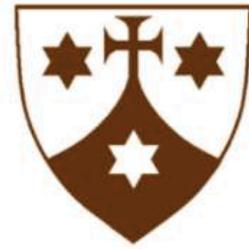




The VINE



June 2021

News from the Secular Discalced Carmelite Community in England and Wales



Photo Credit: Ashley Dace/The Slipper Chapel – Walsingham

IN THIS ISSUE

From our National President	2
Summary minutes of the National Council meeting	3
News from East Anglia Region	5
Retreats and Regional Days	6
Liaison Group	7
The Living Flame Initiative	7
Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel	8
Carmelite Contemplative Circles	8
Exciting News from Boars Hill	9
Darlington Carmel Printing Press	9
New Book at the Carmelite Book Service	10
A new Carmelite saint?	11
New courses from CACS	12
Letter from Superior General of Discalced Carmelites	14

Deadline for contributions to the next Vine: Monday 4th October 2021

Contact: Tim Burton OCDS carmel@kinabra.net 01328 700165

Dear Fellow Carmelites,

Carmel and Courage

I write this on 31st May, the Feast of the Visitation, when our thoughts turn to a teenage girl who walked eighty-one miles as the crow flies, from Nazareth to the hill country of Judea, to visit one she loved, her cousin Elizabeth. The baby she was carrying was also visiting the one he loved, John the Baptist, who leapt in his mother's womb with the joy of meeting his unborn cousin, Jesus.

This story of courage and determination and love brings us to the end of the burgeoning month of May, when winter finally releases its chilly grip and Creation is bursting into full foliage and flower.

The *Song of Songs* quoted in the Office of Readings encapsulates this day:

Come then, my love,
my lovely one, come.
For see, winter is past,
the rains are over and gone.
The flowers appear on the earth..

Show me your face,
let me hear your voice;
for your voice is sweet
And your face is beautiful.

Mary's soul glorified the Lord, and those three months with elderly Elizabeth would have been a time of rejoicing together. But Mary's contemplative call was about to lead her far away from any plans she had in mind to care for this *Son of the Most High* with her relatives and friends in her home town of Nazareth. She would find herself in the smelly stable in Bethlehem, then on the rocky ride to Egypt and exile; we know the story.

As Carmelites, we wear the Scapular as a symbol and sign of our allegiance to Our Lady, of her mantle that protects us, and of her intercession and love. But it is not a cosy scapular, it is a working scapular, originally a type of apron for Carmelites bending over spades or pots and pans. Like Mary, we too may be called on journeys we had not planned, an apostolate we had never envisaged. But, as Edith Stein tells us, 'You need not be alarmed. What you have promised is indeed beyond your own, weak human power. But it is not beyond the power of the Almighty – this power will become yours if you entrust yourself to him.'

In these times of plague and uncertainty, we need to find ways to trust and rejoice. In July we celebrate the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, and again entrust ourselves totally to Mary's protection. This is the greatest day in our Carmelite calendar, and let us celebrate it together as one Carmelite community, as is suggested in this edition of *The Vine*.

Let us truly realise that God sees a beautiful face and hears a sweet voice in every one of us, in every human being. He searches for us throughout life until we meet him, face to face. Mary, his beloved mother, is our guide and protector wherever we are called to go. Pope Francis has the last word:

*United in this month of May with Our Blessed Lady,
may we grow in the certainty that our heavenly Father always hears our prayers.
Upon you and your families I invoke the joy and peace of the Lord.
May God bless you!*

GENERAL AUDIENCE MAY 26, 2021

SUMMARY MINUTES OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL MEETINGS

held via Zoom on 22 March and 17 May 2021

Present

Annette Goulden (National President), Fr Matt Blake (Provincial Delegate), Mark Courtney (Secretary), Cyprian Blamires, Mary Farrell, Chris Noble, Joan MacInnes, Phyllis Ibbs, Deborah van Kroonenburg. Tim Burton (Webmaster) was present on 22 March for the discussion of the website and The Vine.

Stock-Taking

These two meetings were focused on how the Secular Order could best move out of lockdown to a situation where regular meetings would once again be possible. The March meeting started with a review of the current situation in each of the regions; and the May meeting had a presentation from Annette on the priorities for helping groups in different situations, and on practical measures that might be taken over the next year to help Groups in different situations operate effectively and to provide centrally-organised facilities and events.

Website

Tim Burton was commended for the work he had done in setting up and developing the new website. Much new content had already been added in the form of introductory material about the Secular Order, short lives of the Carmelite saints, and a Carmelite book list. There were also extensive general interest and formation resources in the form of notes, guides and the transcripts and audio recordings of Carmelite talks, both contemporary and from past years. These were continually being added to and the Council was arranging the digitising of recordings of many more past talks, which, with copyright consent from the speakers, would be placed in the general or "For Seculars" parts of the website. The Council also wanted to ensure that the website had up to date information about forthcoming events of Carmelite interest.

The Vine

The bumper February edition of The Vine had demonstrated its value in keeping Secular Carmelites in touch during the pandemic. The Council saw a continuing central role for it in reporting Carmelite news and wanted to ensure that every Secular was able to see a copy of it.

Teresian Prayer Group

The Teresian Prayer Group provided an annual programme on prayer at Kensington in 2018-19 and 2019-20 open to Secular Carmelites and to all comers. It will be resuming in October with a programme for 2021-22, and this year the monthly talks by distinguished Secular and Religious Carmelites will be recorded on a private YouTube channel, while the associated small group prayer and discussion will continue in small groups in different venues. This gives it the potential to be accessible anywhere and, as a first step, groups will meet in Gerrards Cross and Orpington as well as at Kensington.

Walsingham Pilgrimage, 26 June

Ours will be the first live pilgrimage this year, with the format much the same as in previous years. The people at Walsingham were confident that the pilgrimage would go ahead as planned, although if the restrictions were not completely lifted on 21 June as scheduled, there would be a few adaptations.

Secular Carmelite Retreats

Since neither Boars Hill nor Ampleforth will be open in the summer, the originally planned Secular Carmelite Retreats cannot go ahead. Instead, Fr Matt Blake will give a virtual and non-residential retreat from Kensington from Monday 26 to Friday 30 July: he will give two talks in the Church each day, which will be live-streamed and also available live and recorded on YouTube. This will allow anyone to create their own retreat by watching remotely, and local communities can also get together during the retreat in a physical meeting or by organising a Zoom breakout. Seculars will also be able to travel into Kensington on any day to hear the talks in person and participate in other retreat activities organised there.

National Presidents Conference

This will take place on the weekend of 5-7 or alternatively 12-14 November. There is now a significant chance that we shall be able to hold it at Boars Hill, but we are still considering various back-up alternatives.

Regional Days

The Central, East Anglia, London and South-West regions have now arranged a Regional Day of Recollection for this year, and the others plan to do so.

Report on Finances

Phyllis Ibbs, our Treasurer provided a financial report for the period since September 2019, showing that, because of reduced expenditure during the pandemic, our balance had increased by about £1,500 above pre-pandemic levels, and she projected a further increase this year. The Council noted that there might be calls on this reserve to finance activities during re-opening.

Miscellaneous

In response to enquiries it was confirmed:

Our communities and groups can invite anyone they wish to attend one or more meetings as a visitor or guest. Discretion should be used: sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. And, of course, guests can always be uninvited: attending a few meetings as a guest confers no right to attend indefinitely.

Asked about coverage of material from other spiritualities, the Council confirmed that our website is there to convey Carmelite spirituality and that that should be our focus.

Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the National Council will be at 10.00 am on Monday 5 July via Zoom.

NEWS FROM EAST ANGLIA REGION

In East Anglia, as I imagine elsewhere, we're beginning to meet again in our local groups, sharing our experiences of the past year and praying together again.

And soon we will also have the opportunity to meet with other members of the Order at the annual Carmelite Pilgrimage to Walsingham on Saturday 26 June. Last year's pilgrimage, of course, had to be cancelled as have so many diocesan pilgrimages, so the fact that ours is to be the first 'proper' pilgrimage since the beginning of the pandemic makes it all the more special. For those of you who are able to come, the day begins at the Shrine at 11am with a talk by Fr Matt and ends at 4pm after Adoration and Benediction in the parish church. Even if you can't come, you can follow Fr Matt's talk and the Pilgrims' Mass on the live stream from the Shrine website: walsingham.org.uk

In July, we shall gather again to celebrate the Feast of Our Lady of Mt Carmel by joining with the sisters at Quidenham Carmel for Vespers on the day itself.

And then in October, Fr Matt will visit us again at Quidenham for our first Regional Day since 2019. This will give us an opportunity to welcome new members and to allow the acceptance of Promises and entry into Formation for all those who have been waiting patiently over these months of lockdown.

It seems strange to be making plans again – though always with the added condition of 'God willing'!

Joan MacInnes

RETREATS AND REGIONAL DAYS

OCDS Retreat Monday 26 July to Friday 30 July

Unfortunately, the availability of accommodation this year at Boars Hill Retreat Centre remains uncertain. The friars plan to open the Centre for meetings and limited residential provision in September, Covid restrictions permitting. Work is under way to make all the bedrooms in the Pyramid ensuite, thereby reducing the number in that building to eight.

To replace our residential retreats at Boars Hill, Fr Matt will be giving us an on-line retreat from Kensington Church, with two live-streamed talks each day (also broadcast and recorded on YouTube) at 11 am and 3 pm. The retreat experience could be enriched with Zoom/Skype reflection groups organised locally by communities or regions, based on the talks. At Kensington Priory, as well as the Parish Mass at 12.15 pm and the opportunity for private prayer, there will be opportunities to share other retreat activities including a packed lunch and Evening Prayer: Mark Courtney will post a timetable and details on the Secular Carmelite website when they have been arranged.

Regional Days

These days of celebration together will provide the long-awaited opportunity for Fr Matt to receive people into Formation and to accept First and Final Promises.

The following are planned so far, provided Covid restrictions allow:

South West Region	July 3rd	Weston-Super-Mare
London Region	July 24th	Kensington
Central Region	Sept 25th	Northampton
East Anglia	October 2nd	Quidenham

Walsingham Pilgrimage, 26 June

Please see the Secular Carmelite website or the poster in the February *Vine* for the timetable for the day. Joan MacInnes will post any significant changes to the scheduled programme on the Secular Carmelite website: secularcarmel.org.uk

Retreat with Fr Matt at Dowry House, Walsingham: 22–24 October

For details and updates please see the events calendar at the Dowry House website:

<https://www.dowryhouse.org.uk/events/events-calendar/>

LIAISON GROUP

This group replaced the Retreat Group at Boars Hill which functioned for many years in offering OCDS led Carmelite days, evening forums and other activities at Boars Hill retreat centre to complement the weekend residential retreats.

Times have moved on and, even before Covid restrictions, the apostolate of the friars at Boars Hill markedly developed, with online courses, retreats and triduum. In response to this new outreach, a liaison group made up of members of the Secular Order from our province has been formed. It meets with Fr Alex and Fr Kelvin about every two months with a view to the friars and seculars sharing information and offering each other mutual support in prayer and apostolate as an ongoing Zoom group.

Examples of this mutual apostolate, outlined in this issue, are the Living Flame initiative, the celebration of the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, and Carmelite Contemplative Circles.

Secular members of the Liaison group and their respective Communities are: Annette Goulden, Chair (Oxford, St Elijah), Joan MacInnes, Secretary (Norwich), Nick McClusky (Glasgow), Kathy Twist (Welshpool), Deborah Van Kroonenburg (Newton Abbot), Eileen Fahy (Wirral, Rock Ferry), Cyprian Blamires (St Elijah, Oxford), Verity Smith (Leeds).

In his recent letter (May 24, 2021) to the OCDS, our Superior General, Fr Saverio Cannistrà, says, 'the relationship we want to establish between OCDS and our religious is one of collaboration and mutual respect of their legitimate autonomies'. The Liaison Group seeks to do just that.

THE LIVING FLAME INITIATIVE

The *Living Flame* is a Provincial Project that will offer a programme of formation over three years for young adults (aged 20-25 years) The Oxford component, led by Fr Kelvin at Boars Hill, will offer a forum in which participants can share questions and experience of prayer and faith, from June on-line, and in person from September 2021. The programme will progress from the forum to a more structured formation schedule and include an on-line monthly Eucharist for young adults. It may take place at an easily accessible venue in Oxford.

The unique aspect of the *Living Flame* is that each young person will have a personal mentor, and those in the Secular Order who are experienced Carmelites are invited to consider putting themselves forward for this mentoring role. It is early days and more information will be forthcoming, but if anyone is interested, please contact Annette: annette@goulden.co.uk in the first instance.

FEAST OF OUR LADY OF MOUNT CARMEL, 16 JULY 2021

Let us join together in celebrating this great feast!

Leading up to the 16th, the friars at Boars Hill will invite us to participate in a triduum on the 13th, 14th and 15th July. The three days will focus on the three branches of the Carmelite family: the friars, seculars and nuns. On July 16th, there are plans for an open-air mass at Boars Hill followed by a picnic and prayers.

The events on July 16th will all be streamed on-line so that our communities and groups throughout the country can participate in parallel, while local Carmelites can participate in person. Perhaps your region or community could share the mass on-line and then have a picnic together. Perhaps we could, throughout the country, pray a short liturgy at the same time together. Prayer in parallel is very powerful.

Posters with more information will be circulated once the details have been finalised by the Community at Boars Hill.

The hope is that all three branches of our Carmelite family will be united on this auspicious day, praying and rejoicing together under the mantle of Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

CARMELITE CONTEMPLATIVE CIRCLES

Carmelite Contemplative Circles (online and/or in-person) are open to anyone interested in drinking from the wellsprings of Carmel's 800-year old spiritual traditions to satisfy the burning thirst for intimacy with God. All Christians from every walk of life are welcome.

The circles offer people a forum where one can be open to God's tender and nurturing love present and active in our lives. They do this by providing a nurturing and very formative experience for people on their spiritual journey through the shared wisdom, prayer and friendship of other members of a circle and the Carmelite team associated with Boars Hill Carmelite Priory.

Online or in-person regular meetings of each circle (usually twice a month) take a simple format that allows time for:

Shared wisdom – insights from a shared reading of selected text on spiritual themes (prayer, silence, solitude, the spiritual journey, seeking and finding God, etc.) from the wider Christian tradition or from the writings of Carmelite saints. There are no set readings. The only reading shared is the spiritual reading done during the meeting. Members will receive the text of the reading in advance of the meeting. They may wish to continue pondering the text after the meeting and through the time before the next meeting.

Shared prayer – silent / guided prayer

Shared friendship – which is a special aspect of the contemplative circle in the footsteps of Saint Teresa who wanted all her foundations to be where, 'all must be friends, all must be loved, all must be held dear, all must be helped. (Way of Perfection, 4:7)' Members have time to share a conversation over tea/coffee.

The Priory offers support to each circle with video and other resources for spiritual growth as well as spiritual assistance. Also, the Priory will organise presentations on spiritual themes for members of the circles to be given by invited speakers and experts in Carmelite spirituality.

It is hoped that people who wish to experience membership of a circle will be willing to commit for a period of about six months and then discern if it's not for them. However, people may belong to a circle for as long as they wish.

Belonging to a Carmelite contemplative circle is free and no donations are expected for participation.

As regards the size of our circles, we draw our inspiration from St Teresa's original desire for her communities to be like a little college of apostles (12 in number). Hence, each circle could have up to 12 members. And in the footsteps of Teresa the foundress (and indeed, the apostles) from each circle of up to 12 members, some participants are commissioned to begin a new circle and welcome new members. In this way, the circle lives out the missionary apostolate of Carmel in the footsteps of Teresa.

Anyone interested in belonging to a circle may contact Dr Heather Ward, OCDS, the Carmelite Contemplative Circle Co-ordinator, at heatherward67@yahoo.com who will be happy to assist.

EXCITING NEWS FROM BOARS HILL

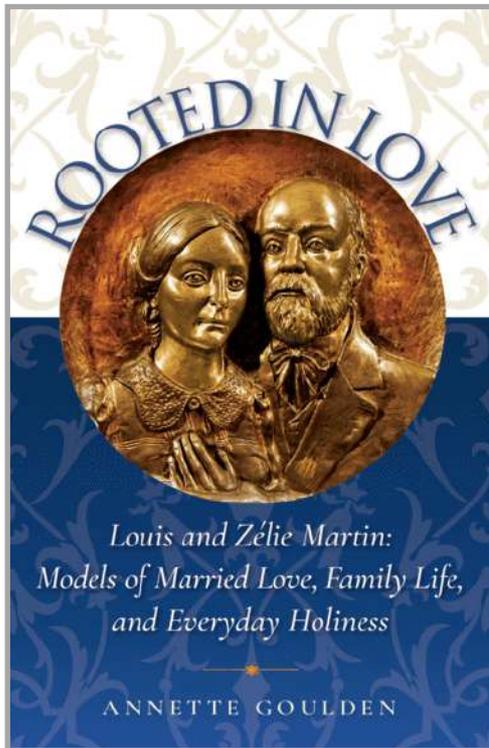
The Provincial Chapter has approved a proposal that the Annex at Boars Hill, now 60 years old and well past its sell-by date, should be replaced by a two-storey brick building, with ensuite bedrooms, meeting rooms and other facilities. A meeting with the architects was held on 13 May 2021, and plans will now be drawn up. Of course, all depends on planning permission and funding, so it is early days yet.

DARLINGTON CARMEL PRINTING PRESS

As many of you know, Sr Frances at Darlington Carmel had been very ill with bowel cancer. She was deeply touched that so many Seculars prayed for her and sent her cards. She died peacefully on 27th May and her funeral will take place on 15th June.

All the books printed by Darlington Press, which was run by Sr Frances, will be transferred to the Carmelite Book Service at Boars Hill. Sr Frances printed the new and inclusive ring-bound OCDS Constitutions, and also our *Ratio Institutionis*. These and some copies of *In the Footsteps of St Teresa* the popular book by John Bernard Keegan OCD, will now be available from the Carmelite Book Service.

The Secular Order is deeply grateful to Sr Frances for her prompt service, great sense of humour and willingness to take on anything we asked of her. We were hoping she could print a version of our *Constitutions* which included the full texts of the references, but sadly she was not able to follow this through. May she rest in peace.



**Rooted in Love: Louis and Zélie Martin:
Models of Married Love, Family Life, and
Everyday Holiness**

When Sts. Louis and Zélie Martin were canonized in 2015, they were the first spouses to be declared saints as a couple. Their lives are proof that God works through ordinary families to draw his future saints – like St. Thérèse of Lisieux, Louis and Zélie’s youngest daughter – toward holiness. Even before their first encounter in the small town of Alençon, France, God was preparing Louis and Zélie for marriage. Later, he continued to sustain them powerfully in their married love and family life.

Rooted in Love: Louis and Zélie Martin: Models of Married Love, Family Life, and Everyday Holiness explores the stages of Louis and Zélie’s marriage, from the joys of parenthood, through the sorrows

of bereavement and terminal illness, and ultimately to the challenges of single parenthood and dementia—experiences which many families face today. Louis and Zélie show us how, amid both the joys and the sorrows of family life, we can grow in our understanding of God’s love for us. From the initial urge to earn God’s favour with sacrifices and sufferings to a deeper understanding of God’s unconditional love even in the minutiae of daily life, God was Louis and Zélie’s guide on the path to holiness, a path that is open to all married couples.

This book is for both families and individuals – to offer them light and guidance to live their ordinary everyday life in closeness with God. No matter one’s vocation in life, Louis and Zélie exemplify how everyday experiences, such as being a working parent, running a business, or raising a difficult child, can be sacramental if one is open to a trusting relationship with God, even when he seems to be absent. Whatever the situation people find themselves in, this saintly couple shows how daily actions and choices—however small and ordinary—are highly valued by God and can lead to holiness, to a close relationship with him, and to forming children who are strong in faith, maturity and joy.

A NEW CARMELITE SAINT?

Thank you to Christian Kendall-Daw for drawing attention to the present initiative in France for the beatification of Père Jacques de Jesus. The following account and prayer is taken with permission from the cause's French website, which also includes further valuable information and photographs: www.jacquesdejesus.com

Born Lucien Bunel in Normandy in 1900, Père Jacques was inspired by his father's example of deep piety and social service to study for the Catholic priesthood. He was ordained in 1925 to serve the Diocese of Rouen. After his ordination, he quickly became a noted preacher, as well as being a successful teacher. He also maintained a deep interior life of prayer.

Bunel had considered becoming a Trappist monk before his ordination, and still sought some way of integrating service to others with an intense life of prayer. When he came to know the Discalced Carmelite nuns at Le Havre, he found a spiritual tradition which answered his quest. He entered the Order in Lille in 1930 and given the religious name by which he is now known. While he was preparing for his final profession of religious vows in 1934, the superiors of the Order suggested that he consider opening a school for boys. This was accomplished by him with the opening of the Petit Collège Sainte-Thérèse de l'Enfant-Jésus in Avon, Seine-et-Marne, that same year, of which he served as headmaster.

The friar served at the school until the outbreak of World War II, when he was conscripted for service in the French Army. When France surrendered to Germany the following June, he was released from military service. He returned to the school but became an active member of the French Resistance.

As headmaster, Father Jacques utilised the best tool available to him. He made the boys' school a refuge for young men seeking to avoid conscription for forced labor in Germany and for Jews. In January 1943, he enrolled three Jewish boys — Hans-Helmut Michel, Jacques-France Halpern and Maurice Schlosser — as students, under false names. He also hid a fourth Jewish boy, Maurice Bas, as a worker at the school; sheltered Schlosser's father with a local villager; and placed a noted Jewish botanist, Lucien Weil, on the faculty of the school.

The Gestapo discovered Father Jacques' activities and seized the friar and the three Jewish students on January 15, 1944. Weil, his mother, and sister were arrested at their home that same day. On February 3, 1944, German authorities deported the boys and the Weil family to Auschwitz, where they perished.

Père Jacques was imprisoned in several Nazi concentration camps, eventually arriving at the Mauthausen-Gusen concentration camp. There he found ways of raising the morale of his despairing compatriots. When all the priests at Gusen were moved to the Dachau concentration camp — reputedly less severe than Mauthausen — Jacques concealed his priestly identity and was the only priest for 20,000 prisoners at Gusen. He learned enough Polish to minister to the Polish prisoners, who called him *Père Zak*. Though he grew progressively weaker, he remained one of the Resistance leaders still active in the camp, gaining the respect of all its inmates.

He and the other inmates of the camps were liberated by American troops at Mauthausen in early May 1945. Suffering from tuberculosis and weighing only 75 pounds (34 kg), he died in a hospital in Linz in Upper Austria, several weeks later.

Prayer for Beatification

Father of Infinite Goodness,
You gave Père Jacques de Jésus
from childhood on the desire to love You
and to love all people
with an undivided heart.

You lavished him with talent
for the education of young people,
You chose him to become a priest,
You called him to enter the Order of Carmel.

Among the inhuman horrors of the concentration camps
You made him a fervent witness of faith and love,
until he made the perfect offering of his life.

Grant us the graces which we ask of You
by his intercession and,
if it is Your will,
glorify him in Your Church,
through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Saviour.

Reports of favours received can be sent to:
Vice-Postulation de la cause du Père Jacques
1, rue Père Jacques – 77210 AVON Cedex
FRANCE

NEW COURSES FROM THE CENTRE FOR APPLIED CARMELITE SPIRITUALITY

The Spiritual Direction Training Programme 2021

The innovative Spiritual Direction Training Programme (Carmelite Tradition) starting in September 2021 is a two-year programme of distance-learning with short residential schools. The course is offered by the Centre for Applied Carmelite Spirituality, Boars Hill, Oxford, England and will run in Oxford (UK) from 8th September and in California (USA) from 15th September.

This programme is suitable for people in pastoral ministries, those already trained in other traditions of spiritual direction who wish to enrich their practice, those wishing to prepare for accompanying others on their faith journey, and anyone wishing to deepen their knowledge of Christian Spirituality by drawing on the insights of Carmelite saints and mystics into human self-understanding, spiritual growth, and the life of prayer.

Admissions Deadline 1st August 2021 to begin September 2021

Email: ruth.preston@carmelite.org.uk

Living Prayer Course 2021

The new nine-month Prayer Course enables one to practise contemplative living according to one's own lifestyle. The course meets one weekend (Friday – Sunday) a month from September 2021 to May 2022, and is presented by the Living Prayer Course Team of the Institute for Applied Carmelite Spirituality and invited speakers.

Formation is offered in contemplative prayer, lifestyle and activity through:

- Deepening one's experience of Silent Prayer, Lectio Divina, Contemplative Liturgy, Psalmody, Prayer Journaling, the 'Gratitude Prayer' and Spiritual Reading.
- Nurturing the contemplative dimension of one's lifestyle by exercising discernment, simplicity, forgiveness, integrity and commitment.

Each weekend includes a review of the previous months' practice(s), soul-friending, Silent Prayer, talks, sharing and rest. Each month's theme is supported by a Spiritual Counsel and Prayer Practice(s).

Admissions Deadline 1st August 2021 to begin September 2021

Email: ruth.preston@carmelite.org.uk



SUPERIOR GENERAL OF DISCALCED CARMELITES
Corso d'Italia, 38
00198 Roma – Italia

*...Straining ahead for what is still to come, we are
racing for the future,
for the prize to which God calls us upwards
to receive in Christ Jesus
(Phil 3,13-14)*

My Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Secular Order,

We have come to the conclusion of the sexennium 2015-2021, six years marked by joys, tribulations and so much hope. Now, on the threshold of our General Chapter, I want to thank the Lord for everything He has allowed us to experience and achieve, but also to thank each of you as you supported us with your prayer and solidarity. At the same time, I would like this letter to express my prayerful and affectionate closeness to all those who are sick and who have lost family members and friends during the pandemic or are suffering from situations caused by it. May the Lord strengthen and support you with His grace and faithful love.

1. In my letters to you during the past six years I have sought to underline various aspects of your OCDS life that I consider essential. I recall some of them here to keep our memories alive and avoid a characteristic flaw of our times, which Pope Francis refers to as “a growing loss of the sense of history, which leads to even further breakup” (Cf. *Fratelli tutti* [=FT] 13-14).

The OCDS letter in 2016 presented a report of the suggestions sent from the various Provinces as a contribution to the reflections of the 2015 General Chapter. They referred to the possibility of establishing an international Council of OCDS, further development in formation in the Teresian Carmelite charisma and an improvement in communications between OCDS and the Friars and Nuns. These are still valid suggestions and continue as on-going projects for the future. In 2017, we reflected on the manifold possible expressions of the mission of secular Carmelites. Mission is an essential factor in the OCDS vocation and is first and foremost the right and duty of every baptised and confirmed Christian. We note the necessity of a greater and more active collaboration of our secular members with the Friars and Nuns of the Order, where this is possible. According to his/her personal vocation everyone is called to promote the spiritual life as friendship with the Lord and this is manifested in specific works for the good of others. Then in 2018, I dealt with some particular aspects

of the identity of OCDS members. I made specific reference to the necessity of prayer and silence, being aware of the Lord dwelling within us (cf. *The Way of Perfection* 28,8-10) and overcoming the temptation of being satisfied with a sterile superficiality, exposed to mundane conditioning. The following year I insisted on the role of local and provincial Councils. It is in these that the vitality of the community/province becomes evident, in regard to fraternal care, formation and missionary witness. Insofar as I have been able to ascertain during this period of the pandemic, many provincial Councils have organised congresses and meetings on formation and prayer on line. Despite their limitations, these have proved invaluable in supporting and accompanying the members of their communities.

Lastly, in 2020 I recalled the 50th anniversary of the Doctorate of our Holy Mother Teresa and the 20th anniversary of the II international Congress of OCDS, referring to certain achievements but also pointing out the challenges that had still to be confronted in various provinces. This was a year marked by the spread of the Covid 19 pandemic. The upsets we have had and are still going through have allowed us to experience our extreme impotence and fragility. Let us grasp it as a precious opportunity of learning to adopt an attitude of humble and trusting hope in God's infinite love, certain that "His mercy is everlasting" (Psalm 136).

2. With regard to the general situation of the Secular Order, I report the following statistics (updated to 6 May 2021). The total number of members with promises (temporary and definitive) is 28.824, present in 92 countries. There are 775 canonically erected communities with an additional 341 groups or communities of formation. 97 communities have been canonically erected during the past six years. These are very significant data, not only registering the numerical increase of OCDS, but even more importantly, underlining its vitality and effectiveness.

3. I also wish to refer to some worries and perplexities regarding certain attitudes that are surfacing here and there among some members of OCDS. Particularly I refer to the emergence of polarizations and radicalizations. It appears that some characteristics of today's world have begun to penetrate our ranks. Pope Francis called them particularisms, populisms and fundamentalisms. If these are fostered "ancient conflicts thought long buried break out anew... myopic, extremist, resentful and aggressive..." (FT 11). They are signs of selfish individualism, masked as zeal for some forms of apparent orthodoxy. In practice, these attitudes manifest themselves as support for polemical personalities in the Church, not fully in agreement with the Second Vatican Council, remaining doggedly attached to a Church that is definitively outdated. Unfortunately such attitudes and conduct create conflict and useless divisions and become a counter-witness to the expressed will of Jesus that His disciples be united in love and truth (Cf. John 15,17; 17,23). St. Teresa has already warned us of

the risks of “indiscreet zeal” (1 *Mansions* 2,17) that damage communities so much and dampen and diminish charity. Today we are called to build communities that demonstrate the Good Samaritan’s concern for the world, shown by gratuitousness (cf. FT 139), by tenderness (cf. FT 194) and by the art of encounter (cf. FT 215). True fraternal relationships bear the seal of respect and of behavioural traits such as “approaching, speaking, listening, looking at, coming to know and understand one another, and to find common ground: all these things are summed up in the one word ‘dialogue’ ” (FT 198).

Another problem can arise from the harmful use of social networks if they diffuse disrespectful and false news about the magisterium (Church and Bishops), or slander the good name of others. I ask myself if anyone behaving in this way can really be part of our Order and a true child of our Holy Mother Teresa. We must make use of these modern facilities with prudence and in an effort to build bridges. If there is need of discussion, let us do so in a search for truth, without ever being lacking in respect or love. We should be constantly mindful of St. Paul’s lesson: “Do all you can to preserve the unity of the Spirit by the peace that binds you together” (Ep 4,3).

A further worry would be the tendency in some circumscriptions to revert to clericalism or passive submission of lay persons in the ranks of OCDS. The relationship that we want to establish between OCDS and our Religious is one of collaboration and mutual respect of their legitimate autonomies. With regard to the Secular Order, you must remember that you have autonomy for your government, for your formation and for the organization of your activities, in accordance with the norms approved by the competent authority. We must not take backward steps in time. This would mean not being attentive to what the Spirit is asking of us today. We are called to journey together (*syn-odos*) as pilgrim people of God in history, recognizing that we complement each other in our vocation in the service of the same charism. Your lay vocation implies a dedication to building up the Kingdom in the midst of the world (cf. LG 31-32; ChL 15).

4. In conclusion, I would like to leave you with some thoughts for reflection on how you might persevere with dynamic fidelity on your journey in collaboration with the other branches of the Order and the Teresian Carmelite family. All of us, in fact, are called “to be mission” in a world that keeps changing and suffering, while garnering our strength from our relationship of friendship with the Lord. This will be possible if you confront your troubles and difficulties from within, finding light in that faith that never forgets God’s fidelity throughout the course of history. In this sense, “the believer is fundamentally one who remembers” (EG 13). We are immersed in a digital ambience where our inner selves are at constant risk of being inundated with waves of information and images that do not concern us and that only leave us with superficialities. Hence, our urgent need of rediscovering those spiritual dispositions outlined in our Rule. This is especially true in regard to meditation on the Word

of God instructing us to safeguard our memory and keep our hope alive, constantly renewing our covenant with God in Christ.

This was the example set by Sts. Teresa of Jesus and John of the Cross during their lifetimes: although immersed in the current problems of the Church and of the Order, their hearts were always fixed on their Trinitarian fatherland. Like them, in a humble and trusting relationship with the Lord, we must seek to find the inspiration and strength to work in the service of the Church and our Order. Again, like them, we must journey and work together. Teresa sought allies among religious and lay people who would assist her progress in making foundations according to the charism she had received. In this way, it is essential that every member of our Order feels co-responsible for that area of the Church to which he/she belongs, as well as building up their own Carmelite community with active and mature involvement.

All this calls for an openness to and docile acceptance of formation. We must be trained especially with a view to achieving a theological perspective on life, in a concrete faith that is open to hope and to “expressing itself in love” (Gal 5,6), a faith like that of Mary and Joseph, centred on the Word of God becoming incarnate in our daily necessities. An integral part of such formation is an assimilation of the writings of our Saints from the point of view of a lay vocation.

May the light shining from the Risen Crucified illumine your lives and hearts so that you can live in its fullness your vocation and your mission in the Church and world of today. May you be sustained especially by the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church and by St. Joseph her spouse, Patron of the whole Church and the “most generous Protector” of our Order.

May the Lord bless and protect your families and your communities!

Fraternally in Carmel,



Fr. Saverio Cannistrà
Fr. Saverio Cannistrà, OCD
Superior General

Rome, May 24, 2021 - Feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church