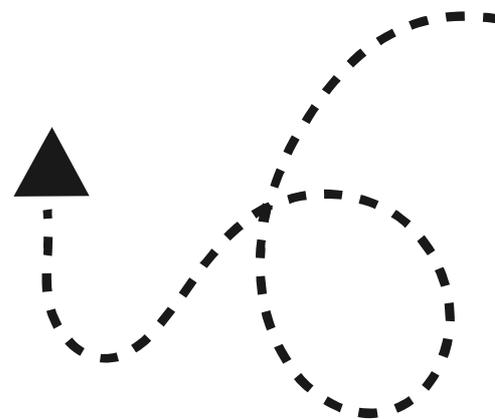


# GUIDELINES FOR THE FRANCISCAN CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS ANIMATION





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# INTRODUCTION

Attention to the children is repeatedly presented starting from the Old Testament (e.g., Prv 17:6; Hos 11:4; Gl 2:16; Jdt 4:10 ff ; Ps 8:3; Is 7:14) as children show us the privileged way to rediscover God's attention to each of us.

Jesus clearly states that God reveals the Kingdom to the children and that whoever welcomes them welcomes Him (Mk 10:13-16; Mk 9:33-37; Mt 21:12. 14-16; Mt 11:25; Mk 9:37; Mt 25:40).

Christian revelation has made us aware that children are redeemed by the blood of Christ and through His grace they have become children and friends of God and heirs of eternal glory. Children and adolescents have value first and foremost for themselves, in the season of life they are presently living and not in view of what, in a future to come, they will be able to give to the family, to the society, to the OFS or to the Church. Civil and religious institutions are for the children and not children for institutions.

This conciliar reinterpretation of biblical and evangelical teachings has led the Church in recent decades to prepare suitable instruments for the human and Christian formation of children and adolescents, with special attention to the role of the family and educators.

The OFS General Constitutions, at Art. 25, recall the responsibility of the Secular Franciscans regarding the youngest, recalling the paragraph 30 of the Vatican Council II decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem* that deals with the apostolate of the laity and, to it, we can add John Paul II's Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, which speaks about the children specific contribution in the apostolate task (paragraph 47).

The OFS has a specific duty toward children and adolescents, as well as toward young people, to "bear witness to the Christian faith, the evangelical spirit and secular Franciscan spirituality, both as individuals and as a Fraternity" (Art. 67 FIOFS Statute ad experimentum).

However, within the Order the attention to the children is still generally very poor, and only a National Fraternities minority dedicates themselves to this service: there is little awareness of this specific mandate received from the Church and enshrined in Article 25 GGCC.

Yet, engaging in the animation and care of the children would be an effective way for implementing the point no. 13.2.2 "Vocation" of the XVI General Chapter Conclusions, specifically dedicated to the OFS (but also to the YouFra) promotion. Experience teaches us that when there are groups of Franciscan children, are they who make the OFS known to their parents who, very often, show interest in knowing the Order and in becoming members thru the profession.

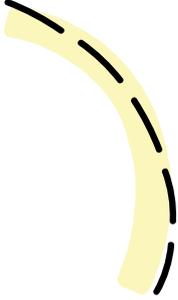
These guidelines are intended to provide animators with basic tools for animation; to be a stimulus for National Fraternities that have no experience in this kind of animation and, while respecting individual realities, give common parameters for National Fraternities that have already promoted Franciscan children's groups. They are a synthesis of experiential paths and documents developed over the years by different OFS and YouFra National Fraternities and are proposed by the CIOFS Presidency as a tool for implementing the FIOFS Statute ad experimentum supporting the National Councils, the OFS and YouFra animators and the Spiritual Assistants.

# I. FRANCISCAN CHILDREN HISTORY

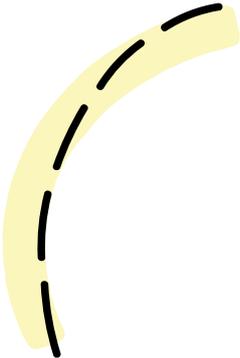


# I. FRANCISCAN CHILDREN HISTORY

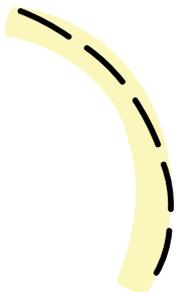
XIII Century: The presence of children among the St. Francis followers is evidenced by *The Little Flowers*, Chapter XVII, FF 1847, which reports "How a boy friar, while St. Francis was praying by night, saw Christ and the Virgin Mary and very many other saints hold converse with him"



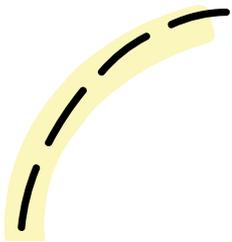
1585: Pope Sixtus V *motu proprio*, with the bull *Ex supernae dispositionis* instituted the Archconfraternity of the Cordigeri at the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi and granted the Conventuals General of the power to erect similar confraternities in all the churches of his Order (the same faculty was granted: in 1587 to the Minister General of the Observants; in 1622 to the Minister General of the TOR; and in 1904 to the Minister General of the Capuchins). From the beginning of the 20th century, the confraternities of the Rope erected in the various Franciscan churches began to be increasingly used to educate children in the Christian and Franciscan style, in preparation for entry into the then Third Order.



1882: Pope Leo XIII, considered the Third Order a particularly suitable institution "for the lay people, whatever was their sex, age, condition, status." (November 30.1882 speech)



1905: With the promulgation of the Catechism, St. Pius X recommended that in any Sunday and feast days the children be obliged to be instructed in Christian doctrine and requested that parish priests be assisted in this work by pious secular persons. "The necessity of providing as far as possible for the religious institution of the tender youth. Has suggested us to print a Catechism, which clearly expounds the rudiments of the holy faith, and those divine truths, to which the life of every Christian must be informed" (letter to Card Respighi, Vicar General Diocese of Rome, June 14, 1905)



1912: In order to interest adolescents and lead them on the right path Pius X asks the Franciscan Third Order that its members be witness of Christian life (Apostolic Letter Tertium Franciscanum Ordinem).

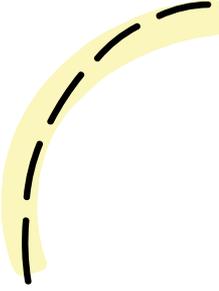
Franciscan tertiaries began to take care of the children, deepening the Pope's request at their international and national Congresses, but especially by gradually promoting the birth of groups of boys and girls alongside TOF fraternities.

1914 – 1915: Birth of first groups of "Candidates to become Cordigieri".

1926: 7th centenary of St. Francis transit, with the encyclical "Rite expiatis" (April 30, 1926) Pope Pius XI, after having emphasized "As first, therefore, his many children of the three Orders must copy in themselves the distinguished image of the Father and Lawgiver" and than the great function of the same people in the evangelization of the world, speaking specifically of the Third Secular Order, the Pope hopes for its spread, inviting bishops and priests to promote it by "teaching the flock about the aims of this Order of secular men and women. [...] and those who cannot yet give it (their name), in reason of their age, let them enroll themselves as candidates cordiglieri, so that from childhood they may be accustomed to this holy discipline."

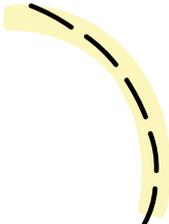
1934: In Italy, in a magazine of then Third Secular Order, there is mention of the Cordigieri children to whom in some places, was given the graceful name of "Araldini" (Little heralds).

1935: Letter to all Brothers and Sisters of the Three Franciscan Orders (Minister General OFM): "care with great love the Section of the Franciscan Cordigieri, who are appropriately called Little Herald or Herald" (June 20, 1935).

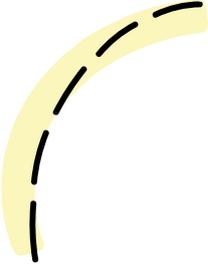


1965: Pope Paul VI, in his declaration *Gravissimum Educationis* (Oct. 28/65) affirms the "sacred right" of children and young people to be helped in their human and Christian growth and urges the sons and daughters of the Church to work generously in the field of education, worldwide.

1989: "The Decalogue of the little Heralds," prepared by the OFS Interobediential National Council of Italy.



1990 – 2000: The OFS General Constitutions, at Art. 25, make part of OFS legislation the service of educating children and calls for the formation of organized groups, according to age, to whom Franciscan life can be made known.



2001: CIOFS issued a circular letter titled "Franciscan Children Project," dated April 17 and signed Emanuela De Nunzio, OFS Minister General, that was encouraging national councils to implement GGCC Article 25 to which was attached a resource book regarding the project on Franciscan children.

# II. ORGANIZATION



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Are Franciscan children and adolescents those with an age going from a minimum of 5 and a maximum of 17 years (Art. 68.1 FIOFS Statute ad experimentum). These limits cannot be waived, also in view of the fact that the YouFra journey can begin at the age of 14 (cf. "YouFra: Franciscan vocation journey"), and the OFS and YouFra national statutes must provide for ways to facilitate the adolescent's transition to the Franciscan Youth.

To enable suitable formation, it is appropriate to preferably organize groups of children and adolescents by age range. By mutual agreement between OFS and YouFra, each National Fraternity establishes this subdivision.

The groups are organized at the local, regional and/or national level under the guidance of the OFS and YouFra Councils of the same level (OFS GGCC art. 25).

The groups have the objective of the children and adolescent human, Christian and Franciscan growth, as an enrichment of the catechetical journey of Christian initiation that they experience in the parish (cf. art. 68.1 FIOFS Statute ad experimentum).

The groups are the privileged environment in which the child/youth deepens his/her friendship with Jesus, knows St. Francis and St. Clare, learns to relate to "the other" and understands the beauty of being together and of the respect for Creation.

It is up to each national statute to indicate the name, age groups, criteria, themes and organization of these groups.

The service to children and adolescents is carried out in collaboration between OFS and YouFra, valuing in this way the experiences already gained by one and/or the other.

It is appropriate that the OFS and YouFra Councils, at each level, identify within themselves a Responsible/Delegate/Coordinator for the care of Franciscan children and adolescent groups.

# III. HUMAN, CHRISTIAN AND FRANCISCAN GROWTH



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Is to the OFS the responsibility to guide children and young people to discover their personal Christian vocation and to understand that there is a God's plan for each of them. Therefore, together with the YouFra, the OFS is called to help them realize this goal with commitment and generosity.

To have this fully realized, the children must be accompanied in the knowledge of Francis and Clare as models to follow with the goal to encounter Jesus.

Taking care of children and adolescents means first of all helping them in their path of human, Christian and Franciscan growth.

It is fundamental to support the psychophysical development of the child/boy-girl; to help him/her to recognize and to manage his/her emotions; to live friendship starting with the one with Jesus; to make him/her learning how to relate him/her to the others, starting with his/her own family.

Service toward the younger children serves to reinforce the catechetical journey and to deepen the basic concepts of the Catholic faith, founding element of the Franciscan charism. The children Christian growth passes first and foremost through the adults witness who must help them discover that Jesus is the most precious friend.

Finally, to make them experiencing in a simple way the meaning and the beauty of fraternity and the basic values of Franciscanism: that we are all brothers and sisters (even animals and plants); the prayer, the attention to the most vulnerable and the care for Creation.

# IV. FORMATIVE JOURNEY



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The formative journey of children and adolescents' groups is aimed to transmit them the Christian and Franciscan spirituality values, to guide them to experience the fraternity, and to educate them in respect to the human person and to the creation, as well as in forms of service and witness appropriate to their age.

It is aimed to educate children and boys and girls so that they open themselves to the prayer, the community, the Church and to the love for Franciscan life. For this, the path should promote the integral development of the children social-emotional aspects and the encounter with Jesus as friend and faithful companion, through the example of St. Francis, St. Clare but also of other saints, especially those of their age (e.g., St. Maria Goretti 11 years old; St. Peter Yu Tae-ch'ol and Barbara Yi 13 years old; St. Pancrazio 13 years old; St. Jose Luis Sanchez del Rio 14 years old; Blessed Charles Acutis 15 years old).

The goal is to bring the child/boy/girl to:



1. Know themselves and accept each other, through various playing activities, sports and artistic expressions of various kind (drama, singing, dance);
2. Learning to love and respect one's family, friends, school, group, and Creation;
3. Recognize God as Father, Jesus as brother and Mary as Mother;
4. Learning to pray in personal and community form;
5. Getting to know the lives of St. Francis and St. Clare and of the children saints;
6. Make living experience of fraternity.

This path should be organized having in mind the needs of the different age groups and the reality in which children/adolescents daily live, which varies from country to country.

A fundamental element is the building of authentic relationships between the child/adolescent and the OFS-YouFra animator/fraternity.

Each OFS and YouFra national fraternity (it would be better if the work is done together) should provide an itinerary prepared by age groups and stages groups, which best meet the formative and pedagogical needs of children and adolescents.

It is important that this itinerary could help the adolescent in a way that they could wish to continue the journey in the Secular Franciscan family and to make their entry into YouFra.

# V. METHODOLOGY AND EDUCATIONAL TOOLS



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The period of developmental age (ranging from infancy to the threshold of maturity) has psychological stages with rather precise characteristics, although obviously development varies from person to person. The OFS is called to animate children and young people from 5 to 17 years of age: these are the ages with different developmental characteristics, requiring interventions and methodologies tailored to each of them.

To enable suitable formation, it is appropriate to form groups of children and adolescents preferably by groups distinct by age: each National Fraternity establishes the subdivision.

These groups are organized at the local, regional and/or national level under the guidance of the OFS and YouFra Councils of the same level. The presence of a multi-level structure, if scheduled in the National Statutes, allows for the possibility of common moments at the regional and/or national level, which helps the growth of the Secular Franciscan Family children by allowing to have knowledge, exchange and sharing of experiences among children and youth from different territories of the same Region/Nation.

The educational strategies can be the most diverse, depending on the age and specific characteristics of the group: the important thing is that the formative contents be transmitted and that there is a planning of the formative path for each fraternal year.

The main educational tools are: the testimony of the animators and of all the members of the Franciscan Family; formative aids; suitable dynamics; moments of animation; recreational, sports and artistic activities. In short, everything that helps to convey the importance of being together; respect for other children/adolescents and for everything that surrounds them (Creation); the meaning of prayer and love for Jesus.

It is reiterated that the first tool of education is the witness: the children learn from the example, they observe our behaviors and are strict judges when they notice a contradiction between what we say and what we do.

For this service, it is fundamental the choice and the formation of the animators: the center of this are the children of our family and everything must be done in function of their growth, not of our interest.

It is appropriate that in the National Fraternities where OFS and YouFra exist, the guidelines, the formation material, the training courses for animators and the organizational work be performed together, possibly creating, at each level, a mixed OFS - YouFra working group with the presence of a spiritual assistant.

# VI. TRAVEL COMPANIONS



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Family: it is the privileged place where the child-boy-girl/adolescent receives (or should receive) the first education to the faith. It is essential to involve the parents in the children's journey, to have an ongoing dialogue with them and to include them in the activities proposed by the group, especially those of an artistic nature (for example, having them prepare costumes or play instruments, etc.). The animators and assistants should take care of establishing a constant relationship with the families of these little Franciscans and also think to plan moments of prayer for the parents, with the help of the OFS-GiFra Fraternities.



OFS Animator: is a perpetually professed member who accompanies children and adolescents on their path of human, Christian and Franciscan growth. He/she carries out his/her service above all with the witness of the Franciscan charism and the example of life: for this he/she should form and take care of his own spiritual life. He/she is an expression of the OFS fraternity that has entrusted him/her with this service and, therefore, has the task of facilitating familiarity between the reality of children and adolescents and that of OFS members.



YouFra Animator: is a young person willing to give witness of Franciscan life and his charism in order to accompany and jointly work with the OFS Animator in the service to the children and adolescents.





Assistant: is the friar or nun or diocesan priest who spiritually cares for the group, collaborating with the animators in the Catholic education of the children-boys-girls. If he or she is a Franciscan religious, he or she witnesses the beauty and joy of the Franciscan charism and keeps watch so that it be properly transmitted to the younger children.

OFS-YouFra Fraternity: it is the reality that concretely shows to the children and to the adolescents the meaning of spiritual family with the witness of life, especially when OFS and YouFra Fraternities collaborate and organize common moments. Therefore, it is recommended that, whenever it is possible, OFS and YouFra work together on this service.



It is important that family, animators and spiritual assistant collaborate throughout the formation process, creating a personal relationship of dialogue and sharing, to allow true human, Christian and Franciscan growth for the children and the adolescents for whom the OFS with YouFra have care of.

**VII. FEASTS OF THE PROMISE OR  
COMMITMENT - THE HERE I AM  
OR FAMILY – OF THANKSGIVING**

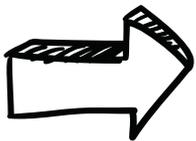


## VII. FEASTS OF THE PROMISE OR COMMITMENT – THE HERE I AM OR FAMILY – OF THANKSGIVING

In order to mark meaningful moments of the Franciscan children and adolescents' groups life events can be planned that could highlight and emphasize the meaning to the path.

The following ones are some proposals that can be realized by the Franciscan children boys and girls groups.

### Feast of the "Promise" or "Feast of the Commitment"



A first moment could be the "Feast of Promise" or "Feast of Commitment" or something similar. Each group can organize a small rite (Liturgy of the Word or Holy Mass or something else, each National Fraternity can decide) in which each child/youth expresses aloud their commitment to follow the path of his/her Franciscan group for one year.

This feast should be placed at the beginning of the any fraternal year

### Feast of the "Here I Am" or of the "Family"



Another celebration that could be carried out by each group is the Feast of the Family, which can be organized in occasion of the Presentation of Jesus to the Temple (Feb. 2) or in the middle of the fraternal year. This feast should place the family of each Franciscan child/youth at the center, because the parents in particular should be involved in the formative journey of their child.

### Feast of "Thanksgiving"



At the end of the fraternal year, it could be planned another occasion of celebration in which the Franciscan family is at its center. In this case, the OFS and/or YouFra fraternity that guides and is responsible for the Franciscan children and adolescents' group must be involved and must be actively present.

It is to each National Fraternity decide if, how and when to have the above proposed feasts.