



CASA GENERALIZIA CARMELITANI SCALZI
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Rome, March 27, 2016

**Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Secular Carmel,
OCD Provincials,
Provincial Delegates, and
OCDS Assistants**

The peace and joy of the Risen Christ be with you!

I greet you with fraternal affection on this Easter Day, the day of victory of the love of God the Father, "who in his great mercy gave us a new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pt 1,3).

As you know, our General Chapter was held in Ávila in May of last year. The OCDS participated through representatives and with your answers to the questionnaire sent by the General Secretary of the Secular Order in September 2014. First of all, I want to thank you for your expressions of gratitude and prayers, as well as for suggestions addressed to the Chapter. In this letter, I would like to address some of the issues raised in your replies and present some suggestions, since during the Chapter we did not have time to discuss them and provide feedback.

1. First, with regard to the establishment of an *International Council of the Secular Order*, the answers we received varied; there were those who were enthusiastic about the idea and those who were opposed. There was certainly no clear majority consensus in favor of the rapid establishment of the Council. The many doubts about the usefulness or appropriateness of this Council, its operation, as well as communication difficulties due to the various languages and the resulting financial costs, invite deeper reflection on this.

In this case, we think it is better to strengthen the role of provincial councils in the various jurisdictions. According to the *OCDS Constitutions* (numbers 57-58) and the statutes of each province, they are charged with the task of organizing formation courses and motivational activities for living out and stimulating the apostolic endeavors of the Communities in dialogue and collaboration with religious. I encourage you to continue on this path, even surpassing the boundaries of individual circumscriptions, to be open to interprovincial and national collaboration.

2. Another issue that I consider important is *formation*. I would first call on our religious to devote themselves with ever greater commitment to the formation of our laity, so that they grow in their own lay identity and witness the spirituality of the Order in their daily life. This task, in addition to the accompaniment of individuals and communities, can also be done by taking advantage of the possibilities offered by new communications media.

A second aspect of formation, in my opinion the most important, is the one that directly involves each community, in particular the community council. Its main task is to promote the "formation and Christian and Carmelite maturing of the members of the community," preparing "the person to live the charism and spirituality of Carmel in its following of Christ, and in service to its mission" (*OCDS Constitutions* numbers 46 and 32). Regarding this, the formation programs of each province should be updated constantly according to a pedagogy adapted to our times and to young people, to facilitate understanding of the charism according to today's mentality, and to clarify the identity of the member of the Secular Order. In addition, the promotion of vocations, their discernment, welcome, and support are crucial to the survival of the Community itself. All these activities will be effective only if coupled with the good example of fraternal life of the communities in the Teresian style. This is the fertile ground that allows one to live and to "infect" others with the life that comes from being branches joined to the one vine that is Christ. Only then is it possible to overcome the temptations of division and face the many challenges that the world presents to us.

Finally, a third thought on formation is in the missionary dimension: every vocation in the Church is called to mission. For this reason, today more than ever, we need solid formation. Bearing witness to the values of the Gospel in the midst of a pluralistic world that is sometimes hostile and in many places anti-Christian, demands courage to face martyrdom and fortitude that come only from the Spirit promised by Jesus (cf. *Lk* 12:11 to 12), as well as a life of prayer and friendship with Him. This vital adherence to Christ is essential to bring the saving message of the Gospel right to the place of one's sanctification, and so to meet the various needs of society and of the Church in every country according to our charism. We received a treasure and we have to share it, to reach out to people to tell them that God wants to embark on a journey of friendship with every human being, whom He loves infinitely, in prayer. From this central nucleus of our charism, we are called to collaborate actively with the mission of the Order.

On the other hand, the Church itself gives us up-to-date and reliable information on evangelization in its documents, in particular in one of the newer ones, *Evangelii Gaudium*. Evangelization is rooted in friendship with the Lord Jesus, in the loving contemplation of Him which arises from the Gospel (cf. *EG* 264). Thanks to this relationship of friendship, we can find Him present in the context of our daily lives, as well as in the people we meet. The Virgin Mary is the model of this attitude, she who pondered in her heart the events of history.

To be good disciples-missionaries, we truly need good doctrinal and Carmelite formation. In this regard, I thank the provinces and communities that help others by sending books or formation materials. On the other hand, I recall some interesting initiatives on the part of some provinces involving laity, religious, and specialists in offering periodic courses for this purpose. As you know, the Order has international formation centers in Rome and Ávila. We also plan to continue organizing scriptural-Carmelite formation during this upcoming six-year period in the Holy Land, in different languages. These venues are open to all and, although they require an effort as far as availability of time and financial resources, they are certainly very important.

3. You have also expressed a desire for more *communication among the friars, nuns, and laity*. In this regard, one of the initiatives undertaken by the Order's Generalate are the letters from the Definitory, which are sent after each session to the Provincial Fathers to distribute to the nuns and laity. We are in the process of redesigning the official web page of the Order (<http://www.carmelitasdescalzos.com>).

We also have profiles on Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/Curia-Generalizia-Carmelitani-Scalzi-658766940887784/?ref=aymt_homepage_panel) and Twitter (@ocdcuria) for disseminating information about everyday events. These are the official sites of the OCD Generalate in Rome.

For wider collaboration in the sharing of information, we ask that you send *news of a provincial nature* (congresses, conferences, etc.) via email to the Secretariat for Information: ocdinform@gmail.com. With regard to the individual provinces and nuns' monasteries, this is done according to the possibilities and means available. It is an important and fruitful service which requires the cooperation of everyone in that province.

4. Before concluding, I want to *thank you* and make *an appeal to provincial chapters of the friars* to be held in the first half of 2017. *Thank you* for the many beautiful testimonies of apostolate and solidarity that you have given us; I also thank you for the financial support that many of you provide to our nuns, friars, and the Generalate of the Order.

The appeal I make to the provincial councils of the OCD provinces is to invite OCDS representatives to the provincial chapters with the purpose of assessing together the progress made and planning joint pastoral initiatives for the future. Good fruit will doubtless result from this dialogue and partnership. At the same time, I extend my thanks to the provincials, OCDS provincial delegates, and to the communities' assistants. Your ministry is important, as it helps to recognize the dignity of the laity in the Order who are called to live the same vocation to holiness according to the charism of the Teresian Carmel in the midst of the world.

May the Virgin of Carmel and St. Joseph, her Spouse, intercede for each of you, for your families, and for the communities. The Lord bless you in your mission during this Holy Year of Mercy, that you may be signs of the Presence of the Kingdom.

Fraternally,



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