

Dear OCDS Members:

Greetings to the OCDS in our Province.

Know that the friars are praying for the OCDS members of our Province, asking our gracious God to protect you from illness, and to comfort those who have experienced loss of a loved one or friend. While we are living in uncertain times, we understand that Jesus walks by our side, sending the Holy Spirit to comfort us, so that we may joyfully live by peaceful endurance, praising God for all the graces He has bestowed upon us.

Acknowledging that the method and rate of “opening” will vary in each state and county, I want to send this letter to offer some suggestions on different aspects on the resumption of OCDS life in the Province.

The first point I want to make is an important one: *All groups are to follow the guidelines of their local health authorities, as well as their local dioceses. No meeting is to take place that does not meet the requirements of your diocese and county / city.* It is important that we keep the health and safety of the other members of our community in mind, and by following all local guidelines, we will help create a safe environment for our meetings. This will probably mean all members, when meetings begin again, will be required by the state or city, to wear masks to the meetings. *If this is required in your location, everyone should wear a mask following the mandate in your locality.*

In terms of attendance, we again look to the local diocese and county for guidance. Where the requirement for Sunday Mass attendance has been dispensed from, the attendance requirement is also dispensed. If there is a limit to the number of people allowed to gather for a meeting, that is to be strictly followed. If someone does not feel completely safe attending an OCDS meeting, then they should not attend. We all have different levels of “feeling safe” in groups given the present situation and that should be respected. No one should feel forced to attend a meeting if they do not feel safe.

There will be questions about elections when meetings begin. My recommendation is not to have the election at the first community meeting. I think communities should wait at least one meeting so that people can get a sense of what measures are needed to ensure safety, and how to meet any health requirements. This will cause delays, but I think delay is better than conducting an election immediately upon returning.

Regarding formation, I realize this is going to be a complex issue, and my recommendation is that the local council devise a plan, then check with your Provincial Council representative. Hopefully, working together, the OCDS Provincial Council and communities will be able to develop a method for formation matters in this difficult time.

Another issue can be about the ability to meet in a community's normal location. Again, we need to follow the guidelines that a given location requires, especially in terms of number and sanitation. It might happen that a location has decided to cancel gatherings for the rest of the year. If that happens, please contact the Provincial Council member for your area, and we can begin to deal with that issue as it arises.

These are responses to just some of the issues that we will encounter as we begin to meet again in the coming months. I encourage that we practice that patient endurance spoken of by St. Paul. We do not know the course of the coronavirus in the coming months, but what we do know is that God will be with us to give us that peace that comes only from the Holy Spirit.

We have a great vocation as Carmelites, to pray in the heart of the Church for the world and all peoples. Pray intensely for this world experiencing doubt, sadness and fear – pray that the peace of Christ will enter all hearts, and that the Blessed Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Mount Carmel, will spread her mantle of protection over the whole world.

May God bless and protect one and all.

Your brother in Carmel,

Fr. Matthew Williams, OCD

OCDS Provincial Delegate