



YOUFRA: IF WE BUILD IT, WILL THEY COME?

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We are Franciscans. When others encounter us, they should see and hear something different than they see and hear anywhere else. In being Franciscan, we do two things: we are being the presence of the Christian Gospel in a world that needs to experience God's hope and joy and love. At the same time, we are also a beacon to others whom God is calling to our Franciscan life of the Gospel, saying, "Come and see." This second role as beacon--the light on a hill--to the next generation of disciples and Franciscan leaders will be the essential role for Secular Franciscans to connect with young people in the world today.

Let us be real about the world in which young people are being raised. There are real challenges--and also opportunities--for us in reaching out to those young people the Holy Spirit may be calling to explore our Franciscan charism. While we Secular Franciscans help young people build a new YouFra (Franciscan Youth) organization in the United States, we are also helping ourselves to re-think and re-build our own existing Secular Franciscan fraternities to better respond to the needs of young people today. *We* are also transformed in the process of building YouFra.

We are assuming that if we build it (YouFra) in the right place, at the right time, with the right processes, "They will come." And we *are* building: we have a YouFra Strategic Plan, we will soon have a YouFra Fraternity Handbook, and we will have a YouFra initial formation manual. We also need to *build on the inside*, too... in our hearts, in our spirituality, in our relationships, in our prayer life. This is what all Secular Franciscans can do now to build YouFra. We can also build our fraternities up to make sure they are ready for YouFra. Here are some challenging thought questions for Secular Franciscan fraternities. Try answering and discussing these questions together as an activity for your fraternity.

- T When we build for YouFra, how will it be relevant to them?
- T How will it be attractive and meaningful and feed their hunger?

- T How will we offer a vision for Franciscan life that will inspire and energize?
- T How will we show them our balance of contemplation and action that transforms ourselves and the world?
- T How will we live out our fraternity life that models Christian discipleship and love?
- T How will we engage and sustain, rather than just dazzle, attract and release?
- T Why will they want to join us?

Keep in mind that when it comes to successfully reaching out to young people, *what your fraternity is to YouFra...is what your fraternity is.*

How you can build internally in preparation for YouFra? Identify who in your fraternity has the background and experience to work effectively with young people. It doesn't have to be the youngest person in the fraternity; sometimes a wise elderly mentor can be the best person to serve as a YouFra Animator. Get that person or those people up to speed on working with young people by sending them to diocesan training, reading up on youth and young adult issues, and becoming active on our national Franciscan Young Adults webspace and network. If you have no one capable in your fraternity, seek out other area fraternities and partner up. Perhaps a special effort to reach out to potential new Secular Franciscans can target the college professors, coaches, youth ministers, campus ministers, and other professionals who work with youth and young adults.

A YouFra ministry is not for everyone and is not for every OFS fraternity, but it is our responsibility as an order to engage the next generation and to prepare for our order's future and young people's future in the Franciscan life of the Gospel. When we do this right, we can say in confidence as the Holy Spirit invites young people: "If we build it, they *will* come."