

Considerations in Making a Private Vow

First read Constitution #39 and Statutes, Section XX on Vows

Vows are a phenomenon present in all religions. A Carmelite secular's Promise is not made directly to God but rather to the community, to the Order of Carmel. On the other hand, a vow is made directly to God. A vow is an act of the virtue of religion and transforms the Promise into an act of worship and is understood as a giving of oneself, according to the theological virtue of charity.

"A vow, that is, a deliberate and free promise made to God concerning a possible and better good, must be fulfilled by reason of the virtue of religion." (Code of Canon Law, 1191)

A Carmelite secular who desires to make private vows of obedience and chastity should undergo a serious discernment process. The member must be spiritually mature and understand what making a vow means. A member who has been definitively professed for at least five years and is seriously discerning making a private vow must discuss their desire with the local Council and obtain the permission of his or her spiritual director to proceed. The member can then make a formal request to the Local Council. The local Council and the community's Spiritual Assistant need to interview the member.

If the Local Council discerns that the request can proceed, it must then forward the request to the Provincial Delegate and provide the following information:

- A copy of the member's formal request, which should include an explanation of the difference between the definitive Promise and the vow, how the member has prepared over the previous year, and why this member feels called to the vow.
- A letter from the Council describing what it sees as the member's motivation for this request. The letter should also indicate the length of time the member has been definitively professed and verify that the member has spent at least a year in discernment and discussion with the local Council, the Spiritual Assistant, and the member's Spiritual Director.
- A letter of recommendation from the member's spiritual director.
- A letter of recommendation from the Spiritual Assistant if the community/study group has one.

If the Provincial Delegate grants the request to make vows, the setting for the ceremony should be simpler than the ceremony for making the definitive promise because the vows do not create a separate class of membership in the order. Rather, making the vows is an act of the

virtue of religion imposing obligations upon the individual making the vows. It is the definitive promise, not the vows, that makes a person a full member of the order.

If the Provincial Delegate denies the request to make vows, he should state in writing the basis for the denial and whether the member is eligible to make a subsequent request. This letter goes into the member's permanent record and the local Council's confidential files.