

SAYING NO WHEN THE CALL TO CARMEL IS LACKING

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Not everyone is called to Carmel. While we have the obligation to give a warm welcome to guests and to nurture vocations to our Order, we must also recognize when someone is not equipped to be received into our OCDS community. While the Holy Spirit may lead people to our community and give many blessings during our meetings, the next step for some individuals may not be to further progress in our formation program, but toward a different way of life. It is a disservice to delay those who are on a path to discovering their true calling.

Perhaps the most obvious sign that a person is not called to our community is continued absence from meetings without contact with at least the president. Some people maintain excellent attendance, however, and insist that they belong in Carmel even after it is clearly discerned by the council of the community that they do not share our vocation. It is in these cases that it becomes necessary to say no.

It is easier to say no when we are also saying yes, and we can discover reasons to say yes. As we get to know our guests, we learn what attracts them to Carmel. It may be their love of St. Therese, their devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, or their desire for a more structured prayer life. They may be searching for a sense of belonging, or they may be looking for an audience that will listen to what they want to teach. Insight into each person's motivations is invaluable in the process of discerning God's call, and it helps us to be of greater service on those occasions when we must refuse admittance to the next stage of formation. One of the kindest things we can do is to help people find what they are really seeking.

The person with an overarching love of St. Therese may find spiritual nourishment in the Pious Association of St. Therese. Someone who is devoted to the scapular of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel but is not suited to living by our Rule and Constitutions may do best in the Confraternity of the Scapular. Another person who is active in many organizations may simply need to make more time for personal prayer rather than find yet another community of people. We do well to learn about the opportunities and associations in our diocese in order to make appropriate referrals. The internet, of course, is very useful for this purpose.

One reason it is hard to say no is that we dread hurting another person's feelings. We have reason to expect the other person to become closed to us and unwilling to hear what more we have to say. This is a time when we especially want to show caring, but we have no control over how the other person will react to our message. What we can do is pray and make every effort to be both tactful and honest. By God's grace acting through our knowledge and love of the person, we may find ourselves saying that the Carmelite saints are for all the Church or that our Lady protects all her children.

Regardless of how our words are taken at the time, we may find later that they gave the loving encouragement that the person needed while also protecting the community from the problems caused by people who are fitted to a different vocation.