



THE ROAD TO EMMAUS: A PERFECT MODEL TO FOLLOW

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Sharing the Good News with others is a mission set forth for all baptized people. The responsibility of inviting others into a Christ-centered gospel life, is one Secular Franciscans are especially called to when we say the words “Yes, this is what I want” at our profession. The gift of fraternity supports us as we come together to renew our own faith and grow in holiness through ongoing formation and shared ministries.

Our mission doesn't stop with fraternity life. We are called to go out into the secular world with our Franciscan spirituality, especially in reaching out to youth and young adults. The familiar story of Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35) gives us a perfect model to follow. Jesus walked with the disciples as they talked, debated, grieved, and asked questions. He listened to their pain and anguish, offered his friendship, and broke bread with them, which opened their eyes and instilled in their hearts a burning desire for more. Hopefully, this is what happens in fraternity—we build relationships that allow an atmosphere of trust, love, and openness, encouraging members in their quest for holiness.

Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us, a statement of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops regarding adult faith formation, suggests that “to be effective ministers of adult faith formation we will first, like Jesus, join people in their daily concerns and walk side by side with them on the pathway of life. We will ask them questions and listen attentively as they speak of their joys, hopes, griefs, and anxieties.”¹ They use the Emmaus story as the basis of their document.

Since its inception, the Youth and Young Adult Commission has promoted the Emmaus method. We recognize that it's important to share the gospel with young people through prayer and formation, but mainly by the work we do with attitudes of peace, joy, compassion, and love. Working together “can touch their hearts and minds and unfold the deep meaning of their experience in the light of all that Jesus said and did.”² Like the disciples walking with Jesus, young people, through a relationship with us, can “catch a glimpse into the heart of God and find a world made new.”³ We learn a lesson when thinking about what happened to the disciples on the road to Emmaus. “The pathway of their lives opened from confusion and despair into conviction and hope, and they began to grasp the height and depth of God's mysterious love.”⁴ A relationship with young people will likewise touch our hearts and help us see Jesus more clearly! In getting to know us and the Franciscan way of life, they may eventually want to form a YouFra (Youth Fraternity) or enter formation to discern a calling as a Secular Franciscan.

As you are aware, there are many young people who for a variety of reasons have walked away from the Church and even from a relationship with God. The book *Going, Going, Gone: The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholics*, reminds us that “Each person who disaffiliates has a name, a story, and longings of the heart and mind, and all are grateful for the opportunity to have their story heard.”⁵ We can't do that unless we walk with our young people with a determination to build authentic relationships.

¹ United States Confraternity of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), *Our Hearts are Burning Within Us*, USCCB Publishing, #8

² Ibid, #9

³ Ibid, #11

⁴ Ibid,

⁵ A Study of Saint Mary's Press, *Going, Going, Gone: The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholics*, St. Mary's Press, 2017, pg. 7

How do we do this during our time of isolation?

The commission has a few ideas that might inspire you to come up with your own!

1. Heather Cherniack has begun “Holy Spirits” evening gatherings for dialogue among young adults. Her program is based on a philosophy like “Theology on Tap,” which suggests we need to meet young adults where they are (which right now is on social media!). Check it out by contacting Heather at youngfranciscan@gmail.com.
2. Young people are particularly drawn to nature. Many parks or hiking trails are still open if participants abide by social distancing and mask guidelines. Offer to host “pizza in the park,” a backpacking trip, or a river clean-up. Use the opportunity to listen to their stories and share your own.
3. We can help fulfill a great desire to serve. Ask a group of young people to meet virtually and come up with a common project, such as providing backpacks for foster children, filling socks with hygiene needs for homeless teens, or making simple blankets to give to trauma victims. Each person can work at home while visiting across the airways.
4. Prayer experiences appeal to young folks. With churches closed, invite others to experience a virtual prayer service. Each participant can create their own sacred space using a common element such as a candle to provide a feeling of unity. Sites such as www.crs.org have many prayers available, and after modeling young people will be capable of designing their own.
5. Create together! Each person will come to a virtual gathering with art supplies. Read and discuss Ephesians 6:10-17, then spend time using the supplies to make a breastplate, helmet of salvation, sword of peace, or whichever item from the passage they can relate to best. Share the creations.
6. Contact the commission if you have or know of a group of young people who are interested in meeting others. We have several YouFras (Youth Fraternities) who would love to connect with other young people in different parts of the country. kmmolaro@gmail.com



The “family” bond was so great in the St. Francis of Assisi Fraternity in Arizona, two of the members were married! Both the bride and groom had spent several years together in YouFra.



The St. Francis of Assisi YouFra works together on a Habitat for Humanity project. Here they helped frame the house. Notice the Franciscan joy in working together