

To all OFS and Franciscan Youth International Councilors
To all OFS National Councils
To all Franciscan Youth National Councils

Dears brothers and sisters,

OFS and YOUFRA,

Peace and all good:

We are sending the sixth installment of material, from the family commission, to all the fraternities so that our local fraternities may reflect on the family as we were invited to do during the 2014 General Chapter. For the year 2021, the theme that we are proposing for reflection is:

"The care of our older brothers and sisters, their life and journey are part of the history of our Order"

With this theme, we seek to continue walking together with them because they belong to our fraternities. By knowing our roots we will be encouraged to make history and to become part of it -- the one in which God wants us to travel together. We need to find the spaces where we can accompany them from the different realities of each local fraternity, recognizing that, in these brothers and sisters, there is great wisdom that comes from the experience that life gives.

Material, which offers opportunities to reflect on different family issues, is presently on the CIOFS website, www.ciofs.info. This material is published every four months.

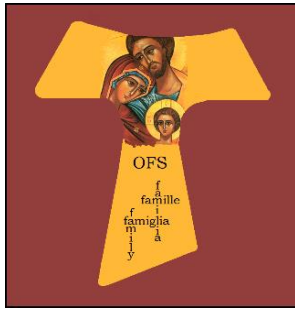
We suggest that each fraternity reflect on the proposed theme for 2021 and then share their findings, taking into account their own reality.

We ask that the various fraternities inform the Family Commission through the CIOFS Secretariat of any initiatives taken as a result of this proposal.

May the Lord bless us and may the Holy Family accompany us on any initiatives we may take on behalf of our older brothers and sisters.



Silvia Diana
Presidency Councillor
Family Commission



ANNUAL THEME 2021

"The care of our older brothers and sisters -- their life and journey are (part of) the history of our Order"

**Family Commission:
Silvia Diana OFS,
Jenny Harrington OFS,
Fr. Hernán Eguzquiza, TOR**

Collaborator on this theme: **Hernán Pablo Iris OFS Argentina**

Translation: **Mary Stronach OFS**

Dear brothers and sisters, we continue to share our ideas on this formation proposal to help the local fraternities of the OFS and YouFRA. In the 2021 proposal we will reflect on how we can accompany our older brothers and sisters in our fraternities. Understanding our history through their lives and journeys allows us to be in continuity with God's plan for our fraternity, which continues in us. History always teaches us. It helps us to get to know each other. It brings us face to face with the figure of many brothers and sisters who have preceded us who have embodied, in the best possible way, the ideal of our Secular Franciscan vocation.

**The OFS Rule, Article 13 says:
... "through developing a sense of fraternity they will find joy"**

WORK PROPOSAL:

**We have developed a dynamic work plan made up of three parts:
SEE, JUDGE AND ACT.**

1. SEE

Let's begin by learning about Hernan's experience, who, at a very young age, began his journey in a fraternity where there were many older sisters:

At the beginning of my life in the OFS, we reactivated the fraternity St. Elizabeth of Hungary. It had been inactive for ten years. From the beginning 17 years ago, those 60 and older were in the majority. I heard my friends and people close to me say more than once: "You hang out with the old people!" I have always felt comfortable with them. They helped me walk all these years in this marvelous way of life.

If I had to define them using one word, I would say they are "bridges." But note: (they are) not only a bridge between the past and the present. They are also bridges between the present and the future.

I learn from them daily - their view of God, their way of conversion, their way of "being concerned about what is important," how they are living their last years

of life. I like to accompany them on their journey, in their thinking, in their conversion... It edifies me.

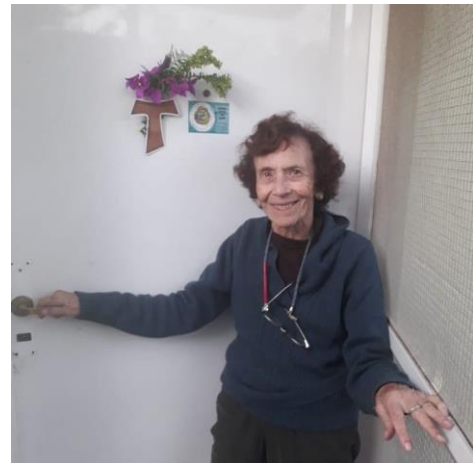
Oliva professed at age 80. She taught me to be a Franciscan, to live and die with gratitude. She was 101 years old when passed away. I miss the chats with her! She always told me: "I must not be doing something right because God does not want me yet."

I like to think about how older adults view death.

We live in a society that, when someone new arrives, be it for a job or fraternal service, they oftent want to start everything from scratch. However memory and prophecy ... are essential - to look back, to evaluate ourselves today and to project ourselves. And in this, we can learn a lot by observing the older brothers and sisters.

We invite you to read some thoughts from our older OFS brothers and sisters. We asked them the following questions: What do you need now from your fraternity?

"My fraternity in Bahía Blanca, never left me orphaned in my needs. It always gives me what is necessary: support, understanding, complete availability. Despite the difference in ages and difficulties arising from health reasons - stomach cancer - I am totally proud of my fraternity ... that continues to develop in the study of the Rule and its analysis ... and especially to emphasize the life of our founding saints, Clare and Francis, taking into account their virtues, their humility, love for the poor and sick brother ... their prayer. "



Maria del Carmen Vespa, is an older sister , 83 years old. She is one of the first "Poor Ladies" in Bahia Blanca, and was a pioneer of what later became an OFS Fraternity.

"I miss my brothers and sisters ... at meeting times. I join (with them) spiritually in prayer ... and when my fraternity calls and/or shows concern for my health, it makes me feel good and I always wait for (their call)."

Rosa Molinari, 76 years old, mother of a large family who, due to health problems, does not attend fraternal meetings regularly.



I am Marta Luna, 93 years old and, until last year, I always attended fraternal meetings, except for when the weather was bad. I have the immense joy that we are in telephone communication with each other. The warm meetings, a shared mate or tea, and when we had the joy of having of the local Assistant, (Fr. Luis Furgoni, Fr. Pedro Bogliacino, Fr. Lepoldo Bóscaro,) with us, their teachings and/or reflections were a gift from God.

What else can I say? My Fraternity. Saint John XXIII is small, but I really feel that we please our Seraphic Father Saint Francis of Assisi, because fraternal love between us always prevails. The Rule and the life of the Poverello are our food and strength so that we can continue on the journey as God wants.



Today we are going through the "pandemic" as the fragile beings that we are. The Franciscan charism, however, has penetrated very deeply in our hearts, and in the absence of personal presence, those who can, make up for it through the computer and they inform me later on details and the results of our reduced activity. For the moment, they can: pray Holy Rosary, collaborate with Cáritas delivering food to many families in the area, schedule dates for the local council, etc.

In summary: How will I pay the Lord for the gift that he gave me to be a part of the OFS and to be a part of my Fraternity?

I am even grateful for this difficult time because it makes us bear in mind the Holy Trinity and our Most Pure Mother. We can see that without this help we can do nothing ... except trust that they love us and that this environment (anguish or fear) drives us to be in frequent dialogue, praying "Lord, have mercy on me and the whole world."

2. JUDGE

The Word of God tells us:

Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?" Genesis 4:9

The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation ***Amoris Lætitia*** of Holy Father Francis tells us:

192. Saint John Paul II asked us to be attentive to the role of the elderly in our families, because there are cultures which, "especially in the wake of disordered industrial and urban development, have both in the past and in the present set the

elderly aside in unacceptable ways.” The elderly help us to appreciate “the continuity of the generations,” by their “charism of bridging the gap.” Very often it is grandparents who ensure that the most important values are passed down to their grandchildren, and “many people can testify that they owe their initiation into the Christian life to their grandparents.” Their words, their affection or simply their presence help children to realize that history did not begin with them, that they are now part of an ageold pilgrimage and that they need to respect all that came before them. Those who would break all ties with the past will surely find it difficult to build stable relationships and to realize that reality is bigger than they are. “Attention to the elderly makes the difference in a society. Does a society show concern for the elderly? Does it make room for the elderly? Such a society will move forward if it respects the wisdom of the elderly.”

In the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation **Christus Vivit** the Holy Father Francis encourages young people by saying:

199. If we journey together, young and old, we can be firmly rooted in the present, and from here, revisit the past and look to the future -- to revisit the past in order to learn from history and heal old wounds that at times still trouble us. To look to the future in order to nourish our enthusiasm, cause dreams to emerge, awaken prophecies and enable hope to blossom. Together, we can learn from one another, warm hearts, inspire minds with the light of the Gospel, and lend new strength to our hands.

In the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation **Querida Amazonia** our Pope Francisco tells us:

34. For centuries, the Amazonian peoples passed down their cultural wisdom orally, with myths, legends and tales, as in the case of “those primitive storytellers who traversed the forests bringing stories from town to town, keeping alive a community which, without the umbilical cord of those stories, distance and lack of communication would have fragmented and dissolved.” That is why it is important “to let older people tell their long stories” and for young people to take the time to drink deeply from that source.

In the Encyclical Letter **Fratelli Tutti** also, Pope Francis invites us to reflect:

18. Some parts of our human family, it appears, can be readily sacrificed for the sake of others considered worthy of a carefree existence. Ultimately, “persons are no longer seen as a paramount value to be cared for and respected, especially when they are poor and disabled, ‘not yet useful’ – like the unborn, or ‘no longer needed’ – like the elderly. We have grown indifferent to all kinds of wastefulness, starting with the waste of food, which is deplorable in the extreme.”

19. A decline in the birthrate, which leads to the aging of the population, together with the relegation of the elderly to a sad and lonely existence, is a subtle way of stating that it is all about us, that our individual concerns are the only thing that matters. In this way, “what is thrown away are not only food and dispensable objects, but often human beings themselves.” We have seen what happened with the elderly in certain places in our world as a result of the coronavirus. They did not have to

die that way. Yet something similar had long been occurring during heat waves and in other situations: older people found themselves cruelly abandoned. We fail to realize that, by isolating the elderly and leaving them in the care of others without the closeness and concern of family members, we disfigure and impoverish the family itself. We also end up depriving young people of a necessary connection to their roots and a wisdom that the young cannot achieve on their own.

On several occasions the current Pope has called us to reflect on this "throw-away culture." In this era, where changes are experienced in a dizzying way in the blink of an eye, the care and, especially the accompaniment of our elderly adults, makes us consider that we should stop and appreciate that, through the love that we have for each other, we will be making the Gospel of Jesus a reality.

3. ACT:

1. How are we living our relationships with the older adults of our fraternity and our society?
2. How do we manage or work on/address the throw-away culture?
3. As Secular Franciscan brothers and sisters, how can we accompany them (our older brothers and sisters) during this stage of their lives? Do we think about them when we plan as a fraternity? In our apostolates? In formation?

4. CELEBRATE:

Let us spend some time together in a space for prayer, giving thanks for the life shared.

Psalm 71:

- ¹⁷ Since my youth, God, you have taught me,
and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds.
- ¹⁸ Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, my God,
till I declare your power to the next generation,
your mighty acts to all who are to come.
- ¹⁹ Your righteousness, God, reaches to the heavens,
you who have done great things.
Who is like you, God?
- ²⁰ Though you have made me see troubles, many and bitter,
you will restore my life again;
from the depths of the earth you will again bring me up.
- ²¹ You will increase my honor
and comfort me once more.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, you were born of the Virgin Mary,
daughter of St. Joachim and Saint Ann.
Look down lovingly upon older people around the world.
Protect them! They are a source of enrichment
for families, for the Church, and for all of society.
Hold them! That when they grow old

while home-bound, they may remain for their families
strong pillars of the evangelical faith,
custodians of noble ideals,
living treasures of strong religious traditions.
Make them teachers of wisdom and courage
that they may transmit the fruits of their mature human and
spiritual experience to future generations.
Lord Jesus, help families and society
to value the presence and role of grandparents.
May they never be ignored or excluded,
but let them find respect and love.
Help them to live serenely
and to feel welcomed during all the years
of life that you grant them.
Mary, Mother of all the living,
always take care of all our
older brothers and sisters.
Accompany them during their earthly pilgrimage
and through your prayers may all the families
meet one day in our heavenly homeland,
where you wait for all humanity
so that we may receive
the great embrace of a life without end.
Amen

January 2021-