

Annual Check-in Interviews and Addressing Concerns

Annual check-in with Candidates for the Promise

It is recommended that Councils meet annually with each Candidate for a brief check-in about their progress. This allows ample time for both the Council and the Candidate to be aware of and address any concerns well before the end of the formation period and discernment for the Promise.

Discussion topics for check-in interviews could include:

Prayer life

- How are things in general in relation to your prayer life?
- Are you able to regularly pray Morning and Evening Prayer? Are you having any problems with the Liturgy of the Hours?
- Are you able to regularly set aside 30 minutes each day for mental prayer? What obstacles are you encountering in trying to do so?
- When you do sit down for 30 minutes of mental prayer, explain what that involves for you.

Interior prayer being central to Carmelite spirituality, issues with a candidate's prayer life need to be addressed sooner rather than later. For instance, if the Candidate describes his or her 30 minutes of prayer in terms of praying devotions or doing housework while praying, the Council and the formation team need to work with that Candidate to help him/her to better understand mental prayer and ways to develop an authentic prayer life. Additional instruction would be in order if the Candidate is struggling with the Liturgy of the Hours.

Formation sessions

- Are you enjoying formation?
- What do you feel you are getting from your formation sessions?
- Are you having any difficulties with formation?

Again, this is to see how the Candidate is doing and to address any issues early on. Councils should speak with the formator(s) about whether the Candidate comes prepared and participates appropriately.

Community life

- Are you enjoying the meetings?
- What do you especially like about them?
- Is there anything that you find difficult?
- How is it going with your community job?
- Are there other community jobs you would like to try?

This statement supersedes all previous statements on OCDS Annual Check-in Interviews.

The online document is the only one to be considered official.

December 2022

This is the Council’s opportunity to see whether the Candidate feels “at home” in Carmel. Does the Candidate thrive on community life?

Addressing Problems and Concerns with a Candidate

The Council

The Council should not wait until the discernment interview to bring up concerns. Attendance and behavioral problems are addressed as they happen. The annual check-in helps to turn up less obvious issues that may be problematic. The Council may meet more frequently with a candidate if there is a need.

In this way, the Candidate has an opportunity to make any necessary changes, and habits do not become ingrained. Concerns should always be addressed in a charitable and just manner, and sooner rather than later. (See Best Practices for articles on conflict resolution.)

The Formator

(See *Role of the Formator* under Best Practices – Formation.) If a formator notices a vocational issue with a candidate, it is his or her responsibility to mention it to the Council. The Council can then determine the best course of action for the Candidate.

The Spiritual Assistant

Quoting from article 44 of the OCDS Constitutions: “The Spiritual Assistant to each community is usually a friar of the Order.... At the different stages of formation of the candidates, he will be available to interview them. The Council may consult him about the suitability of the Candidate to assume the responsibility of the vocation to the Secular Order.... The Spiritual Assistant must be well-versed in Carmelite spirituality and well-informed in the Church’s teaching concerning the role of lay people in the Church.”

Regardless of whether the Spiritual Assistant interviews the Candidate and provides feedback to the local Council, the Council must also do its own interview because it is the Council and not the Spiritual Assistant who has the responsibility for discernment of vocations. The Constitutions do not require the approval of the Spiritual Assistant for the Council’s discernment decisions, and he or she does not vote on the Candidate.

The Spiritual Assistant is a good resource for any concerns that might arise regarding the Candidate’s good standing with the Church, especially in matters of marital status. (See *Invalid Marriage as an Impediment* on the OCDS website under Best Practices – Discernment.) The Spiritual Assistant may also help the Council in talking through discernment concerns if they feel the need for some guidance amid a discernment dilemma.