



GUIDELINES FOR DISCERNMENT IN THE CARMELITE THIRD ORDER (SECULAR)



**for candidates, communities and committed Carmelites
in the British Province
2008**

Cover images

Details from the mosaics depicting the rosary's *Mysteries of Light* on the front of the Rosary Basilica in Lourdes. They were created in a Coptic style by Father Marko Ivan Rupnik to celebrate the Jubilee of the 150th anniversary of the apparitions of Our Lady to Saint Bernadette. They were also placed in homage to Pope John Paul II who popularised the *Mysteries of Light*, first devised in the twentieth century by Carmelite Tertiary Saint George Preca.

Front cover: Mary and Jesus present at the Wedding at Cana
(second Mystery of Light).

Back cover: Elijah present at Christ's Transfiguration
(fourth Mystery of Light).

My brothers and sisters, I implore you by God's mercy to offer your very selves to God: a living sacrifice, dedicated and fit for God's acceptance, the worship offered by mind and heart. Adapt yourselves no longer to the pattern of this present world, but let your minds be remade and your whole nature thus transformed. Then you will be able to discern the will of God, and to know what is good, acceptable, and perfect.

Romans 12:1-2

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(SECULAR)
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Discerning a vocation to Carmel in the Third Order is a role for the individual candidate in partnership with the Carmelite community. The *Rule of Saint Albert* highlights the importance of the community in discerning how the Carmelite way of life may be followed appropriate to each person. Before admitting someone to the Third Order Secular – or for someone to make deepening levels of commitment within it – it is important for the community, especially the council, to reflect with the candidate and discern the will of God. The two central questions for the candidate to ponder are:

What do I wish to do? What is God's will for me?

These guidelines are intended particularly for the period before First and Final Profession of Promises, but can also be helpful for those considering Reception, the Profession of Vows, or committed Carmelites who are reflecting on their vocation as part of ongoing formation. These guidelines should be read in conjunction with the *Rule for the Third Order of Carmel* (RTOC, 2003) and the *Statutes of the British Province* which set out the procedure and timetable for a candidate to apply for different stages of membership of the Third Order. It may be helpful for the council to discuss some of these questions with the candidate on a number of occasions, usually before and after any application for admission is made, and perhaps both in the community meeting place and at the candidate's home. The candidate or community may wish to discuss matters further with the Provincial Delegate or other experienced Carmelites.

Discernment is an ongoing process and cannot be rushed, though at the same time it should not be protracted unnecessarily. It may be useful for the candidate or community to specify a period for reflection (perhaps six months). The questions for reflection below are intended to help individuals and communities to reach a considered and prayerful opinion about a candidate's possible vocation; they are not meant to be a checklist of right or wrong answers since every case is unique. Candidates should not feel dismayed if they feel they do not live up to the high ideals of Carmelite life; the important thing is a willingness to undertake the journey trusting in God. There is also no shame in discerning a journey away from Carmel if that is

where God is calling. The important thing is to give space to God (*vacare Deo*).

The Personal Journey

- What has been the candidate's spiritual journey thus far? What have been the key moments in their relationship with God?
- When did the candidate first become interested in Carmelite spirituality? What led him or her to approach Lay Carmel? What has happened since?
- Has the candidate's experience of Carmel been a good and enjoyable one? Has it been life-giving or a burden? Has the candidate come closer to God?

Maturity and Growth

- Is the candidate at least 18 years old and suitably mature, psychologically and spiritually? This is a pre-requisite for discerning any vocation.
- You do not need to be a saint to enter the Third Order, but has the candidate shown an ability to grow through experiences of sin and suffering?
- Is the candidate open to change in his or her life (a common feature in mendicant spirituality)?
- Is the candidate tolerant of other people and ideas? Do they have an open mind and open heart?

- Does the candidate feel comfortable with those of other denominations, other faiths, and other ways of life? Is he/she prejudiced?
- Does the candidate have a sense of humour? Do they seem to be a well-rounded person? Is religion their only interest?
- Is the candidate aware of his or her own faults, without being overly burdened by them?
- Does the candidate appreciate that Carmel will not necessarily always provide them with feelings of happiness and the answer to all their questions?
- Does the candidate regard him/herself as self-reliant, or are they willing to accept the help of others, including the grace of God?
- Saint Teresa stressed the importance of self-knowledge; does the candidate know themselves?

Formation and Understanding

- Has the candidate shown a grasp of the Carmelite charism: to be a contemplative in a praying community at the service of all God's people?
- Has the candidate completed the initial formation programme approved by the Province?

- Have the Leader and council, particularly the Formator, been involved in discerning the candidate's suitability for profession?
- Is the candidate suitably formed in the basics of Christian belief, as well as the tradition of Carmel? Do they continue to deepen their knowledge by reading the official documents of the Church, including those of the Second Vatican Council?
- Has the candidate shown the intellectual ability necessary to engage sufficiently with Carmel's heritage and mission? Would the candidate benefit from further academic study of Carmel as well as ongoing formation?
- Does the candidate have a good understanding of the *Rule of Saint Albert*, the *Rule for the Third Order of Carmel* (RTOC), and the *Statutes of the British Province*?
- Does the candidate regard the Third Order as just another pious club or society to belong to?
- Is the candidate overly preoccupied with the supernatural phenomena of Christianity? Do they adhere to any devotions or teachings that could be seen as contradicting the simple message of Carmel?
- Is the candidate familiar with the Divine Office, Carmelite calendar, and liturgical traditions of the Province and local community?
- If not a priest or deacon, is the candidate secure in his/her vocation as a lay person? Do they understand the universal call to holiness, and their baptismal calling? By profession are they seeking to become a pseudo-religious, or do they understand the secular vocation in Carmel?

- Does the candidate know how to love God's world, without becoming absorbed by it?

Prayer Life

- Has the candidate brought to God in prayer the question of his or her vocation?
- Within the wider Church community, has the candidate nurtured a personal relationship with Jesus Christ? Does he or she seek to live 'in allegiance' to him (*Rule* Chapter 2)?
- Has the candidate shown a commitment to listening to the Word of God, especially in the Divine Office, *Lectio Divina*, and regular participation at the Eucharist? Do they somehow engage with the Bible on a daily basis?
- How does the candidate feel about relating to the saints of Carmel, especially Mary and Elijah? Do they know about the pre-Teresian saints of the Order, as well as Carmel's Doctors of the Church?
- Is there room for God to act in the candidate's doubts and darker periods?
- Is the candidate comfortable with silence?
- Does the candidate prefer a particular method of prayer? Are they familiar with both vocal and meditative prayer?

Vocation and Accompaniment

- Has the candidate seriously sought to hear and allow the will of God in their life? Do they possess a spirit of openness to God and God's plans (*vacare Deo*)?
- Is the candidate seeking to enter the Third Order of his/her own free will?
- Has the candidate discerned a vocation to the Third Order with a full awareness of other vocations within the Carmelite Family, including the religious life, the Brown Scapular Confraternity, and the Discalced Secular Order? Are they certain they are called to Carmel and not another Order such as the Dominicans or Benedictines?
- Has the candidate received any advice from a friend, spiritual director, accompanier, or confessor?
- Has a reference been sought from a priest or religious who knows the candidate (cf. *Statutes*).
- Has the community been an inspiration or a stumbling block for the candidate?
- Has the community prayed with the candidate about their decision to apply for membership of the Third Order? Has anyone been appointed as a companion on the journey of discernment?
- Has the candidate taken part in any retreats or days of recollection, particularly before applying to make profession?
- Has the candidate got any advice for the community on improving the formation programme?

- Does the candidate appreciate that reception or first/final profession is not automatic nor obligatory?
- Is now the right time to take the next step on the Carmelite journey? Does the candidate need more time for reflection, or conversely encouragement to make a decision about his or her vocation?
- If the candidate is not Roman Catholic, as most are, does he/she and the community understand the ecumenical implications of Carmelite profession? Has the necessary dispensation been sought (cf. *Statutes*)?

Community living and the Carmelite Family

- Has the candidate been an active member of the local Carmelite community, or if a distance-enquirer been in regular contact with the Third Order, for a period of at least two years since Reception?
- Does the candidate feel ‘at home’ in Carmel? Does he or she ‘resonate’ with other Carmelites? Does the community recognise him or her as part of the family? Does the candidate realise the difference between ‘liking’ someone and recognising them as a Carmelite or not?
- Has the community given the council a non-binding indicative vote of approval for the candidate’s application (cf. *Statutes*)?
- Is the candidate involved in his/her local worshipping community? Are they willing to live the Carmelite vocation within their own parish and diocesan context?
- Is the Carmelite community a suitable place to welcome a new vocation? Are the members open to new people and new ideas? Have they the resources necessary to support a newly professed Carmelite?

- Has the candidate contributed to the resources of the community, financial or otherwise?
- Is the candidate willing to share the more mundane tasks at a community meeting, such as setting up, preparing refreshments, and cleaning?
- Does the candidate contribute to the social life of the community, in and out of the meetings? Have they shown concern for those who are ill or at a distance from the community?
- Has the candidate been aware of (and ideally involved in) the wider life of the Carmelite Family at regional, provincial, and international levels? Are they regular readers of *Assumpta*, *CITOC*, *Carmel in the World*, etc.?
- How does the candidate deal with conflict or contradiction in the community? Are they open to being corrected? Can they correct others with charity? Are they able to speak openly and freely without fear?
- How does the candidate balance the tension between community living and the solitary aspect of the Carmelite vocation? Where do they make their 'cell'?

Holistic living

- Has the candidate embraced Carmel in a holistic way and integrated its values into her/his life, or is it 'something that they do on a Saturday morning once a month'?
- Is the candidate in good physical and mental health? This is not necessarily a requirement for membership, but if they not in good health

how will this have a bearing on their life in Carmel and commitment to service? Can the community support them appropriately?

- Without prying into the private life of the candidate, has he or she integrated the Carmelite way of life into his/her own home life and relationships?
- Does the candidate have the consent of their spouse or partner to enter the Third Order (this is not required but strongly encouraged)? How will Carmelite life impact on their family and friends?
- Is the candidate's faith well integrated into the other aspects of his or her life? Are they overly obsessive, scrupulous, or lax with regard to their faith?
- Is the candidate exaggerated in his or her piety? Do they have a 'holier than thou' attitude?
- Would the candidate benefit from any form of personal development or counselling?
- Does the candidate appreciate that Carmel is more something one is rather than something one does?

Service and Mission

- Does the candidate appreciate that Carmel exists as a gift from God for the benefit of the Church and the World, not simply for his or her own personal sanctification?
- Has the candidate shown evidence of being of service to others, both within and beyond the Carmelite community?

- Is the candidate aware of Carmel's prophetic mission and the Order's commitment to upholding justice, peace and the integrity of creation?
- How might the candidate undertake the task of evangelisation and sharing the Carmelite charism and Christian Gospel with other people?
- Has the candidate been involved in any ecumenical or interfaith outreach? Are they willing to engage respectfully with people different from them?
- Without promising poverty, is the candidate willing to embrace the spirit of poverty and solidarity with the poor?

Commitment and the Ongoing Journey

- Does the candidate understand the rights and responsibilities of membership of the Third Order, and the level of serious commitment required?
- Is the candidate willing to give Carmel his/her highest level of priority, finding its appropriate place alongside other commitments (such as family, work, etc.)? Do other priorities mean that now is not the right time to deepen his/her commitment?
- Does the candidate understand the nature of the promises made at profession, particularly the promise of obedience to the Prior General?
- Does the candidate have a proper respect for those in authority, including their community leaders, the Provincial Delegate, and the Prior Provincial?

- Does the candidate try to emulate Mary's purity of heart (*puritas cordis*)? Are they willing to commit to chastity, according to their state in life? (Note: this is not the same as celibacy).
- Is the candidate aware of the requirement for ongoing formation after both first and final profession? What plans are in place for this?
- Is the candidate open to the possibility of being asked to take on responsibilities within the community?
- Do the candidate or the community have any further questions they would like to ask each other?

Issued by the Provincial Delegate to the Third Order,
with the approval of the Prior Provincial,
Solemnity of Saint Joseph, March 2008.

Laus Deo semper et Mariae



Printed by Saint Albert's Press.