**Franciscan Youth and Young Adult Animator training, “Core Four” session 1**

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Welcome to the Franciscan Youth and Young Adult Commission's first presentation. Thank you for joining us. We will explore the topic, “Baptism and Profession as a call to mission.”

We decided to start our series with a discussion of the Mission Statement of the Franciscan Youth and Young Adult Commission, because we’re hoping that going through the Mission will clear up misconceptions and lead you to a deeper understanding. Examining the mission will unite us in our purpose—ignite our passion for young people—and give us the confidence to invite others to join us in the call to bring the gospel to our younger generations.

Writing this Mission Statement was the first thing the Commission did when I was first appointed Chair. It’s almost identical to the one that had been around for many years, with only a few minor changes. The basic concepts have remained true to what our OFS predecessors, the Order and in fact our Church have all been promoting for many years.

As we go through the Mission line by line, you may have questions or comments, so feel free to send a Chat message and we’ll have time at the end of our session to address them or we can continue the discussion on a later zoom.

Our mission is divided into two parts. The first part is our vision, and the second defines the goals. Everything we do needs to fit within this vision and its goals.

We'll examine each section so you are fully aware of the direction in which we're going. It's really important that we're all united, in order to make YouFra strong in your regions and in the United States. Each YouFra will look different, depending on the age and demographics of the young people we are working with, but our mission needs to be consistent.

So, let’s get started.

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The first line of the mission explains that our direction is: **Inspired by the life of St. Francis of Assisi and guided by our OFS Rule (Art. 24) and General Constitutions (Art. 96 & 97)...**

We've asked your regional Animators or a delegate if you don't have an animator yet, to become familiar with the YouFra Essential Documents. You can find the documents on the National website and hopefully you have also read the articles in the TAU USA and letters we’ve sent that have intended to walk you through the process.

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**Our Mission is to bring the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to the youth and young adults of the United States of America.**

Please understand, our mission is **not** to fill the OFS fraternity coffers with new, young people. You may know Kathy Taormina, who was a previous Franciscan Youth and Young Adult Commission Chair and was more recently the commission spiritual assistant for several years before Brother Scott. The first time I met Kathy and heard her speak was years ago at the first All Commissions Conference. When I heard her say that our mission is not to create little baby Franciscans, a huge burden was lifted. I felt like that mission was an impossible task, but the mission of being an influence and sharing the gospel life with young people was a totally realistic endeavor.

We are called as baptized Catholics to cooperate with the Church's mission to spread the gospel. We were given this mission at baptism and then again when we were professed. The mission is to lead others to the Kingdom...not necessarily to lead others to our fraternities.

Drawing younger people to our fraternities may be a fruit we experience down the line due to our efforts now—but our primary concern is to bring the gospel to our younger generations.

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**We are called to share this Franciscan way of life through prayer, formation, and social justice action with all youth whom we encounter.**

Let’s look at each one of these components separately.

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There are three fundamental aspects of ministry to include:

The first one is prayer. Young people are thirsty and searching for God. Offering them a variety of prayer experiences in which to participate and welcoming them into the Sacramental life of the Church, will draw them into a closer relationship with God.

I remember a Franciscan priest sharing one time, that when he was asked what drew him to Francis, his answer was “It was Christ and Francis who drew me.”

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The next way we can reach and serve our young people is through good formation. Young people may discover a desire to know God after attending an event or program—but we're not inviting them to one event, one prayer service, or one Mass. We're inviting them to embrace the search for a relationship with God which will ultimately lead them into a gospel life.

In upcoming presentations, we’ll share what we've learned after studying the Bishops' documents regarding youth ministry, *Renewing the Vision*, *Sons and Daughters of Light*, and most recently their newest framework for youth ministry called  *Listen, Teach, Send*. Pope Francis’ exhortation, *Christus Vivit* has also influenced the direction of our work with youth. These are included in our list of recommended resources that you can find on the national website.

There will be some teaching and mentoring when passing on our faith; but young people need to own their faith and be able to express it in order to mature in that faith.

It’s vital that we realize what we're after is building relationships of trust, openness, and a shared quest for holiness. To help with that, we’ve developed a sequence of topics important to the different stages, beginning with listening and relationship building activities, then moving towards the Rite of Promise, the establishment of YouFra, and finally for deepening their faith after they’ve made the Promise. We’ll share more about this in a future session. Again, this list of formation topics is intended to be a jumping off point to get you started. Young people themselves will eventually be equipped and provided the resources and leadership training to continue their YouFra experience, utilizing topics that are meaningful to them.

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And finally, young people don’t want to sit around and talk about the world’s problems. They want action! Many will simply participate in social justice action and others will actually initiate changes. Yes--they need also to seek the whys and justification for the actions, but they do want to serve. They want to use their hands and feet and voices. Opportunities for this abound, and can include all ages. Joining or financially supporting already existing programs, like Young Neighbors in Action, the Laudato Si Circles, JustFaith workshops or Franciscan Missions are effective ways to meet young people and give a message of hope and solidarity to them.

None of these aspects of ministry—Prayer, formation, or social just action are meant to be separate. Our young people are on a life-long journey, just like we are. Prayer, learning and growing, and working for justice are intertwined for all of us.

The final words in that paragraph emphasize **“with all youth whom we encounter.”** Bringing the Gospel is not just for Catholic young people. Multicultural and ecumenical faith activities are a good way to introduce younger folks to a world and attitude they may not have witnessed before. They learn from each other and discover a common purpose. Eventually, Catholic youth may want to start a YouFra. They will hopefully continue the outreach to other non-Catholic youth. We’ll talk more about that later.

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**We envision journeying with youth and young adults.**

We learn and grow in holiness right along with the young people as we build authentic relationships with them. It’s important for young people to know we older Catholics are also interested in growing closer to God, becoming increasingly involved in our faith, and more deeply rooted in our Franciscan spirituality. This is a life-long process. God is not finished with us yet either.

So, we journey with youth as they

**1) Discern their purpose in life and**

**2) Develop a relationship with Jesus Christ.**

Many young folks have expressed confusion, misdirection, and lack of purpose.

Helping them discover their Christian and human selves in a safe setting is imperative for their well-being and confidence in this desperately negative world. This aspect of YouFra will involve leadership training, vocation mentoring, and formation. CIOFS directives are, that we provide support for growth of young people in the areas of Christian, Catholic, Human, and Franciscan development.

Developing a relationship with Jesus is their only way to peace and understanding. They need to know God cherishes them as His children, infuses them with a purpose and desire to love and be loved, and gives them the grace to succeed in their attempts.

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**After experiencing fraternal life, these young people may desire to form a YouFra community.**

I’m sure you can all say that fraternity life, gathering with your Franciscan family and creating that essential sense of belonging, helps you in your faith life. We all need community. As young people begin to bond and have a better understanding of fraternal life, the idea of forming a YouFra can be introduced. Do they want to know more about the Franciscan way of life? Do they want to follow Christ in the footsteps of St. Francis? Do they want to grow as a Church family?

Not all will be drawn to Franciscan spirituality. Just as we do in our formation programs, there is time for discernment toward their Promise. This journey is different, in that they are not making a lifetime commitment to take on a vocation as we do in our Profession. But it’s no less important. The Promise is a way for them to make the choice to follow Christ as part of the Franciscan family, and for them to say “yes” to a gospel life, at least for now. The Promise is renewed annually. Once at least five youth have made their promise, they may officially form a YouFra, which stands for Youth Fraternity or some say, Franciscan Youth.

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**And if they choose to form a YouFra, the OFS at all levels commits to support them.**

If they request to form a YouFra after they have at least five who have made the Promise, the region needs to be ready to support our young Franciscans by (1) finding a local fraternity to sponsor their YouFra, (2) providing an animator from that fraternity and (3) seeking the appointment of a spiritual assistant. These are requirements for establishing a YouFra.

You can have a wonderful group of Franciscan minded youth or young adults who are meeting consistently and growing in their faith, but if they want to be considered an official YouFra which connects them to the Franciscan Order, they need to fulfill these requirements. Please be ready to help them move forward if this is their goal!

We also can’t emphasize enough the importance of developing vibrant fraternities. This ideal scenario of a group of young people working toward YouFra may not be the reality in your area. That’s okay. Remember, our call is to share the Good News, which can be accomplished in many ways. But a young adult may wander into an established fraternity gathering, and they should be warmly welcomed and inspired by what they experience, or they won’t return.

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The second part of the Mission Statement relates the commission’s goals.

**The commission will:**

**Provide the necessary training and resources** **to aid OFS fraternities in their outreach to youth and young adults and in the formation of YouFra groups,**

CIOFS does not advocate any particular “program,” as each country, culture, group, and age has different needs and expectations. We’ve provided a list of appropriate resources that we feel would serve our youth well. We’ve also developed some Faith Development resources you are welcome to use. They are on the flash drive that each region received.

We have a series of sessions based on the Articles of the Rule called *Living a Gospel Life* written by myself and Jean D’Onofrio, another commission member; and a series of sessions based on the Canticles that a few others wrote, and that we adapted more specifically for our purposes. We’re working on retreats that can be tweaked for different ages, and Brother Scott developed a series for Leadership Training, and had ideas for evening gatherings focusing on Catholic and Franciscan themes. Janice is working with others to create a childrens' Francisan Bible camp. From what we've heard in our conversations, many of you have things going on in your regions also. Wouldn't it be nice if we all shared our successes in order to support one another. We’ve just started compiling ideas for use with even younger children.

These are all resources from which your young people can choose, with guidance from their animator, formation director, and spiritual assistant. Please understand the importance of progressing step by step and not just jumping into sessions without being properly prepared.

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**...being sensitive to differences in culture, settings, and environments.**

We are blessed with such diversity in our country. It’s imperative that we are sensitive to different cultures, languages, genders and even geographical areas. Cultural sensitivity may present an individual and unique challenge for any YouFra, depending on the young people that are participating. Each YouFra will have a different “flavor,” and needs according to their general populace. So again--as you build relationship and get to know your young people, listen to their desires and needs, ideas will emerge both from you as their animator, and from them.

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**The commission will also provide networking opportunities between the national executive council, the commission, local and regional fraternities, Franciscan Youth and Young Adults and YouFra worldwide.**

We have set up some methods for this purpose. We post messages on the National Facebook page called *Monday Messages To and From Youth and Young Adults*. Not very well read--so we’re pursuing a better avenue for communicating inspiring thoughts and sharing ideas and opportunities. We have an animator group email. The commission decided that eventually the youth themselves will take the lead in online presence methods. In the meantime, we’re in the process of setting up other means of on-line presence to allow for dialogue and making connections.

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The commission agrees to  **introduce Catholic and other interested young people in the United States to Sts. Francis and Clare of Assisi.**

Young people are particularly drawn to the stories of Francis and Clare. There are myriad number of ways to introduce young people to the authentic lives of Francis and Clare—evenings of storytelling, retreats, movie nights as examples. Many have grown up with the “bird bath” version of St. Francis complete with the blessing of the animals on his feast day. In fact, Francis’ care for creation does draw people of all ages, so there’s nothing wrong with that. But introducing even one other aspect of Franciscan Spirituality can be a dynamic yet simple method of enlightening them about Francis and Clare, our beloved saints. One of our tasks has been to create retreats and other ways to follow through on this.

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We will **Share with young people the connection between the Gospel of Jesus and the Franciscan spirituality and way of life.**

Young people need significant connections between what they learn through hearing/studying the Gospels--and what it means in their daily lives. They need to witness OFS members in action, living what they believe, not just talking about it. Getting involved even in small ways, and inviting youth to experience these moments with us, and hear our stories as we hear theirs, is a crucial way to help them make the connection--Gospel to life, life to Gospel.

**Closing**

The Commission has done what we set out to do...of course this is ongoing...but it’s important that each individual, fraternity, and region determine what is theirs to do and begin the work at the grassroots level.

We have and will continue to provide resources and guidance, but it’s really up to your region and fraternities. You may not be the ones to step into the world of youth, but hopefully as you gain wisdom you will be able to inspire, find and then educate and support those who will.

I just want to leave you with one last thought. How many of you have had the experience of serving anothers’ needs and in the process discovered you gained as much as they did? We speak about accompanying youth—kind of buzz words we hear over and over. The truth is, God accompanies us at the same time. Our young people are a blessing to us, a treasure we don’t want to lose. I’ve said many times during my years advocating for youth, if St. Francis could hug a leper, certainly we should have the courage to step into the world of young people.

Don’t get me wrong. That’s not to say they are like lepers! But I’ve heard a lot of you share you are faced with a folks in your fraternity, including yourselves perhaps, who are afraid of young people in certain respects; you feel old, tired, unequipped to take this on. I’m encouraging you to trust that with each step you take, “what once seemed bitter will become sweet,” by the grace of God and with the help of one another. Thank you for your dedication, your willingness to learn, and for the joy and hope you’ve brought to the commission.

Peace and all good. May God bless the work of our hands!