



CURIA GENERALIZIA DEI CARMELITANI

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The ministry of Carmelite shrines

Dear Brothers,

In 2017, Pope Francis signed the “*Motu Proprio*” *Sanctuarium in Ecclesia (SE)*. In it, he set out a vision for shrines in the context of the ‘New Evangelization’. The international Liturgy and Prayer commission of the Order considering the place of our Shrines was struck by the importance of this document with regard to our varied ministries in the Church. Reflecting on this significant document we would like to share some ideas and challenges pertaining to the many beautiful shrines world-wide within our Order. This document begins with these words:

The Shrine has “enormous symbolic value” in the Church, and becoming a pilgrim is a genuine profession of faith. In fact, the contemplation of sacred images is evidence of the hope of feeling more strongly the closeness of God that opens the heart to the confidence of being heard and answered in one’s deepest desires. Popular piety, which is a “true expression of the spontaneous missionary activity of the People of God”, finds in the Shrine a privileged place to express the fine tradition of prayer, devotion and trust in God’s mercy inculturated in the life of every people. (SE 1)

While much of what Pope Francis writes could be applied to every one of our Carmelite churches and sanctuaries, his attention is on those major shrines where traditionally a great stream of pilgrims visit. Carmelites too, have several shrines to which the faithful have traditionally come in large numbers (CON 93) which are held in high regard within our Family.

Shrines speak to us about the nature of popular piety and devotion. More importantly they touch into prayer, contemplation, closeness to God, the tenderness of Mary and the rediscovery of our faith life; themes close to our Carmelite experience.

Perhaps, and more importantly, there is a clear link between place and pilgrimage. Today many people, even those not belonging to the Christian tradition, are drawn both to holy

places and to walk with others. Journeying to a place of significance – even returning to a place where one was touched by the experience of God at some time in their lives – they will find solace.

For Carmelites, we can speak of different types of pilgrimage place;

- those connected with a Marian or Carmelite Marian connection,
- those connected with some specific saint of ours,
- or just one of the many shrines that belong to all members of the Church and to which our Family feels a special bond.

It is important to keep in mind that many of these shrines are very important for those of simple and humble faith. They gather together people of all walks of life, building communion and seeking to build a community spirit. In *Sanctuarium in Ecclesia*, Pope Francis links shrines to a certain ‘nostalgia’ for God that helps us to find the necessary strength for conversion. Often, these places become the focus of a nation’s faith expression.

While walking alone or with others on the pilgrim journey, one comes to the point of arrival in which one seeks to find rest. *Sanctuarium in Ecclesia* speaks of a kind of ‘osmosis’ taking place:

This osmosis between the pilgrimage to the Shrine and everyday life is a great help to pastoral ministry, because it permits the rekindling of the commitment to evangelization through a testimony of greater conviction. (SE 3)

The theme of beauty runs through Carmelite spirituality. In many places of pilgrimage, beyond the beauty of the place itself, there is the beauty of support, of reconciliation, of attentiveness to the Word, of spiritual guidance and of the celebration of the Liturgy. Here too one looks upon the beauty of the face of the poor, the sick, the disabled and the marginalised, refugees and migrants. As Pope Francis puts it, at the Shrine the doors are open to all. These things must fit well with the life of friars and sisters in our tradition.

Where these places exist within our Order, we invite you to look again at the significance of the treasured places in our heritage and reflect upon how they might grow in our mission of evangelization. In the emerging parts of the Order, we invite you to consider how it might be possible to cultivate one.

What points might we reconsider were we to look at our significant places? We offer the following points as a way of beginning to answer this question and in the hope that they might give guidance to the renewal of Shrines within the Order.

Welcoming those who come

- Those who come to our shrines find sanctuary, a hospitality that embraces sinners and saints, and are offered an opportunity for the sacrament of reconciliation.
- We are present to those who come to our shrines, not just in the formal ways of liturgy and the sacraments, but by being a personal presence that is visible, with listening ears and where possible offering spiritual guidance.

- In our shrines, we give special attention to young people especially by seeing our shrines through their eyes and our openness to adapting a different way of praying.
- Our shrines are aware of the cultural diversity of expression (especially on each continent).

Liturgy and Prayer

- Our shrines offer a quality liturgy that reveals the face of the living God including choices made in the style of liturgy, music and the inclusion of the various ministries of catechists, acolytes, lectors and ministers of hospitality.
- Our shrines give special attention to the Word of God (including occasions for *Lectio divina* in small groups).
- Our shrines have prayer forms that touch into the reality of many people's lives in a rapidly changing world.

Pilgrim people

- Our shrines look to include a pilgrim walk that arrives at the Shrine.
- Our Carmelite shrines consider vesting our departing pilgrims in Mary's garment, our scapular.
- A witness of charity flows from our shrines so that we also provide food for the most-needy in a visible and generous way.

Pedagogy of evangelisation

- In our shrines our preaching and conferences are recognised as being of a consistently high standard.
- In our places of Marian devotion, a Marian catechesis in tune with contemporary thinking is provided.
- Formation programmes for volunteer helpers, young and old, are established in our shrines so that they too can become missionaries to our pilgrims.
- Formation in liturgy, music and in the various ministries of catechists, acolytes, lectors and ministers of hospitality is provided.

Environment

- Our shrines create spaces, not just for many words and prayers, but of silence: a garden to give praise of all creation.
- Our shrines are centred on the 'image' or symbol that identifies the place and on its spiritual message for our journey.
- Our shrines are places of beauty, offer a high artistic quality so that pilgrims are drawn like a 'magnet' to the place of God's presence among us.

In offering these thoughts, we invite all members of the Carmelite family, to look again at our significant places and renew our Shrine ministry. When this work of reflection is done, it is hoped to gather provincials and shrine directors in each of the regions of the Order to share their thoughts and seek to find a common pathway of new life.

We thank the Liturgy and Prayer Commission for drafting this document for us and we invite you to submit your reflections to the Commission (to admingen@ocarm.org) by 15th December 2022.



Fraternally,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fr. Mícheál O'Neill".

Fr. Mícheál O'Neill, O.Carm

Prior General

and members of the General Council.