



1st INTERNATIONAL YOUFRA ASSEMBLY, SPAIN 2008

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Representatives from around the world gathered in Barcelona, Spain recently to make important international decisions regarding the formation and structure of YouFra (Franciscan Youth) around the world. They gathered from June 28 to July 5, 2007.

From the four corners of the Earth came intelligent, optimistic, and driven leaders who were well versed and educated in the inner-workings of their respective National YouFra programs...and then, there was me.

I was sent with the simple goal to observe and take notes of the great examples those other countries gave as to how to efficiently and successfully run a YouFra program. What examples they were! Some countries have had YouFra for countless years and their members number in the thousands, and yet there were others, like us, who had just begun the process of attracting youth to the lives of St. Francis and St. Clare. There were national presidents of YouFra, long standing members of SFO, the Council of Spiritual Assistants, the CIOFS Presidency, and the Minister General of the SFO...and then there was me. I was sent to learn what I could about how we, the United States, could have a thriving YouFra. The events that took place during that week in Spain were as enjoyable as they were educational, and I will never forget what I saw, heard, and did.

We had whole days focused on the learning sessions, and these sessions all started with a presenter. Among the presentations were topics such as "Young People in the Church," "The Importance of Fraternal Animators," "The Growth of NiFra (Niños Franciscanos, Young Franciscans) Groups", and a presentation from "Franciscans International" from Geneva.

"Young People in the Church" was presented by Monsignor Miquel Delgado Galindo, from the Vatican Pontifical Council for the Laity. He reminded us of the importance of youth by citing what Pope John Paul II had

done during life. Pope John Paul II, more than any church leader before him, had realized the clear importance of youth in the church. If it is true that Christian, and even Franciscan formation should never end, then it is also true it should begin as soon as possible. Because of this, it is important to attract youth to have a closer relationship with not only God, but with St. Francis and St. Clare.

The importance of Fraternal Animators was one of the most significant discussions we had, especially because it related so closely with the YouFra's bond with the SFO. A Fraternal Animator, as defined by the YouFra is, the SFO who seeks to foster, communicate, and advance the YouFra's knowledge of God within the human, Christian and Franciscan dimensions of their lives.

The strength of a YouFra group can only be measured by the strength of its bond with its SFO parent fraternity. However, the reverse is true also. The Secular Franciscan Order as a whole can only be strong if it has a strong bond with Franciscan Youth. Let me rephrase this: because every SFO is required by their Profession to the SFO Rule and the Constitutions to promote the appropriate growth of Franciscan Youth, an SFO fraternity can only be complete if it does everything it can to promote and encourage youth to grow closer to St. Francis and St. Clare.

The characteristics and functions these Fraternal Animators must possess are a youthful spirit, an above average amount of energy, and an immeasurable amount of *passion*. They must have passion not only for being Franciscan, but for working with youth. We concluded that these are most likely the most important people to the YouFra groups, and to the SFO as well, because they represent the physical bridge between the two respective entities.

Franciscans International gave a great presentation about their work in the United Nations as they further the international obligations nations have concerning human rights. They even "borrowed" a video from the USA FYYA's website about how essential water is to life. This was a showcase example of how YouFra can have an active role in the larger Franciscan family.

We, the USA FYYA, initiated and participated in the H2O Project. A project that gives time and money towards building wells in areas of the world in which water is a hard to find resource. What you see here, and the same can be true with established YouFra fraternities, is that a large part of these group's time can be devoted towards actual actions taken to better their community. YouFra is "formed" by action.

As great as all the items discussed at this International Assembly, it means nothing to us as a nation as of now, because we have no formal structured YouFra. Because of this circumstance, I will withhold presenting the detailed proposals because of what I propose now: *"The goal of the United States of America, with International support, should seek the very best method to promote the growth and maturing of YouFra and the strengthening of its bonds with the SFO."*



Human Castle

We proceeded into the heart of Barcelona on an excursion. As soon as we got to the city square, a tower made of people was already being constructed. These famous “human castles” of people were some of the most amazing things I’ve ever seen, and also, as explained by Xavi Ramos, a great analogy for the Franciscan Family. Because every person of the castle is important, so is every part of the Franciscan family. It starts with a great foundation, like the SFO, and as it is built higher and higher, the ages of the people get younger and younger, like the YouFra proceeding to NiFra.

We took a pilgrimage to one of the most beautiful holy sites in the world: the Benedictine Abbey of Santa Maria de Montserrat; which is home to the famous Black Madonna. The church itself gave truth to words “house of God,” because other than the Black Madonna, the decoration and architecture made me value my sense of sight ever more. We hiked various trails of the mountain itself, and the views were unbelievable.

The life-long bonds I made with other people, the stories I shared and listened to, the interesting people I’ve met, and the things I have learned from this International Assembly will never be forgotten. My only hope is that by sharing with others what has happened will help make YouFra in the United States something to be proud of. But it doesn’t stop with me, or the work of the Youth/Young Adult Commission. It starts with *everyone* in the Franciscan family, from friars to every SFO, from newly professed to National Minister.

The question asked of us is what does it take to create YouFra fraternities? And my question to all is this: What are you willing to do to help create these YouFra fraternities? Are you willing to give your time and effort to be a Spiritual Assistant? A Fraternal Animator? Or even the easiest: are you willing to share with a youth or young adult the life of St. Francis of Assisi? Because when it comes the Franciscan family as a whole, when you

measure the strength and vitality of the family, when you ask what is the most important part; the answer should be community, that every part is essential to being family. Every part is equally important and the strength of one is seen in the strength of the other, because if one is lacking, if one person of the human castle is too weak and not supported by another, the whole thing will fall, and everyone will fail. **Everyone!**

Note: For the unabridged article visit our web site at www.franciscanyouthusa.com.

**FRANCISCAN
WORLD YOUTH DAY
JULY 12-14
WORLD YOUTH DAY
JULY 15-21
SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA**



In 1985, Pope John Paul II instituted the first World Youth Day in Rome, Italy. Since then, it is celebrated throughout the Dioceses of the Church every year, with every two or three years being an International celebration.

In 1997, the Secular Franciscan Order began calling together the Franciscan Youth (YouFra) of the world together within this international gathering. We have gathered in Paris (1997), Rome (2000), Toronto (2002) and Vossenack, Germany (2005).

Once again Franciscan Youth will gather, this time in Sydney, Australia. The Franciscan Youth/Young Adult Commission will represent the SFO~USA at these gatherings, sending two delegates.

This is an open invitation for Franciscan Youth from the USA to participate in this celebration. The FYYA can travel with an additional group of six young adults on this pilgrimage.

The estimated cost of this trip is \$2,800.00 per youth. This cost will cover airfare, the Franciscan WYD room/board, the WYD room/board, transportation in Sydney and limited health insurance.

The young adults must be between the ages of 18-26 (as per our Statutes) and will travel with Kathy Taormina, SFO, FYYA National Chair as their coordinator.

For more information, Contact Kathy at www.franciscanyouthusa.com, click World Youth Day, or kltsfo@frontiernet.net.

January 1, 2008 is the deadline for applicants on a first come-first serve basis. A \$500.00 deposit is required to reserve.

