

CLIMBING THE MOUNT IN RESPONSE TO GOD’S CALL TO CARMEL

The Order of Discalced Carmelites, the seculars together with the friars and nuns, forms the nucleus of the great Teresian Carmelite family. The vocation to Carmel is a gift from God, a lived experience in which we all look to the Rule of St. Albert as our fundamental inspiration. Each branch of the Order has its own *Constitutions*, which interpret the Rule for its members. (*OCDS Constitutions*, Preface, par. 3 and 4)

St. John of the Cross uses the image of a mountain, and its ascent, as a metaphor for the spiritual life of intimate friendship with God. This image is echoed by the Church in the words “... may the prayers of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother and Queen of Carmel, protect us and bring us to your holy Mountain, Christ our Lord.” (Mass of the Solemnity of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Opening Prayer) Our life in Carmel is intended to help us in our ascent to this holy Mountain. It is the function of a community’s structured formation program to shape our response to God’s call to reach the summit. We are formed into community for aid and support on our ascent. The Blessed Trinity itself is a community of persons; no one can climb this Mountain alone.

In the experience of community life we find the movement and guidance of the Holy Spirit, and a most effective way to grow in virtue. The call to “...be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt. 5:48) helps us to live three key principles of Carmel: to give ourselves entirely to God, to strive for purity of conscience, and to foster an intimate union with God. Through community life, we learn love, gentleness and respect for others, which enables us to bring souls to Christ. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the formation that begins in our Secular Order community comes to fruition in the experience of our whole lives. It is our responsibility to set aside specific times for personal prayer and study each day, and to be of service to one another.

These guidelines present a structure to shape the formation program of our members and aspirants in accordance with the call of our *OCDS Constitutions* "... to prepare the person to live the charism and spirituality of Carmel in its following of Christ, and in service to its mission." (*OCDS Constitutions 32*) Let us proceed in prayer, with love, detachment and humility (Cf. *Way of Perfection*, 4:4).