

A RENEWED VISION FOR THE CARMELITE THIRD ORDER (SECULAR) IN BRITAIN

Carmelite communities are authentic schools of prayer; in these schools hearts fall in love.
(Pope Benedict XVI, September 2007)

Since our National Gathering in 2002 much has been achieved in the Third Order. With the help of the Holy Spirit there is still much more to strive for, and we are zealous in our desire to continue the journey. Our communities have developed in breadth and depth and are now more firmly rooted in prayer, community, the Bible and the *Rule of Saint Albert*. We want to grow especially in the area of service 'which is an integral part of the charism given to the Order by God' (*RTOC* 46).

Therefore, during the next five years, we strive to grow in the following areas...

Formation

The Third Order and the Carmelite charism are not just for ourselves and our personal holiness. We are – through being 'love in the heart of the Church' – here for the world which God loves so much (cf. *RTOC* 28). Like a heart supplying life to the whole body, Carmelites are also called to be on the extremities, the fringes of Church and Society. This is our prophetic calling, and aids our growth since we are formed by encountering Christ in the little ones and the marginalised. Our service is part of our calling as individuals, but also as communities. We seek to be bold and zealous like Elijah, taking risks. Through organic and natural growth, we will seek to provide better help for enquirers and a fuller understanding of the faith for ourselves. We will be discerning of vocations, nurturing a love of silence and of Scripture, especially through *Lectio Divina*. We want to share with people an authentic experience of God. We will seek a deeper relationship with God, the friend who loves us, through prayer alone and with others. We will continue to use the National Formation Programme as part of initial formation, supported by guidelines for formators. We commit to ongoing formation which is lifelong, concerned with the totality of our lives, and a process of transformation and change. Through holistic formation we seek to become more mature, responsible, adult, Catholic-Christian Carmelites, that is, more fully human. We will draw on resources to help us better understand our charism, such as the riches of the *Rule of Saint Albert*. The *Rule for the Third Order of Carmel* is a set of constitutions which interpret Albert's *Rule* for our particular way of life, concerned as it is with 'temporal activities and material work' (*RTOC* 49).

Organisation

Though Carmel is one of the least regimented orders, organisation is key to helping our communities be centres of Carmelite spirituality. We value our Provincial Delegate and his Consultative Body, and will support them. We recognise the need to develop our identity as Third Order Carmelites and share it with others, through recruiting new tertiaries and sharing our hopes and dreams with other branches of the Carmelite Family. We will nurture a culture of self-responsibility and self-resourcing (including the raising of finances through an annual contribution, the continued development of skills, and regular gatherings of our Family). We seek to be creative and imaginative, sharing our gifts with each other. We wish to become more inclusive, sharing life's journey with people of all walks of life. Our organisation must help us live the Carmelite charism; supporting structures must be ordered towards our mission to the world by building God's Kingdom. We need to remember the elderly, housebound, sick, and our 'distance' members. We seek to include those with (sometimes unseen) disabilities or specific needs, embracing the gifts they can bring to Carmel. The Order is international as well as local, regional and provincial; globalisation offers opportunities as well as challenges. We are committed to ecumenism, embracing those from other denominations who find value in Carmelite spirituality. We will also seek to encounter those of other faiths and none, sharing the light of peace. The growth of Carmelite Spirituality Groups is a gift from God that we welcome with wonder and gratitude; under the oversight of the Provincial Delegate we give them space and encouragement to grow – like seedlings in the garden of Carmel.

Communication

God wishes us to communicate. We seek to deepen the quality and effectiveness of communication between ourselves, as individuals, communities, and as a Province. Communication is a means of reaching out to the world; we must learn to use a language so that all can appreciate our rich symbolism (such as the Order's crest). We will communicate with the broader Carmelite Family, both the Secretariat for Lay Carmel in Rome, and the wider world. The deepest form of communication is dialogue; listening as well as speaking. As Carmelites we turn to Mary, *Theotokos of Carmel*, as our model of love and respect; at her visitation to Elizabeth, the Holy Spirit was present in the encounter. Our methods of communication will embrace new technologies.

Conclusion

Carmel has existed for 800 years because God has a purpose for our Order if we leave space for God. We are the largest expression of Carmel in this land and we are not only a major part of its future but also its present. Despite our fears and the troubles we face (cf. *Luke 21:5-19*) we will endure and not be deterred from our allegiance to Jesus Christ. Our vision presents us with an enormous task, but as the Apostle Paul – whom Saint Albert recommends as our teacher – states, God working in us 'is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine' (*Ephesians 3:20*).

Compiled by the delegates at the Fourth National Gathering of the Carmelite Third Order
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