

INTERNATIONAL CARMELITE LAITY CONGRESS 2024

Following the proposal of Pope Francis for the whole Church *"that all communities should strive to provide the necessary means to advance on the path of pastoral and missionary¹ conversion"*, we invite you to participate in a new process aimed at defining the general lines for the International Congress of Lay Carmelites in 2024, with which we propose "not" an event, but rather the beginning of a new itinerary that will help to promote the vocation of the Lay Carmelite faithful and to build the foundations for the future - in a changing society - for pastoral work in "shared mission".

OBJECTIVES

To give a voice to the "associated" and "non-associated" Carmelite laity, the true protagonists of this itinerary, from an attitude of listening, arousing dialogue that allows the expression of concerns, experiences, opportunities, difficult situations and challenges of our laity.

To create a synodal space that reinforces co-responsibility in order to look at our participation in a diverse and gradual way in the charism and spirituality proper to the Order.²

Exercise discernment, in the light of the Word, in order to know God's will for "a proper and absolutely necessary participation³" of the mission of the Carmelite lay faithful in the 21st century.

To promote a joyful laity, "going out", which deeply lives its belonging and reference within this religious family and transmits a positive message of service to today's society.

To strengthen the links and knowledge of Lay Carmelites at the international level.

WHAT DO WE PROPOSE?

A SYNODAL JOURNEY

Synodality is a constitutive element in the Church and is part of its very nature. The word synodality means "walking together". It proposes to strengthen relationships, requires open missionary communities, invites all to conversion, and leads to mission. The whole itinerary that is being put forward, and the International Meeting of the Laity, will be marked by this key of synodality... let us walk together seeking communion!

A JOURNEY OF ACTIVE LISTENING AND DISCERNMENT

Discernment is the mission of the Church. The first followers of Jesus do not have an immediate answer, but they seek it, they set out, they go to see, (Jn 1 36-39, Mt 2, 1-

¹ Evangelii Gaudium 25

² Pt 30. Rule T.O.Carm.

³ Pt 24. Rule T.O.Carm.



12) ... They leave their comfort zone, they leave "their securities" and venture on unknown paths, and they are not afraid to confront the different, to seek answers ... Only those who really love the truth are ready to seek ... And Jesus says to us - to each one of us - like to those men in the Gospel: "*Come and see*" (Jn 1, 39) and invites us to live an experience.

In the different phases of this journey, from active listening to the laity, we will seek this discernment. It is necessary to clarify the Lord's plan, which implies good reasoning skills, fraternal listening, sincere intergenerational and religious-laity dialogue, in order to recognize and interpret the motions of the Spirit, knowing that it is a gift to be asked for.

A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

The Holy Spirit precedes us in the events of history. The Lord in his Word nourishes and guides our decisions. In describing this process as spiritual, we are inviting you to propose an experience of hope and of a personal encounter with the Lord, where listening, openness of mind and heart have their place. "*In Carmel, people, burdened with so many worries, are reminded that priority must be given to the search for the Kingdom of God and his justice (Mt 6:33).⁴ Only in this way will we be able to live an experience of the Spirit that lays the foundations for the future of pastoral ministry in a shared mission.*

LAY CARMELITES: "CALLED TO SET THE WORLD ON FIRE".

"Every lay Carmelite is like a spark of love thrown into the forest of life: it must be able to ignite in anyone who approaches it".⁵

This motto will accompany us at the Congress and is in line with Pope Francis' insistence on the need for openness in our Church; going out to others to reach out to the human peripheries. We want to underline that we are mission, a laity in action, we seek to go out of ourselves and out of the comfort of our communities, to set out on a journey; the love of God burns our hearts and impels us to share that love with others to change the world.

With the proposed slogan we would like to underline the following aspects:

- "*Lay Carmelites are called to live in the presence of the living and true God*"⁶, the **contemplative dimension** being essential in their life. "*In Carmel, men and women, burdened by so many worries, are reminded that priority must be given to the search for "the Kingdom of God and his justice"*"⁷ .

⁴ Pt. 33 Rule T.O.Carm.

⁵ Pt. 44 Rule T.O.Carm.

⁶ Pt. 32 Rule T.O.Carm.

⁷ Pt. 33 Rule T.O.Carm.



- We are a **family sharing the same charism**, living in the gift of Jesus Christ, taking as our reference point the Rule of St. Albert of Jerusalem⁸ - with the definitive approval of Innocent IV - and the Carmelite tradition. *"The Carmelite Order is present in the Church through the friars, the cloistered nuns, the religious of active life, and the laity, all of whom participate in a diverse and gradual way in the charism and spirituality proper to the Order"*⁹ .

- The Lay Carmelite is called in some way to **service**¹⁰ , which is a compassionate gaze, commitment and transformation for the construction of a more fraternal world, just in peace, and where the common home is cared for, the way to the realization of the Kingdom of God announced by Jesus of Nazareth, in the gift of whom we live. We are a **people "on the move"**, our mission is to be *"witnesses in the midst of a world that does not fully perceive, or totally rejects, the intimate and vital link with God"*¹¹ .

A Congress in three stages

1. The first stage will take place at the local level and is conceived as a moment of reflection and presentation of the process to the laity. For this preliminary phase, we have prepared this document to be read and meditated upon by the laity.

This phase **will run from 15 October 2023 to 25 March 2024**. During this phase, we propose that you work individually on this document, which concludes with a questionnaire that we ask you to fill in (link at the end of the document), which will not take up much of your time. For more information: seclaici@ocarm.org

This stage will culminate with the publication of an Instrumentum Laboris which will gather the different contributions of the document-questionnaire expressing concerns, experiences and challenges of the Carmelite laity and which will be the preparatory document that will set the guidelines for the Congress.

2. The second stage is the International Congress of the Laity to be held in **Rome from 15 to 21 September 2024**. The fundamental objective of the Congress is to determine concrete proposals and lines of action to energize the laity in our respective local realities and to strengthen the bases of the pastoral care of the shared mission. The Congress will revolve around four fundamental itineraries: **FORMATION, SERVICE, FRATERNITY AND PRAYER**, developed in lectures and workshops that will encourage reflection and dialogue among all and help us in our daily lives.

3. The third stage is conceived as the beginning of new paths that will make it possible to concretize what was reflected on in the local phase and what was experienced

⁸ Pt 2 Rule of St. Albert: *"Many times and in various ways the Holy Fathers have laid down how each one - whatever his state or the kind of religious life he has embraced - is to live in the gift of Jesus Christ and to serve him faithfully with a pure heart and a good conscience"* .

⁹ Pt. 30. Rule T.O.Carm.

¹⁰ Pt. 46. Rule T.O.Carm.

¹¹ Pt 49 cf. Gaudium et Spes 35.



on the occasion of the Congress. **Presenting the concrete proposals agreed upon to the General Chapter of 2025.**

TARGET

This itinerary is intended for all our lay people - associated or not -: tertiaries, other lay communities, JuCar, other groups, confreres, school teachers and other professionals linked to the Order, volunteers, members of our NGOs, catechists, etc., and all those who know us and - in one way or another - participate in and live our charism.

We ask the Provincials, the Superior Generals of the religious congregations and/or affiliated to the Order, and those with specific responsibilities for the laity to help us in the dissemination and diffusion of this questionnaire and the invitation to our Congress to all our laity.

As this is a spiritual journey, we ask all of you, especially our nuns, for your prayerful presence in this process.

We propose several reflective phases to help us discern: **CONTEMPLATE, SERVE AND LOVE.**

I. CONTEMPLATE

"The Kingdom of Heaven is also like a merchant who was in search of precious pearls; and when he found one of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it" (cf. Mt 13:44-46).

Throughout our history contemplation is not only the heart of the Carmelite charism but the greatest gift: it is a process of gradual transformation that invites us to be sentinels who discover the signs of God's presence. It is love that transforms our deeds, thoughts and feelings¹².

Contemplation is not an attitude of evasion or engrossment; the contemplative lives looking at the sky and capturing around him the small, fragile and sometimes multi-faceted signs of God's presence in our life and history, strengthening a serious and determined commitment to the transformation of the world.

In Carmel we have sublime testimonies and a whole tradition that helps us to live contemplation, *"in Carmel prayer becomes life and life blossoms in prayer"*¹³ but, we are lay people of the 21st century, our vocation has a "secular character", we are men and women of the society of immediacy, of noise, of frenetic activism, of connection to the screen...

II. SERVE

¹² cf Const. 16.

¹³ John Paul II: Letter to the Order with great joy, 3.



*"The Lay Carmelite is called to **service** which is an integral part of the charism given by God to the Order¹⁴ . "The Second Vatican Council reinforced the meaning and scope of the lay vocation, the mission, in the Church and in the world¹⁵ "... "I am a mission on this earth, and that is why I am in this world"¹⁶ . "It is proper to the laity to live in the world and in the midst of secular business and it is there that they are called to carry out the mission of the Church and to be Christian leaven through temporal activities"¹⁷ , "in their daily reality; called to be "salt of the earth" and "light of the world"¹⁸ .*

III. LOVE: CHOOSING THE FRATERNITY

"Every lay Carmelite is like a spark of love thrown into the forest of life: it must be able to ignite in anyone who approaches it¹⁹ " .

There is the idea that the committed lay person is the one who works in the parish, the one who is there to help the parish priest. *"Little thought has been given to how to accompany a baptized person in his daily and public life; how he - in his daily work - with the responsibilities he has, commits himself as a Christian in life. Without realizing it, we have created a lay elite, believing that only those who work for the priests are committed lay people, and we have forgotten and neglected the believer who often burns his hope in the daily struggle to live the faith"²⁰).* The mission takes us to our daily life, to our work, to our studies, to our neighborhood, to our village, to our family, to our community, to our leisure time. It is there that the evangelizing task entrusted to us is at stake... *"It is love that transforms our deeds, thoughts and feelings".²¹*

Luis Maza Subero, O. Carm
General Delegate of the Carmelite Laity

QUESTIONNAIRE

[Click here access the questionnaire](#)

<https://elink.do/congresocarm2024>

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¹⁴ Pto 46. Rule T.O.Carm.

¹⁵ LG 31

¹⁶ EG 273

¹⁷ Pt. 46. Rule T.O.Carm.

¹⁸ Pt. 49. Rule T.O.Carm./Matthew 7 13,14

¹⁹ Pt 44. T.O.Carm Rule

²⁰ Letter from Pope Francis to Cardinal Ouellet on the occasion of the meeting of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America on 13 March 2017

²¹ cf Const. 16

