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## **Friars Minor. Fr. Fusarelli ( newly appointed Minister General): “Sensitive to the history of the friars.” The gratitude of Amatrice earthquake survivors**

“With a feeling of awe but also of hope, in the awareness of my weakness. I feel very supported in this by the friars, the General's post is not a one-man office. I do not yet know everything I will have to do, but I will let myself be guided by a spirit of listening, without preconceived assumptions, by all the realities, cultures and different ways of incarnating the charism. It is a challenge which is both inspiring and thought-provoking. But I trust in the good Lord.” Father **Massimo Fusarelli**, interviewed by SIR, thus described his feelings after his appointment as Minister General of the OFM for the period 2021-2027, announced yesterday, July 13, in Rome, during the 2021 General Chapter of the Order of Friars Minor (OFM). Father Fusarelli, 58, received the Franciscan habit on July 28, 1982. He professed his first vows on July 30, 1983, he professed solemn vows on January 8, 1989 and was ordained a priest on September 30 the same year. After completing the Institutional Theological Course at Rome's Pontifical University Antonianum, he received a Licentiate degree in Patristic Theology from the Augustinian Patristic Institute. He served as Provincial Definitor, Animator of the pastoral care of vocations and later of ongoing formation; he served as Guardian several times. From 2003 to 2009 he was the general secretary of Formation and Studies; a General Visitor for the Province of Naples and for the unification process of the provinces of northern Italy. He is presently parish priest of San Francesco a Ripa, guardian of the convent and coordinator of the shelter project for the poor. **Father Fusarelli, as you begin this office, what will you bring with you of the many experiences gained as a friar over the years?** First of all, the relations with people I experienced in many different ways, especially with the young, which I have consistently sought to maintain. Secondly, to be open to the novelty that young people represent, to their questions and concerns. Over the past few years I have had the opportunity to work closely with Rome's suburbs, Torre Angela, with the earthquake survivors of the towns of Amatrice and Accumoli, with the refugees and migrants at the parish of San Francesco a Ripa. All those encounters have opened my heart and made me more receptive. I carry with me the attentive listening to all those realities of people and life. These many experiences, including my time as parish priest at San Francesco a Ripa, have taught me not to rely on abstract ideas or ready-made formulas, but to keep close contact with life and reality and to listen, in order to recognise the workings of the Holy Spirit. **You mentioned the earthquake victims of Amatrice and Accumoli, where you served during the most tragic days of the 2016 earthquake emergency. What are your memories of that experience?** The population of Amatrice and Accumoli helped me become more approachable. That was their greatest gift to me. I remember the time I lived in the hamlet of Santa Giusta near Amatrice, in a container home made available by Caritas, later renamed the 'Plastic Convent'. That was for me a major turning point that I will never forget. **Young people, families, refugees, peripheries: all of these are frequently mentioned as urgent concerns by Pope Francis, and would appear to reflect a working programme for the next six years...** It is not a programme. It's what will I am putting in my backpack as I begin this mission, together with the Bible, the writings of Francis and other books, fiction and poetry, which keep me company. It is not a roadmap but rather a set of paths to be followed. And then, the life of the brethren: I have been constantly working with the friars in various services and this has made me increasingly sensitive to their story. **Pope Francis has sent you a telegram conveying his congratulations and blessings upon your appointment. It reads: “May the Seraphic Father St. Francis be an encouragement to you in the guidance of your friars.” What was your response to this message?** I am extremely grateful for the Pope's closeness, also expressed to me by Card. João Braz de Aviz, Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, delegated by the Pope to preside over the General Chapter of the Order of Friars Minor. It is a source of great support and comfort. I hope to have the

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opportunity to ask the Pope his expectations of us.

Daniele Rocchi