

Establishing Canonical Status

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Over the past year, the Provincial Council has had interactions with several of our study groups regarding what is needed to be considered for canonical status. We wish to help clarify the process and what is required. Too many details can make it seem overwhelming, so please do not think of it that way. This is an attempt to respond with information that will assist the study group in its growth and discernment process.

In Article 49, the Constitutions contain a very short list of what is required by the Generalate for canonical status. Read these carefully and pray over the points many times as a study group.

It is important to understand that the canonical process is initiated by the Province and not by the local study group. It is the Provincial Delegate who has the responsibility for obtaining the proper permissions and documentation. This means that the Provincial Delegate, not the study group council, contacts the local Bishop for his permission.

Section XII and XIII of the Provincial Statutes contains further information on establishing a canonical community and special provisions for study groups.

A study group must demonstrate that it has developed a certain level of maturity as a community:

- Has the study group demonstrated that there are enough members willing to assume leadership and serve on the local council, and to field a full slate for elections?
- Has the study group gone through at least two cycles of elections and demonstrated an ability to handle changes in leadership in a mature manner?
- Is the study group willing and able to undertake a community apostolate?
- Is the formation process within the study group mature enough to undertake the formation of any isolates that might be assigned to them?
- Is the study group able to provide formation for all levels of membership? Does the formation conform to the Provincial Statutes?
- How long are the monthly meetings? Are they long enough to include sufficient time for formation, business, and fellowship?
- Has this recognized study group maintained the determined pursuit to become a canonical Discalced Carmelite Secular Community in cooperation with one another and the valid authority over them?
- Are they cohesive and compatible as a group?
- Have they demonstrated an ability to function as a Carmelite community that places the vocation of the Order above itself or individual personalities?
- Does the study group see and understand themselves becoming a community that will outlast the lives of any of its current members; one that will serve the Church and the Order into the future?

Achieving canonical status is not a fast process. It usually takes many years and then involves a lengthy discernment by both the study group itself and the Province Delegate (assisted by the

Provincial Council) to determine if the study group has the maturity needed to assume the autonomy granted by canonical status.

Often our study groups ask what the difference is between a canonical community and a study group. The most significant difference is autonomy:

- Study group councils do not have the authority to approve candidates for the Promise; canonical councils do.
- Study groups are not allowed to elect their council. The council is appointed by the Provincial Delegate. Canonical communities freely conduct their elections.
- When a study group is allowed to hold an election, the ballots are sent to the Provincial Council for counting and the Provincial Delegate (with the advice of the visitorator regarding the vote results) appoints the council.
- Study groups are closely supervised by the Provincial Council. They must submit their monthly minutes to the Provincial Council. Canonical communities only provide their minutes at the time of a visitation.
- Study groups normally receive visitations more frequently than canonical communities. Unless there is some need, canonical communities receive a visitation once every three years. Study groups receive a visitation once every two years.

Study groups are growing in their understanding of living Carmelite community life and the Carmelite charism and how that extends to the life of the Church and the world. A canonical community is depended upon by the Order and the Church to spread the charism of Carmel to the life of the Church and world into the future.

The Provincial Council:

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