

GUIDELINES FOR FRATERNAL ANIMATION¹

1. INTRODUCTION

The OFS, by virtue of its very vocation, ought to be ready to share its experience of evangelical life with the youth who feel attracted to Saint Francis of Assisi and to seek the means of adequately presenting it to them.

(GG.CC. art. 96, n. 1)

The basic documents of the Secular Franciscan Order express the importance of sharing its experience of evangelical life with the youth. It is a source of great joy and gratitude that the Franciscan Youth has existed for over 60 years and is now present in over 60 countries.

The first YouFra International Assembly organized by the CIOFS Presidency in 2007 in Barcelona, Spain, for the first time reflected intensely on the service of the Fraternal Animator. In its Conclusions, the YouFra participants from all over the world contributed with their experiences and helped bring out more systematically thoughts and ideas about Fraternal Animator and Fraternal Animation.

In 2008, the capitulars of the OFS General Chapter held in Hungary, requested that adequate tools be prepared to help Fraternal Animators better fulfill their service. The experience of some national fraternities confirms this need for guidelines and for common methods of animating the youth and creating a well defined relationship between the two fraternities: the OFS and the YouFra.

The need to clarify the importance of fraternal animation becomes evident due to the fact that some YouFra groups have emerged without any relationship with the OFS; while those that were born within the framework of the OFS, either experience identity crises or misunderstand their place and role within the OFS or the YouFra, due to the lack of adequate formation and/or proper animation.

Thus, this document, addressed to the Fraternal Animators and to the Councils of both the OFS and the YouFra at all levels, provides guidelines to ensure an effective fraternal animation of the Franciscan Youth.

2. FRATERNAL ANIMATION

The OFS ... should see to the vitality and the expansion of the Franciscan Youth fraternities and will accompany the youth in their journey of human and spiritual growth with proposals for specific activities and contents.

(GG.CC. art. 97, n. 1)

2.1. The meaning of fraternal animation

The General Constitutions of the OFS require that the YouFra request fraternal animation from the competent secular leaders since it is an integral part of the OFS and it belongs to the Franciscan Family.

¹ *Guidelines for Fraternal Animation* are approved on October 22, 2011, the Feast of Blessed John Paul II, during the CIOFS Presidency Meeting in Brazil held on October 15-22, 2011.

According to the document *Incorporation of the YouFra members into the OFS*, “Fraternal animation is synonymous with accompaniment”. Its primary goal is to be present with the youth in their human, Christian and Franciscan journey as they experience the call to follow Christ in the light of the life and message of St. Francis of Assisi.

2.2. Who is responsible for fraternal animation?

The responsibility for fraternal animation belongs to the entire OFS fraternity which, by the fraternal example of the brothers and sisters, create a climate to bring the Secular Franciscan spirituality closer to the young people.

The Council of the OFS fraternity carries out this responsibility by organizing joint meetings marked by a spirit of mutual communion; and by the appointment of a suitable person to serve as Fraternal Animator.

Finally, the Fraternal Animator by sharing his/her life and presence with the youth on behalf of the OFS, gives flesh and life to this service.

3. THE FRATERNAL ANIMATOR

The OFS fraternities commit themselves to give to the Franciscan Youth fraternities a Fraternal Animator (...).

(GG.CC. art. 97, n. 2)

The Fraternal Animator is the visible interface of the OFS fraternity with the Franciscan Youth because he/she is the person who most regularly participates in the life of the YouFra.

3.1. The role and tasks of the Fraternal Animator

The main mission of the Fraternal Animator is the testimony of evangelical life made manifest in his/her interactions with the YouFra.

To be able to perform a better service in the Franciscan Youth, the Fraternal Animator should know all the existing documents about YouFra and pay particular attention to its formation, cooperating with those who are responsible in the fraternity: the YouFra Council, the person responsible for formation and the Spiritual Assistant.

The role and tasks of the Fraternal Animator are²:

- To accompany the youth in their journey of human and spiritual growth to reach their personal maturity;
- To promote the Franciscan way of life among the youth, by appropriate and dynamic initiatives;
- To provide adequate Franciscan formation which will help the young people to center their project of life on the person and on the following of Christ;
- To foster a close communion with the OFS with which they share the same charism: Franciscan and secular;

² GG.CC. art. 97, n. 1-3.

- To promote YouFra in the OFS fraternities as well as in the Franciscan and ecclesial communities where it does not exist as an option for young people.

3.2. Characteristics of the Fraternal Animator

Based on the role and tasks mentioned above, the Fraternal Animator should have the following characteristics:

- Dynamic and youthful in spirit;
- Open to learning;
- Consistent, spiritual and well formed;
- Respectful, able to listen and open to dialogue.

The participants in the 1st YouFra Assembly referred to some situations that require special attention by the Fraternal Animator. This includes the goodwill to accept the mission; and freedom from other engaging commitments. It is important to have the ability to fulfill his/her task with a deep sense of responsibility without imposing his/her will on the youth. The Fraternal Animator should not confuse his/her mission and tasks with those of the others (such as the YouFra President or the Spiritual Assistant). The engagement of the OFS in YouFra activities should enhance communion between the two fraternities. However, the Fraternal Animator should avoid directing the group in an exclusive way towards the OFS.

All of this requires that the OFS Council exercise caution when appointing a Fraternal Animator making sure that this person, who should be a professed OFS member, has the necessary qualities to work with the Franciscan Youth. When this person is not available then the Council should find someone closest to this ideal.

3.3. The Fraternal Animator at the local level

It is at the local level where a real and on-going relationship exists between the OFS and the YouFra through the Fraternal Animator who relates directly with the YouFra on a regular and frequent basis.

The Fraternal Animator:

- Has to be close to the young Franciscans in their difficulties and rejoice with them in their progress;
- Has to be ready to establish a dialogue with them when they show interest in the secular Franciscan vocation;
- Should constantly encourage the OFS fraternity to fulfill its mission towards the Franciscan Youth.

3.4. The Fraternal Animator at the regional, national and international levels

At the regional, national and international levels the Fraternal Animator is the bridge that ensures an ongoing relationship between the OFS and the YouFra. He/she collaborates in activities such as OFS-YouFra Congresses and gatherings; works with the Fraternal Animators of the lower levels; and organizes seminars and meetings to help them become better prepared for this service.

The Fraternal Animator promotes mutual interest in the brothers and sisters of both the OFS and the YouFra. Given this, it is desirable that he/she is a member of the respective council to better coordinate the life and activities of both fraternities.

3.5. Appointment of the Fraternal Animator

The YouFra Council asks for a Fraternal Animator to the OFS Council which appoints a suitable and well prepared brother or sister for this service. YouFra may propose the name of someone to perform this service, which however should not exceed the term of the OFS Council.

The Fraternal Animator regularly informs the OFS council of his/her activities with the Franciscan Youth.

4. RELATIONSHIP WITH THE YOUFRA

The Fraternal Animator becomes a fundamental presence to support young people in their discernment, especially discernment regarding a secular Franciscan vocation.

(Incorporation of the YouFra members into the OFS, chapter 2)

The Fraternal Animator helps the YouFra members to know their own identity as Franciscan Youth as well as their roles and responsibilities. The role of the Fraternal Animator is one of support, guidance and encouragement allowing YouFra to discover by themselves their own vocation and the best courses of action where activities and programs are concerned.

If invited to participate in the meetings of the YouFra council, the Fraternal Animator shares his/her knowledge, experiences and insights. His/her presence in the YouFra gatherings and assemblies does not only serve as an inspiration but also expresses the affection that the OFS has for the youth.

To ensure a close communion between the OFS and the YouFra, the General Constitutions of the OFS indicates that a representative of the OFS, designated by his or her own council, forms part of the Council of the YouFra.³ It is important not to confuse this representative of the OFS with the Fraternal Animator. However, experience shows that it is useful and possible that the OFS representative be at the same time the Fraternal Animator because in this way a life-giving reciprocal communion is better realized.

5. RELATIONSHIP WITH THE OFS FRATERNITY

The Fraternal Animator, therefore, must also work within the OFS fraternity to foster a proper understanding of the importance of YouFra, to involve it in its activities and to encourage a sense of responsibility for YouFra.

(Incorporation of the YouFra members into the OFS, chapter 2)

In the OFS, the Fraternal Animator can help the brothers and the sisters, in coordination with the OFS Council of the respective level, to know what the YouFra is and to welcome the YouFra members into the fraternity. To promote mutual acceptance and understanding, the Fraternal Animator proposes to the fraternity:

- The inclusion of the YouFra documents in the formation of the OFS;
- To hold joint meetings, gatherings and celebrations;
- The sharing of common projects and

³ GG.CC. art. 97, n. 4.

- The planning of activities with the YouFra with openness and flexibility.

Needless to say, the Fraternal Animator is the person that the YouFra members know better and the person who better knows them. He is the person that makes possible the integration of the YouFra members in the fraternal relation with the OFS, helping them feel confident and supported if they decide to enter the OFS.

6. RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SPIRITUAL ASSISTANT

... a Fraternal Animator, together with the Spiritual Assistant and the council of the Franciscan Youth guarantees an adequate secular Franciscan formation.

(GG.CC. art. 97, n. 2)

A good fraternal relationship between the Fraternal Animator and the Spiritual Assistant makes effective this service of animation to the youth. However, the service of the Fraternal Animator should not be confused with that of the Spiritual Assistant. They have different, although complementary, roles.

Together, they:

- Accompany the YouFra fraternity and its members and collaborate in their formation;
- Offer an example of sacramental and prayer life;
- Witness to their own secular or religious vocation and to the communion with the whole Franciscan Family;
- Animate the young people to live their Christian vocation and Franciscan way of life in fraternity;
- Express readiness and availability for a personal dialogue with the members of YouFra;
- Help them discover the fields of activity in the Church and in society and their ways of engagement.

7. CONCLUSION

To foster communion among members... the council should ... adopt appropriate means for growth in Franciscan and ecclesial life and encourage everyone to a life of fraternity.

(Rule of OFS, n. 24)

Through the service of fraternal animation, the OFS witnesses to the members of the Franciscan Youth and helps them realize their own vocation within the context of the Secular Franciscan Order. This is a sign of the vitality of the OFS fraternities.

The fact that the Fraternal Animator needs to share time and presence in both the OFS and the YouFra requires understanding on the part of the OFS which should be able to provide the means necessary to carry out this service such as formation initiatives, materials, financial support for travels, etc.

To be a Fraternal Animator is a gift and a privilege. It requires dedication, perseverance and shared responsibility which results in mutual enrichment for the YouFra, the OFS and the Franciscan Family as they fulfill their common mission in the Church and in society.