

*“You must have some sort of work to do” (Rule 20)  
Our Contemplative Fraternity discerns its Mission.*

# **INSTRUMENTUM LABORIS**

## **GENERAL CHAPTER OF THE BROTHERS OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY OF MOUNT CARMEL 2025**

### INTRODUCTION

**O**ur General Chapter and its preparation are a *kairos*, a moment of grace. First, it is a time of blessing for us because we are invited to experience our unity; as brothers from around the world we simultaneously pray and reflect on our identity and future. We are even invited to feel our brotherhood with all our Carmelite predecessors, also our saints – even back to the first Carmelites on Mount Carmel. Second, this is a moment of listening together to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, which will determine the course of our future. This is a fraternal, constitutional and ecclesial gathering. It is called “*Capitulum*”, the Latin diminutive of “*caput*” which means ‘little head’. In Hebrew, “*rosh*”, means head, which are like the segments of bamboo, an end, but also at the same time a new beginning. So, with the Chapter we are heading towards a new beginning, yet also a continuation of the previous journey, a new ‘chapter’ (English), a new ‘Bab’ (Arabic, Indonesian)<sup>1</sup> of an expansive book that is linked to each other with the previous chapters in a continuous manner.

The theme of this General Chapter is:

*“You must have some sort of work to do” (Rule 20)*

*Our Contemplative Fraternity discerns its Mission.*

After themes on Carmelite identity in previous General Chapters, the theme of our General Chapter 2025 is about “Doing”, about the work and mission that we are called to engage in. Here there are three things that we will reflect on and explore in depth. First, what does it mean that work is part of our BEING as Carmelites?

<sup>1</sup> “Bab” in Arabic is “door”.

Second, how do we carry out our work? Third, what must we do to respond better, more appropriately and deeply to the signs of our times?

The Rule calls us to “*have some sort of work to do.*” This is a clear directive for all Carmelites. We remember the Lord’s question to Elijah: “What are you doing here, Elijah?” (1 Kings 19:9.13). This question is also addressed to us every day. Every Carmelite is invited every day to “*have some sort of work to do.*” Carmelite spirituality is deeply connected to everyday life. Our lives are given over to work and to finding something valuable and meaningful that occupies our time. Jesus was sent by God the Father to bring to fulfillment the work of salvation: “My Father has been working until now, and I am working” (Jn 5:17). Our work, then, is our participation in the continuing work of salvation, an opportunity to hasten the coming of the Kingdom and at the same time to unite us into the integrity of Creation. Creation is God’s way of working with his creatures. Our modest efforts allow us to cooperate with the work of the Creator, the Source of Life, the Most Holy One. <sup>2</sup>Thus the Holy Father Pope Francis invites us to imitate St. Joseph, a man who was known for his labor, and in doing so, collaborated with God himself, becoming little creators of the world around us (Patris Corde 6).

In this moment of preparation for the General Chapter, the Lord’s question to Elijah: “What are you doing here?” – finds a deeper and more urgent meaning. What are we doing at this very moment? How have we been doing it all this time? This question is addressed to us all, whether as individuals, communities, provinces or as an Order. We are at a crucial moment in the history of our Order, facing serious challenges and major changes. Therefore, we will be asked to discern carefully and make decisions that are important for the future of our Order.

In the Synthesis of the Celebration of the Year of Consecrated Life 2014, the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life speaks of a new paradigm of consecrated life:

*“Consecrated Life is a verb, not a noun.” As men and women, we have a tendency to change living reality (which is never still) into a static noun, into a name label without vitality, which expresses something that is always the same.*

At the opening ceremony of the Year of Consecrated Life on November 29, 2014, a reading was taken from Isaiah 62:1-5. In the midst of a nation in crisis at that time, the prophet rallied their enthusiasm:

<sup>2</sup> Kees Waaijman, *Kekudusan dalam Kehidupan Kekarmelitan Kita* (Sub Kom. Bina lanjut Ordo Karmel Indonesia, Malang 2017) 223.

*For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,  
and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest,  
until her vindication shines out like the dawn,  
and her salvation like a burning torch (Is 62:1).*

At that time the people of Israel were amidst a difficult situation, but they remained hopeful for the future. The key was that they did not just remain silent but were willing to take action and work hard, specifically to rebuild Jerusalem and their future as God's chosen people. Working or doing is about the choices we make, the actions we take, and the impact of those actions on ourselves, our province, the Order, the Church and the People of God. With the General Chapter in particular we are called together with the whole Order to answer the Lord's question above. The signs of the times with the changes and difficulties that accompany them can be not easy to face. How should we respond? What will we choose to do? And how will we address all the tasks in front of us? We will explore this theme both individually and in community in three meetings, animated by serious and persistent personal and communal prayer to ask for the grace of the Holy Spirit himself to guide us all.

# First Meeting

## OUR WAY:

### **WORKING CONTEMPLATIVELY, FRATERNALLY AND PROPHETICALLY**

“..... may always find you occupied; in toil and weariness, working night and day;  
working in silence”

(Rule 20; cf. 1 Tes 2:9; 2 Tes 3:8; 2 Tes 3:6).

**C**armel is first and foremost a way of life. Our Rule says: “This way is holy and good; walk in it” (Rule 20). These words, quoted from Is 30:21, are used by our Rule to conclude the instruction about work. So, work is presented as something that is both holy and good. Although we live a contemplative life, our Rule recommends that we always have some sort of activity to engage in. Our daily life is not only shaped by prayer, but also by the work we do. Our Rule defines life as a Carmelite also by “doing.”<sup>3</sup> An important element of our daily life as Carmelites is “doing some sort of work.” Some kind of work here probably means that we have tasks and responsibilities that we take seriously. “Work” also implies that we are involved in doing something with attention and concentration.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, it is important to note that the Rule does not specifically mention any particular kind of work. Nicholas, the Frenchman who happened to live on Mount Carmel, understood work here as both spiritual work (reading, meditation, prayer), and physical work (copying codices, farming, etc.).<sup>5</sup> However, we are called not only to work, but to work in a Carmelite way and spirit. This is also our mission, witness and proclamation: namely to work contemplatively, fraternally and prophetically among the people.

## **1. Working contemplatively**

In our increasingly busy and chaotic world, many people are like Martha whom Jesus rebuked for being anxious and busy with many things but forgetting the one thing that is necessary (Lk 10:41). Many are also like the Apostle Peter who ‘worked hard all night long, but have caught nothing’ (Lk 5:5).

Rule 20 encourages us also to be occupied with working, but to work

<sup>3</sup> There are four latin words are applied in Rule 20 *agere, fieri, facere, dan opus*. see Kees Waaijman, *The Mystical Space of Carmel. Commentary on the Carmelite Rule* (Peeters 1999), 200.

<sup>4</sup> Kees Waaijman, *The Mystical Space of Carmel*, 203.

<sup>5</sup> Nicolaus Gallus, *Ignea Sagitta* (1270), VIII; ed. A.Staring, in *Carmelus* 9 (1962) 237-307.

contemplatively. It is important to note that our rule juxtaposes “work” (Rule 20) with “silence” (Rule 21). The end of Rule 20 and repeated again at the beginning of Rule 21 instructs us to work quietly. In fact, working diligently, actively and in silence, without making noise or drawing attention to ourselves will be a “precious treasure” that brings “inner peace”. This spirit is necessary and can be lived in all situations and conditions. Here St. Titus Brandsma gave an impressive witness. When he was detained in the Amersfoort concentration camp, in a barrack with many prisoners, no longer having time to write, he described in this way:

*“Working silence. Deprived of his Carmelite lifestyle, he reinvented his Carmelite identity by rearranging his spatial-temporal habitat in which he did some work. By working in silence, he became holy, becoming a Carmelite in a destructive and anti-religious situation.”*<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, the Rule, quoting the Apostle Paul, criticizes those who are going about restlessly and find themselves unoccupied with any activity. Instead, they should always be found busy with doing some work, so that “Satan finds you occupied, lest because of your idleness he manages to find some way of entering into your souls.” Working diligently and actively, humbly and silently, eliminates wandering thoughts and sinful distractions. Additionally, it helps us to concentrate our thoughts and to be drawn into silence so as to deepen our own inner life and thereby eliminate any hidden motives and purify the heart. So working also becomes a path to contemplative life, part of our journey to union with God.

Constitution 11 mentions that work is also a form of mortification and asceticism. Working hard and diligently also can provide a deeper sense and meaning to our prayer. The phrase “have some sort of work to do” may also suggest that work should have a limit, so that it does not consume all our time. A healthy balance between prayer, work, and rest will help us live life more contemplatively and lead to union with God.

## **2. Working fraternally**

The second characteristic of the Carmelite way of working is to work fraternally. This means two things. First, we work conscientiously for the benefit and welfare of our own brothers. This is one of the noble legacies of the monastic tradition, as seen in the teaching of St. Augustine in *De opere monachorum*: Manual work must be done with enthusiasm and for the good of the whole community. RIVC 23

<sup>6</sup> Kees Waaijman, *Kekudusan dalam Kehidupan Kekarmelitan Kita*, 228.

emphasizes that this service should be done voluntarily and disinterestedly, born of a contemplative life, which makes us willing to be sent to serve our brothers and sisters.

Secondly, working cooperatively becomes our preferred way of working. A Carmelite is called to work in a spirit of fraternal collaboration (Const. 98) and work needs to be understood as the work of the community and the mission of the community, even if it is done in silence and solitude. We remember the advice of St. John of the Cross: “Live with others so that you may work and practice in virtue.” Our work should not simply be a personal mission, for this can lead to isolation and self-aggrandizement. Instead, our work should bind us into the life of the community, becoming one of our ways we take part in the life and mission of our fraternity. Here the Holy Father Pope Francis adds that work is part of our journey of holiness, and holiness is a journey in community, side by side with others (GE 141).

*When we live apart from others, it is very difficult to fight against concupiscence, the snares and temptations of the devil and the selfishness of the world. Bombarded as we are by so many enticements, we can grow too isolated, lose our sense of reality and inner clarity, and easily succumb (GE 140).*

### **3. Working prophetically in the midst of the people**

Furthermore, by working, we Carmelites give prophetic witness in the midst of the people. As a contemplative brotherhood, Carmelites seek the face of God even amid the world. In particular, we are called to listen to and interpret the Word of God from the perspective of the poor (Const.94). Constitution no.24 writes more specifically:

*Being “in the midst of the people” is also an expression of “the choice to share in the lives of “the little ones” (“minores”) of history, so that we may speak a word of hope and of salvation from their midst - more by our life than by our words.”*

Therefore, Rule no.20 invites us to imitate St. Paul who worked and toiled day and night. Pope Francis also in *Patris Corde* invites us to imitate St. Joseph who labored tirelessly and did humble chores for his daily bread, reminding us that God himself, in becoming human, did not despise work. By following their example, we try to live a spirit of poverty and show solidarity with the humble

<sup>7</sup> Carlos Mesters, *Intorno alla fonte. Circoli di preghiera e di meditazione intorno alla regola del Carmelo* (Roma Edizione Carmelitane 2006), 196.

people, who also live by sweat of their brow for their daily bread (cf. Gen 3:19; Ps 127:2). As Carmelites we strive to follow the example of the Apostle Paul, who did not escape into a quiet life, only studying and meditating without working with his hands.<sup>7</sup> Rather, this great Apostle worked as a tentmaker to support himself, while giving his time and his whole being to the Kingdom of God by proclaiming the Gospel. The example of St. Paul inspires our lives as minors and mendicants. So we do not only do work exclusively in pastoral or liturgical ministries, but also other works for our livelihood and as a service to others (Rule 20; ET 20; Cons. 57).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND COMMUNAL REFLECTION:

1. How do we, as individuals, as community and as province, work contemplatively: working diligently in simplicity and silence?
2. In what ways do we work together as a community and as a province? Or is there a tendency among us to become more individualistic?
3. How do we bear witness by working hard, with perseverance and in simplicity, and become a sign of solidarity in the midst of the people?

# Second Meeting

## **OUR CHALLENGE: BE VERY ZEALOUS FOR THE LORD, THE GOD OF HOSTS**

“What are you doing here, Elijah?” (1 Kings 19:9)  
“Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too long for you.” (1 Kings 19:7)

**B**eing zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts (1 Kings 19:10-14) was the motto of our Father Elijah. This inspirer of Carmel was a prophet who was burning with zeal to work for the LORD, the God of Israel. Likewise, this zeal has also characterized the life of Carmel for centuries and today's Carmelites must also be burning with the same zeal. However, we know that in the course of his mission Elijah wrestled with how to best live a life of zealous service; this is a struggle we also experience in our own time.

### **1. Temptation and challenge of losing enthusiasm**

It is surprising that after the glorious experience of victory on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:20-46), Elijah fled into the desert and experienced great fear because of the threats of Jezebel. The prophet fell into a deep despair and said: "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors" (1 Kings 19:4). How could this ardent prophet be overcome with such discouragement? Do we sometimes find ourselves in a similar situation?

Pope Francis once said that the present era is a time of great trials, "where it is more difficult to live as a consecrated person in today's world."<sup>8</sup> To fall into despair, to give up, to become lazy and to do nothing are great temptations. This is a challenge for all religious including us Carmelites. Evagrius Ponticus and Cassianus once reminded us that "acedia" or cowardice (feeling wry about life) is a disorder typical of hermits and monks. It usually manifests itself in two forms, namely sadness and laziness. This disease seems harmless enough from the outside, but it is in fact quite dangerous. It can make people feel too unmotivated to do anything, and overcome with a listlessness that snuffs out any kind of enthusiasm or hope. Pope Paul VI once mentioned among several obstacles in the task of preaching, "a lack of fervour (*parrhesía*) that is all the more serious because it comes from

<sup>8</sup> Pope Francis, *The Strength of Vocation. A Conversation with Fernando Prado*. Claretian Publications, Madrid, 2018, 49.

within” (EN 80; cf. GE 130). And to all of us in our time Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* also reminds us of these two temptations, namely *selfishness and spiritual sloth* (EG 81-82) and “defeatism which turns us into querulous and disillusioned pessimists, “sourpusses” (EG 85).

## **2. Our journey is [still] long**

Thank God that Elijah's story did not end with despair in the desert. What changed everything was God's intervention, as God manifested himself twice to Elijah through His messengers. On the second occasion the angel said: "Get up, eat; otherwise the journey will be too long for you" (1 Kings 19:7). It is very important to note here: first, in the midst of the prophet's difficulties and despair, God made himself present, letting Elijah know that he had not been abandoned. Second, the prophet was asked to get up and not remain in that miserable situation. Third, Elijah was instructed to eat, to regain strength from the sustenance provided by God. And lastly , Elijah was told that his journey was still very long, and that his mission was not yet complete. .

Temptation and laziness are part of the human condition. However, St. Teresa of Avila once reminded us that laziness means forgetting that one is a servant who must work hard for one's master, rather than one who just sits quietly waiting for the good results from one's garden that one should have worked for (Libro de la Vida 11,12). So God also invites us to get up. We need to learn from the psalmist who was able to awaken his own spirit:

*Awake, my soul!*

*Awake, O harp and lyre!*

*I will awake the dawn (Ps 57:9).*

The reason why we must get up and become strong again is because our journey is not yet complete. The Lord still has work for us to do. In various groups and places there are always pessimistic voices that tempt us, that tell us that everything has been determined and decided. Nothing we can do can make any difference. We recognize that the present is “complicated and difficult” and that the many crises that affect the world also affect the consecrated life. However, we are invited to acknowledge and confess our weaknesses, but we also want to show the world with strength and joy the holiness and vitality that are present in consecrated life. As like the voice of the angel of the Lord to Elijah, Pope John Paul II also calls out this prophetic voice:

*You have not only a glorious history to remember and to recount, but also a great history still to be accomplished! Look to the future, where the Spirit is sending you in order to do even greater things (VC 110).*

We too need to listen to this call of Pope Francis who reawakens our vocation and asks us to continue to be “lights in the Church”, responding to the new demands constantly being made on us, especially to the cry of the poor.

*Only by such concern for the needs of the world, and by docility to the promptings of the Spirit, will this Year of Consecrated Life become an authentic kairos, a time rich in God’s grace, a time of transformation (Pope Francis, Apostolic letter on the Occasion on Year of Consecrated Life, 21 November 2014, II.5).*

### **3. For the glory of the Lord God Almighty**

Why did Elijah work with such great zeal? What was his motivation? We must not forget that the prophet worked with such great passion because he desired to serve the Lord God of Hosts”. Passion for God is at the heart of Carmelite spirituality. The desire to seek God and serve Him is the starting point and goal of every Carmelite vocation. It can happen that our enthusiasm diminishes and we no longer have the same energy as we did when we first started our journey. The charism of our Order points us in the right direction. Why did this prophet who was once mighty suddenly experience such a deep crisis and lose all his enthusiasm? Our brother Alexander Vella, O.Carm wrote: “The reason why Elijah entered into such a deep crisis was because in a very imperceptible way Elijah had turned God into an idol”.<sup>9</sup> Unconsciously and slowly that glorious victory he experienced over the prophets of Baal had taken over the place of God. God now wanted to manifest His presence in a new way on Mount Horeb, a way that was more profound. This was not the God of thunder and noise and great power, but the God of soft silence (1 Kings 19:12). In silence and in the seemingly ordinary, God speaks and in situations of crisis, God also reveals His presence. This is contemplation, namely, an attitude of openness to God whose presence we find everywhere (Const. 82).

After this experience of God, the prophet was called to continue his mission. This is also the pattern of our own Carmelite lives. While continuously training ourselves in the contemplative life, we are called to persevere and be enthusiastic in our service, sharing our experience of God. There must be something that we

<sup>9</sup> Cf. A. Vella, A Journey With Elijah: Carmelite Seminar On The Prophet Elijah Whitefriars Hall, Washington DC 3-9 April 1991.

always do. The Lord Jesus himself said: "Blessed is that servant whom his master will find at work when he arrives" (Lk 12:43; Mat 24:46). St. Paul gives us an example, for how he struggled deeply but did not feel weary. St. Teresa of Avila advised us to be busy working while directing our hearts to the cross of Christ. This is also an important key to progress in spiritual life (Life 21, 10). The cross will continue to accompany us, but it does not have to exhaust our strength. Pope Francis wrote in *Gaudet et Exultate*:

*Look at Jesus. His deep compassion reached out to others. It did not make him hesitant, timid or self-conscious, as often happens with us. Quite the opposite. His compassion made him go out actively to preach and to send others on a mission of healing and liberation. Let us acknowledge our weakness, but allow Jesus to lay hold of it and send us too on mission. We are weak, yet we hold a treasure that can enlarge us and make those who receive it better and happier. Boldness and apostolic courage are an essential part of mission (GE 131).*

#### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND COMMUNAL REFLECTION:

1. Is there a certain laziness and discouragement in our lives as individuals, communities and provinces? What are the crises and weaknesses we experience? In the midst of our struggles today, do we still have a great enthusiasm?
2. "Get up and eat" (1 Kings 19:5.7). What do these words mean for us, as individuals, communities and provinces today? Where do we get the strength to continue the journey ahead?
3. Is the work we have been doing so far truly for the glory of God? Are we ready for new situations and able to see God's presence?

# Third Meeting

## **OUR DISCERNMENT: SOME SORT OF WORK TO DO**

The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.  
Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees (Is 35:2-3)

*<sup>1</sup> The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,  
the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus*

*<sup>2</sup> it shall blossom abundantly,  
and rejoice with joy and singing.*

*The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,  
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.*

*They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God.*

*<sup>3</sup> Strengthen the weak hands,  
and make firm the feeble knees.*

*<sup>4</sup> Say to those who are of a fearful heart,*

*"Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God.*

*He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense.*

*He will come and save you."*

Isaiah 35:1-4

**T**he name 'Carmel' appears 28 times in the Old Testament and in Is 35:2 Carmel is mentioned in the context of Isaiah's prophecy about the deliverance of Israel from exile. The name 'Carmel' is combined with the word 'majesty/splendor', and this is very appropriate, for Carmel means "God's garden". Carmel, or God's garden, must be majestic. May God also promise us majesty and splendor for Carmel today. However, here, the splendor of Carmel is once again not a noun, but a verb. The splendor of Carmel does not happen right before our eyes, but is a combination of God's grace and our hard work. This promise from God asks the people that their hands will no longer grow weary and their knees will no longer falter. Likewise, for Carmel to be truly resplendent, our hands must not be lethargic and our feet must not be unsteady. We need to believe in God's promise and His providence for the splendor of Carmel, but this requires us to work assiduously.

## 1. The important task of discernment

“You have some sort of work to do” is the theme of General Chapter 2025. These words of the Rule seem very simple, but they are inspiring and prophetic. In the context of our General Chapter, these words contain a very important message for the future of our Order: what are we doing? Pope Francis in *Gaudete et Exultate* reminds us that in our time we need to have the art of discernment (GE 167). Father General in his Letter of Convocation has underlined this crucial task:

*By discernment we will be able to identify clearly what apostolic work we are called to take on and in what manner we should perform that work as a way of giving expression to the gift we have received from the Holy Spirit, to be put at the service of God's reign, in other words, our charism and tradition.* (Fr. Míceál O'Neill, O. Carm. The Convocation of the General Chapter 2025).

In this spiritual discernment we individually and collectively study, examine, see possibilities, decide and choose clear and concrete, strategic, visionary and useful actions for the growth of our Order in the future. In a world that increasingly offers many choices, we have a historical task to choose wisely, carefully, but also courageously follow through on these decisions. Constitution 95 affirms:

*“Since not all forms of apostolic work easily fit in with our charism or with the resources of an individual community, we must always discern among the various options presented in any given situation.”*

For this task of discernment we need to recall the following criteria, as outlined in our Constitutions, namely:

- Listening attentively to the Word of God – and interpreting it from the perspective of the poor. This also includes listening to the guidance of the teaching of the magisterium of the Church (Const. 94)
- A clear and profound understanding of the charism of our Order (Const. 95)
- Listening to and responding to the realities of our world today: both global and local. First, we need to read the signs of the times; the problems arising from the cultural, social and religious circumstances of the people (Const. 94); and secondly, we need to look at the charisms and talents of the friars and the natural limitations of our contribution (Const. 94).

While remembering what the Holy Father said about the culture of fast-paced action, so that we need to learn to cultivate patience and precision, we also need to be aware of the urgency of important decisions and actions.

## **2. Recognizing and understanding the signs of our times**

We have a responsibility to carry out meaningful works that appropriately and effectively respond to the signs of the times. Through various encyclicals and other letters, the Holy Father Pope Francis has addressed the important signs of our times in the light of the Word of God and the teachings of the Church. We present here some basic themes to be the material for our discernment.

### **a. To proclaim joy and hope**

In our increasingly advanced times, there is an attitude that must be our concern, that our world is increasingly lacking in joy and hope. This must be a serious concern in our homilies, proclamations, works and presence.

*The great danger in today's world, pervaded as it is by consumerism, is the desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet covetous heart, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience. Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. God's voice is no longer heard, the quiet joy of his love is no longer felt, and the desire to do good fades. This is a very real danger for believers too. Many fall prey to it, and end up resentful, angry and listless. That is no way to live a dignified and fulfilled life; it is not God's will for us, nor is it the life in the Spirit which has its source in the heart of the risen Christ (Pope Francis, EG 2).*

### **b. Becoming a contemplative in our Time**

In *Gaudete et Exultate* 147-157 Pope Francis underlines the importance of living a life of constant prayer, so that the people of our time need to grow in friendship with God, in silence, intercessory prayer, adoration, reading of the Scriptures and the Eucharist.

*Finally, though it may seem obvious, we should remember that holiness consists in a habitual openness to the transcendent, expressed in prayer and adoration. The saints are distinguished by a spirit of prayer and a need for communion with God. They find an exclusive concern with this world to be narrow and stifling, and, amid their own concerns and commitments, they long for God, losing themselves in praise and contemplation of the Lord.... (147).*

*Saint John of the Cross tells us: "Endeavour to remain always in the presence of God, either real, imaginative, or unitive, insofar as is permitted by your works". In the end, our desire for God will surely find expression in our daily lives: "Try to be continuous in prayer, and in the midst of bodily exercises do not leave it.."(GE 148).*

In our Carmelite lives we strive to equip ourselves with spiritual weapons. And the Holy Father writes:

*The Christian life is a constant battle. We need strength and courage to withstand the temptations of the devil and to proclaim the Gospel. This battle is sweet, for it allows us to rejoice each time the Lord triumphs in our lives (GE 158).*

### **c. Fraternity and the culture of encounter**

In the face of the dark shadow of an increasingly disconnected world (FT 14-15) in the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis invites us to welcome all people as our brothers and sisters (FT 1), following the example of St. Francis of Assisi who knew no boundaries (FT 3).

*“Life, for all its confrontations, is the art of encounter”. I have frequently called for the growth of a culture of encounter capable of transcending our differences and divisions. This means working to create a many-faceted polyhedron whose different sides form a variegated unity, in which “the whole is greater than the part” (FT 215). What is important is to create processes of encounter, processes that build a people that can accept differences. Let us arm our children with the weapons of dialogue! Let us teach them to fight the good fight of the culture of encounter! (FT 217).*

### **d. Integrity of creation**

In the Encyclical *Laudato Si*, the Holy Father calls for concern for what is happening to the Earth as our common home.

*This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she “groans in travail” (Rom 8:22).*

Pollution and climate change, waste and throwaway culture, water problems, loss of biodiversity, the decline in the quality of human life and social decline, global inequality, etc. (LS 20-52) are serious ecological problems of our time. Therefore, Pope Francis calls for conversion, including ecological conversion (216-221), because “The external deserts of the world are expanding, because the internal deserts have become so vast.” (LS 217).

### **e. Young people**

Young people are the hope and future of the Order, the Church and the world. Therefore, pastoral care for young people must be one of most important concerns:

*We took the account of the disciples on the way to Emmaus (cf. Lk 24; 13-35) as paradigmatic for our understanding of the Church's mission to the young. This passage expresses well what we experienced at the Synod and what we would like every one of our particular Churches to experience with regard to the young. Jesus walks with two disciples who have not grasped the meaning of all that happened to him, and are leaving Jerusalem and the community behind. Wanting to accompany them, he joins them on the way. He asks them questions and listens patiently to their version of events, and in this way helps them recognize what they are experiencing. Then, with affection and power, he proclaims the word to them, leading them to interpret the events they have experienced in the light of the Scriptures. He accepts the invitation to stay with them as evening falls; he enters into their night. As they listen to him speak, their hearts burn within them and their minds open; they then recognize him in the breaking of bread. They themselves then choose to resume their journey at once in the opposite direction, to return to the community and to share the experience of their encounter with the Risen Lord. (Synod of Bishops, 'Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment', 27 October 2018, no 4.).*

## **3. Decisions and actions that bring newness and freshness**

The difficulties and problems experienced by religious congregations today take on many faces. However, Pope Francis reminded us at the celebration of the Year of Consecrated Life to embrace the future with hope:

*But it is precisely amid these uncertainties, which we share with so many of our contemporaries, that we are called to practice the virtue of hope, the fruit of our faith in the Lord of history, who continues to tell us: "Be not afraid... for I am with you" (Jer 1:8). (Pope Francis, Apostolic letter on the Occasion on Year of Consecrated Life, 21 November 2014, I.3).*

The Gospels of the New Testament are deeply missionary, perhaps more than we imagine. Therefore as we reflect upon the scriptures, we find the inspiration for going out to others and bringing the light of the Gospel. Constitution 96 states:

*Inspired by the fundamental directions of our charism and by present-day ecclesial and social contexts, the following guidelines are offered for the orientation and discernment of our apostolic mission:*

- *a life of brotherhood and prayer in the midst of the people;*
- *a response to the needs of the local and universal Church;*
- *a preferential service to the poor and the marginalized;*
- *a special attention to issues concerning women;*
- *a commitment to justice and peace;*
- *a care for those who show an interest in the spirit, the spiritual heritage, and the life of Carmel.*

Constitution 101 encourages us:

*We joyfully accept the invitation to "go out" and meet others on the "peripheries" and discover with them the joy of the Gospel.*

This is an important challenge for our common spiritual discernment. The Dicastery for Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic assures us that behind these challenges lies the authentic call of the Holy Spirit to rediscover the richness and potential of this form of life (*Starting Afresh from Christ 13*). The history of the Order has taught us that situations of crisis can provoke creativity which in turn bring newness and freshness to the life of the Order. This has happened for example in the renewal of Mantua, the reform of St. Teresa of Avila, the reform of Touraine along with others. May the actual situation we are facing today encourage us to seek together and to take new steps as God wills. May all this be a new *kairos*, a time of grace with new blessings for our Order.

#### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND COMMUNAL REFLECTION:

1. How have we carried out the apostolic works as stated in Const. 96 so far? Is there anything that still needs to be worked on to bring newness and freshness to our works?
2. What inspiration do the quotes from Pope Francis above (a-e) provide for the work in our community, Province and the Order?
3. What things have we not done so far and what do we need to do to respond better, more sharply and deeply to the signs of the times?
4. What peripheries need our attention?



Proposal submissions and Instrumentum Laboris reflection responses should be sent to:

General Chapter 2025  
General Secretary  
Via Giovanni Lanza 138  
00184 Rome,  
Italy.  
Email: [seggen@ocarm.org](mailto:seggen@ocarm.org)

