

Attracting New Vocations – Let’s Get the Word Out

by Claire Bloodgood, OCDS

Some of you have asked for guidelines on “getting the word out.” This is very important if the OCDS is to survive and thrive in the province. Many communities are not attracting enough new members to replace those who are becoming aged and infirm.

In the past, “advertising” was frowned upon. The feeling was that the Holy Spirit would draw the people he wants. This is true, He does call people, and can intervene when He sees fit. However it is also true that God normally works through human beings (that’s us!). It is up to us to make the Order easy to find – visible – to those He is calling. (Romans 10:14)

Here are some approaches that have been seen around our province.

Word of mouth. Members actively invite others to look into the OCDS. Keep your eyes open and don’t be shy when you see potential. One OCDS member in a parish bible study brought in a dozen inquirers in the course of a few years.

Most communities have a **brochure** for members to give out. The brochures explain briefly who and what we are, and whom to contact for more information. These brochures may, with the pastor’s permission, be placed in the church. Don’t limit yourself to one parish! Anything within driving distance is fair game. Here’s a sample brochure you may adapt. (click on “Aspirancy brochure”)
<http://www.thereseo cds.org/formation-materials/aspirancy/>. Feel free to create your own.

Notices in **parish bulletins** are popular and cost nothing. Again, every parish within an hour’s drive should receive information for their bulletins. If they don’t want to insert a notice, the community might **buy an ad** for the year.

Some communities have their meetings listed in the **parish calendar** and their contact information on the **parish ministries web page**. Again, it raises awareness.

Promise ceremonies at a regular parish Mass make the community more visible. So does attending **feast day Masses together**, wearing the scapular. Some communities are able to set up a display highlighting the saint being celebrated. Something for people to take – holy cards, scapulars, etc. – is a nice touch. And of course the community brochure.

Outreach, outreach, outreach. That means **apostolate**, spreading Carmelite spirituality. The more Carmelites get out there and talk to people, the more people see and are attracted to the Carmelites.

- **Classes and talks** are a mainstay.
- **Retreats and days of reflection** open to the public also attract new people.
- Consider Carmelite-themed **articles for city and diocesan papers**;
- Arrange an interview for the local **Catholic radio**.
- Many communities have a **website**, a **blog**, or other form of presence on **social media**. These are especially attractive to younger people. Be sure to include a “for more information” link.

When deciding whether to accept a person for aspirancy, keep in mind that aspirancy is a “getting-to-know-you” time. We don’t expect the level of spiritual maturity we would want to see in a person entering preparation for the Promise. Are they practicing Catholics, are they interested in a deeper prayer life, do they seem able to get along with others, and do they want to learn more about Carmel? That is enough to begin with.

The year of aspirancy will show whether there is a possible vocation: attraction to Carmelite spirituality, perseverance in prayer, interest in the studies, able to form community, and a good fit with work and family responsibilities.