

“Community Apostolate”

Introduction by Rebecca Lambert, OCDS

Our opening prayer is from one that Saint Therese of the Child Jesus composed for the missions: “Hasten, O most loving Savior, the joyful establishment of Thy Kingdom upon earth. Draw all men to Thy most loving Heart in order that they may partake of the incomparable benefits of Thy Redemption in the everlasting happiness of Paradise. Amen.” [See Penny Hickey, OCDS, *Drink of the Stream: Prayers of Carmelites*, Ignatius, 2002.]

Our OCDS Constitutions mention the apostolate on nearly every page, and our reactions have been mixed. Many of us want to respond more fully, yet others feel that our lives of prayer and the duties of our state in life will have to be enough, because there is simply no more that we can fit into our schedules. This may be especially true for those who are parents of young children, who are doing all they can by serving their families and living our life of prayer. Others have said that prayer alone is their apostolate. Actually, “Prayer and the apostolate, when they are true, are inseparable... According to St. Teresa, “The purpose of prayer is the birth of good works.” (*Const.* #26)

So, what is the apostolate? The *Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People (Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 20) tells us, “The Church was founded to spread the kingdom of Christ over all the earth for the glory of God the Father, to make all men partakers in redemption and salvation, and through them to establish the right relationship of the entire world to Christ. Every activity of the Mystical Body with this in view goes by the name of ‘apostolate’; the Church exercises it through all its members, though in various ways. In fact, the Christian vocation is, of its nature, a vocation to the apostolate as well.”

Looking at the Church document, *The Lay Members of Christ’s Faithful People (Christifideles Laici*, no. 59), “There cannot be two parallel lives in [our] existence: on the one hand, the so-called ‘spiritual’ life, with its values and demands; and on the other, the so-called ‘secular’ life, that is, life in a family, [and] at work... The branch, engrafted to the vine which is Christ, bears its fruit in every sphere of existence and activity.” And, as Saint Paul said in the first letter to the Corinthians, “...whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” (1 Cor. 10:31)

“Our best model...[for the work of the apostolate is the Queen of Apostles,] our Blessed Mother, Queen of Carmel, Mother of our Order. Think of how she went in haste to help her cousin Elizabeth, and at Cana, how she counseled them to do what the Lord commanded. On another occasion, she waited, persevering in prayer with the apostles for the coming of the Holy Spirit, [and] thus giving witness to intercessory prayer (see Constitution 4)”

As Carmelites, we ought not to be afraid of the apostolate. We "must be to the world what the soul is to the body." (OCDS Constitutions, Epilogue) On the other hand, in our eagerness to establish a formal apostolate for our Community, we must remember that the apostolate is the fruit of prayer and use proper discernment (cf. *Const.* #25-28 & *Provincial Statutes*, Sec. II).

Lucy has more to share with you about the apostolate, and then Thelma will give you some specific ideas to consider before committing to a Community apostolate.

Community Apostolate
by Lucy Okoh, OCDS

When we hit our toe, we feel the excruciating pain throughout our body. So as we are part of the Mystical Body of Christ, if one of our members suffers, we all suffer. In Matthew Chapter 25, 35-36, Christ in speaking of the Corporal Works of Mercy says, “For I was hungry, and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink;...”

In the *Constitutions* #26, “The vocation to the Secular Order is truly ecclesial. Prayer and apostolate, when they are true, are inseparable. The observation of St. Teresa that the purpose of prayer is “the birth of good works” reminds the Secular Order that graces received ought to have an effect on those who receive them. Individually or as a community and, above all as members of the Church, apostolic activity is the fruit of prayer.

Internally, we could say that we are prayerful at all times. In *Section II of the Statutes*, “The primary apostolate of the Teresian Carmel is prayer, and its mission is the sharing of Teresian Carmelite spirituality.” As we come closer to following our Promise of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience, we come closer to union with Christ. As our prayer life deepens, our desire for an external apostolate increases.

External Apostolate could be an individual or a community apostolate. In the *Constitutions* #28 we read: “To their apostolic commitment they will bring the wealth of their spirituality in the various forms it takes in evangelization: missions, parishes, houses of prayer, Spirituality Institutes, prayer groups, the ministry of spirituality.”

Some examples of how individual prayer bears fruit by flowing into the local Church or community are as follows:

1. Joining in Church prayer groups for Right to Life.
2. Serving in the local Church for Church social activities like Christmas party, All Saints Day party for parish children, a Lenten pot luck, donut Sundays, etc.
3. Participating in local Church groups like the Legion of Mary, the Knights of Columbus, the choir, etc.
4. Serving in Liturgical Ministries like Lector, Eucharistic Minister, etc.
5. Serving the homeless by making and distributing sandwiches, by preparing food for the food line, by collecting and distributing clothes, etc.
6. Creating Carmelite prayer cards and greeting cards for distribution to the local Church.
7. Evangelize through Carmelite talks given at the local Church.

Community Apostolate
by Thelma Prisco, OCDS

Brothers and sisters, I'd like to talk to you today about the community apostolate in Carmel. Maybe you are thinking, as I did a few years ago, that there was already so much to do! We were still a new group and certainly, I felt that all of us had our hands full enough. Our membership was still small, but when we make our Promises to our Community, we promise to strive for evangelical perfection, in the spirit of the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience, and through the beatitudes. (C. #11) After considering that to be a good Carmelite requires obedience, I began to ponder what we could do together as a community. Sooner or later, every group should have one.

Some things you should know about our Carmelite apostolate

1. First, perhaps, we can read in our Constitutions #57 and Provincial Statutes Sect. XXVI (26), #6 that the primary responsibility of your Provincial Council is to assist in the formation of your members and in the apostolate. And so, here we are. I hope, and pray, that our presentations and our panels will be of service to all you presidents and leaders because we do want to help you in whatever way we can.
2. Our first apostolate, of course, above all other considerations is that of prayer. Our holy Mother, St. Teresa says, "the purpose of prayer is the birth of good works". Prayer and apostolate, when they are true, are inseparable. Apostolic activity is the fruit of prayer. (see C. #26) The mission of the apostolate is the sharing of our Teresian Carmelite spirituality (see C. #28 and Provincial Statutes Section II, #1.)
 - 1) If you are a newer group, you will first want to be sure your community is firmly established in their daily Carmelite obligations and practice of prayer. It takes time to make the changes in our lives that allow us to follow the Secular Teresian Carmelite way of life that makes us Carmelites and time to develop a true Teresian spirituality.

I understand everyone is very busy, whether you have a job, you have other responsibilities, even if you are retired, it takes time to sort out what is really important in your life and what isn't, and make the changes that are necessary to be able to live this life, or at least, to be making a sincere attempt. But prayer is our first apostolate.

Before you begin looking for a community apostolate, pray about it, ask your community to join in your prayers; and let the Holy Spirit guide you.

3. What are some of the possibilities for a community apostolate? Some things you might want to consider:
 - 1) If adoration is available, each person could volunteer to spend time in adoration regularly, praying for priestly vocations and for all our OCD and diocesan seminarians to become holy priests and for the protection and holiness of our Carmelite and diocesan priests.

- 2) Your members could volunteer some time each month to helping in your local or nearby homeless shelters. This is also something that members can be doing as their own personal apostolate.
 - 3) If facilities are available and you have enough members, you could organize a retreat. Everyone should be welcome to come but if it is presented as Carmelite, and silent, it will likely draw those who are attracted to that kind of a retreat. A retreat is a lot of work, but it can be very, very rewarding.
 - 4) Sponsor a Day of Recollection centered around one of our Carmelite saints; for instance, St. Teresa, whose centenary will be in 2015 and it could be planned, if possible, near her feast day in October.
You could even plan a yearly retreat with St. Teresa as the focus of your retreat. This would draw attention to our Holy Mother and her spirituality and potentially be a benefit to many.
 - 5) Each member could choose a seminarian or priest to pray for each day. They need our prayers, and they are, or will be, the leaders in our Church.
 - 6) Evangelize by giving Carmelite presentations at your local church (or churches) on a Carmelite saint, particularly one of our Doctors, St. Teresa, St. John of the Cross or St. Therese.
 - 7) Each member could sign up for one day of the week to fast and pray for the good of our country during these disturbing times.
 - 8) Begin a prayer group or bible study, using Lectio Divina.
4. In undertaking a community apostolate, your community needs to be sensitive to the interests, abilities, and talents of your members working together, as well as to their physical and financial capabilities. (C. #5)
- Suppose you decided to give Carmelite saint presentations at your local church, but only a few were interested. This probably, then, is not a good choice. The community apostolate does not have to be a difficult one. Keep in mind what might work well for your members to participate together in.
5. Benefits of having a community apostolate.
- 1) It helps bind you together as a community as you share in doing good works.
 - 2) It can help your group become better known in the community, thus attracting those who might have a calling to Carmel.
 - 3) It often gives you an opportunity to evangelize and share the Teresian Carmelite spirituality
 - 4) Many apostolates can serve to make you more widely known in the community.
 - 5) Some apostolates will serve to encourage prayer in others outside of your community.
 - 6) It proves St. Teresa's remark that "the purpose of prayer is the birth of good works."
 - 7) And lastly, apostolic activity is fundamental to our vocation to Carmel. (C. #9)