

FAQs about the Draft Statutes

The Provincial Council would like to thank those who have written with questions and comments on the draft Statutes for our province. Despite this list of questions that we are responding to, we've really only heard back from a few Seculars. We do know many communities out there are studying the draft Statutes and we look forward to hearing from more of you.

Provincial Council:

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Q: I don't understand the election process for the local council.

A: We did have trouble figuring out good wording on that one. Perhaps it would be most helpful to walk through an example election.

First comes the election for President. Say, Teresa, John, and Therese have been nominated for President. A simple vote is taken and Teresa gets elected. John and Therese are then eligible, if they have been nominated and agreed, to be elected as Councilors.

Next comes the election of the three Councilors. So, we have John, Therese, Benedicta, Elizabeth, and Lawrence who've been nominated. Each voting member will rank their three choices. Example of how the voted ballots would look:

Voter #1

1st Choice – John (3 pts)
2nd Choice – Benedicta (2 pts)
3rd Choice – Elizabeth (1 pt)

Voter #4

1st Choice – Therese (3 pts)
2nd Choice – Lawrence (2 pts)
3rd Choice – Benedicta (1 pt)

Voter #2

1st Choice – Therese (3 pts)
2nd Choice – Benedicta (2 pts)
3rd Choice – Lawrence (1 pt)

Voter #5

1st Choice – Elizabeth (3 pts)
2nd Choice – John (2pts)
3rd Choice – Therese (1 pt)

Voter #3

1st Choice – Benedicta (3 pts)
2nd Choice – Therese (2 pts)
3rd Choice – John (1 pt)

Voter # 6

1st Choice – John (3 pts)
2nd Choice – Benedicata (2 pts)
3rd Choice – Therese (1 pt)

OK. Now the points get tallied:

John – total of 9 pts

Therese – total of 10 pts

Benedicta – total of 10 pts

Elizabeth – total of 4 pts

Lawrence – total of 3 pts

So, Therese, Benedicta and John are elected to Council.

Now, let's suppose that the newly formed Council decides that they'd really like Therese to be the Formation Director. Well, she can't be a councilor and formation director at the same time. So, they can appoint her as Formation Director and then per Statute III.4.c, Elizabeth would replace Therese as a Councilor. We hope that this provision within the Statutes will relieve communities of any concern they have about nominating a potential Formation Director to Council and also enable the Council to choose from among themselves if they feel that person is the one called to serve as Formation Director at this time.

Q: I'm confused about the staggered terms for Provincial Council.

A: The term of service for Provincial Councilors is six years. This is a pretty long time as it is and so we have included the provision that no one can serve consecutive terms. This insures that there will be "new blood" on the Provincial Council. At the same time, we wanted to be sure that there would be some continuity so there wasn't a fully new Council trying to figure out from scratch how to do the various duties of the Provincial Council. So, we'll stagger the terms.

The first Provincial Council election will be in 2008. At that time, two or three members will leave the Provincial Council and an election will replace them. The members elected in 2008 will serve through 2014. In 2011, the remaining original members will vacate their positions and an election will be held for those open council seats. Those elected in 2011 will then serve through 2017.

How, you ask, will we decide in 2008 which current Provincial Councilors will leave and which will stay? Hopefully, it'll work out that the number who want to leave at that point and those willing to serve three more years will be in the right numbers. If it turns out that too many want to leave or too many want to stay, well, then we'll just pray to the Holy Spirit and draw straws.

Q: What is the difference between a leave of absence and someone who doesn't come to meetings because of illness or age? What would be a good reason for a leave of absence?

A: A leave of absence should be something serious and something limited in duration. One example comes from the Austin community. A member who is finishing up her PhD received a one year teaching position at Mt Holyoke College in Massachusetts. Since she obviously would not be able to make meetings but knew that she'd be back in Austin after the year (her husband remained in Austin), she was granted a leave with instructions to maintain monthly contact via one of the local council members. Another example that comes to mind might be that a spouse has taken ill and is in need of round-the-clock care by the OCDS member. The duration of such a situation is harder to predict. Nevertheless, this gives you an idea of what is meant by "serious".

Now, for those who are unable to attend meetings because they are older and not able to get out much anymore or who have health problems which make it difficult to attend meetings, regular contact with the community should continue. Someone in the community should be in touch with those members through visits or calls on monthly basis. In fact, since those who for health or age are unable to attend meetings, it would still be good for them to do the readings for each month and that would provide a good topic for conversation during those monthly contacts. Whoever is in touch with these home bound members, should also report at each meeting on how they are doing. Many communities already have someone serving as infirmarian doing this.

Q: Can people really be dismissed from the Order for not attending meetings?

A: Community life is "a fundamental element of our vocation" (Art 9). So, attendance at the monthly meetings is very important. It is there that we most fully learn what it means to be Carmelite. It is also in community that we grow in faith as we learn from each other, are challenged by each other, and see God in one another. Article 47 of the Constitutions grants the Local Council the authority to dismiss a member of the community. While we would certainly hope that it never comes to that, lack of regular attendance can be a reason for dismissal. First, Local Councils should make an loving effort to call the individual back into community. If after such efforts do not prove fruitful, then dismissal is an option. Always, the Provincial (through the Provincial Council) should be consulted before dismissal.

Now what we want to avoid is being draconian about attendance. We all have occasional times when other obligations may conflict with a community meeting. A family member is getting married, we have to work that weekend, etc. An occasional absence is not cause for alarm. It is regular, sustained lack of attendance which requires some action.

*** see additional information in this Flos Carmeli

Q: What does the monthly contact with an isolate involve?

A: As with the above mentioned ill and aged, an isolate should probably be doing the monthly reading that is being discussed at the community meetings. Then whether in writing or via phone with the community member who is in touch with the isolate, thoughts, questions, insights from the reading may be shared. And if this happens to be in writing, with the isolate's permission, that can be shared in the larger group. One of the Provincial Councilors spent some time living in Chicago while remaining in touch with her local community (eventually returning after graduate school). Frequently her letters were shared at the community meeting and she always received notes and minutes of the minutes. Austin has sometimes taped presentations for members that are unable to attend that month so they don't miss out on the discussion and this might be something that can be done to help the isolate share in what the community is learning.

And we do strongly encourage all isolates to meet with the community in person at least once each year. It might be that the isolate attends retreat with the community or joins them for a day of recollection.

Q: We have one of our members who made definitive promises a year ago and came before Council last month to request to make vows....the Council approved, that was before we received the new statutes.....is she grandfathered under the old statutes?

A: These are DRAFT statutes so not yet binding. They won't be binding until they get approved by the General Definitory in Rome which will be December at the earliest and might even be May depending on how long it takes for us to make any revisions. However, since the Provincial's permission is required for vows and the draft has now been published, the Provincial Delegate (through whom permission is requested) has already started following the five year period put in the Statutes.

We moved the "wait" period back to five years because we wanted to get away from any sense that vows are simply the next step after a year. Many simply do them "automatically" because they've had a year in definitive promises. Hence, also, our emphasis on the discernment. There is a range within our province where in some communities just about everyone makes vows whereas in others, only a few are in vows. And our sense was that in general, we leaned a bit more to the latter than the former. Vows in no way change someone's status in the order. They are a more serious commitment demonstrated by the fact that they are made to God and not to the order/community. Hence, they involve the virtue of religion. In other words, someone who has taken vows but then fails to live up to them does so under the penalty of sin. Whereas someone failing to live up to their promises, does not invoke such a penalty although it is still a very serious matter. Another way in which this difference gets played out is the fact that the local council can dismiss someone in promises either at the request of the member or as part of a process addressing something like lack of attendance at meetings. But the local council does not have the authority to release someone from vows. That takes a cleric higher up the "chain of command". In fact, that

is specifically governed by Canon Law even for private vows such as the ones OCDS make. Hence our line about having to contact the Provincial Delegate for someone in vows leaving the order.

Q: Why don't you mention the Angelus and the Rosary under the section on Marian devotions?

A: Please know that we discussed making the statute about devotion to Mary specific (and specifically recommending the rosary) but we decided to leave the choice of devotional expression to the individual members. Probably, the rosary and/or the angelus are devotions of choice for many if not most Carmelite Seculars, but some may opt for a different expression or perhaps a more interior focus in being devoted to Mary. As Fr. Aloysius indicated in his talk in Las Vegas, meditation / mental prayer bespeaks our primary way of imitating Mary in her being with Jesus, she who pondered his words and actions in her heart, and so, too, is the way of all of us in being devoted to Mary, of being with her. We express this interior disposition in different ways - some by the rosary or other traditional devotions, others primarily in a more fundamental fashion such as simply being united with her in and through our mental prayer. As Fr. Aloysius noted too, these are ways that are different, not necessarily better. Besides, in terms of informing as well as forming true devotion to Mary, we refer individuals and communities to documents of the church to be their guide, and allow them the freedom to choose how they are to respond. This is in line with our understanding that within our order are divergent and multicultural differences in devotion to Mary to be respected, each honoring Mary according to the individuals intention and alignment with the Church and her teaching.

Q: When you talk about community size, what is too large?

A: The important thing to remember in regards to community size is the quality of community life. Do the members know each well? Do they have a feel for what is happening in each other's lives? Is the community small enough for good discussions or do people get lost and never heard from at meetings because there are so many? The sense of the Provincial Council is that 40 is probably a good size for communities. HOWEVER, we do have two communities in our province that are much larger than that. Lafayette has about 100 members. We didn't want to force them to downsize. And also, making it a hard and fast rule might not serve well in splitting into two communities since there are many factors to consider. Are there enough people with the gifts needed for leadership positions in both communities? Is there a meeting facility available for the new group? Are there enough members for two groups? And more. At the same time, we do want communities to be alert to having a size that allows for a sense of intimacy among the members. Teresa was always concerned that her communities not get too large and we also encourage communities within our province to be thinking in terms of good community life.

Q: Speaking of community meetings, what should we do if there's not enough room at the local Carmelite monastery for our community?

A: While we certainly encourage all of our communities to foster relations with the nuns and friars in their area, it is not required that a Carmelite Secular community meet on Carmelite premises. Many of our communities have no Carmelite friars or nuns nearby and so they meet in rooms at local parishes, schools, universities, and such. What is important is that you have room for those attending. Some communities spend part of their meeting broken out into smaller groups so need space with a number of smaller rooms. All need space large enough to hold all the members when they are gathered as a whole. It is more important to meet in space that fits the needs of the community than that the space specifically be a Carmel. Our mere presence will "carmelize" the space. ☺

Why do we have to have a community apostolate? I have family, I work full time, I already have these other Carmelite obligations. I am also involved in RCIA and the liturgy committee and a couple of civic groups. I don't have time for a group apostolate. The Constitutions say our apostolate can be individual or group so why are you imposing a group apostolate on us?

Anyone involved in RCIA and other major committees in a parish like yourself, already knows the power of the collective to bring about change or to serve. The leaders of our Carmelite Order understood this, too, when Father General Macisse wrote that, "While priority is given to those places where the apostolic commitment is individual (the family, one's profession or work, and the parish), each OCDS community should have an apostolic commitment as well."

Apostolate isn't another thing we have to do. It is a way the Carmelite communicates our charism in the world. We do that as individuals, certainly. We are being called by the Order to impact the Church and world as Carmelite communities, sharing and communicating our charism of contemplative prayer. The impact of the RCIA team or liturgy committee is different than an individual's impact on the welcoming of those desiring baptism or in the development of good liturgies at a parish. Both the team and the individual's efforts are needed to get the jobs done.

Group and individual apostolates have their own prophetic and evangelical natures. Both are needed. Both are asked of us by the Church by virtue of our Baptism and the Order. The great thing about group apostolate is that it is carried out by the whole community and is not dependent solely upon one person. Some play less active, but none the less important roles. Not everyone is behind the podium or coordinating. All support the common end.

This is one example. If an OCDS community hosts a one day workshop on prayer for adults each year, there would be a multitude of jobs that would require widely varying gifts and time: teachers, small group facilitators, hospitality (bakers, servers, greeters), agenda & program development for the day, fliers (developing, setting up on a computer, folding, distributing), environment folks, writing a bulletin blurb & emailing it to all

parishes in the area, writing thank you cards, etc... This activity could use many people: a good coordinator, an excellent cookie baker, someone to purchase punch, and on and on. The collective of the community provides the power to create this wonderful event that can do one little piece toward the call we have by the Church to communicate our charism of prayer to the Church and world. And that's it for the year.

It may require a reordering of priorities, but that is nothing new for one who finds Carmel. Remember how we all wondered at the beginning, how we would ever be able "to do" all that is called for as we live out the Rule of St. Albert in our Constitutions? Didn't it seem impossible at one time to almost everyone? Then the Holy Spirit began to work and everything just seemed to fall into place. We look back and realize that somehow, quietly and gently we laid some things aside, took up new ones, and "put on the way of Carmel" under the influence of that Holy Spirit.

There are as many examples of individual and group apostolate as there are creative minds and souls to envision them. Father General Macisse mentioned in one of his talks that included the topic of apostolate, a small OCDS community of twelve who operate a retreat center! It doesn't matter so much if the apostolate is large or small. Openness to bringing the prophetic witness of the Carmelite community, sharing its charism in the Church and world, is needed. That is a challenge to we who have typically been very quiet in the living out of our vocation...not so "out front and identified as Carmelites".

And let us take this opportunity to once again remind you to mark your calendar for the OCDS National Congress in St Louis, Sept 29-Oct 2, 2005. The title will be "OCDS: Men and Women of Prayer at the Service of the Church" and we'll be hearing a lot at it about apostolate. It'll be a great opportunity for all of us to reflect even more on this aspect of our vocation to Carmel.