



SERVANT LEADERSHIP WITH FRANCISCAN YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS: WHAT IS YOURS TO DO?

Kathleen Molaro, OFS, National FY/YA Commission Chair

In an earlier article, the FY/YA Commission suggested that the OFS in our nation need to first UNITE our efforts, then IGNITE each other by sharing inspirational ideas, and finally INVITE young people to join us in our desire to live a gospel life. We see this happening, and share the following.

How are we uniting?

We have 14 regions that have appointed FY/YA Animators. We trust the rest of the regions are still educating and inspiring their brothers and sisters to take some action in the area of youth, and are seriously seeking Animators, on the regional level and eventually within each fraternity. The goal is to provide a network for sharing ideas, information, concerns and successes. We hope regional councils are also studying the FY/YA documents so we are united nationally in our understanding of the expectations and processes required for establishing Franciscan Youth and Young Adult groups.

How are we igniting?

For many regions and fraternities, this might be a time to listen only... a time to observe and reflect on how best to enter into the world of youth with a humble and helpful attitude. It is tempting to want to swoop in and try to fix what's been missing or broken. Coercing young people into believing that being Franciscan is what they need will send the wrong message and eventually backfire. Instead, we need to grow into an understanding of who our young people are and how we can serve them. Each little spark lends itself to an eventual flame! The goal, remember, is to ignite their desire for holiness and to offer them an opportunity to learn more about Franciscan spirituality. There are many ways to do this. Hopefully, we can share our ideas.

How are we inviting?

In the recently published book, *Called: What Happens After Saying Yes to God*, Brother Casey Cole, OFM, states, "If we are to be followers and imitators of St. Francis—then the thing we need above all is the humility to know that people do not need us: They need Jesus. Francis never wanted anyone to follow him, he wanted them to follow the one he followed." It's Jesus the world needs, and our responsibility as Secular Franciscans is to bring the light of Jesus to others, especially our younger Catholics, and even their non-Catholic friends. We do this by being ourselves, and by witnessing the joy of the Gospel

everywhere we go, especially when spending time with young people.

Seek what is yours to do.

How we connect with the younger generation is going to look different with each individual, fraternity, and region. Jesus said "Do not be afraid" (Mk 6:50) and "I am with you always, to the end of the world" (Mt 28:20). Pope Francis reminds us in *Gaudete et Exsultate*, that those words enable us "to go forth and serve with the same courage that the Holy Spirit stirred up in the Apostles" (#129). He warned us that our lack of fervor tempts us to keep close to the shore! Yet the Lord calls us to put out into the deep and let down our nets. We may be called to serve in very simple ways, one little gesture at a time close to the edge of the water. That's certainly acceptable, as long as it's not apathy that's keeping us there. If others are being asked to go deeper and let down their net, we can be there to support them. Perhaps eventually we'll have the resources and courage to venture deeper ourselves.

As Servant Leaders in the area of Franciscan Youth and Young Adults, there are many who have accepted the challenge to unite, ignite, and invite, and have taken that first plunge (or at least have put their toes in the water!). At least five regions are now actually working with young adults on a regular basis. Some individuals have shared formation-type materials they've created for presenting to youth or young adults. A few have mentioned activities they've invited young people to attend (movie nights, special prayer services, JPIC projects) and several folks have offered to help the commission design specific retreats that can be shared. The Spirit is moving across the country!

There are also those who are anxious to be Servant Leaders in the area of FY/YA but who are laying the groundwork first. They're creating teams, searching for the age and availability of youth in their areas, and brainstorming ways to draw them into the Franciscan family fold.

We are all a part of the FY/YA Commission. If we remain united in our purpose, share our ideas and successes in order to ignite others to action, and invite young people to experience a life in Franciscan fraternity, we can in all honesty say we've done what we were called to do. Blessings on your journey, and thank you for your prayers and hard work.