



# Face of Francis Poster

## A Teacher's Guide

Bullying is real. Children confront it wherever they go: in school, on the Internet, sometimes even at home. Many experts have offered solutions. Indeed, in recent years we have seen a host of measures designed to prevent bullying: laws, rules, regulations, and safety-zones. Meanwhile, others question whether bullying isn't simply a normal part of life, if not a beneficial rite of passage.

Steeped in the Franciscan tradition, we believe bullying is neither good nor normal. On the other hand, we recognize it won't disappear if we fail to address root causes, or offer only punishment after the fact. Rather, we seek to address underlying causes of bullying.

## Bullying Dynamics

Using the example of Saint Francis, who tamed the fierce wolf of Gubbio, we seek to transform those who slip into bullying. We start with understanding one of the primary causes of bullying: *the need to create an effect*.

Typically, a bully has a strong need to know he or she can affect another. A bully may feel they are constantly told what to do, where to go, how to be, and they may feel they are not allowed to decide or choose anything for themselves. Instead, they have the feeling that others direct and dictate all their actions.

The resulting insecurity, about whether or not they are able to decide or cause anything, leads to anxiety, unexpressed resentment, or fear. They develop a desperate need to prove (mostly to themselves) that they can cause something, anything, to happen. They need to know they can make a decision, even a harmful decision. They need to know they have a voice.

To satisfy this need, they push another child's sensitive emotional buttons. They trigger an effect. They cause a visible reaction — often a look of startled hurt. The emotional reaction playing out on the face of another child delivers a perverse satisfaction: they have caused something! They have demonstrated power to make something happen.

## The Approach

How do we address this harmful behavior? What is the solution? If we further constrain their ability to cause something we tend to make the problem worse. They will become even more desperate to exert cause. We fuel the fire. If need be, they will turn to covert means and work their mischief in the shadows.

The alternate solution is to redirect their need to affect others toward positive rather than negative effects. We enable them to cause recognizable yet positive responses on the faces of others. They are guided to the “Face of a Franciscan.”

What is the “Face of a Franciscan”? It is a Face we put on that looks at others in the way St. Francis looked at others. He looked and saw God in all creatures. He recognized the divine in all his “brothers and sisters.”

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, writing in *Deus Caritas Est*, notes, “Seeing with the eyes of Christ, I can give to others much more than their outward necessities; I can give them the look of love which they crave.” This “look of love” characterizes the Face of a Franciscan.

Friar Murray Bodo, in *The Threefold Way of Saint Francis*, tells the story of meeting Karl Menninger, whose first words were, “You have a real Franciscan face.” The friar was moved by Menninger's recognition of the Franciscan charism. Later, Bodo wrote:

*“Everyone wants to know if she or he is good, is beautiful, has something to give. The Franciscan gift to them is affirmation of the light, manifest or hidden, of their true face.”*

Saint Francis, perhaps more than any other saint, teaches the importance of detecting and touching the *image of God* in the other. What, you might ask, is this image of God? The phrase references “the Divine within,” the presence of the Holy Spirit we all receive as a gift through God’s grace. When we are lifted up, when we are inspired, that sacred presence stirs within. When our hearts fill with Christ’s love we recognize what it means to be endowed with the image of God.

When we are kind, when we do something nice for another person, we can feel the Divine stir within, especially when we care for someone weaker — as Jesus taught us to do. Or, we may feel Spirit move within when another person helps us, when someone shows us kindness or love. We feel special. We may feel lighter, as if we could fly.

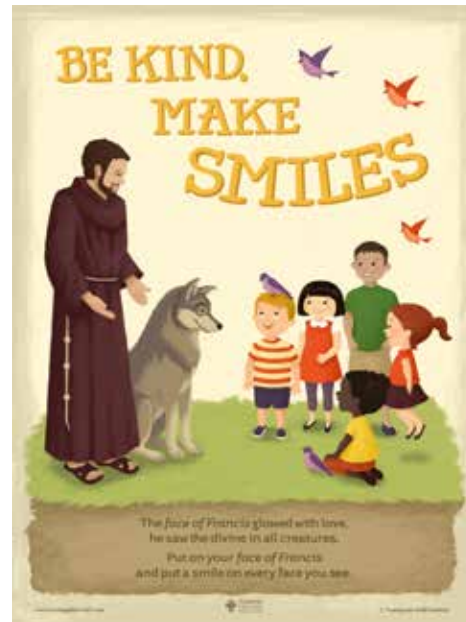
## Using the Poster

In the poster scene, this feeling is represented as the Face of Saint Francis shines brightly with kindness for the children. They are lifted up. Smiles brighten their faces. Saint Francis’ holy gift of Divine Face causes an effect – it causes the Spirit to move within which lights up smiles.

We recommend using the poster to prompt informal discussion. Ask students to describe how the children pictured must feel. When Francis and the Wolf at his side (who was once a bully but who is now a friend) cast their eyes upon the children, what do the children experience? Ask students if they might have experienced anything similar.

Then, subsequently, ask students what they believe they would need to do to create a good feeling in another. What would they need to do to bring a smile to the face or eyes of another? What acts of kindness might accomplish this task? How might they show another person they care? What looks, actions, or words, do they believe will bring smiles?

One possible helpful analogy would be a helium-filled balloon. The helium is invisible but nonetheless real, like loving-kindness we show another. Just as the helium causes the balloon to rise, our kindness can cause another to feel lifted up. We can even see their face light up into a smile. We can see the tangible effect we can cause using kindness that is often invisible but real.



Ask students to discuss times when they felt lifted up (however slight) by kindness, caring, love. Have they experienced a smile they could not suppress? Encourage them to express how they felt when someone was kind. Or how they felt when someone shined a happy face (Face of Francis) in their direction.

Encourage students to practice small acts of kindness. Have them practice letting their eyes show the caring they feel inside. Perhaps discuss how the image of God within them can function as a light that shines on others. Have them practice sharing their Face of a Franciscan with others. Ask if they can imagine this is a gift they present to others. Ask them to report their findings when they shine the Face of Francis: what did they notice?

Once a week, in a short informal discussion, ask students if they have been able to share the Face of Francis. Have they been able to show kindness? Were they able to make smiles appear? Were they able to detect the Divine, a spark of God, in all creatures, like Saint Francis did?

## Additional Thoughts

An excellent resource for teachers that explains “God is Love” theology is the papal encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* written by Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. (See [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20051225\\_deus-caritas-est\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est_en.html).) Passages in the encyclical can help you discuss the “divine within” in the context of “loving one another.”

Expect challenges. For example, you may want to pose the question: “Do you imagine some people receive so little kindness, caring, and love that they are frightened when someone is nice?” Ask if any students received a “hard look,” a response that communicated, “What do you want from me?”

Explain the disappointment that may emerge from this experience is one reason St. Paul, in the Bible, tells us love is patient:

<sup>4</sup>Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, <sup>5</sup>does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, <sup>6</sup>does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; <sup>7</sup>[a]bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (New American Standard Bible, 1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

Discuss how it may take time for people who never before received a gift of love to feel comfortable with such an unusual and valuable gift. Explain that when a student shows another the shining Face of Francis, the other

may pull back. They may not know what to do. It may take time for them to adjust to the gift of caring. Explain that is one reason we say love must be patient.

Query students, Do you tend to get angry when someone rejects your kindness? How do you feel when you are pushed away? How do you feel when someone does not want your help?

Rejected kindness, caring, or love makes people feel hurt and *very angry*. Encourage students to understand that they should not be provoked, and they should not act in an unbecoming manner. Discuss how they should endure and bear all things — as part of being kind. Ask them to speculate what might have happened if Francis was not patient with the fierce wolf.

## Expanding the Scope of the Project

In following weeks you may wish to pose the question, “What do you think the world would be like if everyone had the Face of Francis?” Explore what they feel they can do to help people understand that God placed love and kindness inside us.

As discussion continues, from time to time throughout the school year keep in mind that contemplative spiritual formation cannot be rushed. Success depends on grace and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Do not embarrass a student for lack of speed in comprehension or application. Explain that it took Francis many years before he could help the Wolf become peaceful.

Be certain students know this is not a graded exercise but rather the type of work that grows inside us. The task is to remain watchful and listen closely – until they feel the spark inside that motivates them to give the gift of the Face of Francis, to another.

Additional teaching aids will be posted online from time to time. Taming the Wolf Institute will notify you regarding new releases. We recommend visiting [tamingthewolf.com](http://tamingthewolf.com) where you can read the “Legend of Saint Francis Taming the Wolf.” The Legend may become an additional valuable tool for the classroom that helps expand the concepts imparted by the Face of Francis “Be Kind, Make Smiles” poster.

We pray your conversations are fruitful and, over time, you are able to see a tangible increase in displays of kindness and a reduction in bullying acts. We pray you are able to encourage students to adopt a contemplative demeanor that puts them at cause over showering kindness on others.

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### Biographical notes regarding the author:

Greg Stone earned a Masters in Dispute Resolution from the Straus Institute for Dispute Resolution at Pepperdine University Law School. Subsequently, he married contemporary conflict resolution approaches with the peacemaking legacy of St. Francis in *Taming the Wolf: Peace through Faith*. Stone has mediated cases in the Los Angeles and Ventura Superior Courts. He is an adjunct professor at St. John’s Seminar in Camarillo, and has delivered conflict resolution workshops for clergy, deacons, religious, diocesan staff, and laity.

To learn more about the Institute, visit [tamingthewolf.com](http://tamingthewolf.com).