# SPIRITUAL ASSISTANCE AND FRANCISCAN YOUTH

# *OFS General Chapter 2017*

# SPIRITUAL ASSISTANCE

In their reflection, National Fraternities acknowledged and expressed their appreciation for the generous service provided by Spiritual Assistants to both the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) and to the Franciscan Youth (YouFra), spread out across the world. However, in managing the OFS, it was also acknowledged that the spiritual and pastoral care of the Secular Franciscan Order is entrusted by the Church to the Franciscan First Order and the Third Order Regular (TOR) and that this duty is exercised by their General and Provincial Ministers. It is these Franciscan Major Superiors who are responsible for the quality of spiritual assistance and pastoral care, and for the specific preparation of the Assistants so that they will be suitable and well-prepared (*Statutes for Spiritual and Pastoral Assistance to the Secular Franciscan Order*, Art. 5).

It should be noted, however, that the OFS is interested, willing and available to assist the Major Superiors in supporting Spiritual Assistants in exercising their duties and responsibilities. This would include participation in formation courses for newly appointed Spiritual Assistants, and the overall training of Spiritual Assistants regarding their service to the OFS.

Major Superiors are also encouraged to include their responsibility to the OFS in the formation programs of their friars and the responsibility of the First Order and Third Order Regular to engage with the OFS as an integral component of the Franciscan Family.

National Fraternities also pointed out the need for better connections between the General Spiritual Assistants and the National Spiritual Assistants, especially through the creation and distribution of circulars that support and encourage Spiritual Assistants in their respective ministries.

# FRANCISCAN YOUTH (YOUFRA)

The Secular Franciscan Order is called to share its experience of evangelical life with youth who feel attracted to St. Francis of Assisi and considers itself to be particularly responsible for the Franciscan Youth (OFS GC Art. 96).

Essential to the commitment of the OFS to Franciscan Youth is the development of a relationship between Secular Franciscans and members of the Franciscan Youth, and their respective Fraternities. It is recognized that the development of relationships requires a willingness on the part of both parties to spend time together and to share vocational journeys with each other.

In its reflection, National Fraternities acknowledged the richness of the YouFra documents that are already available to support the establishment, formation, and guidance of Franciscan Youth, including:

* + YouFra – A Way of Franciscan Vocation
  + YouFra Formation Program
  + Sample Draft of YouFra National Statutes
  + YouFra International Regulations
  + Conclusion of the 1st YouFra International Assembly – Spain 2007
  + Incorporation of the YouFra members into the OFS
  + Guidelines for Fraternal Animation
  + Guide for the Establishment of a New Fraternity of Franciscan Youth (YouFra)
  + Conclusions of the 2nd YouFra International Assembly (Croatia, 2014)
  + Celebrations in the Fraternity of the Franciscan Youth

It is important for fraternities to realize that today’s YouFra is different from the YouFra of the past. The above documents are helpful aids in understanding the nature of YouFra and how best to work with Franciscan Youth.

## Proposal 8 – OFS Engagement with Franciscan Youth

It is proposed that greater strides be made by the Secular Franciscan Order in sharing its experience of evangelical life with youth by:

* + developing a formation module for use by Secular Franciscans that would outline the call of the OFS to share its experience of evangelical life with youth and its overall responsibility for Franciscan Youth;
  + encouraging local fraternities to reach out to youth who may be seeking an experience of evangelical life in the manner of St. Francis (all available technological means should be employed in reaching out to young people, including social media, blogs, etc.);
  + organizing special activities for young people, and even children, in order to share its experience with them, and to promote the creation of YouFra Fraternities in their localities;
  + organizing joint gatherings, activities, and events in those areas where there are YouFra Fraternities so as to provide opportunities for getting to know one another better and, through these activities, to strengthen their awareness of belonging to the whole Franciscan Family; and
  + exploring opportunities to collaborate with YouFra members in areas of responsibility in which they have a particular competence; for example, development of websites and engagement in social networks).

While some may think of Franciscan Youth as the “future” of the Franciscan Family and the Franciscan charism, the Secular Franciscan International Presidency has been reminded on many occasions that Franciscan Youth is part of our “present” reality, and that the OFS must continually seek opportunities to work with YouFra as one of its particular ministries.