Final Statement from the Participants of
The International Carmelite Course on How to Engage Generations Z?
Being Faithful Witnesses to the Carmelite Charism from One Generation to the Next
(General Chapter 2019)

Zoom, 15-19 and 22 - 26 November 2021

Due to the unprecedented global reality of COVID-19, we, the Carmelite friars, nuns, and lay participants from the Americas, Africa, Europe, Asia, Australia, and Oceania gathered virtually on Zoom to learn, discuss, and seek creative and relevant ways on how to engage Generation Z. Our heartfelt gratitude to the General Formation Commission and moderators: Fr. Benny Phang, O. Carm., Fr. Jose Claudio de Alencar Batista, O. Carm., Fr. Alejandro López-Lapuente Villalba, O. Carm., Fr. Roberto Noel Rosas, O. Carm., Fr. Martin Pulickal, O. Carm., and Br. Daryl Moresco, O. Carm.; and to Mr. Kenneth J. Pino, the Zoom host from Carmelite Media, PCM, for making this year's Carmelite international course possible.

In the opening of the course, the Prior General, Fr. Míċeál O'Neill, O. Carm., welcomed us with a brief but motivating message challenging us, to value proper communication as a means to bridging differences from one generation to another.

On the first day, Mrs. Cicilia Evi Yuwono presented to us the psychological perspectives and strategies to engage Gen Z. According to her, Gen Z are referred to as digital natives who have mastered the use of technology. Their extensive exposure to technology causes them to have a short attention span that does not exceed 8 seconds. Cecilia emphasized the "Bedroom Culture" to identify the way Gen Z works where they simply stay in their bedrooms and accomplish multiple activities using their gadgets. These young people are easily triggered by some situations that would always connect them to technology, such as, FoMO (the Fear of Missing Out); boredom, which triggers them to use their smartphones during idle times; and the habit of Phubbing ('Phone' and 'Snubbing'). Advancements in technology and their use create a gap between the older generation and Gen Z where most of our students in our formation houses, schools, and dormitories belong. One of the biggest lessons learnt was that we need to learn a new digital language to relate better to Gen Z and future generations. Therefore, there is the need to "reclaim conversation" that all interactions cannot be done digitally. As Carmelites ministering to Gen Z much of our interactions should be relational.

On the second day, Mr. Brian Rhude talked about *The Paths of Youth: Exploring the Various Social and Cultural Realities of Gen Z*. He used Pope Francis' exhortation, *Christus Vivit*, as a basis to explore the social and cultural realities of Gen Z. Brian highlighted the recent high rate of child mortality, persisting HIV cases, and rampant internet usage as some of the global realities that surround Gen Z. In the midst of these global realities, Gen Z is also exposed to the digital environment and migration which places them in tensions between finding their identity in a relativistic society, discovering experience based in reality in a virtual world, having distrust of structures, suffering abuses, and defining sexuality while facing a dreadful commoditization of beauty and of youth. Brian also made the important point that the Church and indeed the Carmelite Order can be the prophetic model which can and should enable Gen Z to find their true selves in Christ. Moving on from here he introduced the idea of accompaniment – how do we help and support young people to encounter Christ in their lives.

The third talk was from Fr. Benny Phang, O. Carm., our Vice Prior General. His talk was entitled *Just a Click Away: Morality of Gen Z, Offering Formation of Good Conscience and Virtues*. He started with an overview of the developing worldviews that went through changes in history. The earlier would be the classical worldview which is concerned with the nature and purpose of things, hence a search for an objective truth. On the contrary, the latter worldview, postmodernism, is against objective truth and focuses on the individual as the focal point of knowledge. Everything, then, becomes relative and largely subjective. It is the latter worldview Gen Z are born. A strong emphasis on the self, coupled with the present age of technology, Gen Z-ers are faced with several moral issues found in the internet that may elicit alarming long-term implications. Those are: religious radicalism, pornography, LGBTQIA+ phenomena, and Post-Truth. These, among others, make Gen Z vulnerable to moral dilemmas that may obstruct the process of their maturity. As a challenge, Benny invited us to guide Gen Z to form a good conscience and to develop virtues. Using Christ as our model, our approach should be to meet Gen Z where they are and to walk alongside them with prayerful compassion, that each person is valued and made in the image of God. As educators and formators engaged with Gen Z, Benny invited us to be "gurus" to them, to be present, and to be authentic models on how to live in the presence of God.

On the third day, on first week, the four Carmelite members of Generation Z from Europe, Africa and the Americas were given a platform to discuss pertinent issues affecting their generation. The aforementioned continents were represented by Luca Zerneri, O. Carm., João da Costa, O. Carm., Daniel Ulises, O. Carm., and Ashley Salima, O. Carm. On the second week, we listened to Carmelite students from various parts of Asia: Joseph Tuan Bui, O. Carm., Thomas Onggo, O. Carm., John Lorenzo Morales, O. Carm., and Justin Shaji, O. Carm. The issues which they tackled include the inevitable reality of intergenerational relationships in Carmelite communities and beyond and how they see the possibility of breaching the gap. The recurring issues of pornography, LGBTQIA+ and misinformation were comprehensively explored by the members of Generation Z and it was enriching to listen to this discussion since they are much involved with other members of their generation and thus gives them a vast wealth of exposure to pertinent issues affecting Generation Z.

They cautioned us about the dangers of excessive reliance on technology and the internet because they can also distract Gen Z Carmelites from genuinely living out their vows and spirituality. We are invited by these young Carmelites to balance the use of technology and to be open to the benefits it offers. They also articulated the pressing challenge of incessant questions from their peers, family and friends about the relevance of their religious vocation in a pluralistic contemporary society. They also pointed out the misconception of happiness as pleasure among the members of Generation Z. Furthermore, they noted that the diverse phenomena characteristic of Generation Z cannot be treated in isolation since either of them is related to the other.

This meet and talk session was followed by a task of Mapping the Intergenerational Relationship Challenge. Fr. Benny and Br. Daryl gave us an orientation on how to do the task. Each generation had to analyze its own strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT), then each generation analyzed the other generations' strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats as a necessary step in the process of providing strategies to bridge intergenerational gaps.

On the fourth day, Fr. Craig Morison, O. Carm. gave us scriptural perspectives on how we can deal with Gen Z. His talk was titled *Jesus Walks the Road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-33) with Generation Z = the Woke Generation*. In considering Gen Z as a "Woke Generation," Craig characterized the awakening of Gen Z to the issues of climate change and structural injustices found in our societies. Gen Z expects those, who are in the older generations, to be awake too. Craig led us into a reflection on the two disciples on the road to Emmaus and how Jesus awakened their faith during their moment of darkness and confusion. He also challenged us to reflect on the questions: How did Jesus awaken them? How does Jesus awaken me? Am I still asleep in my own life? What are the signs of times that could awaken us from our sleep? Craig showed us how Jesus walked with the two disciples going in the wrong direction while listening to their experiences. While heading towards that wrong direction, Jesus awakened their hopelessness through the breaking of the bread and brought them back in the right direction, Jerusalem. Pope Francis called this process the "art of encounter". Craig finally invited us to reflect: Do we judge Gen Z and their experiences? Or do we accompany them in their journey and guide them in the right direction towards God?

The final talk was from Prof. Donna Lynn Orsuto, who shared her presentation titled: *Sharing the Gift of Carmel with Generation Z*. In her presentation, Donna pointed out that Carmel is founded on an exceedingly rich heritage and tradition. It is the responsibility of the elder members of the Carmelites Order to hand on this rich tradition to Generation Z with joy because joy fascinates the young people. She asserted that love is central to transference and or handing on of this tradition of Carmel. The gifts which Carmel needs to share with Generation Z include beauty, fraternity, prayer, silence, solidarity and joy, among others.

Donna identified Gen Z in two groups namely, as "nones" and those who are "religious declined." Donna mentioned that these "nones" were heavily influenced by the widespread secularism among Gen Z. It is in this context that Carmel exists and is invited to share its gifts. Finally, Donna argued that since Gen Z generally seeks affective communities which are supportive, listening and understanding, it is fundamental that Carmel must live up to its 'charism' as a contemplative fraternity in the midst of people. This entails that Carmelites need to genuinely accompany, and befriend Gen Z as well as to show them by our way of life that we care and love one another. In these ways we can thus be able to share the gift of Carmel by Generation Z.

From this whole series of presentations, sharings, and reflections, we, the participants from the Americas, Africa, Europe, Asia, Oceania, and Australia, have discerned and prayed about some resolutions in order to better engage with Gen Z, and with reference to the *Global Plan of the General Council 2019-2025*, we commit: to listen and dialogue with Gen Z, to better understand their world and to learn their language; to offer Gen Z our accompaniment and witness as their elder brothers and sisters, so they can appreciate the reality of life and seek it in the living face of God; and to use wisely the aid of information technology as a means to communicating, engaging, and bridging the intergenerational gap.

We can only pass on our Carmelite charism from one generation to another by building bridges to connect the gaps brought by the differences of each generation. We have to realize that most of our students, brothers and sisters in our communities in the Order are Gen Z-ers. We, therefore,

need to cultivate the virtue of humility, so we can listen and dialogue with one another with open minds and compassionate hearts.

As older brethren, we first have to be aware of ourselves and own our Carmelite identity, so that we can accompany the younger ones in the process of formation as genuine witnesses. We journey with Gen Z in the ups and downs, the joys and pains of their lives. We work together with Gen Z in recognizing the presence of God in the moments of their lives, and in the process, we also learn from them how to see reality in this present and evolving age. Accompaniment, therefore, implies a two-way process guided by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Finally, the Carmelite charism of prayer, fraternity, and service lived in contemplation will always be relevant despite the differences of generations, if only it is properly communicated through effective and contemporary means; and if genuinely lived out by those who are called to it. Being enriched with Carmel's spirituality, we can offer to one another the joy of life in allegiance to Jesus Christ.