

December 2, 2020

Dear OCDS Members:

I hope all is well with everyone as we strive to be strong in our Carmelite vocation and continue to pray for relief from the current pandemic. Know that all the friars in our Province are keeping you in our prayers, encouraged and strengthened by your Carmelite spirit and devotion.

I realize the difficulties that communities & groups are experiencing as Secular Carmelites; most communities & groups are not able to meet in person; some members living in isolation; with communication being difficult and the future uncertain. Know in the midst of all this that our Lord reigns and God's providence continues to guide all toward God's wonderful kingdom. Therefore, I encourage all to hold fast to Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, for as St. Paul tells us:

For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rm.8:38-39)

We belong to Jesus, and He will watch over and protect us from all trials and tribulations, bringing us to eternal life. Rest and be peaceful in that great hope that comes from Jesus Christ.

I wish to write of some matters that need our attention:

- The OCDS Provincial Council and I think a theme for 2021 will be helpful for us to deepen our Carmelite life. To assist in this, we will be dedicating 2021 to the theme of Mental Prayer. As we know, mental prayer is one of the foundations of the Discalced Carmelite Secular life, and one that we can never stop learning about. Further information on this theme will be shared in the coming months.
- I will be having Zoom meetings with the various OCDS communities & groups throughout the Province. I will be asking our various OCDS Provincial Council delegates to organize their regions so I can meet with the various communities via Zoom. These Zoom meetings hopefully will begin in late January and run through February. I view the meetings as a time to gather, answer questions that might arise, and where we can, offer mutual support so that our faith and love of Carmel will grow.

- Because of the time away from in-person meetings, I require that once normal, in-person meetings begin, that you wait for three meetings before you either conduct or redo a straw ballot for leadership positions. This is to ensure that people return to the meetings, or if they have not, to allow someone else to receive votes. This is also a reminder that in either the straw ballot, or the final election, there needs to be a quorum of members present, which is defined as half of the eligible voting members, plus one.
- Formation can continue online, mail, and phone, for the past formation year but a person cannot move forward to the next formation year until in-person meetings resume, at that point, the Councils can approve candidates and ceremonies to take place. The reviewing of the past year formation or a book study on a Carmelite topic or saint is recommended in the interim.
- It is allowed for Spiritual Assistants to give conferences via Zoom, Facetime, etc. If possible, these can be recorded and sent to those unable to attend.
- Attendance requirements at meetings will begin again when the dispensation from the obligation to attend the Sunday Mass is lifted in the local diocese where the community meets. Members can be excused up to that point. However, members cannot advance in their formation, or vote, unless physically present for meetings.
- Due to the pandemic, no apostolate report is due for 2020.

If you any questions about the above, please contact your OCDS Provincial Council regional representative.

One final matter, and it is a serious one. We have just passed through a very contentious election, with the aftermath being equally so. I want to remind all members that we are to avoid all political discussions during our meetings. A wide divergence of opinion is allowed toward politics in our Catholic faith, so we need to make sure we do not judge one another by political thought or allegiance.

There is no political litmus test for being an OCDS member. We all need to remember that being in the OCDS is a *vocation from God*. The OCDS is not a social club where social attitudes control membership. *Our vocation comes from God*, and that needs to be respected in all matters. It is not proper to judge someone's vocation on their political views or on the party they vote for, and especially not use that as basis to judge one's Catholic orthodoxy. Being a Catholic in good standing, committed to Carmelite spirituality, is what is required

for entry and continued presence in the OCDS. *If there is any question on a person's Catholic orthodoxy, it is not for the council to make a determination on that question, but to inform the Provincial Councilor for that region, and they will discern about this concern with the Provincial Delegate on how best to proceed with the matter.*

In this time where the possibility of division is real, we are to remember what the OCDS Constitutions writes:

The local community of the Secular Order of the Teresian Carmel, a visible sign of the Church and of the Order, is a place to live and promote personal and communal fellowship with God in Christ and in the Spirit and with other brothers and sisters (cf. Rom 8:29) in accordance with the Teresian charism. The person of Christ is at the center of the Community. (OCDS Constitutions no.24 [a])

It is Christ who is at the heart of the OCDS life, and it is our relationship with Jesus that is the most important aspect of our lives, not the powers and politics of this world.

Does this mean we are to ignore politics? By no means. The providence of God has placed us in the USA at this moment in history and we are to cooperate with this grace. We strive to be the best citizens we can, praying that God's will be done through the actions of our elected leaders. As OCDS members we do not cooperate with evil, always leading lives worthy of the name Catholic and Carmelite. Jesus died, not only for us, but for all peoples, that we might be one in His Kingdom. Let us pray for our leaders, as well as for peace, justice and truth in our world, that all will come to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

I leave you with the words that St. Paul shared with the Colossians:

As therefore you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so live in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. (Col. 2:6-7)

Let us abound in thanksgiving for our Carmelite vocation, placing ourselves under the protective mantle of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, asking for the intercession of St. Joseph, patron of our Province, that we may lead lives worthy of our calling.

Your brother in Christ,

Fr. Matthew Williams, OCD
OCDS Provincial Delegate