



A LITTLE BIT OF LOVE GOES A LONG WAY

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When I served as a youth director, each summer we participated in a week-long service program called “Young Neighbors in Action.” One year, our week was spent in an orphanage in Mexico. Among other chores, we were each asked to choose one child and befriend them, rather than spread ourselves among the large group. We were told it would be better for that one child to benefit from extra love and attention, even if only for a week. “A little bit of love goes a long way. The love settles in their hearts and can be drawn on later,” the director explained.

I believe the same philosophy applies when reaching out to youth and young adults. Young people are often in flux at this point in their lives, so we may only have them for a short time. Every moment counts in building a loving relationship that might “settle in their hearts.” Are we genuine? Do we truly live what we preach about gospel life? Are we willing to hear their story and share their successes, fears, and struggles?

Many fraternities have shared that a young adult will call or drop into a gathering to check out the Secular Franciscans. They often have but a few months to join us, considering they may be on a break from school, looking for a job elsewhere, moving away from family to start their own, or any number of reasons. They may or may not stay, depending on their need and intention—but also on what they find when they arrive. The FY/YA Commission has encouraged all fraternities to be ready for the possibility of younger members by taking a close look at their fraternity dynamics.

I found myself reflecting on the *Instrumentum Laboris* in light of this challenge. On pages 5 and 6 there is a list of ways to animate and guide our fraternities. Simply rephrasing them a bit helps us see why they are important to consider if you are serious about offering the gift of fraternity and Franciscan spirituality to young people.

- ◆ Do we understand the importance of a Christ-centered life, and are we able to inspire young people to adopt that goal?
- ◆ Do we encourage one another to accept and respect the young person simply because they are a brother or sister of Christ?
- ◆ Do we witness a life of prayer and intimacy with the Lord, both as individuals and as fraternity?
- ◆ Do we work for justice and invite young people to join us, and do we join young people in their work toward a more just world?
- ◆ Do we share concrete experiences and truthful stories of our own spiritual journey and allow young people to do the same, without judgment?
- ◆ Do they see us in fidelity with the Church, our Order, and each other? Are we obviously growing in our faith and in our charism?
- ◆ Do we model lives of vital and reciprocal communion, and are we an active presence in the world?
- ◆ Do our young people see us as a family, working together and sharing responsibilities?

Jan Parker wrote in the Winter 2021 *TAU-USA* about the term “prophetic creativity” used in the *Instrumentum Laboris*. She describes prophetic creativity, saying “It is innovative action we take in response to the Holy Spirit working within us.” The Holy Spirit is moving across our country, inspiring us to journey together with our younger Catholic brothers and sisters. The apostle Paul says, “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” (Gal. 5:22-23) Practicing these virtues and modelling a way of life led by the Holy Spirit and our beloved Saints Francis and Clare is what we are called to do as Secular Franciscans. A **little** love goes a long way. Just think what a **lot** of love can do!



The commission gathers via Zoom monthly with FY/YA Regional Animators for ongoing training, prayer, networking, and formation. Our meeting right before Pentecost included a “Prayer for Perfect Charity,” and ritual for strengthening the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The prayer can be found on the National Website on the FY/YA page, in the young adult faith development document, *Living a Gospel Life: Walking in the Steps of Saints Francis and Clare of Assisi—Session 10*.