

**“The New OCDS Legislation and the Vocation to Carmel”**  
**Las Vegas, June 2004**  
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These Constitutions that you now have as your legislation are not the Rule of Life, which was written in 1974. These Constitutions are a development, an evolution of what the Secular Order is. Prior to 1974, there was a Manual, which was written in 1921. Before that time, however, there was no universal rule or anything similar. It is very easy to read history It's more difficult to live history, to be history and in a very real sense, all of us Roman Catholics during these last forty or fifty years, are part of a historical movement and a development of our identity as Roman Catholics in the world.

The Secular Order started, some 600 years ago when Blessed John Soreth with his Council and with the Friars, decided that this spirituality that had been developed from Israel, from the Holy Land into Europe and was developing into the mendicant life, should be shared. So the decision was made to establish the order of nuns and the Secular Order. Prior to the end of 1400, there were only Carmelite Friars. So, your history as Secular members of the Order, although that was not always clearly understood and still is not clearly understood, is that you are **members** of the Order.

The Nuns are still not organized worldwide in any kind of Provincial category of structure. All the monasteries of Nuns are autonomous. The Secular Order groups that began 600 years ago were generally groups of lay people who over the next 500 years to the early 1900's were identified with a monastery of Friars. Only in the early 1900's did the Secular Order groups begin in places that were not associated with monasteries of Friars and so there was generally the idea that the Nuns had a particular identity because they lived in monasteries and the Friars had a particular identity because they were Friars who lived in monasteries. The Secular members were, in fact and in understanding, auxiliary or adjunct members to the monasteries of friars. And that's generally how they were understood.

During the course of history, before 1921 there were some four or five different rules for the Secular Order. There were different rules in different parts of the world because the Secular order was not understood as a global entity. But even those many rules were a step forward in understanding the Seculars as a group of lay people who had legislation of some kind. Legislation gives identity; it establishes you as distinct. In 1918 a new Code of Canon law went into effect and one of the results of this new law was that religious communities had to identify the lay people who were associated with them. Which of these groups were confraternities and which of these groups actually formed some part of the Order. The "Order" at that time, was understood to mean the Friars and the Nuns.

So, in 1918 the General in Rome put a commission together and they wrote The Manual. It was published in 1921 and contained the rules and it was the first time in 500 years that there was a global understanding of what it meant to be a Secular member of Carmel. Then after the Second Vatican Council in 1974, another commission wrote a new rule, which was a further development, a step forward from the Manual. Most of us are familiar with that Rule and now are becoming familiar with the Constitutions. However, most of us still think in terms of the Rule of Life in our understanding because that is what we were trained in. The Constitutions are another step forward in the identity of the Secular Carmelite.

This identity is highlighted in the **Preface of the Constitution**:

*“The great Teresian Carmelite family is present in the world in many forms. The nucleus of this family is the Order of Discalced Carmelites: the Friars, the Nuns, and the Seculars. It is the one Order with the same charism. The Order is nourished by the long tradition of Carmel, expressed in the Rule of St. Albert and the doctrine of the Carmelite Doctors of the Church and the Order's other saints.”*

**Part I “Our Identity, Values, and Commitment**

*“Secular Carmelites, together with the Friars and Nuns, are sons and daughters of the Order of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel and St. Teresa of Jesus. As a result, they share the same charism with the religious each according to their particular state of life. It is one family with the same spiritual possessions, the same call to holiness and the same apostolic mission. Secular members contribute to the Order the benefits proper to their secular state.”*

**Members of the Church**

*“The members of the Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites are faithful members of the Church called to live “in allegiance to Jesus Christ” through a friendship with the One we know loves us in service to the Church Under the protection of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, in the biblical tradition*

of the prophet Elijah and inspired by the teachings of St. Teresa of Jesus and St. John of the Cross, they seek to deepen their Christian commitment received in Baptism.”

Now your identity in these Constitutions, approved by the Holy See is confirmed. You are not adjunct members of the Order. You are not auxiliary to the Order. You are the Order. The Secular Order is present in countries where there are no Friars and no Nuns and it is amazing how fast it is growing. There are 40,000 Secular Order Members in 90 countries. It has now developed into a presence within the Order.

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One of the things I'm most frequently asked for is a formation program. But I believe. the request is actually, "What do we do in the first year, second year, third year, fourth year and fifth year?". Rather than a Formation Program they want to know what is the information they are supposed to give. I had one developed, but I was a little hesitant to give it out because we are not clear about what the formation program should be.

One of the glaring empty spots in most formation programs that I have seen is that there is very little emphasis given in formation to the very thing that makes you members of the Secular Order: the Promise. It is this that makes you members of the Secular Order – not St. Teresa of Jesus, not St. John of the Cross-and not the spirituality of how to pray or how to use the Bible for Lectio Divina. There are many people who use all those things who are not members of the Order. And because this formation for the Promise is lacking, many times people do not understand themselves as members of the Order. They understand themselves as Carmelites, but not as members of the Order. I am a member of the Order because I belong to a Province that received me, in which I made my commitment, therefore I'm a Carmelite, because I'm incorporated.

Another area that is lacking in the formation programs is imparting a true understanding of community. You are members of the Order because you belong to a community - because you identify with other people who share your identity and in that sharing confirm each other.

To illustrate this point I want to respond to a question that I am very frequently asked. I want to respond, give an explanation and make a suggestion. The question comes from

Presidents or Council members, but mostly from Formation Directors:

“Father, what do we do about people who come to the Secular Order but belong to many other organizations – they go to Charismatic meetings, they go to Cenacle meetings, also belong to Medjugorje prayer groups and belong to Our Lady speaks to beloved priests, and they belong to all those things. How do we explain to them that this is different than belonging to all those different things? “

I try to be practical in answering that question. What are the obligations these Constitutions envision in the life of the Secular Order Member? I see six obligations that are part of the rhythm of the Secular Carmelite's life. These six obligations consume time & energy.

**1. Meditation.** Carmel is identified with meditation. I'm using the word meditation as opposed to the word contemplation because we know that most of us wait a long time

before God gives us the gift of contemplation. So we meditate or do mental prayer if you would like to use that term. Meditation is our daily devotion under the inspiration of Our Lady of Mount Carmel who is our Lady of Meditation – it's that way of relating to God that is specific to Carmel and Carmel's Love, devotion, and relationship with God. So I put that in first place because we can do that no matter where we are. Traditionally we use about thirty minutes a day. It might be fifteen minutes in the morning and fifteen minutes in the afternoon or it might be thirty minutes at one time. Sometimes it might be ten minutes three times a day depending on work or family schedules and other things. We have to be practical but we are conscious of having to do that. We are conscious of wanting to do that. Common sense – that's the Carmelite spirituality. Meditation is in the first place as the first of our daily obligations that takes 30 minutes of our day. Part III on the Constitutions: *Witnesses to the Experience of God, PP 17 – 24* is entirely on prayer.

**2. Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, and, if you can, Night Prayer.** Night Prayer, as the Constitutions mention, is optional. All of these things are when you can do it. If you can't do it you can't do it! None of these things that I mention are under the obligation of sin except what the Church commends as under the obligation of sin. The Friars, the Nuns, we have two hours of mental prayer a day - an hour in the morning and one hour in the evening; our Office of Readings, Morning Prayer, Mid-day Prayer, Evening Prayer, Night Prayer – the Nuns have two more hours of prayer. Why do we have more and you have less? Why? Because you have families, or you have jobs and other obligations that God is going to ask you about first.

Here two reasons why I think it important to emphasize the Liturgy of Hours as prayer. First when we said Morning Prayer this morning, the Pope in Rome said the same exact Morning Prayer nine hours before. The Secular Order members in Malaysia said them six hours before that. When you are at home by yourself and you are saying Morning Prayer or Evening Prayer or Night Prayer, you are not doing that alone, you are joining other people.

Second reason is you are not picking texts that are pleasing to you; that's not prayer, that's self-consolation. How can you hope to convert to the will of God if you are making the word of God convert to how

you feel? You are taking texts that the Church says, offers, gives, and you are adjusting your spirit to it. So we use the Liturgy of Hours to get us out of ourselves with the words of the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures and prayer. So Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, and Night Prayer would probably take 25 minutes out of our day. Add that to the 30 minutes for mental prayer and we have 55 minutes of our day used up.

**3. Mass** – of course Mass is the most important thing in the hierarchy of order. But we have to go some place to do that. Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, Night Prayer, Meditation, we can do it on a plane, we can do it at home, we can do it on the way to work. . We don't have to go to Church to do those things. But if we go to Mass with some frequency, more than once a week, more than Sunday, which is an obligation, by the time you get up, leave, you drive to Church, go to Mass, drive home, we're talking at a minimum, forty-five minutes to an hour or more time. So that's thirty minutes for Mental Prayer, plus twenty-five minutes for the Liturgy of the Hours, plus forty-five for Mass equals an hour and forty minutes.

**4. Mary.** We're a Marian Order of the Church, and there may be some expression of devotion to Mary that we want to practice everyday, if we can. Our first and primary devotion to Mary, however, is expressed in meditation. Looking as Mary did, in St. Luke's Gospel twice, at the life of Christ and meditating on these things in her heart. That's our primary Marian devotion. We wear the scapular. Many people say the Rosary everyday. So let's add another fifteen minutes to say the Rosary, for those who say the Rosary. It's not mandatory. The Rosary is an expression of devotion. If you do say the Rosary, there's another fifteen minutes, so you have an hour and fifty-five minutes everyday, and we still have two M's to go!

This is what we are trying to explain to people when they come to the Secular Order or to people in the Secular Order as to what we are, what they are doing when they are joining this. What are their obligations? Those first four things, Meditation, Morning Prayer, Mass, Mary – they are a part of the personal daily life of the individual member of the Secular Order. The other two M's are a little bit different because they are not a part of the daily life but a part of the energy flow, you might say, of the Secular Order members.

**5. Meetings.** There are so many things that fit into this category of meetings: formation, information and fellowship. Formation – not just the formation of individuals but also the formation of community as a community. It is not a collective group of individuals who love our Lady and love Carmelite spirituality. It is a community of people who have made a commitment to each other. It's very clear, when you make your promises; you make it to the Community. You are incorporating yourselves as members of a community.

Another important understanding that is mentioned in the Constitutions is that the Spiritual Assistant is not meant to be Formation Director for the community because it is not his job to form individual members of the community. His job, as defined in the Constitutions, is to support and assist the President, the Council and the Formation Director.

That is part of forming community because if the leadership of the Community understands their responsibility and their role, then the community begins to take shape and it's identity becomes clear as a community of people. The Council has to function properly and all must realize that the Council is the superior of the community, not the President. The superior of the Council is the Provincial and the superior of the Provincial is the General.

But in order for the Council to function properly it has to function in a certain way. It has to be educated, formed to function as the leadership of the community. When we speak about the formation of the Council, there are some things that have to be understood about Councils and the way they function. If you are a member of the Council, you have an obligation to the other members of the Council and to the Community to respect the privacy of the Council.

If a member of the Council reveals, outside of the Council, decisions that have been made regarding candidates or other important matters, it could result in divisions within the community and stifle the freedom that councilors should feel within the council meetings. How can the Council arrive at a good decision if councilors are afraid to speak, afraid to express themselves because they are afraid that their opinion is going to be repeated? Confidentiality is a practical and necessary point.

. There is also the necessity for information. We call them formation classes, but I'm going to call them "information classes", where information is passed on in the various stages of those being formed. Remember that there are three stages in initial formation: those in the Aspirancy, those in the two years preparing for First Promises, and those in the three year period before Definitive Promises. I hope in that in those two years prior to First Promise that there is enough preparation for the importance of the Promise and what it means. Not just what does St. Teresa teach about prayer and how to use the Bible - I'm repeating this again because it is a very important point, to understand the consequences of making the promises. Then in the third period of formation for three years, there is the preparation for the Final promises. So, there are different stages of information that need to be given. And they can't all be given at once. You can't put people who are in Aspirancy stage together with those who are preparing for Definitive promises.

. In some Communities, I have found that everybody from the oldest to the youngest, including those who have made Definitive promises are all together for the formation program. That's not really good formation. You can't put people who in the Aspirancy stage in with those who are in Definitive Promises. If I'm a teacher of

Mathematics and I put first graders in with eighth graders, it would not work for obvious reasons. Paragraph 36 of the Constitutions states very clearly: that there is a “gradual introduction to the life of the Secular Order structure” So it’s important to understand that it is done in stages. It is a gradual introduction to the life of the Secular Order.

The purpose of the Aspirancy is to give the Community an opportunity to make an adequate discernment of the person who is coming **“After the initial period of contact the Council of the Community may admit the applicant to a more serious period of formation that usually last for two years leading up to the first promises”** Our Communities are not factories of Carmelites, where we put people on a conveyor belt to form them and once you have finished the Aspirancy period, you have to enter into the second period automatically. How can that be good formation?

So the Constitutions specifically say that it is the Councils responsibility to decide if the person is ready to begin the next stage and the Council might not be ready or the person may not be ready. So does that mean that they either go home or they have to begin the next stage? No, it may be necessary to add a few extra months. If you have a fixed time, for example six months or twelve months for Aspirancy, you can lengthen it by one half of the original time, either three or six months depending on your term of Aspirancy Same with the second period where there is two years, you can lengthen it by one year. The third period of three years can be lengthened by one and a half years. This will be helpful for our communities because then they will take extra care in making decisions and in informing and forming our people

**“At the end of this stage, with the approval of the Council of the Community, the applicant may be invited to make the First Promises.”** So, with the approval, the applicant “may” be – see the language that is used in here – it’s not necessary that they be invited to make the promises after two years.

And **“In the last three years of the initial formation, there is a deeper study of prayer, the Scriptures, Documents of the Church, the saints of the order and formation in the Apostolate of the Order. At the end of these three years, the applicant may be invited by the Council to make Definitive Promises.”**

One of the differences between the **Constitutions** versus the **Rule of Life**, is that in the Rule, the Spiritual Assistant had the right to veto the decision of the Council to admit someone to the various stages of formation. That’s gone. The Council now has the responsibility of making those decisions and carrying out those decisions. We are not just forming individuals, but we are forming Communities. Is this person capable of being a member of your community? Not are they capable of praying; not are they capable of saying the Rosary everyday; not if they are very faithful to Mass everyday; - but are they capable of being members of your community? Are they capable of relating to the other people in the Community?

This is again, a step forward in the understanding of the Discalced Carmelite Secular Order member’s vocation. You have Community. It is one thing is to know the Carmelite Spirituality and another thing to be a member of the Order. They are two different things. Hopefully members of the Order know the spirituality, but there are experts on the spirituality who are not members of the Order, who do not know what it means to be a member of the Order. They may know St. Teresa and St. John Of The Cross and be able to quote them better than most of us, but that doesn’t mean they know what it means to be a Carmelite. You are Carmelites. We are Carmelites. The Nuns are Carmelites.

So being part of a community, being involved in forming that community is what happens at the meetings. Because you, Secular Order members, have meetings where you meet and talk with other people and you decide things about your Carmelite life together. and are responsible for forming yourselves as members of this religious family. Your part in that now is very much to take responsibility. In my visits with communities around the world, I’ve discovered that there are many Communities of the Secular Order who have no idea of belonging to the Order.

It’s not because those Priests who formed them did not understand something about Carmelite Spirituality, they did understand it, but they did not understand what it meant to be a member of the Order.

An example is Thailand. There are two Secular Order Communities – one is very large, it has about 120 members. I’m the first Discalced Carmelite priest they’ve seen as Secular Order members. It has taken me three visits before they finally began to understand that I am coming from Rome because they belong to what I belong to. They had no contact with the Order. They have a Diocesan Priest who is very good, who studies their spirituality and knows a lot about Carmelite Spirituality, but even he did not understand that Secular Order members were members of the Order.

So, formation, information, fellowship, - these are the three things that happen in meetings. Without these meetings your Order falls apart, your communities fall apart. People who do not come to meetings cease to be members. Even if they are still on the rolls

## **6. Mission**

Paragraph 25 of the Constitutions speaks of the realization on the part of the religious orders that because of the events in history there is a need to share not only the spirituality but also the mission of the Order. I’ve come to use the word “Mission” instead of the word “apostolate”, because when I use the word

“apostolate” people tend to get nervous. They say “Am I suppose to quit my job and leave my family?” So I use the word “Mission”.

Carmel has a mission. Carmel’s mission is that we know God so that God may be known. That’s the gift of our vocation. That is what we receive by being Carmelites, we know God. But it’s not just for us, it’s so that God may be known. There is a fairly new two- volume book of the Concordances on the writings of St. Teresa in Spanish. Eight hundred and ten time in the Concordance, St. Teresa uses the verb “to serve” in Spanish to describe the life of prayer. We are Teresian Carmelites. Do not have some fantastic image of St. Teresa that removes her from service – from doing for others for God.

When I went to be a Carmelite, I thought I’d be off in a cloister someplace praying. I didn’t know who was going to do the dishes, but I was sure I was going to pray. There’s that quote from St. Teresa that says that works is what the Lord wants, works. She is saying this to cloistered Nuns. The reason that God is giving us grace to know Him through the life of prayer is for us to do something. We cannot do it without prayer. In the Constitutions, Chapter 3 is entirely on prayer.

Chapter 4 is then **SERVING GOD’S PLAN**. The verb used “serving” is on purpose - it’s a Teresian verb and is used when talking about the prayer life. If she uses it eight hundred and ten times in writing about the life of prayer, there must be something very specific about that verb. The mission that you share in is to know God – the Carmelite interior life – so that God may be made known. That’s our Carmelite mission. (Apostolate). When I speak about the mission of the Secular Order, I speak of doing something as a community, especially together with the Friars in terms of helping to spread Carmelite spirituality.

Here’s an example I’d like to give regarding eleven people of the Secular Order of Kuching in Malaysia where there are no Carmelite Friars. I’m their Spiritual Assistant and they see me twice a year, and they were in existence for a couple of years before I even got there.

Every month, the community puts together a Lectio Divina commentary on the daily Gospels for the following month, and they mail that to all the priests in the archdiocese of Kuching. Nobody told them to do that they were just trying to figure out what to do. It’s a little book about the size of a Missalette that you would see in the parish and just has the Gospel in it and then they put this Lectio Divina meditation in. They get a lot of things from the Internet; they give it to the secretary of the Archbishop to read to make sure there is nothing wrong – heretical or mistaken in the commentaries. Then they type it out, print it, and mail it.

I was thinking, the Secular Order is forming the priests of the archdiocese of Kuching in Carmelite spirituality because the priests are reading this everyday. Many priests, the night before they go to bed, have Mass in the morning and they wonder what they are going to say for a few minutes after the Gospel. These priests have this little commentary and they get up in the morning and they share with the people the thoughts they got from the Carmelite’s. So:

MEDITATION -  
MORNING PRAYER – EVENING PRAYER – NIGHT PRAYER –  
MASS –  
MARY –  
MEETINGS –  
MISSION-

These six things are an answer to people who want to become a Carmelite who also belong to many other groups. If they want to be a Carmelite this is what is entailed. It is a sacrifice to do these things everyday, to have this as a rhythm in your life. It takes time and commitment and leaves little time for other groups, if you are going to do it well. Some people have the club mentality with regard to religious organizations, but this is not a club. You don’t join a club when you become a member of the Order.

So I want to make a suggestion for a comment to be included in the Provincial Statues. “All are welcome to become members of the Secular Order except those who belong to other Secular Orders, and/or those who belong to other organizations whose membership would prohibit the person from participating fully in the life of the Secular Order.” That’s Teresian! Again, the step forward in these Constitutions is a step forward in the understanding of the Secular Order as members of the Order. That step forward has to be developed in the communities. We must strive to develop an understanding of our corporate identity, to develop the understanding of belonging to this body of the Order. We the Friars, and you yourselves have treated yourselves as individuals in many ways. But the structure that’s given in the Constitutions of Secular Order now understand you as members with responsibilities and with obligations for your own government, for your own decisions, for your own formation. And it’s part of the way the Holy Spirit is moving the Church along.

I’ve repeated many times, “member of the Order” because I want to put emphasis on the fact that you are Carmelites because you are members of the Order. This is not joining a club. And as I’ve said many times before, **“Being a Carmelite is not a privilege. Being a Carmelite is a responsibility!”** That’s for me and for you. Responsibility doesn’t mean burden – it means the ability to respond. So, as Carmelites, we are given the grace of our vocation through those six means to respond to the God who calls us and to respond to the world that needs to know God.