



## LIVE YOUR MISSION: INVITE YOUNG PEOPLE ALONG

by Kathleen Molaro, OFS, National Franciscan Youth  
and Young Adult Commission Chair

When reflecting on youth and young adults and the characteristics of their age group, their challenges, and the changes they face, certain needs are consistently mentioned. Young people need:

Friendship and a like-minded community that offers opportunity for relationships.

Meaningful work and ways to serve and help in discerning both.

A close relationship with God and an avenue in which to grow in their faith.

A church family that is vibrant and authentic.

Independence, but also sometimes support and help.

Someone who will listen, and a safe place to freely express themselves.

Hmm. Don't we older folks want the same things? Those of us who are aging face many changes and challenges. We also need friends, meaningful "work," and a strong faith life. We need someone to listen and help us when necessary, but also to allow us our independence. It seems there are a lot of needs both generations share.

There are also a few obvious differences, of course:

Young people are usually blessed with a high energy level and healthy young bodies.

They are often highly motivated to change the world and eager to get involved in hands-on activities that we sometimes shy away from due to age and infirmity.

They are globally aware and connected to the world in a way that is often a mystery to us older folks. Their skills in the area of technology are a much-needed asset in today's world, and yet, they aren't always as able to connect socially and build relationships. For some, the digital age has robbed them of the traditional ways of getting to know others—through face-to-face dialogue and interactions.

So what can we do to bridge the gap between generations?

### Pray

At a recent Visitation Chapter, our Region was gifted with the presence of Father Giles Gilbert, OFM Conventual. He shared a quote from Maximilian Kolbe. "Those who have been forced into inactivity are our greatest asset." Father Giles suggested that "Our home- and hospital-bound folks have the opportunity to pray for us. They can truly offer their suffering for the good of the Order. When we offer our sufferings up for others with good intention, it becomes a powerful tool." So, pray for our young people and those who are able to serve them.

### Be Ourselves

"Ourselves" might be vulnerable to the disappointments and challenges of aging. We may feel overwhelmed and burdened by our physical limitations, loneliness, or a need to find purpose now that our life career is over. It's okay to be honest with our younger folks. They are willing to hear our challenges also, which gives them permission to be imperfect, to be free to share their own challenges, and invites them to practice listening skills and charity. (Note: Be careful not to burden them with constant stories of ailments and grandchildren! Remember, we should be seeking "not to be understood, but to understand.")

Young people often don't have a concept of "interdependence," or "vital reciprocity." To build a relationship of trust and love with another person, to bridge the gap, we may be required to be our true selves, not someone we think the young people want us to be. They want us to be authentic! To share the wisdom of our experiences. To be the Church they crave. They want to be treated as equals, not as honored guests or a side group to cater to. They want to be as important to us as we are to them.

### Listen, listen, listen!

In Phoenix, Ariz., Brother Scott Slattum, OFM, has been working alongside young adults for a while now, and is helping the twenty-somethings start a YouFra group. One thing he discovered was the simple need for young adults to know that someone is willing to listen. They want to be able to share their stories, pain, joys, and struggles with people who are not there to judge, criticize, or give unsolicited advice. They simply need us to listen.

Brother Scott found that one of the older adults who had been helping him, an elderly gentleman who simply attended their gatherings in the background, had eventually built a trusting relationship with the young people. He is now the one they call when they need to talk! Perhaps this is the only gift he has been able to give, but it is one that is cherished and utilized, in spite of (or perhaps because of) his age.

### Live our Mission

We are called to live from Gospel to life and from life to the Gospel, with a joyful and willing heart. Young people will be naturally drawn to us if they see that in action. So live your mission, and invite young people along for the ride! Offer your help, your ear, your prayers, or whatever you are able to give. Our Order might be aging, but we're still able to encourage each other daily and lift one another up in spiritual joy, no matter how old we are. Different age groups may live our missions in different ways, but there is beauty in who we are, and we shouldn't be afraid to share that, no matter which generation we grace.