section I have either collected personally from my visits at *Dar Leopoldo* or taken from an unpublished 3 page write up *Suret il-Bniedem Foundation* provided by *Dar Leopoldo*.

offers another shelter in Valletta, *Dar Tereza Spinelli*, targeted for homeless women and their children.<sup>77</sup>

### **5.2.1 The Objectives of *Dar Leopoldo***

The home's aim is to offer temporary shelter to homeless men who due to different individual circumstances have no accommodation. Presently the setting can accommodate up to 24 residents at a time. The residents who make use of the service are supported in their physiological, psychological and emotional needs. They are assisted to find new employment an alternative accommodation whilst they are helped to re-integrate into the community with more self-confidence, empowered to tackle their problems and seek professional help when deemed necessary. Moreover, constant case-reviews are carried out to assess the needs and actual situation of the service user.

### **5.2.2 Referrals**

Referrals can be initiated by the individual himself or by any other person or agencies. The referred person must be willing to make use of the service and ready to adhere to the home's rules and regulations. Each possible service user is assessed and then it is decided whether that person is eligible to make use of the service or not. Referral agents will be required to co-operate with the Home to actively contribute in the care plan even after the admission of the referred person.

In the cases of emergency admissions, the staff member on duty makes an assessment and decides whether an individual can be accepted or otherwise. In these cases the person is accepted only for one night until further assessment is carried out. If a person needs to be admitted to the Home after 10.00 p.m. he has to go to the nearest police station and the police officer himself on duty contacts *Dar Leopoldo*.

*Dar Leopoldo* also offers services to the maximum of 4 young males between the age of 15-18 years with emotional and behavioural problems and with no alternative

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<sup>77</sup> Cf. CRISPIN TABONE OFMCAP, *The Capuchin Mission in the Maltese Islands*, in *Suret il-Bniedem* 1 (May 2003), 1-2. Currently, the Foundation is also thinking of establishing a new shelter in Marsa for persons who live at Mount Carmel for the sole reason of housing problems and not because of mental health problems.

accommodations. Usually, in such cases, the only alternative placement is Mount Carmel or the young offenders' wing at Corradino Correctional Facilities (YOURS). Hence, in conjunction with *Aġenzija Apogġ* and other agencies or entities, *Dar Leopoldo* helps these young adolescents to improve their quality of life in interpersonal aspects aiming at independent and fulfilling living.

### **5.2.3 Admissibility Criteria**

To be admitted, the potential service user must be an adult male homeless person who is independent and self-sufficient (e.g. in self-care, cleaning, laundry, travelling, mobility, budgeting skills, communication, maintaining healthy social relationships and treatment) with no alcohol and drug problems, and is willing to work and improve his situation.

### **5.2.4 Set Up and Structure**

The setting offers a sense of community in which the residents learn to live with other members and together they co-operate for their own well-being and improvement of their situation. The setting itself offers space to cultivate a sense of responsibility and respect towards each other. The residents experience the advantages and difficulties of living within a community in order to facilitate re-integration into the larger society.

Residents must:

- Respect other residents and staff members
- Abide to the established rules of the Home
- Share bedrooms, bathrooms and other common areas with other residents
- Be present for meal times, attend and actively participate in residents' meetings and support groups
- Respect neighbours by not disturbing them
- Refrain from smoking within the premises except in yards, roof and balconies
- Maintain healthy social contact
- Comply with medical treatments, if any, as prescribed by doctors/specialists

- Maintain employment (for employed service users) or register for work with Employment and Training Corporation (ETC) and seek employment (for unemployed service users)

Residents cannot make use of deal with drugs; they can be asked to submit urine sample for testing. Likewise, alcohol is not permitted into the premises and no person is allowed inside the Home under the influence of alcohol.

### **5.2.5 Volunteers**

*Suriet il-Bniedem* is run in a professional manner but there is room for volunteers. One can commit himself to help for a numbers of hours per week in these areas: administrative work, fund raising activities and by giving direct help to the residents.<sup>78</sup>

## **6. CONCLUSION**

The ultimate goal of *Dar Leopoldo* is to assist the homeless service user to use his potential and get re-integrated into the mainstream community. This goal is solely achieved by the willingness and determination of the same service user. The commitment of the staff, the referral agent and other agencies are essential in reaching the ultimate goal. Success is likely to be achieved only through the co-operation and mutual understanding between all parties involved.

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<sup>78</sup> RICHARD GALEA, “*Suriet il-Bniedem* tniedi skema ġdida ta’ volontarjat“, *Suret il-Bniedem* 3 (June 2004) 4-5.

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