

DEVELOPING FORMATION PROGRAMS

The local Council is responsible for “the formation and Christian and Carmelite maturing of the members of the community” (Constitutions, Art. 46). Council members must be active in the life of the community and maintain a purposeful stance of openness to all members of the community, to be able to fulfill the responsibilities assigned in the Constitutions.

The local Council explores many ideas related to the three stages of formation and ongoing formation that will support the maturing of members of the community as described in Article 46 of the Constitutions. The discussion often begins as Councils look through the lens of the current Legislation to see if their formation process needs updating or as they begin the process of writing out their 1 year plan for Aspirancy, a 2 year plan of Preparation for First Promise, a 3 year plan of Preparation for Final (Definitive) Promise, and to write a plan for ongoing formation.

The discussions quickly begin to include other considerations that experienced Councils and formators know are central to the needs of a good formation process. Eleven of those needs are listed below. They could be used by a Council developing a new formation program, or to support a Council as it evaluates its current formation program.

These ideas are meant to strengthen current practices and stimulate new ideas that support the ministry of formation in Carmel. The list starts with the topics to be covered in a formation process (see the Provincial Formation Guidelines) and the timeframes of those formation sessions but immediately transitions to other important considerations for the Council to make. They can be prioritized on the basis of what the community already has in place. Additions or changes can be made to a community’s practice on that basis, over time.

- 1 **CALENDAR:** Make a calendar for each level of formation. In which month will you cover which topics? How long will a formation session be? How will the community retreat be included?
- 2 **FORM CARMELITES:** Identify different ways to engage the community in the topics being studied. What techniques will be applied at each level of formation to take it from “information” to “formation”? How will your community members be challenged to study the texts and their hearts and their lives to become informed, formed and to mature in their Carmelite vocation? (See the article on Questioning Strategies in this Flos Carmeli.)
Fr. Aloysius Deeney, General Delegate to the Secular Order, challenged us to ensure that secular formation programs include, “formation for the mind so they are satisfied that they know what they need to know, formation for the heart (I want to give my heart to God), and things ‘to do’ that brings them thru the process of being formed.” How does the community’s formation program meet those challenges?
- 3 **SECULAR IDENTITY:** Everything that occurs in formation needs to support the development and maturing of Carmelite personality. How will these choices of

- topics and strategies help clarify and strengthen the secular identity of those being formed? Will they form members to understand and discern how they are called to live the consequences of being Clothed, making the Promises or making the Vows as secular members of the Discalced Carmelite Order?
- 4 **ENGAGE:** The Council must maintain a purposeful stance of openness to its members. How will the Council make an effort to get to know each person in all levels of the formation process and observe how they relate to the community? How will the Council intervene if it sees problems developing? How will the Council spot, form, and call into service future leaders? How will the Council assure that those being formed will have ample opportunity to engage with the community?
 - 5 **VISITORS:** How will visitors be screened? What steps will the Council use to discern if a visitor will be invited to become an Aspirant.
 - 6 **ASPIRANTS:** What will be asked of Aspirants as they discern if they are called to Carmel (participate in the Aspirancy formation program, participate in community meetings, begin to live the prayer and liturgical life of a secular, interview with the director of formation and Council, community retreat, reflection questions, letter of petition, etc)? How will the Council measure progress in prayer, community, apostolate, study and preparation for Clothing? How will the Council get to know, and what steps will it use for discerning if an Aspirant will be Clothed (interact with them at meetings; contact references they provide; read the letter of petition; pray for the assistance and guidance of the Holy Spirit, St. Teresa, St. John of the Cross, and Our Lady of Mt. Carmel; reflect; interview the candidate; take time to discern and pray; then vote; inform the candidate; etc.).
 - 7 **FIRST PROMISE and FINAL PROMISE:** How will the Council measure progress in prayer, community, apostolate, study and preparation for the Promise? How will the Council discern if a candidate will be invited to make the Promise (make a purposeful effort to get to know the candidate; read the letter of petition; pray for guidance of the Holy Spirit, St. Teresa, St. John of the Cross, and Our Lady of Mt. Carmel; reflect; interview the candidate; take time to discern and pray; then vote; inform the candidate; etc.)? What steps will be asked of candidates as they discern if they are called to make the Promise (participate in the formation program, attend community meetings, be of service in the community, yearly interviews with the formator, yearly retreat with the community, reflection questions, letter of petition, a final interview with the council, etc)?
 - 8 **SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES:** How will the Council handle those special circumstances of formation such as when someone transfers to the community prior to making final profession or when an isolate needs formation support? How will the Council help someone from the community prepare and discern if they are called to make Vows?
 - 9 **WHEN THE ANSWER IS 'NO':** How will the Council tell someone, and who will tell them, if the Council discerns a person will not be Clothed or make Promises or Vows?

- 10 **FORMATION TEAM:** How will the Council support the director of formation in determining and training those who will be responsible for the various levels of formation, recalling that it is important for individuals to experience more than one formator as they go from one level of formation to the next, and as they experience ongoing formation?
- 11 **RITUALS:** How will plans and programs for the ceremonies and celebrations for Clothing, Promises, and Vows be handled?

Do not be overwhelmed at the thought of trying to address every one of these elements immediately. It takes time. The workshops for Councils held last summer in our Province were wellsprings of ideas for applying these concepts. Creative Councils work together to establish comprehensive formation processes that fulfill our Legislative mandate and inspire community members to new depths of vocation as Carmelite seculars.