

Carmelite Third Order (Secular) British Province

INFORMATION FOR ENQUIRERS



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How do I join the Third Order?

The first step is to make contact with the nearest community, which might be a Third Order Chapter or a Carmelite Spirituality Group, and to go along to one of their meetings. There are approximately twenty such communities of Tertiaries or 'Lay Carmelites' in Britain. Information on their location and meeting times is available on the Carmelite website – www.carmelite.org – or can be obtained by contacting the National Secretary, whose details are printed on the back of this leaflet. Those who cannot attend meetings can still make contact with the Third Order in other ways (see the section below).

What are Carmelite Third Order meetings like?

They are usually held monthly and are made up of the following elements: (1) input and discussion on a Carmelite theme; (2) prayer time, including *Lectio Divina* Bible meditation; and (3) social time. The actual time spent on these three main elements might vary slightly from group to group.

What is the difference between a Third Order Chapter and a Carmelite Spirituality Group?

Until recently, all Third Order groups were called 'Chapters' which is a traditional word describing a religious meeting. However the term 'Lay Carmelite Communities' is now favoured as it is a more accurate description of what we desire to be! These groups have certain privileges and responsibilities; they are bound to have elections, they have the power to receive new members into the Third Order, and preside over their formation and profession.

Carmelite Spirituality Groups have less formal origins, although they have been set up and approved by the Carmelite Order. They have developed in answer to the need that many people feel to explore the Carmelite way and its spirituality without *necessarily* having to become members of the Third Order to do so. Typically, a CSG might contain a core group of Third Order members plus other lay people and Christians of different denominations.

What happens next after I have made contact with a group, and if I decide I want to join the Third Order?

Because the Third Order is an integral part of the Carmelite Order, and not a prayer group, a sodality or association, the process of becoming a member involves a serious journey of discernment and formation spread over a number of years. The first step is to attend a few meetings in order to get a feel for the community and to learn a little about Carmel as a way of life. If, after attending a minimum of four meetings, you feel you may have a calling to the Carmelite way, you can ask to be received into the Order, and then – if the local community

accepts your request – you would begin a period of at least two years’ initial formation, in which you learn about Carmelite tradition and spirituality, and during which time you begin to live as a lay Carmelite.

If, after initial formation, you and the person(s) responsible for accompanying you in your formation discern that this is your vocation, you may apply to the community Council to make your first temporary profession. If this is accepted, you will continue in ongoing formation, living as fully as possible the life of the community and then – if you and the community discern it – permanent profession would follow three years later. Although this may seem like a long drawn-out process, from the moment of your reception you are part of the Carmelite Family, and your journey towards profession, and beyond, is very much part of the whole story. Formation as a Carmelite is an ongoing, life-long process.

What if I am not able to get to meetings?

Some people live too far away from a community, or else they might be unwell, or for some reason unable to travel. Although the sense of living as part of a community is an essential aspect of the Carmelite vocation, there is provision for such ‘distance member’ cases. Initially you would make contact with the National Secretary or Provincial Delegate. After assessing your personal situation they would come to a decision with you about the best way to proceed. Each case is dealt with on an individual basis, but most likely you would be ‘linked’ with your nearest group or an individual experienced in Carmelite living, and go on to complete your formation as much as possible by phone, email or post. Although you may not be able to attend regular community meetings, you might be encouraged to make occasional contact by attending Third Order retreats and other gatherings.

Who can become a member of the Third Order?

Any Catholic lay person or member of the diocesan clergy, over the age of 18, who discerns with the Order that the Holy Spirit is calling them to this.

Do I have to be a Roman Catholic to be a member of the Third Order?

You do not have to be a Roman Catholic to have an interest in Carmelite Spirituality and to feel inspired to live by it. Christians of other denominations are very welcome to attend community meetings and if they discern a calling to live the Carmelite way in the spirit of the *Rule of Saint Albert*, they can apply to the Provincial Delegate to make a formal commitment to live out this calling. In recent years several Christians of other denominations have felt called by God to

Lay Carmel, and we are developing ways of welcoming them in an appropriate way.

How do I live as a member of the Third Order? What should I be doing?

Living as a Carmelite is perhaps more a case of ‘being’ rather than ‘doing’. Lay Carmelites immerse themselves in the spiritual tradition of the Carmelite Family, which is focused on living a life of ‘allegiance to Jesus Christ’, as our 800 year-old *Rule of Saint Albert* puts it. Inspiration is drawn from Mary, our patron and sister, the prophet Elijah, and the *Rule of Saint Albert*.

With this in mind, we try to take part in the celebration of the Eucharist on a daily basis if this is possible. If able to, we join in the Prayer of the Church by praying at least Morning and Evening Prayer from the Divine Office. Like Mary we ‘ponder the word of the Lord’ which leads us to the practice of *Lectio Divina* Bible meditation, and with Elijah we learn to pray in silence.

As Carmelites we express our allegiance to Jesus through the three-fold elements of prayer, community and service (known as the ‘charism’ of the Carmelite Order). These three elements help us be disposed to God’s gift of contemplation, learning to see as God sees and to love as God loves. Our prayer empowers us to love our neighbours and serve them, wherever we might find them, and Carmelites express this in some form of apostolate, according to their means, time and talents. We also have a duty to support the Order with our financial contributions.

However, it is important to remember that committing ourselves to God and God’s people as Lay Carmelites does not remove our obligations to our family and friends, our work, and our life within the parish or church community. As Lay Carmelites we strive to live the Evangelical Counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience, according to our situation in life.

What is the difference between the Ancient (O.Carm.) and Discalced (O.C.D.) Observances of the Carmelite Family?

(This information is produced by the British Province of the Ancient Observance of the Carmelite Order sometimes abbreviated as “O.Carm.”). The Carmelite Family developed around the year 1200 from laymen who settled as hermits on Mount Carmel at the time of the Third Crusade. They received a rule of life from St. Albert, the Latin Patriarch (Roman Catholic Bishop) of Jerusalem. In the middle of the thirteenth century the conflicts in the Holy Land forced them to seek a new life in Europe. They settled in England, and other places, becoming part of the mendicant movement of friars (begging brothers). Lay people played

an important part in the life of the Order as it grew in Europe, and communities of nuns gradually developed.

Over time, there were various reform movements which sought to maintain the focus on the Carmelite ideal. As part of the Counter-Reformation in 16th-century Spain, St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross began a renewal of the Order known as the Discalced Reform. After their death some of their followers broke away from the 'Ancient' Observance, leading to a distinct 'Discalced' Carmelite Order. Today we speak of one Carmelite charism being lived by two orders, and we are all part of the one 'Carmelite Family'. The two branches are both present in Britain and share many initiatives. The Carmelite Third Order (T.O.C.) and the Discalced Carmelite Secular Order (O.C.D.S.) increasingly work together.

You speak a lot about 'formation'; what is it?

'Formation' is not a new word, nor a uniquely Carmelite one. The Second Vatican Council had a great deal to say about the importance of a well-formed laity, and every religious order or congregation has always emphasised the importance of 'forming' its novices.

Formation does *not* mean 'training' or even 'teaching', but is more to do with an organic and holistic process of conversion and spiritual growth which involves a person at every level, including the intellectual, moral, emotional and social, throughout a whole lifetime. Carmelite formation is Christian formation with a particularly Carmelite flavour! Obviously, however, at a fairly basic level, someone who knows little about the Carmelites will *want* to learn as much as possible. Formation can be helped by formal study for those who wish, as well as engaging in a variety of Carmelite-related activities. All members of the Third Order in Britain are guided through a programme of initial formation, and are expected to engage in ongoing formation as a life-long process of transformation.

So what will my Carmelite formation entail?

We would identify some 'key elements' of formation in our Carmelite tradition, which should always be part of our understanding of what it means to be a Carmelite. These include a recognition that *Jesus* is the centre of our love, the ground of our being, and the focus of our allegiance, especially as we encounter him in his *humanity*. *Mary* and *Elijah* are the pre-eminent patrons and models of Carmelite life, and the other *saints of Carmel* accompany us as we walk in the footsteps of Christ. Carmelites are solitaries who come together to form *community*, and we offer ourselves in the *service* of others. Carmelites seek to live in the presence of God in *prayer*, and we are ever aware that our lives are a *journey* towards God. We make *space for God* in our lives and seek to be people

of *pure hearts*. All these elements are found repeatedly in Carmelite writings and form part of our understanding of our identity. All these elements are held together in God's gift of *contemplation*, through which we are transformed to love as God loves.

On a practical level, formation in the Third Order entails individual reflection and group discussion about the key elements of the Carmelite tradition. As well as following the initial formation programme of the British Province, Tertiaries can expect to study the *Rule of Saint Albert* and the *Constitutions* of the Third Order. Participation in other events and programmes can help the formation process, such as the Carmelite Institute of Britain & Ireland (CIBI) which offers distance-learning courses in Carmel's spiritual tradition, the Carmelite Forum, retreats, national and regional gatherings and study days.

How do members of the Third Order in Britain keep in touch?

Communication between members of the Order is vital, so that we can support each other and build up the Carmelite Family. In addition to attending community meetings, the primary way Lay Carmelites keep in touch with each other is through *Assumpta*, a magazine produced 10 times a year featuring articles about Carmelite spirituality and news. Regional and national gatherings help to build up the sense of family, as do retreats, days of recollection and 'Days for the Carmelite Family'. Many of these events are listed in *Assumpta* and on the website of the British Province: www.carmelite.org.

How is the Third Order structured? What is the relationship between the Third Order and the rest of the Carmelite Order?

Although the least well known, the Third Order is in fact the biggest branch of the Carmelite Family. We are in close contact with the friars, enclosed nuns and apostolic sisters of the Order, and collaborate with them in many forms of ministry, but have autonomy to administer our own affairs. In Britain we come under the oversight of the Prior Provincial, who maintains contact with the Third Order via a Provincial Delegate, who visits and supports the communities. The Provincial Delegate has oversight of the Third Order, and to help its development he or she meets regularly with a National Consultative Body (NCB), which consists of the National Secretary for the Third Order (who oversees the administration of Lay Carmel), and other appointed members. At an international level the Order has a General Commission for Lay Carmel.

Does it cost anything to join the Third Order?

No charge is levied for membership of the Carmelite Order, and no one will be turned away from the Third Order because they cannot contribute financially to

its running. For many years the friars have underwritten the costs of the Third Order, but we believe it is right that this should be the responsibility of Tertiaries themselves. Therefore an annual contribution is now asked of all members of the Third Order. At the present time (2009) this is set at £25.00 a year, and includes the cost of receiving *Assumpta*. If members cannot afford to pay the contribution they are asked to contact the National Secretary; those who can afford more are invited to be generous and help defray the costs for other Lay Carmelites.

If I join the Third Order, can I remain a member of other church groups?

Joining the Third Order does not normally require anyone to cease belonging to another group within their parish or the wider Church. Indeed, membership of the Third Order should deepen one's commitment to the life of the Church. Having said that, membership of the Third Order should be seen as a very serious undertaking, and one which demands a greater degree of commitment and loyalty. As stated above, Carmel is a way of life, not simply a prayer group or sodality, and participation in the life of the Order – particularly community and regional gatherings – should be a priority. The practice in the British Province is that Lay Carmelites should not belong to any other tertiary order.

Are there other ways of belonging to the Carmelite Family as a lay person?

Indeed there are. The Carmelite Family is very diverse, and offers a sense of belonging to a wide variety of people. The most general form of belonging is to be enrolled in the Brown Scapular Confraternity; members of the Confraternity have a loose affiliation with the Carmelite Family, and have no obligations other than the usual devotions associated with the Scapular. Those who want to make a more serious commitment to the Carmelite way of life may be called to the Third Order. However, there are other branches of 'Lay Carmel' which might be their particular vocation. For example, single women may feel called to join the Carmelite Secular Institute known as 'The Leaven' (details on www.carmelite.org). Others may feel attracted to the Discalced Carmelite Secular Order (OCDS), or to other branches of the Carmelite Family. The important thing is to discern God's will.

Further information and contact details

British Province website: www.carmelite.org

The Provincial Delegate for the Third Order – Mr. John Berry
70 Unett Street, Hockley, Birmingham, B19 3BL
Tel: (07910) 434677 E-mail: delegate@laycarmel.org

The National Secretary to the Third Order – Mrs. Veronica Errington
Brook Cottage, 30 New Street, Mawdesley, Lancashire, L40 2QP
Tel: (01704) 821642 E-mail: natsec@laycarmel.org

Saint Albert's Press (Carmelite books and media)
Carmelite Friars, 34 Tanners Street, Faversham, Kent, ME13 7JN
Tel: 01795 537038 E-mail: saintalbertspress@carmelites.org.uk

Aylesford Priory (Carmelite retreat & pilgrimage centre)
The Friars, Aylesford, Kent, ME20 7BX
Tel: 01622 717272 E-mail: reception@thefriars.org.uk

Spirit & Regulation of the Carmelite Third Order

The Rule of Saint Albert (c.1205-1214)
www.ocarm.org/eng/

The Rule (Constitutions) for the Third Order of Carmel (2003)
www.ocarm.org/eng/articles/rtoc-eng.htm

