

## **CCA HISTORY**

**Sr. Marian Steffens, OCD**

### *We come to share our story 1970 to 2015*

As I greet you today, the most important message I want to pass on is the truth that You, each one of you is CCA. We are CCA. The key to this reality is our relationships. Just as each family has a story, a history, so does our Association. I am happy to begin the story and Sr. Claire will take you to our present situation, but it falls to you, our newer members to carry the torch and keep the story alive and growing.

### ***All stories start 'In the beginning' and so it is with ours.....***

The purely contemplative life has always been treasured as an important part of the Church. Many letters, instructions, addresses, are the proof of the esteem for this charism for the Church.

Pope Pius XII issued an Apostolic Constitution in 1950, entitled *Sponsa Christi*. Besides laying out the theology of the purely contemplative life, Pius acknowledged the need to adapt the long standing regulations of what is called *Papal Cloister* because of 'variations and changes of time and circumstances' in a sentence, which to me is a good rule of thumb for interpretation of law and the documents states: "And not only the apostolic orders, but also the purely contemplative ones have been times induced or compelled by circumstances and the grave need in which they find themselves to modify these same norms or to interpret them more broadly." (p.17 introduction to the constitution) In this same important document, there is a strong recommendation by the Holy See for monasteries of nuns to form federations (Article VII).

Because all monasteries are *sui juris*, i.e. autonomous communities where the prioress is a major superior, this call of the Church was not readily accepted. The situation at the times called for something to be done as monasteries were struggling with isolation and lack of vitality. The poverty of some groups was a concern, but the viability and the spiritual health were even of greater concern. There was need for the building up of the purely contemplative life and this document strongly encourages the nuns to find suitable monastic work in the goal of proper support of their monasteries.

Federations were seen as a way 'to give one another fraternal aid, not only in promoting the religious spirit and regular monastic discipline, but also in managing economic matters'. (#8 page 34)

***The years that followed this document have been named "the rocky road federation."***

Within our Carmelite order there were attempts to begin. There were regional meetings held in Boston, Indianapolis and a big gathering in Philly in 1954 at Eden Hall. Federation was debated and fears were surfaced. The question of autonomy always surfaced, but it seemed there was the fear of losing the simplicity of our government as autonomous monasteries that was the biggest obstacle. No one wanted to have another structure with a mother general or federal president. Mistrust was evident.

**And then came Vatican Council II** with the strong call of the Spirit to renew structures and religious life. In 1965, Fr. Thomas Kilduff, OCD who had been working in formation with our Carmels with the help of others, planned a meeting in St. Louis to address the need of renewal and the situation of our US Carmels. The prioress and novice mistress came to hear theologians and canonists as well as prepared papers given by our own sisters. This gathering was a watershed for the renewal of our monasteries and it was at this St. Louis meeting that the question of federation again surfaced. There were many meetings in St. Louis.

After the meeting, letters were exchanged, but no strong recommendation was forthcoming from our generalate. In fact some in Rome were opposed.

However **there was a felt need among the nuns to help each other** in the renewal process called forth from the Vatican Council. In New England, with the support of the provincial, the sisters began to meet on a regular basis in each other's Carmel. It was a grass roots effort to build relationships and trust of one another. The entire host community was present for the on-going dialogue and we encouraged the Carmel to send not only the prioress but to let it be open to all. These meetings and sharing not only prepared us for CCA, but also helped us to accept the diversity we were experiencing in our efforts to respond to the call of the council.

At the same time there were efforts across the various contemplative orders to assist one another and a national seminar was planned for all Orders to come in 1969 to Woodstock. It was here that a national association of contemplative sisters was initiated, ACS.

In Barrington, we sent 4 sisters to this seminar and received help from Saranac Lake Carmel. Sr. Ellen came to our Carmel for six months. The New England Association was enabling this assistance in personnel.

In 1969 Fr. Christopher Latimer, OCD, provincial of Washington Province received a rescript to call a meeting of those Carmels interested in beginning a federation/association.

Twenty-four monasteries sent delegates to Marriottsville, January 29-Feb.2. It was here that the **45 delegates chose to begin an association**, rather than a federation and chose an interim group of 5 members to plan the next steps.

**Statement of purpose and statement to the participating carmels:** *It is the insight of this assembly that a union of carmels in the United States will promote and strengthen personal and community renewal in our Teresian ideal. The unity we desire is above all one that flows from a basic understanding, love and acceptance of each Sister and community rather than from a detailed organization.*

*We wish to propose to the carmels who were represented at this initial meeting that this union be established in a very true sense by a commitment of each community to this end and to an involvement in the working process now begun-in so far as they desire.*

**We chose to be called ACN, Association of Carmelite Nuns.** The committee was:

Mary Paul Cultri - Latrobe  
 Jean Alice Mcgoff - Indianapolis  
 Angela Pikus - Elysburg  
 Vilma Seelaus - Barrington  
 Connie FitzGerald - Baltimore

In the beginning there was not yet enough trust to name a coordinator.

### ***The first meeting of the new association***

It was decided that the first meeting of the New Association would be in 1971 at Richfield and focus on the Carmelite charism. Each of the 21 member carmels would present a paper on an aspect of the charism. We would be a grassroots association meetings open to all sisters in our communities. Sisters formed a lifelong friendship and found respect, acceptance, affirmation and the freedom to challenge and disagree. Trust deepened as we came to know each other as sisters and friends.

The interim committee sensed that our members shared a deep conviction that the reality of Carmel is a unique gift of the Spirit within the Church. This stimulated the desire and the hope that all of us together in our 21 monasteries would enter into the preparation for our 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting with enthusiasm.

The assigned topics:

- Why review and concentrate on the Teresian Charism? - Barrington, Little Rock Peewaukee
- Teresian Charism (Prayer Forms, Education, Etc.) - Baltimore, Bettendorf, Bronx
- Silence - Wheeling, Boston, Lafayette
- Solitude - Reno, Saranac Lake, Sacramento

- Penance – Barre, Oklahoma, Jackson
- Prayer as Friendship: Presence in Friendship in Community – Latrobe, Loretto, Cleveland
- Presence to the World or Communication – Indianapolis, Savannah, Concord

These grouping of Carmels encouraged interaction and collaboration, incorporating the views of 3 Carmels in the final paper and deciding who would give the paper were also enabling of the gifts of the 3 different communities. There were 117 nuns and friars who attended this 1971 meeting.

### ***Succeeding meetings***

It was at the 1972 meeting that an organizational structure was established. With the assistance of David Ruhmkorff from Management Design, Inc. (Ohio)

The member monasteries decided to choose *Unity in Diversity* as a major expectation, setting up a coordinating committee of 5 and the decision making body called the DA delegate assembly comprised of 2 members from each community. We set up goals and decided to have yearly meetings (the first 10 meetings were held annually). Communication and trust between Carmels and individuals were of major concern. There was a desire to assess the real needs of monasteries and set up strategies and goals to meet the needs. It was seen to be an enabling organization. At this gathering, the trust level enabled the delegates to vote for a coordinator. Sr. Mary Paul was elected.

In 1973 we met at Adrian, WI and our focus was prayer and communication. The small group sharing indicated how the trust level had grown and there was a greater peacefulness about diversity. (Witness of Mother Amata – San Diego Carmel)

As we moved ahead in our renewal process, it was a time of change in our member Carmels, there was no clear guidelines for the order. Communal discernment was needed. Our 1974 meeting at Racine had discernment as its focus. Our good friend, Sr. Agnes Mary Burkhard, SSND, taught and led us through the process of discernment. It served us well when we attended Fr. Finian Monahan's meeting in St. Louis with all the Carmels later that year.

In preparation for this national meeting with the general, CCA considered the possibility of dissolving if there was a consensus to form only one national union in the United States. Although there were pros and cons to this question, CCA wanted unity and we agreed to the possibility.

Discussion at the meeting – consensus reached, hands raised, the under current and the splintering of the group followed. St. Teresa's Association was started. We felt betrayed, but determined to keep working together in the renewal called forth by the church at Vatican Council II.

### ***Conception of the Charter of Life***

It was fitting that our 1975 meeting in Holyoke should be planned to review our history of Carmel so that our renewal and adaptation be in harmony with the charism of the Order and with the Spirit's call. Our own sisters led us through our history with many creative presentations. The guest resource persons, Fr. John Finnegan and Sr. Margaret Brennan, IHM, affirmed and encouraged the growing desire of the nuns to express in some literary form our lived experience of the ten years since the council. Thus an important decision of the participants was that a *Charter of Life* should be written, based on the contribution of all member Carmels. A task force for this project was set in place shortly after the Holyoke meeting.

We welcomed our first international guest in the 1976 meeting in Faulkner. Sisters from Holland, Canada, and the Philippines, listened with us to Sr. Mary Daniel Turner, SND's provocative talks on Poverty. Then we dialogued with them about their experiences and insights and we committed ourselves again to ongoing communication about our concerns in the order, particularly Constitutions and self-government.

Work on the charter was the focus of the 1977 meeting at Convent Station. The task force had offered guidelines and a diagram for assisting our reflection from responses received had been able to draft sample texts for consideration. Later, CCA, ACS and CLSA, sponsored a seminar for contemplatives on the Theology of Church and Law—all these preparing us for new Canon Law in 1983 and our new legislation in 1991.

**At this time, 4 of our Carmels withdrew from the CCA with the intention of beginning another Association.** Oklahoma, Peewaukee, Little Rock and Jackson, would be charter members of the new association begun in 1978, Queen of Carmel.

Father Brian McDermott and Father Bob Leavitt held our rapt attention in both 1978 in Cincinnati and Holyoke II in 1979 as they gave us talks on Christology and Theology. They were our first resource persons to have a return engagement by popular demand.

In 1981 our meetings became biannual. Renewal and initial formation were a two-fold focus of our concern and our own sisters were again our resource persons at Faulkner II in 1981 with Fr. Tom Berry to give us an appreciation for the new cosmology.

A desire for an updated history of Carmel surfaced at this meetings and the importance of communal archives surfaced and led to the planning of an *Archive Workshop* in November, 1983 at Beacon Carmel to assist communities in their discernment and proper preservation of archival materials. The existing history committee continued to collect oral histories of the senior members of communities and the reprinting of Charles Curries' *Carmel in America* was planned for 1990.

CCA also had meetings for the treasurers and musicians of our member Carmels.

Contemporary interpretations of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross were enthusiastically welcomed by the participants of our 1983 meeting in Faulkner. Constance

FitzGerald and Jack Welch, O.Carm shared their gifts in this area and enriched their audience with insights into the profundity of our saints' message for today's Carmelites. Also at this meeting some of our sisters in initial formation requested a program that would enable them to profit from the giftedness of sisters in other communities. The CCA honored this request by planning a formation seminar at Peterborough, N.H. at which sisters from several carmels would share their particular expertise with the sisters in formation. Additional seminars took place in 1986, 1988 and 1990. In 1993 the Intra-Carmelite Formation Program began.

Ways in which the texts of John of the Cross address stages of human/spiritual growth were eloquently unfolded by Fr. Ernest Larkin, O.Carm at the 1985 meeting held in Willimantic, CT. He was followed by Miriam Lahey, a gerontologist, who spoke to out increasing concern for the well-being of the growing numbers of elderly and ill sisters in our communities as well as to the aging process we are all in.

At this meeting a decision was made to re-publish Carmel in America and to initiate the process for an eventual updated history of Carmel in the US. The formation directors met together and planned a meeting to share their experience and learn from each other as well as from qualified resource persons. From 1985 through 1990 they gathered each year and profited greatly through their learning and sharing.

The end of 1986 witnessed the arrival of the draft legislation. Voluminous was the correspondence that flowed between associations and federations throughout the world as we sought the best way to respond to Rome about this text. Sisters from the US Associations met in Redlands, CA to share their thoughts and to collaborate on material for a response. Later in that same month of February, a special meeting of CCA was held at the Christian Brothers Retreat House in Narragansett to share the fruit of the Redlands meeting and to compose a corporate response to the legislation.

At our 1987 National Meeting at Our Lady of Peace in Narragansett, Sr. Mary Daniel Turner, SND helped us once again by raising our awareness of our inner resources and power as women. The theme of the meeting was *Women of Carmel: Our American Experience*. Sr. Joan Williams followed with her story of Elizabeth Carberry, an early American Carmelite from whose experience we can learn from for our time.

The bicentennial of Carmel in the US was wondrously celebrated at our 1989 meeting in Baltimore. Through an all-star cast of speakers and responders, every aspect of Carmel was presented and reflected upon. Carmelites from beyond CCA came to celebrate with us. Then, a significant step for our future was taken when the DA accepted a proposal that we look into the care of our members and find ways to collaborate in these areas which are affecting our communities. The quality of contemplative life in Carmel is the value that may well call us to close collaboration in the future.

Two years later in 1991, we were farther into the situation of uncertainty about the future because of the above factors. At this meeting held once again in Narragansett, Kevin Culligan nourished us with material drawn from John of the Cross' *Dark Night*, pointing out the value of our experience of the darkness and calling us to transformation. Sr. Joanna of

Holland laid open to us the situation of the Carmels in Holland and urged us to deal with our concerns now while we have the energy and ability and the options for it.

Then Sr. Mary Ellen Butcher, OP strongly impressed on us the need for future planning and gave guidelines for it. Sobering thoughts were engendered, which led the participants to request of the CCA a process for helping our Carmels to get to know each other better in view of a probable need for future collaboration.

The CCC, the Community Concerns Committee set up a plan where our members were asked to arrange for smaller group meetings among themselves. These meetings helped us all to know the reality of each of our Carmels. From this project and the intense collaboration of Barre, Saranac Lake, Elysburg and Beacon was born a new foundation, the Carmel of the Incarnation founded in 2000 on August 24<sup>th</sup> and located in Beacon, NY.

At our 1993 National Meeting we had another Prayer/Communication experience using the format of the Experiment in Hope, sharing in small groups on the Gospel of Luke. Later that same summer a group of our sisters and Fr. Steve Payne, OCD had a more intensive experience of the experiment in hope at a retreat house in Biddeford, Maine.

The bonds of friendship were strengthened in both these events of CCA as Sr. Jean Marie wrote in her narrative account of the 1993 meeting, "Not only was it evident in our sharing that we trust in our own experience of God, but that as Carmelite women, we have come to a maturity that is at home with diversity."

The next National Meeting was at Esopus, NY and it was a celebration of our 25 years together.

We continued to work on our goals and to plan the next steps for our journey.

In 1997, we celebrated the centenary of the death of St. Therese and enjoyed our sister's performance of Therese's play *The Triumph of Humility*.

In 1999, we met at Graymoor, NY where our sisters were resource persons with the theme of Carmel's Unfolding Story. During this gathering we were able to visit our Carmel in Beacon and see the progress of the expansion of the building which would welcome the merger of the 3 Carmels.

Throughout these years we witnessed an historical continuum of Carmelite women come to a solidarity, respect and concern for each other ever since that first meeting in Marriotsville, in 1970 where we pledged to one another to seek to collaborate in the work of renewal and adaptation as in our original statement of purpose.

Continued participation is the key to our future.

## CCA MEETINGS AND THEMES 1970 TO 2014

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| 1970 | Marriottsville, MD<br>January 29-February 2<br>Foundational Meeting<br>“ACN”                         | 1978 | Cincinnati, OH<br>May 31-June 7<br>“Christology”   |
| 1971 | Richfield, OH<br>May 26-June 3<br>“The Heart of the Teresian<br>Contemplative Life”<br>(Our Charism) | 1979 | Holyoke, MA<br>August 2-9<br>10 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary<br>“Theology of Contemplative Life”                              |
| 1972 | Richfield, OH II<br>March 20-28<br>Organizational Meeting<br>“ACN” becomes “CCA”                     | 1981 | Faulkner, MD II<br>May 6-13<br>“Exploring the Fruits of Renewal;<br>Building the Future; Initial and<br>Ongoing Formation” |
| 1973 | Adrian, MI<br>May 21-29<br>“Unity In and Through<br>Prayer/Communication”                            | 1983 | Faulkner, MD III<br>May 6-13<br>“Myth, Meaning and the<br>Morrow; Renewed<br>Understanding of Teresa and<br>John”          |
| 1974 | Racine, WI<br>May 8-17<br>“Discernment Process”  | 1985 | Willimantic, CT<br>May 15-22<br>“Surrender to the Unknown”   |
| 1975 | Holyoke, MA<br>May 21-30<br>“Research Into Our Roots;<br>Canon Law/Charter of Life”                  | 1987 | Narragansett, RI<br>May 6-13<br>“Women of Carmel; Our<br>American Experience”  |
| 1976 | Faulkner, MD I<br>May 10-17<br>“Poverty”<br>International Guests                                     | 1989 | Baltimore, MD<br>June 2-9<br>“Celebrating the Bicentennial”  |
| 1977 | Convent Station, NJ<br>May 9-18<br>“Spiritual Poverty;<br>Charter of Life”                           | 1991 | Narragansett, RI II<br>May 22-29<br>“O Guiding Night”  |

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| <p>1993 Skaneateles, NY<br/>May 12-19<br/>“With Love Enkindled;<br/>Experiment in Hope”</p>  | <p>2005 Loyola Retreat House,<br/>Faulkner, MD<br/>May 20-26<br/>“Reverencing the Past, Imaging<br/>the Future”</p>  |
| <p>1995 Mt. St. Alphonsus Retreat Center<br/>Esopus, NY<br/>May 14-19<br/>25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary<br/>“Cherish the Past, Celebrate the<br/>Present, Create the Future”</p>                   | <p>2007 Campion Renewal Center,<br/>Weston, MA<br/>May 29-June 4<br/>“Carmel: Silence and Hope in<br/>Our Changing World;<br/>Challenges and Dreams”</p>                     |
| <p>1997 Our Lady of Peace Spiritual<br/>Life Center, Narragansett, RI<br/>May 21-27<br/>“Celebrating the Centenary of<br/>the Death of St. Therese of the<br/>Child Jesus and the Holy Face”</p> | <p>2009 Precious Blood Spiritual Center,<br/>Columbia, PA<br/>Convocation June 2-8<br/>“Spring of Creation-Spring of<br/>Elijah”</p>   |
| <p>1999 Graymoor Christian Unity<br/>Center, Garrison, NY<br/>May 5-11<br/>“Carmel’s Unfolding Story”</p>  | <p>2012 Bon Secours Spiritual Center;<br/>Marriottsville, MD<br/>April 24-30<br/>“Transformation: The Paschal<br/>Journey”</p>   |
| <p>2001 Villa Maria Retreat Center,<br/>Villa Maria, PA<br/>May 2-8<br/>“Passion for God;<br/>Transforming Journey”</p>  | <p>2014 Bon Secours Spiritual Center;<br/>Marriottsville, MD<br/>May 11-17<br/>“Discovering Anew the Teresian<br/>Treasure: The Challenge of Our<br/>Contemplative Call”</p> |
| <p>2003 St. Stephen Priory, Dover, MA<br/>June 11-17<br/>“Expanding Carmel’s Horizons;<br/>The Beginning Holds the Future”</p>   |  |

As we look back over the years, and the themes of our national meetings, we see that each team followed up on the directives of the Delegate Assembly, guided by the goals of CCA.

*A few reflections:*

- Studying the charism was an early direction.
- Sharing resources assisted us in responding to the call of renewal given by the church in the Vatican II documents. We grew in trust of one another as we

experienced the different decisions made by other communities in the area of adaptation. We embraced our reality of unity in diversity.

- Being a grass roots association, we had opportunities to grow as individuals; this finding our voice, enabled strong communities as well.
- Excellent opportunities were provided by CCA for on-going formation.
- There was an on-going effort both to receive approval of our statutes as well as reaching out to invite and include the other associations in our national meeting.
- Each community cooperated in the work of articulating our Carmelite experience today and the CCA Charter of Life manifests our unity, trust and love.
- Surfacing names of available sisters to serve in leadership has been an on-going challenge.
- We have continued building relationships on the international level.
- The efforts to reach out and welcome the other associations have increased.
- We welcomed the opportunities to collaborate with the friars and welcomed them to our national meetings.
- We encouraged our members to form interest groups and hold meetings on regional level.
- We accepted invitations to participate in the meetings of international associations and kept up correspondence with these friends.
- We welcomed opportunities to collaborate with our Carmelite Friars.
- We welcomed and encouraged regional gatherings and interest groups e.g. the Trust Committee planned a *Trust Seminar* with Mother Kathryn Sullivan, RSCJ, a scripture scholar, as a resource person.
- The *Roots Committee* shared their findings in an early newsletter called '*Digamagigs*'; this committee also published early documents and ancient texts. There were other committees serving CCA; e.g. *Declarations Committee, Government Committee, History Committee, Community Concerns Committee*.
- In 2009, the style of the coordinating committee changed to a leadership team where those elected shared the roles of leadership. At this meeting the term of service was for a 3 year term. *The Delegate Assembly* voted in 2012 to return to a 2-year term