



Order of Carmelites | Province of the Most Pure Heart of Mary
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Ongoing Formation Methods
Lay Carmelites of the
Province of the Most Pure Heart of Mary (PCM)

1. Original “Gumbo” Method (2017 - Dahlstrom Method)
2. Carmelite Potluck “2.0” (St. Anne LCC #4302)
3. “Microwave Gumbo” Method for Ongoing Formation (Flower of Carmel LCC #2104)
4. “Box of Chocolates” Method for Ongoing Formation (Canada – East Region)
5. Alternate Book Discussion Format (Servants of Mary and Joseph LCC 4104)

Introduction

For many years the PCM Province of Lay Carmelites has required ongoing formation in the form of an at-home book reading/study and a follow-up group discussion during the monthly community meetings. Sr. Libby Dahlstrom, O.Carm., who was the Lay Carmelite Office Associate Provincial Delegate and primary Visitor of all communities until 2022, developed a “Gumbo” method, which sprang from her roots as a native Louisianan.

In many ways, the “Gumbo” method has evolved into a “Lectio Divina” exercise and has been very successful in enriching and forming Lay Carmelites who are at different levels of their spiritual journey. However, this highly recommended (at times considered required) method has not appealed to every Lay Carmelite Community.

In recent years various communities have requested to apply different methods of this ongoing formation exercise that support continuing spiritual growth in Carmelite spirituality but might better fit the personality of their group. In the past year or so, I agreed that other methods could be “vetted” and requested communities who developed an alternative that worked better than the “Gumbo” method to submit their suggestion to the Lay Carmelite Office (LCO) for review. This packet is the result of that request.

There are several elements to the PCM ongoing formation program:

1. The primary method for ongoing formation is to read, study, reflect on, and discuss a book that allows Lay Carmelites to become more knowledgeable of the Carmelite charism and continue to grow spiritually.
2. The material (book) must be Carmelite in nature and preferably taken from the *Recommended Book List for On-going Formation and Personal Reading (2023)*.
3. Prior to each meeting, community members prepare by reading short assignments that should be able to be completed in about 30 minutes.

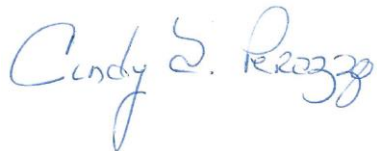
4. It is permissible to “take a break” from book study once or twice each year or whenever the community transitions from one book to another. This auxiliary material, whether in the form of a video, webinar, short magazine article, etc., must also be Carmelite.
5. On-going formation is scheduled for 1 ½ hours. All community members must engage in the communal discussion. We learn from each other as we share how the reading has inspired and influenced how we live out our Carmelite vocation.
6. It is not acceptable to simply “open the discussion” to whomever has something to say. Each member should be prepared to contribute to the discussion. A good way to prepare is to have three highlighted sections pre-marked and ready to share during the discussion phase.
7. Those who find it easy to speak within a group should be sensitive to the needs of others in their community who find it more difficult to share openly and need more time to process and reflect. Each member should be given ample time to enter the discussion. It is critical that each member of the community feels welcome to contribute and is given the time and opportunity to share.
8. Discussion is never to devolve into personal news, parish and/or diocesan information or gossip. Ongoing formation is not the forum for discussion of church dogma or activism for the various movements within the church. National or international political discussion is never to be discussed. Every discussion within the monthly community and formation meetings must remain strictly Carmelite in nature.

The LCO is distributing the following packet for your consideration. This packet should be printed out and placed in the Community Manual, Formator Guides, and in your *Carmel's Call* binders. Take the time to discuss the five (5) methods included in this packet. ***This should be done in Council and be facilitated by the Formation Director.*** Any of these methods – or combination - can be used as of January 2024. Your local community may need to try several before it settles on the approach that fits naturally for the group. This is completely acceptable. Remember that the resultant discussion should last about 1 ½ hours, include participation by each community member, and encourage reflection on how the material supports spiritual growth.

Your regional teams, especially the Regional Formation Coordinators, are available to discuss the various methods. I have asked them to consider holding a regional council meeting sometime this year, with ongoing formation as the main topic.

The Lay Carmelite Office leadership recognizes the importance of regular, ongoing formation to foster a lifetime of growth in authentic Carmelite spirituality for each community member. Ours is a spirituality that has been given to us and, in turn, offers us a path to wholeness and confidence that we are where God wishes us to be.

May we all experience many blessings as we grow together as Carmelites!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Cindy A. Perazzo". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Cindy A. Perazzo, T.O. Carm.
Provincial Coordinator
January 2024

Gumbo/Potluck Analogy

Ongoing Formation

Sr. Libby Dahlstrom, O.Carm. – Visitations 2017

The Gumbo ingredients you add to the 'pot' are the significant passages that you've underlined as you read the homework assignment before you get to the meeting. In the making of Gumbo, the ingredients include a variety of foods that will be put together and cooked to produce a wonderful meal that is never the same from one Gumbo to the next. This is because the ingredients are somewhat different each time the dish is made. You will see this is also true for the spiritual mix that will be put together in the Ongoing Formation session. Each session will not be the same as the previous one from one Community Meeting to the next. Each will have its own 'flavor' and ability to nourish. However, each member has homework and in order to make the Spiritual Gumbo, the homework must be done or you will have limited ingredients with which to 'cook'. If you are invited to a Potluck, you would never fail to bring something or you would be considered a 'freeloader', a 'moocher' or worse! So it is with the Ongoing Formation. **The homework for each person is to read the assigned pages BEFORE the day of the meeting and underline ALL of the significant ideas that touch them.** Each member needs to take seriously the obligation to do the homework. All of these underlined passages will become the (spiritual) ingredients forming the basis for the 1 ½ hours of ongoing formation for that month's community meeting. (Note: if someone is absent for a meeting, it is that person's responsibility to find out what the assignment is for the next month's Ongoing Formation.)

Format for the Ongoing Formation segment of the meeting: (*making spiritual Gumbo*)

Preliminary: IF there are 10 or more members present, get into small groups of 5 or 6. These small groups need to be formed in a RANDOM way each month. Decide who will be the first person so that all will know when a circle has been completed.

STAGE ONE –basic idea is to read aloud all the significant ideas that have been underlined by the members of the group.

- a) First person notes a page number and indicates where on the page the underlined idea is located. All in the group find the page and mentally read the sentence(s) as the person reads the idea aloud, with no discussion or explanation. This puts this idea into the symbolic "gumbo pot." Everyone in the group puts a mark of some kind (e.g. a dot or circle) in the margin next to what the person read aloud so that after all the ideas have been noted/read aloud, you will know what's been added into the "pot."

- b) The next person in the circle does the same process with one of his/her underlined ideas. This does not need to be “in order” of assigned pages; the next person can choose to note an idea from any of the assigned pages in random order.
- c) Each person notes/reads aloud one underlined idea per turn, and the group is to go around the circle 3 times.
- d) After 3 rounds, the question is asked: does anyone else have anything underlined that has not yet been noted/read aloud.
- e) Stage One is completed when everything that anyone in the group has underlined has been added to the “pot.”

STAGE TWO –basic idea is to hear insights about some of the ideas that have been noted/read aloud in the first stage....

- a) The first person will pick any idea that has been read aloud and is “in the pot” and SAY SOMETHING about its significance to living the Carmelite vocation for you. This is to be stated in only a few sentences; it’s not meant to be a comprehensive presentation or anything like that. It’s meant to be an idea or insight regarding its connection to Carmelite spirituality. NO discussion.
- b) Go around the circle 3 times; say something about only one idea per turn. You may choose ANY idea that has been noted /read aloud: it can be an idea you put in yourself, or one that someone else put in, or an idea that someone else has chosen.

STAGE THREE – this stage corresponds to “eating and savoring the gumbo”---- FREE-FLOWING IN-DEPTH DISCUSSION

- a) Now is the time to actually discuss ideas and insights that have surfaced in the first two stages. Anyone can bring up an idea/insight for in-depth free-flowing discussion...NO MORE GOING AROUND THE CIRCLE IN TURN.
- b) The task is to “go deep” into the meaning; the task is NOT to try and “cover” all the ideas that have been put in the “pot.”

St Anne Lay Carmelite Community #4302

Reading Together: Ongoing formation and community discussion guide

As a community we “read together;” sharing insights and learning from each other’s unique perspective is an important part of being in community. Reading “together” is not a natural method and often frustrating.

Using the guidelines from our Provincial leadership, a structured reading method helps to include all voices and perspectives from the community. This document can be used as an addendum to the prescribed method, often referred to as the “gumbo pot,” and written from the perspective of a facilitator. To avoid confusion, we will call this the “potluck table.”

Facilitator: Your role is to keep the conversation moving, and to help the discussion converge upon one or two themes for open discussion. The group will need to go through a process (outlined below) before open discussion, to ensure maximum participation. A group size of 5-7 people should be able to finish in 90 min.

Participants: Your role is to contribute to the process of “reading together” by bringing your dish to the table. Your contribution is valuable, and you should be prepared ahead of each discussion. Other's contributions are equally valuable, so sharing the table and avoiding too much discussion early in the process is important.

Step 1: Bring your dish to the table...15-20 min

Facilitator...ask everyone to offer a short passage from the selected reading. This is not the time for discussion, or insights, only “bring a dish to the table” at this time. You may go in order around the table to ensure equal participation. Everyone should note the passage in their books.

Participant...read a short passage, no discussion. The first step is not about you, it is about preparing for our community meal later in the session.

NOTE: Three times around the table should be sufficient to cover the entire reading.

Step 2: Taste and reflect about what you see on the table...20-25 min

Facilitator...ask everyone to select a short passage from the contributions already made. At this time, our table is full, so encourage participants to review all of the passages or “dishes on the table” before making a selection. Try to avoid new material! During this step, you should also

note frequent passages, and begin to distill a theme or two that sums up the chapter...allow the group to arrive at the theme(s) organically.

Participant...you should select a passage which has already been selected. It may be your own previous selection, but preferably one that another participant has “brought to the table.” Offer a very brief reflection about how this passage speaks to your particular Carmelite vocation. This is not the time for discussion, long reflections, or personal testimonies, but this is truly about “you” and your vocation.

NOTE: Three times around the table should be sufficient to find a recurring theme.

Step 3: Grab a plate, fill it up, and enjoy each other’s company...15-20 min

Facilitator...Announce the theme for open discussion. This should be selected based on how frequently it came up during the Step 2 reflection. For example, “we visited page 42, six times, reflecting on the theme of prayer during dryness. Let’s discuss that as a group for the next 15 min.”

Participant...Open discussion, as we enjoy the feast before us.

Microwave Gumbo Style for Ongoing Formation
Submitted by Flower of Carmel LCC #2104

Important Notes:

1. Like the Gumbo format, it is essential that the facilitator of the Formation session ensures everyone is involved and has a specific opportunity to present their thoughts. This should be done by going around the group in an orderly flow and giving everyone a chance to present their highlights.
2. Each person must prepare for the Formation session by reading the assignment and highlighting passages they found to be important to their Carmelite charism and spirit. Each person should identify several passages they wish to share with the community since someone else may highlight and share the same passage.
3. The formation session should still take about 90 minutes.

Discussion Process:

1. The facilitator selects the first person to present one of his/her highlighted passages. That person reads his/her passage and explains why they highlighted that passage. His/her explanation should focus on these questions (or similar ones):
 - i. How does this passage relate to your journey in Carmel?
 - ii. What in this passage stirred your interest?
 - iii. What did this passage make you think of as you read it?
2. The group should now discuss that passage and their reaction. This discussion should continue to be guided by the questions. Not everyone needs to talk during this portion, but the facilitator should not let the conversation be dominated by a few, thereby neglecting others. This is a time when the wisdom of the Holy Spirit should flow from the group (from everyone, not just a few).
3. When that conversation subsides, the facilitator invites the next person in the group to present one of his/her highlighted passages, followed by another group discussion.
4. This process of going around the group continues until everyone has an opportunity to present his/her highlighted passage.
5. Once everyone has shared a passage, everyone is allowed to present another highlighted passage, followed by discussion.
6. Formation discussion groups should ideally be between 6 and 10 people.

Ongoing Formation Alternate Method

Submitted by Canada-East/New York Region

Here is a suggestion for a new format. This new proposed format helps to maintain focus on each golden nugget of the material. Instead of being a “soup” method, it is more like a “box of chocolates.” Each “chocolate” is fully savored by the group before selecting the next “chocolate” to try.

Homework

The community formation coordinator, or a member of the community council, assigns the pages to be read for the next ongoing formation meeting. Members read the assigned material beforehand and select a minimum of three passages each that touched them or inspired them. The minimum requirement is to select three passages, but members are encouraged to choose an extra passage or two in case of overlap or if there is time for additional passages to be shared. A passage from the reading material can be a few words, a short phrase, or a few sentences, but should not exceed one paragraph in length.

Ongoing Formation Meeting

Preparation

Divide the members into groups with 4-6 members in each group. Let’s call the participants: Participant A, Participant B, Participant C, etc. Assign a facilitator for each group from among the members in the group. The main job of the facilitator is to keep track of time and to make sure discussions do not exceed the recommended time framework.

Opening Prayer

Begin the meeting with an opening prayer. This can be the traditional Holy Spirit Prayer, or another prayer that the community has chosen for the opening of their ongoing formation meetings.

Format of sharing

The facilitator for the group will assign the order for sharing. He or she will also make it clear that all sharing is optional at each stage of the sharing process, and a participant can say “pass” or “amen” or “please come back to me later.”

Round 1

Participant A reads the first passage that he/she has selected from the reading material and explains why the passage was selected or why it inspired . Other members of the group refrain from speaking or commenting until Participant A has finished speaking about their selected passage. After Participant A has finished speaking, members of the group may share any thoughts they may have about the selected passage. The group discussion lasts anywhere from zero minutes (if there are no comments from the group) to a maximum of five minutes. The group facilitator will keep track of the time and gently bring the group discussion to a close after five minutes. The group facilitator can say something like “We can come back to this discussion later if there is still time, but now we must turn to Participant B to begin their sharing.”

Participant B reads the first passage that they selected, and he or she explains why they have selected the passage or why it inspired them. Group discussion follows on Participant B's passage (0-5 minutes). The round continues until all participants in the group have shared their first passage.

Round 2

Round 2 is the same format as Round 1 except that participants now share the second passage that they have selected from the reading material.

Round 3

Round 3 is the same format as previous rounds except that participants now share the third passage that they have selected from the reading material.

After Round 3

If there is still time remaining in the meeting, participants may share additional passages they may have selected, or the group facilitator may return to any previous discussions that were deferred because of the 5 minute discussion limit.

Duplicate Passages

It often happens that members select the same passage for discussion. It's perfectly acceptable to share the same passage more than once during the rounds. Most likely the members who choose the same passages have different reasons for doing so, and there can be different nuances to the ensuing discussions. Alternatively, if a participant would prefer to avoid duplication, they may elect to share a different passage when it is their turn. For those participants who prefer to avoid duplication, they are encouraged to select one or two extra passages when they do their homework so they can resort to one of these extra passages in the event of duplication.

Closing Prayer

The meeting ends with a closing prayer. This can be the traditional closing prayer, or another prayer that the community has chosen for the closing of ongoing formation meetings.

ONGOING FORMATION FORMAT

Submitted by Servants of Mary and Joseph LCC #4104

- Read the assignment before the meeting and underline or highlight passages that you personally felt inspired by, had an impact on you or were difficult to understand.
- Break up into small groups.
- Begin with one person sighting a passage from the assignment and reading it to the group. Then the person can talk about what impressed them or made an impact on them or inspired them about this passage.
- Then each person that also underlined that passage can add their comments or insight and the passage can be discussed further. If someone found that passage difficult to understand this can be the time to discuss what others gleaned from it.
- Go around the circle to the next person who can then cite and read a passage aloud to discuss and delve into what they found insightful or challenging.
- This process continues until all the underlined passages have been discussed. It is not necessary to go in order by page.
- Stop 15 minutes before the time for discussion is up and give each person an opportunity to say how this assignment may have had an impact on their spiritual journey or what insights they may have gained. The group may also try to find a particular overriding theme or lesson to be learned from this reading assignment.