

## **PRINCIPLES FOR LEADING DISCUSSIONS**

Several different kinds of discussions may take place in OCDS meetings and formation classes. There may be simple discussions of upcoming events; consideration of a course of action preliminary to a vote; factual discussion of a text under study; or faith sharing. Although ultimately all our discussions are directed toward developing our union with God in faith and internalizing various aspects of the Carmelite charism, a discussion leader needs to have a clear understanding of the immediate goal of a discussion in order to gently guide the participants to maintain a proper focus.

A basic principle is that each of us is led by the Holy Spirit on the spiritual journey in Carmel; the Director of Formation and team play a subsidiary role, always careful to respect God's way of working with others.

1. Prepare beforehand. Understand the material to be discussed and the points you want to make, and anticipate questions that are likely to arise. Develop open-ended questions without yes or no answers. Open-ended questions are very useful, both in discernment and in assessing knowledge and understanding. Be sure that the questions are not intimidating in any way. No more than a third of the available time should be devoted to presentation, with two thirds reserved for discussion.
2. Listen carefully to the participants and ask questions only when necessary to keep the discussion moving or focused. Being truly heard and accepted (even if not always agreed with) will stimulate everyone to join in the exchange of ideas.
3. Maintain a focus without being bound to a prepared set of questions or outline; adapt to what is needed as the discussion moves along.
4. Encourage participation by gently including hesitant members, gradually developing a warm, accepting, open climate. A sense of humor, expressed in a sensitive, caring way, will add to everyone's enjoyment of the discussion.

5. Maintain an inviting facial expression, tone of voice and body posture. It will make an enormous difference in how your efforts are received.
6. We should be paying constant attention to our own honesty, respectfulness and openness during discussions and encourage others to do likewise, in order to assist the community's growth.
7. Allow for lots of levels of disclosure; encourage each person to contribute at a personally comfortable level.
8. Accept silence as an important part of natural human communication that can be very useful. As it is an important aspect of our charism, encourage comfortable silences, but know when to break the silence in order to maintain momentum.
9. Encourage participants to wait before speaking a second time, to give others an equal opportunity. This is a time when silence can be personally beneficial for the person who wants to speak, and for the group, giving us an opportunity to absorb what has already been said, and encouraging the more reticent members to contribute. There is a shared responsibility for how a discussion develops.
10. Since trust is essential to allow each person to open up, our sharings do not become topics of conversation or gossip in other settings.
11. Some faith-sharing groups focus simply on faith sharing, without catechesis. Ours is not one of those. While we ask each other to listen carefully in order to understand one another properly, and to accept one another as we are, in love, occasionally there is a need to correct someone. Usually this is best left to those in authority. When it is necessary, it should be done calmly, with great kindness and respect for the person being corrected, and for any others present.