

Guidelines for a Group in Discernment and Its Mentoring Community

New OCDS groups must be under the guidance of an established community willing to be mentors of their development. The principle applies that “communities form communities”, individuals do not form communities.

Process:

If contacted by a canonical community:

If a canonical community wishes to start a new OCDS group due to the need to reduce its size or because there are enough OCDS in a nearby geographic location to warrant a new group, the Provincial Council (PC) will assign the canonical community to help oversee the new group in discernment.

1. Once permission has been sought by the mentoring community and received from the Provincial Council (Sec. XV. 1, Statutes) a group may be formed under the PC's supervision, whose goal is to focus on what it means to be Discalced Carmelite Secular in terms of its personal and communal responsibilities, under the guidance and with the support of a Mentoring Community (MC). This group, called a Group in Discernment (GID), shall be the first stage in the process of becoming a canonically established OCDS community.

2. The MC council shall be involved in identifying a coordinator and formator for the GID whose appointment will be made by the PC. If it has some members who are already members of the Order (First or Definitive Promise) then the coordinator and/or formator normally would be chosen from those more experienced members. The coordinator would normally be a member of the new group, but the formator may be a member of the MC, at least initially, if none of the GID members are discerned ready to assume the role.

3. The level of support initially needed by the GID shall be discerned and agreed upon by the MC council and the PC. If the new group is close enough to the MC, they might be required to attend a specified number of the meetings of the MC for the sake of observation and discernment. In all cases, members of the GID have their formation monitored by the council of the MC in conjunction with the appointed coordinator and formator. As a Group in Discernment, it is important that the members receive formation on the specific vocation of the Carmelite Secular in addition to formation on Carmelite spirituality. As a foundation, the GID shall normally complete together the Aspirancy formation program found in Statute XXI.

If members come to the GID still in formation for Promises, it will be determined by the MC council and the PC if they need to continue formation with their original program for the time being, or if the GID formator is able take up their formation. As soon as reasonably feasible all members of the GID will attend only that meeting and will be formed there by the assigned formator, under the guidance of the MC's director of formation.

The MC council and the GID will be co-responsible for discernment of candidates. The final approval for profession is made by the MC council since only they have the canonical authority to approve professions. However, the leadership of the GID also needs to learn how to discern so they should participate in the process.

4. Once the GID is established with a stable number of members ranging from 8-12, it should begin meeting monthly and take no new members for the first year, allowing the GID time to stabilize, and for its members and the MC council to discern if the GID with its current membership has the seeds of a Carmelite community.

Carmelite Secular Groups in Discernment usually meet for 2-3 hours once a month. The purpose of these meetings is to participate in the shared study of Carmelite spirituality and explore the OCDS vocation. GID members pray the Liturgy of the Hours together that is appropriate to the time of their meeting. Conferences on the vocation and Carmelite spirituality should include time for the members to discuss the material and share their thoughts on the readings/presentation and how they see it applying in their own lives.

Once the GID formally begins to meet, if some of its members are already Isolate members of the Order or members of a canonical community, they are temporarily released from the requirements of their prior membership status and take on the requirements of this “missionary effort” as they participate fully in this discernment of a new community.

5. The GID will open a checking account for accountability with moneys collected and disbursed.

6. The GID cooperatively establishes such things as their meeting location, a schedule to best accommodate their group, roles of service needed by them (such as secretary, treasurer, prayer chain leader, liturgist, hospitality minister, etc...) and identifies people to serve in them, under the supervision of the PC and MC council. As it progresses, the GID will gradually be asked to take on more responsibility for its own administration.

7. It is recommended that a MC council representative visit the GID meeting once or twice in that first year to observe, to offer support and to encourage the members. The MC council will oversee and act as a resource to the GID coordinator and formator, and may assist the GID by inviting its members to join community retreats, offer presentations on specific topics, share formation materials, and in other ways that seem prudent, while fostering maturity and independence in the GID leadership and members.

8. Minutes of all meetings will be sent by the GID to the MC president, the PC visitor (who will meet annually with the GID), and the Provincial Delegate. Minutes shall include a listing of members in attendance and who was absent, the meeting date, time, and place. Minutes also include a very brief (paragraph or two) description of any talk

given as well as the name of who gave the talk. A short summary is provided of any business conducted and descriptions of activities with names given for those in roles of service to the group.

The minutes provide important information to the MC council and PC on how the GID is progressing in Carmelite community life and identity, and helps sketch a picture of those emerging as future leaders in the group. It is preferable that these minutes be provided in electronic format.

9. Clues that the GID is progressing and maturing include the following:

- a. they become less dependent upon the mentoring group
- b. they are docile to and cooperative with the lawful authority over them
- c. they exhibit a determination to continue toward becoming a Carmelite community
- d. they are cohesive
- e. they are compatible as a group
- f. they want to continue on to the goal of becoming an official Carmelite community (ref. XV. 1, Statutes)

10. The first year is a year of discernment for everyone both on an individual basis and on a group basis. This process is expected to take at least a year and might take longer depending upon circumstances. At the end of the year, a member of the Provincial Council will make a visitation which will assist the GID, its leaders and the MC council in discerning whether the group has the potential to grow in and attract others to the OCDS charism and thus is ready to be elevated to recognized Study Group status.

After a minimum one year of stability and of exhibiting the above qualities (9. a-f) and upon completing the discernment process, the GID can inform the MC council in writing of its desire to become a recognized Study Group. If the MC council concurs in the GID's readiness, the MC council will send the GID letter of request with their own letter of recommendation to the PC and Provincial Delegate for discernment and permission. The MC council will also send the name of a spiritual assistant candidate and persons from the GID that they recommend to be named as director of formation.

11. The Provincial Delegate will appoint a spiritual assistant and a director of formation if it is determined that the GID is ready to become a recognized Study Group.

12. See XV. 2. a-b for Study Group guideline specifics.