

THE IMPORTANCE OF LEADERS PRESENCE

by Willie Guadalupe, OFS

This is an article that I have been thinking about for several months. I felt I needed to relate to our leaders the importance of their “Presence.” I would like to share observations I made and complaints I heard in my role as your Multicultural and Diversity Councilor and to provide suggestions on how to make the best of your presence as regional leaders of diverse fraternities.

The complaints I heard were either from local ministers or fraternity members. On more than one occasion, members of fraternities who are from other cultures would mention how they feel isolated from their regions because of the language barrier.

At the regional level, leaders would express guilt because they were not visiting those fraternities as often, for the same reason.

The intent of this article is not to address this challenge, but to use the challenge as an opportunity in a more positive way.

Quite simply, be Present to each other.

Some regions have fraternities whose members’ first language is not English. Communicating with them is not an easy challenge and will require humility and patience, but it can be done. Leaders will need to exhibit these virtues when dealing with all fraternities, but especially those that are culturally diverse.

Spend time with members of the fraternities. Learn to speak greetings in their vernacular

language. ‘God bless you’ and ‘good morning’ are good places to start. Fraternity members will appreciate your presence and willingness to try to communicate and will feel welcome rather than isolated.

Remember, language is not always verbal. Body language spoken in smiles and nods of the head can convey love and warmth.

Your presence as a leader alone without speaking their language is a way that you can show sincerity in learning more about another culture, and that can be an asset that may help to overcome cultural barriers. When communicating, remember that someone’s lack of proficiency in English does not reflect their level of intellect. Both sides should speak slowly and try to have someone who can translate if possible but this is not necessary.

Even though you may not speak their native language, our Franciscan kinship contains the language of love and affirmation. The presence of your leadership will give you the ability to connect authentically, build confidence, trust, and inspire and motivate members into action.

As we pursue our multicultural interactions, remember the words of St. Francis: “Preach the Gospel at all times, when necessary, use words.”

This quote embodies how St Francis understood the ministry of presence. It is less about the words you speak and more about simply walking the journey with people.

Article 31 (General Constitutions of the Secular Franciscan Order - 2000)

2. The office of Minister or Councillor is a fraternal service, a commitment to hold oneself available and responsible in relation to each brother and sister and to the Fraternity so that each one may realize his or her own vocation and each Fraternity may be a true community, ecclesial and Franciscan, actively present in the Church and in society.