

Re : Workshop # 18: Co-responsibility in the fraternities

Excerpts from FRANCISCAN YOUTH AND SPIRITUAL ASSISTANCE

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Introduction

Right from the time of its birth in Italy during the years following the second world war (1948), the YouFra has had a surprising development and role, not only for the Franciscan Family, but also in the society of that time. It was a new Franciscan impulse for those young people called by the Holy Spirit to live, and give witness to, the Gospel in a world that had just come through great destruction and suffering caused by the war; a world which was beginning to change rapidly and to enter into a new era through great geopolitical and social changes, but also a world which had a great need for peace, reconciliation and brotherhood.

All this was present in the new YouFra, which, in its youthful way of living and giving witness to Franciscan spirituality, became a new light and hope for society and for the Church. After almost 60 years, the Franciscan Youth continues to be attractive to many young people in many countries and, at the same time, continues to be a wonderful experience of the Franciscan spiritual journey for the young people of today.

Specific characteristics of YouFra

IN THE FIELD OF PASTORAL CARE OF YOUTH, IT IS FOUND THAT YOUNG PERSONS ARE ATTRACTED TO ST. FRANCIS AND THAT THEY WISH TO DEEPEN THEIR CHRISTIAN AND FRANCISCAN VOCATION. TO THESE YOUNG PERSONS, FRANCISCAN YOUTH AND THE SFO PROVIDE OPTIONS, WHILE RESPECTING THE DEMANDS OF THE YOUTH IN MODERN TIMES, THEIR CRISES, PROBLEMS AND QUESTIONS.

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, AS CONDITION TO HAVING CONCRETE APOSTOLIC EXPERIENCES.

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 minimum age to join the YouFra ... If deemed appropriate, the National Statutes of the YouFra may establish the minimum age for joining it (for exemple, 14 to 17 years of age).

Relationship between the YouFra and The SFO

That is why the Franciscan formation received in the YouFra as a young person who wants to enter the SFO can be considered valid as a period of initiation into the SFO. The period of initial formation for the SFO has to take place under the responsibility of the council of the SFO to which he/she wants to belong, in conformity with what is prescribed in the Rule and the Constitutions of the SFO. In the case where there is a group of young people in the YouFra who want to undergo initial formation together, they can form their own group, at the discretion and under the guidance of the council of the SFO fraternity to which they want to belong.

...

Organization of the YouFra

a. The local fraternity

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 (for example, weekly) 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 into the Franciscan family and in the local church.

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 fraternity 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 requested to provide spiritual assistance.

b. The regional fraternity

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.

SPIRITUAL AND PASTORAL ASSISTANCE ...

The Secular Franciscans, during their eight-century long history, always had close relations with the Friars of the First Order and TOR and, together with the Poor Clares of the II Order, are an integral part of what we call the Franciscan Family.

The Franciscan Youth, in so far as they are young lay people called to live the charism of St. Francis, also form part of the same Family

The spiritual and pastoral care of the SFO, entrusted by the Church to the Franciscan First Order and the TOR, is the duty above all

They must guarantee three fundamental aspects of the life and mission of the Secular Franciscans:

- fidelity to the Franciscan charism;
- communion with the Church;
- unity with the Franciscan Family

By virtue of the vital reciprocity between the religious and the secular members of the Franciscan Family and in regard to the responsibilities of Major Superiors, spiritual assistance to the fraternities of the SFO at all levels must be assured as a fundamental element of communion⁶⁸. In the Statutes for Assistance (art. 2,3) we also find an explication of what should be the aim of spiritual assistance:

The purpose of spiritual assistance is to foster communion with the Church and with the Franciscan Family through witness and sharing of Franciscan spirituality, to cooperate in initial and on-going formation of secular Franciscans and to express the fraternal affection of the religious towards the SFO

According to the *General Constitutions of the SFO* the pastoral and spiritual care of the Secular Franciscans, on the international level, should be exercised **collegially** by the Ministers General of the First Order and TOR⁷⁰; on the National and Regional levels, the Major Superiors, who exercise their jurisdiction in the same territory as the SFO-YouFra, should agree on their duty collegially⁷¹.

In this regard, we find the following expressions about collegial assistance by the spiritual Assistants on various levels in the *General Constitutions* (art. 90,3):

- On the national level: *The national assistants give their service to the national council, see to the spiritual assistance to the SFO in the whole territory of the national fraternity and, at the national level, to the co-ordination of the regional assistants. If they are more than one, they form a conference and give their service collegially*⁷³.
- On the regional level: *The regional assistants give their service to the regional council and see to the spiritual assistance to the regional fraternity. If they are more than one, they form a conference and give their service collegially*

The spiritual Assistant

*The spiritual assistant is the person designated by the competent Major Superior to carry out this service for a specific fraternity of the SFO. 3. To be a witness of Franciscan spirituality and of the fraternal affection of the religious towards the secular Franciscans, and to be a bond of communion between his Order and the SFO, the spiritual assistant should be a Franciscan religious, member of the First Order or the TOR . The appointment of Spiritual Assistants pertains to the competent Franciscan Major Superiors in an analogy with what is established in the Statutes for the Spiritual and Pastoral Assistance to the SFO*⁸⁰. *In so far as is possible, the service of assistance to the YouFra and SFO should be carried out by the same person.*

The Assistant must help the Fraternity to live unity in diversity and to respect autonomies, different ways of living fraternal life, different formative methods, the way of holding meetings or doing the various apostolic activities, keeping in mind, however, that it is certainly very nice and important to share some moments of prayer, encounter, formation and apostolic activities together in order to give witness to the common mission.

...

Conclusion

I wish to conclude this discourse with the words of the four Ministers General on the occasion of the presentation of the Rule of the SFO, words which express all the affection and fraternal love of the Franciscan Religious for the Secular Franciscans:

We, the Franciscan Ministers, with all our Friars are ever ready and open to offer you all our assistance so that we may walk together in the way of the Lord.