

“Community Apostolates”
Fr. Donald Kinney, OCD

(This is a summary of the main points of his conference.)

To begin, I would like to ask you to turn to the “Summary of responses to Fr. Alzinir’s questionnaire”, p. 2 #3:

3) Give some examples of the more significant and specifically *apostolic* works carried out (individually or communally) by the Seculars in your Community.

“Our Communities see prayer as their primary apostolate. The fruit of this prayer is expressed by serving God and others through everyday work and in our neighborhoods in a multiplicity of ways: For example, in their parishes our members are active, as individuals and as Communities, in religious education, as readers at Mass, as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, and in music ministry. They are also involved in visiting the sick and elderly, pro-life activities, feeding and clothing the poor, organizing rosary processions and novenas, and helping with spiritual conferences. Most of our Communities offer financial support to the Friars and Nuns and to our Mission in Uganda.”

Thank you for support of our seminarians, individual houses, including our Mission in Uganda.

Very impressive: and this is just a summary. There were quite a few individual apostolates we could not mention.

Community apostolate! What is that!

If I had given this talk a year ago, it would have been very different. This past year, I have had a conversion about community apostolates. My eyes have been opened to see community apostolates in another way. Like St. Paul after his conversion, scales have fallen from my eyes. I have seen the light!

Until about a year ago, I thought—and I have told so many of you—that in your communities/groups, because you are all so busy, because you come together so infrequently, that it is very difficult to come up with a common apostolate, that you should do the best you can and not worry about a “community apostolate” which you can all share in.

The OCDS Constitutions speak of the importance of an apostolate on nearly every page.

However, to my knowledge, very, very few communities and groups have an apostolate where most of the members actually do come *together* to reach out *together* for the Church. For example, it would be admirable if your community or group could do what the San Jose Vietnamese-speaking OCDS Group has done: a few times they have reserved a soup kitchen in San Jose for a few hours and all have met to cook and serve a meal for the homeless. Not only that, but they have had a classical pianist playing while the poor people ate...

Until my “conversion” about the community apostolate, I assumed that perhaps this was just not possible for most of our communities. I assumed that Carmelite Seculars might be able to do this, say, in the Philippines or in Nicaragua, but not in our country where our lifestyle is so hectic and we in our communities are so scattered, where we already do so much for the Church.

Really?

Have we erred on the side of caution and even complacency? I know very well that the primary apostolate of Carmel is prayer. But let’s not be like that person visiting an OCDS community for the first time who wouldn’t mingle with others at the social time. When asked why, she said, “I don’t want to talk to people. What I’m looking for in your community is just to pray.”

This is a greatly distorted way of thinking. But we can tend in that direction by believing that all I have to do to help the Church is pray.

This kind thinking goes contrary to the Gospel. Aren't we supposed to follow the example of Our Lord whose "heart was moved with pity for the crowds because they were troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd"?

Aren't we supposed to follow the example of St. Teresa who was so grieved by the plight of the world and the Church in her day? On the first page of the *Way of Perfection*, St. Teresa, "this cloistered nun with no external apostolate" writes, "This news [of the harm being done to the Church throughout Europe] distressed me greatly, and, as though I could do something or were something, I cried to the Lord and begged Him that I might remedy so much evil. It seemed to me I would have given a thousand lives to save one soul out of the many that were being lost."

Can you believe it? You and I have come together here these days because of what one person's hopes and dreams, because of what one person can do!

The OCDS Constitutions in section #26 state that "Prayer and the apostolate, when they are true, are inseparable." This same section of your Constitutions quotes St Teresa's famous words, "The purpose of prayer is the birth of good works." (IC V,3,11)

My feeling of being satisfied—and even feeling complacent—that our communities are not doing more is also contrary to the two Church documents you are asked to read in our *Formation Guidelines*:

In the Vatican II "Apostolicam Actuositatem" promulgated by Pope Paul VI in 1965. Now Bl. Paul VI speaks of "the unmistakable work being done today by the Holy Spirit in making the laity ever more conscious of their own responsibility and encouraging them to serve Christ and the Church in all circumstances." (Introduction)

My feelings of being complacent about us not doing more also goes contrary to Pope John Paul II's even stronger words in "Christifideles Laici" in 1988, Pope John Paul II. That powerful document is based on Jesus' parable in

Matthew chapter 20 about the man who finally showed up to work in the vineyard so late in the day: “You go into the vineyard too.”: “You go too.” (2)
 “Why do you stand here idle all day?” (3)

If I have to blame one person for my conversion, for shaking me out of my complacency, self-sufficiency, I have to blame Pope Francis. Time and time again, his frank, direct, words have been working on me. They have “hit the nail on the head” His words have gotten through my hard head:

“Each Christian and every community (he said “every”) must discern the path that the Lord points out... All of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach the “peripheries” in need of the light of the Gospel” (EG20).

“I hope that all communities (he said “all”) will devote the necessary effort to advancing along the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion which cannot leave things as they presently are.” (EG 25)

There is a wonderful unofficial ambassador of Pope Francis but official representative of our Father General for the Secular Order. His name is Fr. Alzinir Debastiani, the OCDS General Delegate.

Before the OCDS Congress in Atlanta last August, Fr. Alzinir came to San Jose to study English for a month with us. I did not expect to what extent he would be a missionary to us and to me

Several communities and groups in the San Jose area, he spoke very simply. Another way of looking at things. A whole new way of understanding How God gives us gradual enlightenment all along: “Of course! Why didn’t I see that all along?” I was blind, but now I see!”

There is much we can learn from one another: the experience of other communities:

The Albuquerque Community sent me something they do that is so simple and obvious:

A few times a year, members of a community or group attend Mass in different parishes in their area, sitting together up near the front, wearing their ceremonial scapular. Then with the pastor's permission, after Mass they distribute our OCDS vocation brochure, or the ICS brochure on St. Teresa's Prayer of Recollection, or some other Carmelite text. This is a wonderful opportunity to speak to people about Carmel.

Another next step, would be to get the pastor's permission to organize a few hours of recollection in a parish church, with a good group of your members. Publicize it in a bulletin announcement. One person could give a talk on a Carmelite subject. Or you could simply read a few simple texts from our Carmelite Saints on the Eucharist, on the family (St. Louis and Zélie), in Year of Mercy (St. Th: "The Good God is all mercy and love." Maybe provide refreshments or ask people to a bag lunch.

Recently the Santa Clara Community organized a day of recollection in the chapel of the Carmelite nuns in Santa Clara.

The Shoreline, Washington Community organized a whole day on St. Teresa at the Seattle Cathedral with a Carmelite priest speaking and their Archbishop offering Mass.

In this outreach, Fr. Alzinir has asked that we give special attention to youth groups. A few of you could go once or twice a year to visit them. Youth groups are often looking for speakers. Show your interest and encouragement. This could even help plant seeds for vocations.

Many of you pray for vocations and have names of seminarians. I've always liked what the OCDS community in Danvers, MA (in the Washinton Province) does: At the beginning of each new school year, they find out the names of new seminarians in Archdiocese of Boston, and then they buy copies of *Story of a Soul* and send them to them. You could do that in your diocese.

"To go out of ourselves and to join others is healthy for us." (EG45)

All this is summed up in the mission statement of our OCDS Provincial Council these three years:

“Our mission is to awaken a dynamism that will transform the way we live as sons and daughters of St. Teresa, so that we may contribute to awakening the world to a new way of living, one that is possible and that we can incarnate, and which will enable us to communicate the Gospel to the people of the world today.” (see Gen. Defin. Letter 22, at www.ocds.info)

Ephesians 3:20 – “Now to Him who is able to accomplish far more than we ask or imagine, by the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”