

OCDS Formation Program

Introduction

The purpose of formation is: “to prepare the person to live the charism and spirituality of Carmel in its following of Christ and in service to its mission” (Const. 32), and “the preparation of individuals inspired by the Holy Spirit to live a spiritual life according to the principles of Discalced Carmelite spirituality.” (Ratio #6)

Each person in formation must be evaluated individually to take into consideration the circumstances of her/his life and where s/he is in their spiritual journey against the demands of the Secular Carmelite vocation. “The purpose is to ‘prepare the person.’ The stress on the person who is to be prepared helps the formation community understand that the process must be directed to the individual in a concrete way. The people who come to the Secular Order of Carmel are, with few exceptions, people who have many commitments, especially with families and with work. The program of formation must be flexible enough to adapt to the circumstances of each person who is to become a member.” (Ratio #5)

“Good formation depends on good information. At the same time it must be clear that formation is distinct from information. The primary role of the persons responsible for formation in the Secular Order community is to accompany those in formation to help them put into practice what they learn through the process of formation. The information they are given through reading and classes is meant to be a help to the person’s spiritual growth.” (Ratio #7) The goal of formation thus goes beyond informational learning to gradual personal transformation that leads to evangelical service. Finding ways to practically apply formation teaching, according to the circumstances of the individual and the local community, is an important aspect of each community's formation program.

It is the role of the teacher, the Director of Formation and the local Council to provide help and guidance to the candidate in discerning his/her vocation. It is important to make sure the candidate understands that acceptance in the Order is a mutual discernment process and that the local Council has the final authority to accept a person or move them on to the next stage of formation. The community also has a responsibility to get to know the candidate in order to aid in the discernment process and to see if the candidate can/will contribute in a positive way to community life.

The General Definitory of the Order has prepared the Ratio Institutionis to assist the Secular Order with the important task of formation. The Ratio was approved by the Generalate in September 2009 and is a document which seeks to present the fundamental principles that guide the process of formation and the philosophy behind the formation of the members of the Order. It is not a program of formation. Each jurisdiction of the Order is responsible for the design and implementation of its own formation program. The Ratio presents the guiding principles of formation for the entire Secular Order and can be found on the Washington Province OCDS website.

The Ratio presents the following Essentials of Formation:

Human Formation develops our:

- ability for interpersonal dialogue, mutual respect and tolerance

- readiness to the possibility of being corrected and to correct others with serenity
- capacity to persevere in our commitments

Christian Formation enhances our:

- capability to receive the necessary theological foundation by means of the Catechism of the Catholic Church and Church documents
- appreciation of our baptismal consecration
- zeal for conversion, Christian commitment and holiness of life
- fervor to live the demands of following Jesus by taking part in His saving mission in unfolding our prophetic, kingly and priestly calling

Carmelite Formation confirms our Carmelite identity in the:

- study and spiritual reading of the Scriptures and in the practice of Lectio Divina
- importance of the liturgy of the Church, especially the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours
- spirituality of Carmel, its history, the writings of the Order's Saints
- formation in prayer and meditation
- formation for the apostolate based on the teaching of the Church and on understanding our role as Seculars in the apostolate of the Order

It should be emphasized that formation is an ongoing, lifetime process in the life of the Secular Carmelite and an ongoing communal and individual responsibility.