

More FAQs about the Draft Statutes

As might be expected, more good questions have come in about the Statutes.

Q: Why do you use the term "Carmelite Secular" instead of "Secular Carmelite" throughout the Statutes?

A: (from Gerald) I first heard the term Carmelite Secular used in preference to Secular Carmelite in a talk presented by Fr. Aloysius Deeney, OCD, at a Congress in San Francisco a few years ago. I do not recall what Fr. Aloysius provided in justification of that preference, but I do recall that the term resonated with me. And then I began to reflect why. For indeed, what's in a name? Why would I say that the name "Carmelite Secular" sounds sweeter to me than "Secular Carmelite", a name some have said that they prefer. After all, although our Constitution does use the term Carmelite Secular in the opening paragraph of Section I, thereafter it refers to us as Secular Carmelites. That would certainly argue forcefully on the side of the opposition party. So, why am I arguing for using the term, Carmelite Secular?

Let me explain that I am writing on this issue because the Provincial Council has chosen "Carmelite Secular" as the preferred term, and I am a member of the Provincial Council seeking to justify this term as our preference. Admittedly, I recognize that in the scheme of things, this is not a major issue. However, I contend that the business we are engaged in now - the business of understanding better who we are and how we are to be - is important; consequently, how we choose to define ourselves, our values, our way of being, etc. deserves care down to the very choice of words and terms that we use. Should we not give some thought to the name we give ourselves? I think we should. So, I am offering a justification for our decision to use the term "Carmelite Secular" as the better way to describe who we are.

I am of course by virtue of my Promise a member of the Carmelite Order, but the nature of my existence as a Carmelite, my state in life, is secular. Therefore, it seems more accurate to speak of my identity as Carmelite Secular rather than Secular Carmelite. By using the term Carmelite Secular I am placing the word Carmelite in relationship to secular as an adjective. I am sure you all remember from grammar school what an adjective is and does, but just in case: an adjective usually precedes a noun or pronoun, and modifies it by describing, identifying, or quantifying it. Consequently, relating the word "Carmelite" to Secular as an adjective seems a better and more truthful way of describing who we are. Our state in life is not Carmelite, that is, we are not religious. Our state in life is Secular. But even if we would want to describe ourselves existentially as Carmelites, would we want that state modified by the attributes of Secular? Does it not resonate more truthfully within you, when you "ponder" it all, to say that yes indeed I am an individual who lives in the world but my life in the world in all its aspects is best described, identified and even quantified by the Carmelite charism? In saying that we are Carmelite Seculars we are saying that we are members of the Church who strive to live in the world with the mind and heart of Jesus and the Gospel values He taught, rather than

in the spirit of the world with its false values. Furthermore, we are saying that this striving is modified (transfigured) and enhanced by the Promise we make as Carmelites.

In addition, when we look at how we refer to our friars and nuns, they are Carmelite Friars and Carmelite Nuns. Again, Carmelite is modifying their state of life as a friar or a nun. We never say they are Friar Carmelites or Nun Carmelites.

So, what's in a name? Maybe nothing, but again perhaps everything! It depends on how important it is to you what name is used to describe who you are and who you are striving to be. We think the name, Carmelite Secular, best describes who we are and who we are ever striving to become in the midst of the world. We think it best indicates how we want to relate to the world and influence it. We think it best describes how we want to give ourselves to God on earth and serve His Church in the modern world: as lay men and women imbued with the spirit and ideals of Carmel.

Q: Where will the members of the Provincial Council find the time to make visitations? Don't they have families and jobs and other obligations?

A: This is truly an excellent question. In our province we have 19 canonical communities, 14 study groups, and 7 groups in discernment - quite a number of places to get to. First, remember that right now the only person who has been making visitations for any number of years has been the Provincial Delegate. And as you might imagine, there's no way for him to get to all those groups in one year. In fact, when we looked back, he's only been getting to about 4-5 communities/groups each year. Realistically, we know that even with five Provincial Councilors, we won't be able to get to each of those groups once a year. However, our goal will be to visit each community/group at least once every three years. Study Groups and Groups in Discernment will be visited a bit more frequently since we've learned that there are many questions, especially with our new groups. The specific dates of a visitation will be worked out between the community/group being visited and the Provincial Councilor. The schedule for the Provincial Councilors has each of us visiting 4-5 groups/year. When possible we assigned two groups in the same area to the same Councilor so that person can visit both in one trip. This might mean asking some of our communities and groups to hold a meeting a day/time different from normal to accommodate the visitor.

Q: In addition to the visitations, it seems like the Provincial Council is a pretty big time commitment. Seems like it might be difficult to recruit members to serve on it.

A: We talked about this a bit when trying to decide the length of service. Admittedly, those of us on this first Provincial Council really only had a vague idea of what might be involved when we agreed to serve. We also recognize that because we are having to start from scratch with our duties, we have much to do that future Provincial Councils will not necessarily have to worry about. For instance, we have to figure out all the details of how we do visitations. While future Provincial Councils will want to review and maybe modify those details and procedures, they won't have to start from a blank slate the way

we are. So, future Provincial Councilors hopefully will not have quite the heavy work load we do at this time.

We'd also like to point out that when each of us was asked to serve on the Provincial Council, it did take some discernment on our part. And as time as gone on, some of us have had to discern how we use our time and energies. When we made our profession, we committed to Carmel being a priority in our lives. This has meant that in order to serve on the Provincial Council, a few of us have made a discernment to discontinue our involvement in other things (resigning from the RCIA team, not renewing service on a board of directors, etc). Our commitment to Carmel being a priority means that at this point in our lives, our call to serve on the Provincial Council takes priority over things which we feel are of lower priority than God, family, Carmel. When our term of service on the Provincial Council is over, we may return to some of those other involvements that are near and dear to us. But for this point in time, our service to the province has taken the priority over some of those things.

Discerning priorities and how we use our time and energy is something that should be familiar to all Carmelite Seculars. We have to do it as part of our formation when integrating our daily OCDS obligations into our lives. Those of us who serve on Local Councils have had to discern it before agreeing to being on the ballot for elections. Those called to be Formation Directors certainly know that before agreeing to serve in that role they have to discern if they have the time and energy to do so.

It is our hope that as time goes on, there will be many in our province willing to make the province a priority in their lives and agree to serve on the Provincial Council. We, the current Provincial Council, promise we will do our best to set in place structures that will make the job much easier for those serving in the future. Only time will tell. We can say that despite all the hard work, we've been rather enjoying it. We are learning so much about our province and slowly but surely meeting some of the people we serve. We have lots of dreams for supporting our communities (such as regular workshops for the councils). On the day we elected our president, she was hit over the head by one of the lines from the Office of the Readings later that day: Rev 19:10: "I am merely a fellow servant with you...in giving witness to Jesus Christ". She took that as her "motto" of what her role as president should be but it would fit for the whole Provincial Council in relation to serving our province.