

Franciscan Youth

(YouFra)

A Way Of Franciscan Vocation

CIOFS, ROME 2004

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The Franciscan Youth (YouFra) A Way Of Franciscan Vocation

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1. Introduction

To whom is this document addressed?

1. This document is intended for all those responsible for the YouFra Fraternities: the Council of the YouFra Fraternity, the one in charge of formation, the SFO Fraternal Animator and the Spiritual Assistant.

Objectives of the document

2. It intends to clarify, in broad lines, the identity of the YouFra; to offer leads and suggestions for the animation and formation of the YouFra; and to unify opinions for the work of animation of the YouFra.

What the document is not

3. The aim, however, is not to issue new norms, but, rather, to underline what is already found in the General Constitutions of the SFO (Art. 96-97) and in the resolutions of the General Chapters, particularly that of Mexico in 1993 and that of Rome in 2002. Neither does it seek to make all the YouFra groups uniform, but to walk in unity while respecting diversity.

2. Specific Characteristics of YouFra

4. In the field of the pastoral care of the youth, we find young persons, attracted to St. Francis, who wish to deepen their Christian and Franciscan vocation. To these young persons we must offer the options of the Franciscan Youth and the SFO, while respecting the demands on the youth in modern times, their crisis, problems and questions.

5. Some of the essential elements in their vocational journey are:

-To feel the call of the Holy Spirit to undergo, in fraternity, the experience of Christian life;

- Progressive discovery of St. Francis, his project of life and his values;
- Ecclesial and social presence, in order to have concrete apostolic experiences.

6. The Franciscan Youth, as described in the SFO General Constitutions, differs from other Franciscan Youth groups by:

- The acceptance of the Rule of the SFO as an inspirational document;
- The personal and formal commitment (the Promise) is made before God and the fraternity to live that inspiration;
- Belonging to the Franciscan Family and being an integral part of the SFO; the accompaniment and animation provided by the lay Franciscans
- The proper National Statutes approved by the National Council of the SFO or, in its absence, by the Presidency of the CIOFS, which sets down the conditions to belong to the Franciscan Youth.

3. What is Franciscan Youth (YouFra)?

a. Spiritual characteristics:

7. The Franciscan Youth (YouFra)...is formed by those young people... (Const. 96.2)

The YouFra is formed by young people, meaning to say, it is a temporary stage in life limited to the youth, which begins with adolescence and ends when the person reaches maturity.

8. ...who feel called by the Holy Spirit... deepening their own vocation... (Const. 96.2)

The YouFra is a vocational way that presupposes an initial call which develops into an option in life. Being a call, it implies on the part of the young person a response, which is confirmed through a personal commitment (a Promise) before God and in the presence of the brothers and sisters.

9. ...to share the experience of Christian life in fraternity... (Const. 96.2)

The YouFra is an experience of fraternity, meaning to say, a community of young believers, sons and daughters of the same Father, who share their faith, based on fraternal love. Their fraternity is inserted into the ecclesial community in which it lives and acts.

10. ... in the light of the message of St. Francis of Assisi, deepening their own vocation within the context of the Secular Franciscan Order... (Const. 96.2)

The YouFra walks in the light of the message of St. Francis of Assisi, meaning to say, they discover gradually and assume this project of life and its values. It belongs to the Franciscan Family as integral part of the SFO and considers the Rule of the SFO its inspirational document. It asks spiritual assistance from the competent religious superiors, and fraternal animation from the Secular Franciscans.

b. Organizational characteristics:

11. The Franciscan Youth has a specific organization... (Const. 96.5) The YouFra is organized according to its own criteria, which can be specified in its particular statutes. It has

its own fraternities and responsible leaders at all levels, and counts on spiritual assistance and a specific fraternal animation.

12. ...and teaching methods adequate for the needs of the world of youth... (Const. 96.5) The YouFra adapts itself to the needs of the youth through its method and contents of formation. Its formation is intended to help the youth in their vocational option and enter completely in the world in which they live.

13. ...according to the existing realities in the various countries... (Const. 96.5) The YouFra is present in many countries and constitutes a very diverse reality which cannot be made uniform. The socio-cultural situation defines the reality of being young, the responsibilities that the youth can assume and the possibilities of formation and action.

c. Relationship between the YouFra and the SFO

14. The Franciscan Youth (YouFra) in so far as the SFO considers itself to be particularly responsible for it... (Const. 96.2) The SFO has a particular commitment to the YouFra as part of its own pastoral service to the youth and the promotion of vocations. That is why it must accompany the young and help them mature their vocation as well as their introduction into the life of the fraternity.

15. The members of the Franciscan Youth consider the Rule of the SFO as an inspirational document... (Const. 96.3) The members of YouFra accept the Rule of the SFO as an inspiring document for the growth of their Christian and Franciscan vocation, individually and as a group. The relationship between the YouFra and the SFO is to be impregnated with the spirit of vital and reciprocal communion. That is why the vocational journey of the YouFra, normally, though not necessarily, leads to the SFO.

16. The Franciscan Youth, as component of the Franciscan family... (Const. 96.6) The YouFra is part of the Franciscan Family as it is an integral part of the SFO, and, as such, it is accompanied and animated by the Secular Franciscans. Besides, its responsible leader at the international level and at least 2 members of the YouFra National Council are young lay professed Franciscans. (Const. 97.3)

17. A representative of the Franciscan Youth...form part of the SFO Council... (Const. 97.4) At all levels of the fraternities of the SFO, there must be a member of the YouFra, chosen by his/her own council, who becomes a member of the council of the SFO. S/he has the right to vote in the SFO council only if s/he is a professed Secular Franciscan. In the same way, a member of SFO, chosen his/her own council, is to become a member of the council of the YouFra at the same level.

18. The representatives of the Franciscan Youth in the international council of the SFO are elected according to the international statutes (Const. 97.5) The international statutes of the SFO determine the number of YouFra representatives in the international council, the fraternities represented and their competence.

4. Vocational Journey

19. The YouFrans deepen their own vocation in the light of the message of St. Francis through an itinerary of progressive and ongoing formation. Vocational discernment will be the main focus during this journey.

Normally, this vocational journey is made up of the following stages:

a. Initiation

20. This is the stage for searching, observing, approaching and starting the initial formation which will culminate in the Promise of the YouFra. For the youth, this is the first contact with the YouFra where s/he asks him/herself: What is fraternity? What can I contribute to the group? The YouFra on its part informs him/her of the ideals, demands, expectations, methods and style that characterize it.

The length of this stage will depend on the situation of each person and of the YouFra group. If deemed appropriate, the National Statutes of the YouFra may establish the duration of that stage, for example, 3 to 6 months, taking into account the situation of those who come from other Franciscan groups (pre-YouFra).

The minimum age to join the YouFra will depend on the personal development of each person as well as his/her cultural situation; but it must be remembered that YouFra is meant for young people and not for children. If deemed appropriate, the national Statutes of the YouFra may establish the minimum age for joining it (for instance, 14 years of age).

b. Formation for the Promise in the YouFra

21. This is the period of formation and full integration in the life of the Fraternity. At the end of this period, the candidates confirm their option with a personal promise made before God and in the presence of the brothers and sisters. For the youth, this is the time to recognize and love the gospel according to the example of St. Francis in the fraternity. It takes willpower and fidelity to conform one's life to the gospel, and to acquire, progressively, the Franciscan values, lived with the spirit of commitment and service to others. The YouFra, on its part, accompanies the young person in searching for his/her way and spiritual growth.

The National Statutes of the YouFra may establish the minimum duration of this stage; it should not be shorter than one year and not longer than two years. If it seems advisable, the Statutes may also determine the maximum length of that stage of formation for the Promise in the YouFra. It falls under the competence of the local YouFra council to receive candidates to the Promise, according to the modes established in the national Statutes.

c. Deepening One's Vocation

22. This is the stage of the verification of the call in which the youth acquires and deepens the values that characterize the spirituality of the lay Franciscans and their mission in the church and in society. For the youth, this is the time to discover and incarnate in his/her daily life the inspiration of the SFO Rule in order to verify his/her authentic vocation and his/her answer to the call of God. It provides experiences of communion and participation with the brothers and sisters within the Franciscan family and experiences of mission and service to the Church and to society. On its part, the fraternity is to help the youth to clarify and discern the vocation that will better answer their capacity and aspirations.

The period of this temporary promise cannot be prolonged indefinitely because the time to make options, the discernment period, is only one of the stages in the life of every person. The National Statutes of the YouFra should determine the end of this period, considering the cultural and social situation in the country; in any case, it should not go beyond the age of 26.

5. Relationship between the YouFra and the SFO

a. Joining the SFO

23. The members of the YouFra who wish to profess in the SFO are to observe the provisions of the Rule, the Constitutions and the Ritual of the SFO (Const. 96.4).

The vocational journey of the YouFra, normally though not necessarily, leads to the SFO.

b. Belonging simultaneously to Franciscan Youth (YouFra) and to SFO

24. Due to the continuity of the vocational way of the YouFra towards the SFO, the profession in the SFO does not necessarily exclude the youth from belonging to his/her YouFra Fraternity.

The young person, who by profession in the SFO makes the Rule of the SFO his/her project of life, can continue his/her journey with his brothers and sisters in the YouFra.

There may be a number of reasons why a young person may simultaneously be an active member in both fraternities, his YouFra fraternity and his SFO fraternity. It may well happen that the YouFra fraternity needs the expertise of the young professed for the animation of the other young members, either as the one in charge of the YouFra fraternity or an active member of the same.

In any case, it is necessary that the young professed be active in both fraternities, even if his/her activities, in accordance with the council of the SFO, may be mostly geared toward the YouFra. This activity in the youth fraternity still ends at the age of 26.

c. Animation of the YouFra

25. The SFO shall seek the most suitable means to foster the vitality and increase of the YouFra; it shall stand by the side of the youth to encourage them, and shall provide for them all possible means to help them advance in their journey of human and spiritual growth. (Const. 97. 1).

26. The said means will vary according to circumstances; however, one of the most important ones will always be close contact with the SFO. For this reason, the local fraternities should make room for the young, either by allowing them to participate in their meetings, or by entrusting to them specific ministries in the fraternity. It is equally important that the SFO fraternities be flexible in their organization, and that they seek creative ways of forming special groups in the fraternity, under the guidance of the council of the fraternity.

27. Another indispensable means is the direct accompaniment of the youth by suitable members of the SFO. The SFO Constitutions enjoin fraternal animation to the YouFra as well as the presence of a SFO representative in the YouFra council at all levels. Usually, though not necessarily, the SFO representative in the council of the YouFra will also act as fraternal animator of the YouFra.

d. Spiritual Assistance

28. Equally indispensable is the spiritual assistance of the YouFra on the part of the first Order and the TOR (Const. 96. 6). Being a part of the Franciscan Family, the YouFra needs spiritual assistance to guarantee its fidelity to the Franciscan charism, its communion with the Church, and its union with the Franciscan family (Const. 85. 2). It belongs to the proper major Franciscan superiors to appoint spiritual assistants to the YouFra, by analogy with the provision of the *Statutes for the Pastoral and Spiritual Assistance of the SFO* (Statutes for Pastoral Assistance, 5, 2; 11, 2). As much as possible, one and the same person is to provide spiritual assistance to both the YouFra and the SFO.

29. At times, the young show preference for certain assistants, because they are more attuned to their problems. This natural talent, however, can become a subtle temptation for the spiritual assistant in the exercise of leadership, to accumulate power for himself, and to lord it over the youth. It is for that reason that St. Francis often encourages the practice of dispossession of everything, and to be “subject to every human creature for the love of God.” Whatever good the Lord works through the assistant brothers should not be withheld, but rather it should be placed at the humble service of the youth.

6. Form and Contents of Formation

30. The Franciscan Youth has... teaching methods adequate for the needs of the world of youth... (Const. 96. 5) In order to meet the needs of the youth, the methods of formation must be flexible both in form and content. Young people all over the world keep changing all the time and grow very quickly. On the other hand, it is necessary to keep one’s identity without being swayed by transitory fads.

31. ...according to the existing realities in the various countries... (Const. 96. 5) The prevailing conditions in every country also constitute an element of diversity in both the form and in the content of formation. However, such diversity must not exclude the basic unity of criteria concerning formation. In order to attain all its objectives, formation must cover the person's human, Christian and Franciscan dimension.

7. Organization of the YouFra

a. The local fraternity

32. The local fraternity is the primary cell of the YouFra and the place where the young meet to undergo their experience of Christian life, in the light of the message of St. Francis.

The fraternity meets often, such as weekly or bi-monthly, to live together their relationship with God and with their brothers and sisters. The meetings must include moments of prayer and formation as well as moments of action and recreation. The gatherings are to be organized in such a way that they foster the YouFra's insertion in the Franciscan family and in the local church.

33. The recognition of the local YouFra Fraternity belongs to the YouFra council of the higher level, together with the local SFO council—the two councils with which the new YouFra Fraternities inter-relate (Const. 46, 1). The pertinent SFO councils make up for the lack of SFO structures. The proper religious superior is to be informed about the establishment of a new YouFra fraternity; also he is to be asked to provide spiritual assistance.

34. The local fraternity is animated and led by a council composed of at least three members chosen, for a limited period of time, by and from among the members of the same fraternity who have made the Promise in the YouFra. Aside from them, the SFO representative and the spiritual assistant are also members of the council. It belongs to the local council of the YouFra to admit those undergoing initiation into formation for the Promise in the YouFra and, once the formation is completed, into the Promise itself.

b. The regional fraternity

35. The National Statutes of the YouFra may determine, if deemed necessary, the establishment of regional YouFra fraternities in the country and how to establish them. If so, the same Statutes must determine the composition and competency of the chapter and of the regional council.

c. The national fraternity

36. The National YouFra Fraternity is made up of all the local YouFra Fraternities that exist within the boundaries of the corresponding National Fraternity of the SFO. The official recognition of the new National YouFra Fraternities belongs to the National Council of the SFO or, in its absence, to the presidency of the CIOFS.

The National YouFra Fraternity may issue its own Statutes, which must be approved by the National Council of the SFO or, in its absence, by the presidency of the CIOFS.

8. Other Young Franciscan Groups

Groups of Children and Adolescents

37. For a long time now, there have been groups of children and adolescents within the Franciscan family; they were called *Cordígeros* (Cordbearers), *Niños Franciscanos* (Franciscan Children), (Nifra), *Floreциllas* (Little Flowers), *Heraldos* (Heralds), *Juglares* (Troubadours), Micro-YouFra, Mini-YouFra, Pre-YouFra, etc. Some of these groups are animated by members of YouFra and by Franciscans, both lay and religious. At times, it is easier to organize and animate groups of children, mostly sons and daughters of Secular Franciscans, than it is to organize groups of adolescents.

38. The life of such groups has to be very closely linked to that of the local YouFra Fraternity and the SFO; their growth will depend, to a great extent, on the presence of competent animators. It is important even now that the national councils of the SFO and the YouFra, with the help of interested religious men and women, coordinate this animation ministry and publish reading materials to aid the formation of such groups.