

A PORTRAIT OF SUCCESSFUL FORMATION

Chris Hart, OCDS

The following checklists are based upon the formation guidelines of the California-Arizona Province. Their purpose is to aid Formation Directors and Community Councils in establishing effective formation programs by providing a tool for regularly evaluating the outcome of the programs. Without being all-inclusive, the checklists also paint a picture of how those in different levels of formation might appear. They seek to answer the following frequently asked questions:

1. What might a Secular Order Carmelite look like according to Human, Christian, Carmelite and Apostolate formation in each of the three periods of formation?
2. How might the community aid in the formation process as part of ongoing formation?
3. How might a community measure the effectiveness of the formation program and what should its development include in addition to the information list provided by the provincial guidelines?

Formation Checklist

Aspirancy

Aspirant's Role

Human Formation:

- An attentive spirit who has made himself present to a new experience.
- All senses, especially those of vision and hearing, alert and ready to absorb tangible experiences and relate them to intangible realities.
- In a seeking frame of mind. Seeking to find out more as to our call, creation, purpose and meaning of daily life events.

Christian Formation:

- To recognize the need for prayer in life.
- To have a relationship with the Blessed Virgin Mary.
- To have a desire to grow closer to God and a desire to better understand their role in relationship to the Blessed Trinity.
- An appreciation for frequenting the celebration of the Sacraments, scriptural reading, and the Liturgy of the Hours as the prayer of the Church.

Carmelite Formation:

- A desire for the support of a community of like-minded people.
- A willingness to explore Carmelite history, its origins and the written works of those saints who have lived this way of life.
- A desire to learn more about prayer, why we need prayer and the role it plays within the Church.

Community's Role

Human Formation

- As the light of Christ for all whom God sends to us, all community members have the opportunity to practice a response of love to God by giving warm welcome, active support and help to all who are new to the community and aspire to recognize the fullness of their call within the body of Christ.

Christian Formation:

- As each member of the community has offered to the community unique, God-given gifts, by way of the promise, each member should be willing to assist the aspirants in their Christian formation by being eager to listen to questions, problems and daily struggles, provide reassurance of God's love, and keep aspirants in daily prayer.

Carmelite Formation:

- Provide assistance in praying Liturgy of the Hours in community during meetings.
- Members should make themselves available to assist with praying the Liturgy of the Hours between meeting dates.
- Community members need to lend assistance to Director of Formation in the area of instruction by a willingness

Aspirant's Role

Formation for the Apostolate:

- A recognition that we are loved by God.
- A recognition that we are called to make some response to God as a return of love.
- A growth in understanding that each one of us has a unique response of love to give to God.
- A realization that the community meetings offer a safe environment to practice this loving response to God by way of prayer and active participation.

Community's Role

- to share experience in living out daily life.

Formation for the Apostolate:

- As listening pray-ers for the needs of the Church and the immediate needs of the secular members in the world, the community's members should first of all practice these skills within the membership of the community.
- Each member should continue to seek a fuller understanding of "who they are" within the body of Christ. In doing so, they can lend loving example and share helpful suggestions to encourage aspiring members in this growth process.
- All members should encourage one another with the idea that what we as Carmelites bring to the needy world, whether physically active or not, is our focus of actively building the kingdom of God through a spirit of "being" rather than "doing".

Evaluation of educational materials and structure of community formation pertaining to effectiveness in obtaining above goals.

- Do those aspiring to discover if this way of life is for them have adequate opportunity to share in fraternal charity with senior members of the community?
- Does the informational material that the community has chosen to offer give necessary information without extra burden to aspirants?
- Is adequate reflection time given to aspirants to allow God to reveal what He has begun?
- Is adequate time given to aspirants for their questions to be answered by a community representative and/or its individual members?
- Is there a system of communication in place to adequately track the starting point, growth and areas of weakness in the four areas of formation program?
- Has community provided for the best example of our daily life to be given during each meeting?
- In the active apostolate that the community has chosen, does it flow naturally as a fruit of prayer or is it forced activity that takes time out of our day?

Formation Checklist

Formation I

Candidate's Role

Human Formation:

- Begin to recognize a spiritual reality behind tangible experiences.
- Begin to recognize and use the five spiritual senses that correspond to our bodily senses.
- Begin to recognize the constant presence of God and that God dwells within all creation.
- Begin to trust the movements of this God even when difficulties arise.
- Begin to understand the unique connection among all human beings.

Christian Formation:

- Begin to reflect and take a new look at common Biblical passages that carry new meaning.
- Begin to notice a new path of life that seems refreshing, revitalizing and life giving.
- Begin to recognize an internal need to attend Mass daily.
- Begin to recognize the movement of the Holy Spirit in our lives.
- Begin to understand benefits in following Christ's precepts as they are put into practice.
- Begin to discover the value of the Blessed Virgin Mary's life as a model of prayer and faithfulness.

Carmelite Formation:

- Begin to discover a new order and structure of daily life.
- Begin to acquire an appreciation for the saints of the Carmelite Order.

Community's Role

Human Formation:

- In the sharing of fraternal friendship the presence of Christ is revealed and shared, building up and encouraging the reality of the kingdom of God in time leading toward eternity.

Christian Formation:

- Encourage candidates in formation to continue to seek benefits in the practice of theological virtues and the Beatitudes.
- Encourage candidates in formation to recognize graces revealed through failings as well as successes.
- Members should show eagerness in lending prayerful assistance to the daily concerns of candidates' lives.

Carmelite Formation:

- Members should be willing to share experiences of God's movement within personal life experiences in group or class setting.

Candidate's Role

- Begin to appreciate the Carmelite identity found in scripture.
- Begin to discover the benefits in praying the Liturgy of the Hours.
- Begin to recognize that silence, solitude and stillness provide a path of renewed grace and communion with God.
- Begin to find a security in living out the rule of St. Albert as interpreted by the Secular Order's Constitutions.
- Begin to discover support and friendship among the members of the community.

Formation for the Apostolate:

- Show a willingness to practice a loving response to God by way of leading the community in opening or closing prayers.
- Show growth in fraternal charity by having a willingness to share God-given talents with community.
- Desire to make a commitment to the community to live this way of life.
- Begin to recognize that a vocation to Carmel is for the benefit of the world.
- Begin to understand what it means to die to self-desires, and the graces received by the death of self-desires.

Community's Role

- In listening to God, members should also be willing to listen to the needs, struggles and daily trials this Carmelite way of life offers.

Formation for the Apostolate:

- Be open to receive the skills and talents offered as gifts to the community by candidates.

Evaluation of educational materials and structure of community formation pertaining to effectiveness in obtaining above goals

- Do candidates in formation have adequate opportunity to spend time with senior members in order to build strong friendships?
- Does the informational material that the community has chosen give a well-rounded base of information about this Carmelite way of life and its saint?
- Is the information presented in a way that senior members can offer examples of successful daily, lived experience?

- Is the formation program organized in a flexible manner to provide room for life's struggles, trials, and unexpected mishaps that led to missed classes, missing instructors to teach the classes, or unforeseen weather condition that cause cancellation of scheduled meeting date?
- Is there a system of communication in place to adequately track spiritual growth of candidates or areas of weakness in any of the four areas within the formation program?
- Is the community open to the acceptance of new talents, skills, and gifts being offered to it by candidates?
- Has the community provided for the best example of our daily life to be experienced during each meeting date?
- Do informational materials or community members encourage candidates to seek a fuller understanding of "who they are" in the body of Christ and the response of love that they have to offer God and one another?

Formation Checklist

Formation II

Candidate's Role

Human Formation:

- Recognizes the spiritual reality behind tangible experiences.
- Seeks consistent use of spiritual senses. Relies mostly upon movements of the Spirit, therefore waiting and listening are practiced most often.
- Begins to recognize constant presence of God whether or not He is "felt" tangibly or intangibly.
- Understands human need to be united to other human beings and the unity shared between them regardless of whether they are physically present or not.
- Is comfortable in being alone. Does not feel isolated.

Christian Formation:

- Finds spiritual nourishment in reading the Bible, especially the New Testament.
- Has internal need to attend Mass daily, but remains flexible to God's movement in daily life.
- Seeks to practice remaining at peace during unexpected daily events.
- Seeks to put into practice and model the Blessed Virgin Mary's way of life.
- May recognize an inadequacy of self and seeks God's aid in every possible way.
- Finds continued practice of this way of life renews the internal spirit, bringing new life and purpose to daily life experiences.
- Has an understanding that dying to self is needed for Christ to live.

Community's Role

Human Formation:

- Summing up what has been listed before this; ALL members are called to share in one another's unique response of love to God. This requires that we encourage, strengthen and build up one another through prayerful listening and loving encouragement, remembering always, and in everything, to refer all things to God and His loving care.

Christian Formation:

- Summing up what has been listed before this; ALL members are called to share in one another's unique response of love to God. This requires that we encourage, strengthen and build up one another through prayerful listening and loving encouragement, remembering always, and in everything, to refer all things to God and His loving care.

Candidate's Role

Carmelite Formation:

- Enjoys the new-found freedom that this way of life offers.
- Rejoices in spiritual friendships found within the lives and works of the saints of the Carmelite Order.
- Finds strength to endure daily struggles, trials and unexpected events of daily life, through the writings and examples of Carmelites throughout history.
- Finds that internal identity can be best expressed by way of this Carmelite identity.
- The words silence, solitude and stillness take on more meaning than what is found by living in physical quietude, physically alone or physically motionless.
- Finds comfort and security to trust the movements of God by living out the Rule of St. Albert as interpreted by the Secular Order Constitutions.
- Attendance at meetings means a great deal. It has become a suffering not to attend.
- Community meetings have become a safe place to practice virtue, share gifts of God's grace and encourage one another, in order to develop the strength to share the gifts of their Carmelite vocation with the world.
- Have discovered that this way of life gives needed grace to those who die to self desire and gives grace to those in need no matter where they may be.

Community's Role

Carmelite Formation:

- Summing up what has been listed before this; ALL members are called to share in one another's unique response of love to God. This requires that we encourage, strengthen and build up one another through prayerful listening and loving encouragement, remembering always, and in everything, to refer all things to God and His loving care.

Candidate's Role

Formation for the Apostolate:

- Puts God-given skills and talents at the service of the community.
- Shows a willingness to share in leadership positions, such as leading the Liturgy of the Hours in community, leading group discussions, sharing personal experience within the formation group, assisting the community's Council in lightening the burden of needed tasks.
- Has a desire to practice a loving response to God in daily life by making a permanent commitment to the community.
- Recognizes the world's need of God's grace and seeks some prayerful or possible physical solution to share in God's giving spirit.

Community's Role

Formation for the Apostolate:

- Summing up what has been listed before this; ALL members are called to share in one another's unique response of love to God. This requires that we encourage, strengthen and build up one another through prayerful listening and loving encouragement, remembering always, and in everything, to refer all things to God and His loving care.

Evaluation of educational materials and structure of community formation pertaining to effectiveness in obtaining above goals

- Since these candidates may spend a great deal of time with senior members, do they also get an opportunity to spend needed time with aspirants and candidates?
- Does the informational material that the community has chosen give a well-rounded deeper study of prayer – especially supporting a life of internal silence, solitude and stillness – the saints of the order, the OCDS Constitutions as pertains to daily life, and the Blessed Virgin Mary as a model for a way of life?
- Is the information presented in a way that lends room for shared experiences in daily life, as well as time for necessary questions to be explored and answered?
- Is the formation program organized in a flexible manner to provide for life's struggles, trials and unexpected mishaps that lead to missed classes, missing instructors to teach the classes, or unforeseen weather conditions that cause cancellation of scheduled meeting date?
- Is there a system of communication in place to adequately track spiritual growth of candidates or areas of weakness in the four areas within the formation program?
- Is the community open to the acceptance of new talents, skills and gifts being offered to it by these candidates, especially within the areas of leadership?
- Has the community provided for the best example of our daily life to be experienced during each meeting?

- Do the informational materials or the community members encourage those in temporary promises to seek a fuller understanding of “who they are” in the body of Christ, and the response of love that they have to offer God and one another?
- Does the community offer or provide a connection to the friars, nuns and other secular Carmelite communities to aid in building fraternal bonds within the greater Carmelite family?