

## To the Stigmatine Laity

Very dear Stigmatine Laity and Friends,

We, the General Chapter fathers, assembled in Brasilia, reach out to you, as our brothers and sisters, and want to express to you our joy in considering you as part of the same family with us, one single great Family, joined in the same name and in the same charism of St. Gaspar Bertoni.

In fact, as we have already corresponded to the Stigmatine Religious Vocation, so, too, your being Stigmatine Laity is a vocation and is a response to the call of God through the Charism of St. Gaspar. We are united in the pathway of holiness with our Father, St. Gaspar, and we are united in the same Mission that the Founder and entrusted to us: **Go forth and Evangelize.** Sharing the same charism and the same Missionary restlessness, we wish to speak to you about our Father, St. Gaspar, in order to know him better.

St. Gaspar, in his Priestly Mission, always made room and gave importance to the Laity. In order to form the Leaders of his entire organizational plan for his Oratories, he would gather them evenings in his own home, for their deeper and more profound formation.

There was a continuance flow of all kinds of people to Fr. Bertoni's room. This is the account of an eye witness:

***... All in our own city of Verona, and many from other places who had heard him spoken of, venerated him. And those who needed him for consultation treasured his very sage advice. His ardent charity for the needy and the afflicted must have been beyond all measure: how they could give witness to this if the many, many men and women were still alive who benefited by him. I myself witnessed on many occasions the large numbers of people who would flock to the door of his residence to seek help and comfort from him. And he would welcome all of them equally, the poor and the rich, the wise and the unlearned, they would find him always tranquil in spirit, and serene in countenance, peaceful in his sentiments and wise in all his conduct toward them...*** [This is the account of a Diocesan Priest, Fr. John Beltrami. Vol. VI, p. 561].

In the Homily on the day of his Canonization, November 1, 1989, Pope John Paul II said the following:

***... It is significant to note that St. Gaspar Bertoni drew up a plan for the Christian Life, in which come provision was made for all, for every walk of life, in the call to holiness of life: not only for Priests, but for married couples, on the example of the Holy Spouses of Nazareth, for the youth,***

***for the workers and for every category of persons. His friends, the Apostolic Missionaries, in communion with the pastoral plan of their Bishops, would preach this message: the universal call to holiness, with the realization that from Christ's Sacrifice, from His Merciful heart, from His Stigmata, hope flows for all. St. Gaspar knew how to lead so many souls to become a part of that immense multitude what today [All Saints' Day] we contemplate with exultant and grateful heart ...***

Beloved Friends, already many years have passed since our General Chapters have thought of you, and have written very beautiful words to you that we desire to have you hear as an invitation to be part of our Stigmatine Family:

***... Many friends were always attracted and orientated by our spirituality and activity. To their collaboration is bound the success of some many of our activities and works. From them also there is due in great part our missionary expansion to other countries. The Apostolic Mission demands the openness of the Institute to the collaboration of the Laity. The General Chapter maintains in act that our charism, since it is an authentic gift and a richness for the whole People of God, ought to be communicated also to the Laity. The Stigmatine spirituality takes nothing away from the Laity of what is specific to them, but rather can assist them to carry out with a more fervent spirit their commitments as Christians, in their temporal realities [of family, work, society] and in the context of the Church. All the Confreres ought to be motivated, encouraged and stimulated to this openness toward the Laity, because the future and the renewal of our activities depends also on this. If the advantage for the Laity in this is a great one, it is also for us Stigmatines who can verify our identity and receive assistance and encouragement in our apostolic endeavors... [General Chapter of 1988].***

***...Among the Laity who are close to us some seek to share our charism. For them, the Congregation is called to work out a plan of formation and accompaniment ... [General Chapter of 2006].***

Now we want to thank you because you have assisted us with your prayer and with your solidarity. We thank you for having done well in walking along with us and giving us the occasion of verifying our own Stigmatine vocation.

We ask you to assist us to read always more deeply the signs of the times and the yearning of humanity for justice, peace, the protection of the created world. We ask you to respond ever more to the Mission of announcing the Gospel in society, in the political world, in the economic undertakings, and in the entire temporal realm.

Lastly, we share with you all that which some of you have written to us:

**...Together we can create strong and affectionate environments where individuals might feel themselves loved by the community that surrounds them. Together we ought to form a serene community, characterized by sobriety, in that it is capable of discerning the authentic values of life and of being entrusted to Providence...** [From the Stigmatine Lay Assembly, held in Verona, October 2005].

In these days of our General Chapter, we have verified our own Stigmatine identity in the light of an invitation addressed to all of us religious to become **Monks at home, and Apostles outside**. We ask you to continue to be close to us with your prayer and with your friendship so that we might be able to be ever more coherent in this our characteristic.

To you we address the invitation to live ever better your spirituality and apostolic experience in our Family, and in those places where you are presently living. May you experience much joy in hearing of our presence and our closeness and in living more profoundly our belonging to the Charism of St. Gaspar.

In this path of St. Gaspar Bertoni, the Holy Spouses, Mary and Joseph, are close to you, in their conjugal and family life. May the Holy Spouses assist us in living our Christian vocation and consecration in 'Holy Abandonment' and in full filial confidence in the Father.

We greet you in Christ and in Bertoni,

### ***The Capitular Fathers***

*Brasilia, February 14, 2006.*

*Note: Italian original text translated into English by Rev. Joseph C. Henchey, CSS, in Feb., 2006.*