

The Role of the Secular Community Council

Key Points of Fr. Cannistra's Letter dated: 6 March 2019

The Superior General of the Order, Fr. Cannistra, annually gives OCDS instructions and encouragement. These key points were extracted from his letter Ash Wednesday 2019. They correlate to the information Council prepared to share with the community in anticipation of our first Council elections.

1. **Council Role** according to OCDS Legislation. *See Council Role and Definition Table*
 - a) The Council serves to guide the community and is the immediate authority of the community. It accompanies and leads the community in its mission, which includes discerning and accepting God's ways together with the General and the Provincial.
 - b) The Council must encourage the *communal character of the Christian and Carmelite vocation* and look upon each member, and each other, with God's eyes. The community Council should bear witness to a "captivating fraternity," the root of which is the Holy Trinity. Council members must strive to work together harmoniously, with humility and with prayerful discernment. The majority vote and input of the (5) Council members determines decisions that are made for the community. The opinions of any one individual Council member significantly contributes, but also submits, to the group's collective discernment.
 - c) Provides formation, apostolate, and unity within the community and the Province.
2. **Community Role:** The entire community, in the rich diversity of its members, is called together to pray, listen, analyze, dialogue, discern, and offer advice, seeking God's Will in decisions affecting the community. Council and Community must collaborate to achieve its mission. How?
 - a.) *Communion:* A commitment to the "we" vs. the "I". All must seek the common good, and be diligent in preserving a spirit of unity and collaboration within the community, even in the midst of opposing viewpoints or personal preferences.
 - b.) The skill required for working collaboratively involves *cultivating specific relational virtues*: the discipline of listening, the capacity to give the other person space, readiness to forgive, and willingness to put oneself on the line according to a genuine spirituality of communion. Each Holy Mass we celebrate together, we should renew our individual commitment to unity, recognize our personal fragility and sins, and be reconciled with God and with our brothers and sisters in Carmel.
 - c.) All must seek God's Will, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, at the service of the mission.
3. **Duties of the Council** according to the OCDS Legislation: *See the Council's Responsibility Table*
 - a) **Composition:** President, (3) Councilors, FD who has made DP ~ total of (5) voting members
 - b) Primary responsibility is taking care of the formation and Christian and Carmelite maturing of the members of the community
Council must:
 - (a.) *Meet frequently* in reference to taking care of formation programs and the growth of the community
 - (b.) *Exercise discernment* in admitting candidates to formation, 1st Promise, and Definitive Promise
 - (c.) *Give consent* to those wishing to take vows
 - (d.) May reduce or extend the period of formation, with consent of the Provincial (e.g. in case of illness).
 - (e.) *Oversee the process of dismissal* of members, as well as evaluating and discerning with a member who wants to leave the community
 - (f.) *Receive transfers* from other communities
 - c) Responsibilities involving the community life
 - (1.) *Preserve fraternal communion* within the community (*crucial role) according to the style of St. Teresa (See Constitutions #24d)
 - (2.) Every 3 years convene the community for *elections* of the new Council: President and (3) Councilors
 - (a.) New Council appoints Secretary, Treasurer, and FD
 - (b.) The Council's authority is *temporary and shared*, renewed every three years
 - (c.) The Council receives an *authority of mediation and delegation* from the community that elects it.

4. **Functions of the Council Members:** *See the Role of the Council and its Members*
- a) Authority is shared equally among Council members, who have different functions. This authority should be lived with a “mother’s love,” with “discretion,” humility, and respect. *Humility is essential* ~ an attitude of service, considering others as superior to oneself. Requires our eyes to be fixed on God, not centered on oneself. Council must come together to know the truth; otherwise factions can develop, rivalries, and vainglory in the community.
 - b) Council must lead according to the Spirit and charism of the Teresian Carmel, according to what is defined in the Constitutions. Members of the Council must *know well the documents that govern the OCDS* and let themselves be guided by them.
 - c) Council members are leaders who *must be in accord* with one another. This requires “active co-responsibility” within the Council itself, in the choices and decisions to be taken, as well as arousing the active and responsible participation of each member of the community. Both share responsibility-for decisions concerning the good of the community and in the exercise of the discernment of truth. *A solid formation is necessary* that leads to the practice of discernment in community. *Each member is co-responsible* for the community, its formation and mission.
 - d) Council serves as a support for the community’s good
 - e) Mediates between the Order and the community members
5. **Council Members must possess these characteristics:** *See the Traits of a Good Councilor and Time Commitment Tables*
- a) Members of the Council must look to Christ, who came to serve and to give his life for others.
 - b) The Council must understand that the community is a gift from above that must be guarded and as a place where Christ is present.
 - c) Council must seek the community’s good and lead it to human, Christian, and Carmelite growth with the attitudes of the good Shepherd.
 - d) Must be able to live and promote *confident dialogue* at different levels: within the Council itself, b/t the Council and other members of the community, with other communities, with the provincial Council, and with other realities of the Order. Acting with prudence, discretion, and safeguarding confidentiality are essential behaviors for any Council member.
 - e) Requires the “*patience of listening:*” *humility, patience, willingness to understand, and an effort to respond in new ways.* This requires an inner disposition of harmony and docility to the Spirit, as well as courage to speak. This must be done with frankness and openly and refer to what one has prayed about and weighed up in the silence of the heart and in the light of God. In other words, seeking the truth together with others in humility. (see pg. 3, #6)
 - f) Dialogue must be respectful of others and of the diversity of opinions and experiences in the community, and recognizing differences, make possible a “*communion amid disagreement.*”
 - g) Must be willing to go beyond the surface of the conflict and see in others their deepest dignity. In this way, conflicts can be brought into harmony by the unity of the Spirit.

Let’s respond to God’s call with gratitude and confidence: We are in an authentic time of grace. We are called here and now to be prophetic, sensing in faith the way to go together, thus corresponding to God’s Will. God makes us holy through our link with one another. With the call to the Teresian Carmel, we have the guarantee of Divine support in continuing to walk the path of holiness in community, with the virtues of “endurance, patience, meekness, joy, humor, daring, and fervor.” We seek to promote the witness of the Kingdom in the midst of the world and thus collaborate in the mission of the Church and the Order.

The Council's Responsibilities

46: The Council, composed of the President and three Councilors and the Formation Director, constitutes the immediate authority of the community. The primary responsibility of the Council is the formation and Christian and Carmelite maturing of the members of the community.

The following table tries to capture the main areas of responsibilities per legislature; however, it is not all inclusive as circumstances may require Council involvement in different areas of community life.

Brief Summary of Areas of Responsibilities of the Local Council

Areas of Responsibility	Description
Oversees community life	<p><i>Preserve fraternal communion</i> within the community (crucial role) according to the style of St. Teresa (See Constitutions #24d)</p> <p>The overseeing of the community life involves knowledge of the secular order and tending to its activities. Requires Council to meet, communicated, plan activities such as ceremonies and retreats, and make sure all the documentation for members and community is in order. Keep attendance records for general meeting and study groups.</p> <p>An assortment of other duties including, keeping records and assigning jobs in the community, replacing members of Council for serious reasons, if necessary, dismiss members of the community.</p> <p>Council members produce the monthly newsletter and responds to any questions and guidance needed by members of the community</p>
Admit candidates to formation, the Promises, and the Vows	<p>This involves discernment. Care must be taken to distinguish between a devotion to Carmel and a vocation to Carmel (goodwill is not enough). Important observations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration should be given to the quality of the daily commitment on the part of a candidate and how well the candidate fits into the community. • Council members should get to know each person in formation. • Council members must accept their responsibilities and have the courage to make good decisions. • Appropriately handle transfers of people from other communities and provinces. <p>Council members must know the candidates progress and the candidates themselves as much as possible throughout the formation year. This will require interaction during the Community meetings specially fellowship time. The report of the facilitators in accordance with guidelines provided and the Formation Program, Ratio and local Council instructions will greatly assist the Council in the discernment process.</p>
Formation	<p>While the Formation Director and facilitators are responsible for preparing the candidates, the Council oversees the entire formation program, and is responsible for its content. Facilitators execute the lesson plans and report to Council progress of candidates.</p>
Develop leadership	<p>While the Council is the governing authority of the community, it is important to groom other members of the community to assume future leadership roles.</p>
Prepare the community for elections and to become Canonically Establish.	<p><i>Elections:</i> Follow Const #50-55 regarding local community elections every 3 years. Develop and follow a plan to train the community and execute the election instructions in the legislature.</p> <p><i>Canonical Establishment.</i> Follow the requirements in #49 of the OCDS Constitutions and work closely with the Regional Assistant throughout the process. Upon approval by the Regional Assistant, the required paperwork will be submitted to Rome by the Main Office.</p>

The Council is for service to the truth. As the Council goes, so goes the community. The President presides but does not rule or dictate. Everyone on the Council must be free to speak his mind so there is collaboration and co-responsibility. The root meaning of obedience is to listen attentively. The Council must be discreet,

The Role of the Council and its Members

The Council, composed of the President/President, Councilors and Formation Director constitutes the immediate authority of the Community and its primary responsibility is the formation and spiritual maturing of the members of the community Const. #46. For specific authority of the Council refer to OCDS Const. #47.

This document is in accordance with Constitutions #50-55 and endeavors to clarify the roles of the members of Council by delineating in details the duties of the President/President, Formation Director, Councilors Members, Spiritual Assistant, Secretary, Treasurer. All Council members have the duty to invest additional discerning prayer for candidate/community/Council needs.

The President

The President as a most visible member of the community, it is especially important that she/he endeavor to live and comport self in a way that exemplifies the ideals of the Order and maintains the Carmelite spirit of the prophet Elijah, a spirit of zeal for the Lord God. Her duties are:

- To convoke and preside over the meetings of the Community and Council, showing a spirit of fraternal service to all. This includes developing agendas, synthesizing ideas and discussion, and bringing issues to a Council vote. Responsible for scheduling candidate interviews at time of promotion.
- Speaks for the Council to the Community and Province (Const. #47g.)
- United with the Council members, develops procedures and assigns community members in leadership roles to assist Council in carrying out duties necessary for the life of the community in specific areas, including but not limited to: Apostolate, Ceremonies, Hospitality, Librarian, and Communication, and Outreach.
- Training of new Council members. Assigns duties to Councilors as needed to carry out the Council's primary responsibility.
- Together with the Councilors, evaluates and oversees the formation program.
- Aid the Spiritual Assistant and the Formation Director by supporting them in their task.
- Temporarily take the place of the Formation Director or Spiritual Assistant, in their absence.
- Contact and interview prospective candidates inquiring about joining the community, focusing on the spiritual life. In case of Transfers, contact the President of the community relative to their spiritual maturity and attendance. Follow up with Formation Director and/or Spiritual Assistant.
- Contact extended and infirmed members and members that are on Leave. Delegate as needed.
- Coordinate for the community retreats and days of recollection.
- Maintain a copy of all community records for safekeeping.
- Maintain the community informed of the events in community. Ex: publish the monthly newsletter, send Carmelite appropriate emails to members of the community. Forward all appropriate Provincial correspondence to members and Council.

The Formation Director

The Formation Director (FD) also has the responsibility of setting an example for the community by living the ideals of the Order with zeal and help community members to grow in faith, assisting them to fulfill their baptismal commitments and their Discalced Carmelite promise. Her/his duties are:

- To maintain formation program for candidates preparing for reception of Scapular, first and definitive promises. This includes:
 - Organizing required content of formation lessons.
 - Maintains formation group and attendance/progress records.
- Assigns facilitation duties. Presents assignment plans to Council and obtains approval.
- Training Facilitators. Develop and update training material for Facilitators.
- Update the Council on the formation status of the members.
- Temporarily take the place of the President in the event of his/her absence.
- Contact and interview prospective candidates inquiring about joining the community focusing on their formation. In case of Transfers, contact the Formation Director of the community of those seeking transfer relative to their formation status.

The Councilors

The Councilor's responsibility is to form with the President, the government of the community and to support the Formation Director. Councilors, along with the President and the Formation Director, are the immediate authority of the community. The joint decisions, within the limits of the Constitutions and Statutes, are to be obeyed by virtue of the Promise. The Councilors help promote the ideals of the Discalced Carmelite Seculars. Their duties include:

- Attend Council meetings and vote when needed. Provide input to agendas and approve minutes of meetings.
- Together with the President, evaluate and oversee the formation program, giving full support to the FD.
- Study information provided regarding candidates for promotion from the different sources in preparation for the interviews. (Sources are FD, Facilitators, and Candidate themselves.)
- Evaluate candidates for promotion, transfers and acceptance into Aspirancy.
- Participate in candidates' interviews.
- Collaborate with the Council in performing assigned tasks as agreed by all members.
- Work with the President to coordinate and participate in community retreats and events.
- Work with the President to develop leadership in community members.
- Inform the Council of any issues in the community that have been identified

The Spiritual Assistant

The Spiritual Assistant's duty is to give spiritual aid to the community so that its members may be guided in their vocation and may correspond with it as perfectly as possible. Other duties include:

- Endeavor to promote solidarity between the secular community and the Order at large.
- Attend Council meetings at the invitation of the Council without the right to vote.
- Be available to individually interview candidates at different stages of formation, especially those preparing for Definitive Promise. Report to Council on each candidate's spiritual readiness.
- Be available to the Council to advise about the suitability of a candidate seeking to discern a vocation to the Secular Order.
- Support formation and be available to the Formation Director to advice on formation issues.

The Secretary

The *Council Secretary's* duties are:

- Attend Council meetings (those regular and special meetings) as a silent attendee without the right to vote. Take attendance to the meeting and maintain records, both manually and electronically.
- Record the minutes of the Council meetings, respecting the confidentiality of the proceedings. Maintain minutes in a binder for reading upon request by Council.
- Email the minutes to the President and the Formation Director for review to ensure accuracy.
- Keep the Community register and other records at all times. This includes having charge of the record books of the elections, and of admissions to the Secular Order, to the Promise and the Vows. Secretary keeps these up to date, and presents them to the Council and to the community at appropriate times.

The *Secretary for the General Meeting* may or may not be the Secretary for the Council meetings. Duties for the Secretary for the General meeting are:

- Record the minutes of the General meetings.
- Take attendance to the meeting and maintain records both manually and electronically.
- Email the minutes to the President and the Formation Director for review to ensure accuracy. Maintain minutes in a binder for reading upon request by Council.

The Treasurer

The Treasurer of the Community has charge of, and administers the funds collected under the direction of the Council. Treasurer's duties include:

- Keep accurate financial records. This is a serious responsibility that requires discretion and respect for the confidentiality of the information you collect.
- Present a report of the funds to the Council every six months, to the community and to Province once a year.