

## CCA Projects and Seminars



*Sr. Mary Paul Cutri, OCD*

I will be presenting now an overview of significant Seminars and projects CCA has sponsored. But more importantly, I intend to highlight a theme and a spirit that threads itself through all of our workings together from the beginnings of our association.

In 1988 Sr. Christine O'Brien, one of our beloved former coordinators who has gone to the Lord, wrote this relevant statement about CCA: "We are called to one-ness in love". "Called to one-ness in love". For those of us who have been with CCA from its beginning when CCA was then known, in 1971, as ACN, Association of Carmelite Nuns, our goals for mutual collaboration included, importantly, "to accept and foster unity in diversity". This was the fourth mandate in our Statement of Purpose. Forty years later, that goal, still valid today, has shaped all of the activities and projects of CCA, has stretched our horizons beyond our initial imaginings, and has expanded our vision to now include international participation.

This strong motivation, to be united amidst our diversities, has enabled us to strive for that unity in faith and in our Carmelite ideals which continues to enamor our workings together in CCA and beyond. We have hungered for growth in our way of life, for fruitfulness in the Church and world, but not alone, rather in communication with others. Extensively and beautifully "unity in diversity" has crossed many lines of differences to witness to the charity of Christ among us in lasting friendships. CCA has searched out projects which would enliven our consciousness of oneness in Carmel, strengthen our local communities, enrich our collaboration with others and nourish our desire to see Carmel carried into the future with a living hope and a "creative fidelity".

These projects of CCA, wide in their scope, have ranged from formation seminars, to our CCA newsletter, to meetings with other associations in the United States and abroad, to mutual collaboration with our Carmelite Friars, and to various educational gatherings and special interest groups which provided for our personal and communal needs. How very broad now is our fruitful vision which began from seedlings of hope planted many, many years ago! All of our endeavors have attempted to make real our primary aim ( I am quoting now) "to deepen and develop the Teresian contemplative life in the contemporary Church and world" ...and "to express by mutual collaboration, communication, and help, our deep unity in Christ..." Those were statements we affirmed in the first two years of CCA's beginnings.

So, how did it all begin? In the significant year of 1971, 114 Nuns and 5 Carmelite Friars gathered at what would be known as Richfield I, to be followed by Richfield II in 1972, when we engaged Dave Rumkorf of Management Design Inc. to assist us in the process of goal-setting and collaborative leadership. Then, as we know, a coordinating committee and a delegate-assembly was formed for decision-making. We had a new creation, Carmelite Communities Associated. The door was open now for on-going collaboration and unforeseen possibilities.

As the lines of communication opened among us, many issues of interest and need surfaced, matters which reached beyond our local communities: questions regarding Gerontology, Church Law, government, theology, finances and support, renewal and adaptation at various stages and primarily, the many facets of formation-work and preparation for leadership. What an enormous task! But forty years later, we see what has been done. The Sisters of CCA plunged into the waters, planning and realizing many projects and seminars to supply for our needs in education, formation and leadership.

The Trust Seminar at Marriottsville in 1974 focused on Jesus as Center of our trust, enabling us to spread open our hearts in common concern and care for each other, as we live our Carmelite life in this century.

Our search for understanding brought us together at Convent Station in 1977, for the Canon Law Seminar. It was also in 1977 that work on our Charter of Life was awakened and CCA decided to solicit information from all member Carmels to contribute to this endeavor. Meanwhile we encouraged communication by means of our CCA Newsletter between the years 1979-92, another one of our projects to facilitate sharing.

Gradually the need to mutually assist one another and to share our resources in formative ways materialized in the first Formation Seminar at Peterborough NH. This seminar was actually requested by those women in initial formation who felt strongly, the need to avail themselves of the gifts and experience of their older Sisters in Carmel. The path was paved for a series of similar Formation seminars in the subsequent years of 1984, 1986, 1988, 1990. It was there at Peterborough I, in 1984, that I first met Mary Margaret Yascolt, who would later serve CCA generously, our beloved Sister whom God has taken to Himself since we gathered last. This initiative in formation seminars proved to be so essential to our workings together that, later, the Intra-Carmelite Formation Committee had CCA members participating as early as 1990. Then we became a part of the Carmelite Institute in 1993. Those who are involved in their communities as Directresses of Formation began a concerted effort to broaden their knowledge through shared experiences and valuable input.

Less than two weeks ago the Formators Program, including members of the various Carmelite Associations and our Carmelite Friars, has recently completed its second year of a three-year program which is proving to be very enriching and unifying. Beyond our initial dreams we are truly "deepening and developing our Teresian contemplative life" at its spiritually formative level. And we are doing this, united in our diversity. Small starts yield big results and beautiful flowers do bloom from small seedlings of faith and trust.

A decision was made in 1975 to form a Task Force to compose a corporate, contemporary statement of the Teresian charism. This was completed in the booklet form of the Charter of Life, published in the Jubilee year of 2000.

Seeking to expand our understanding of Church law, CCA members participated in a co-sponsored seminar at Convent Station, NJ, in 1977, entitled "Seminar for Contemplatives on the Theology of Church and Law".

As was mentioned earlier, the Archive Seminar instructed us in preserving documents of our history with its rich heritage. These efforts to gather our historical data became a keen interest and would enable us to update a new version of Carmel in America which was published in 1989 in remembrance of our United States 200th Centennial Anniversary celebration. Another historic and valuable accomplishment!

When good stewardship of finances became a necessary concern, CCA held a Treasurers' workshop in 1991 to instruct us in Finance-Management. From year to year we developed ways to improve our situations and to grow more informed in our responsibilities.

In the 1990s a number of helpful projects developed: a refresher seminar in 1992, a leadership workshop in 1994, an experiment of Hope in the same year and a community-life seminar in 1996.

As I pondered the above events I was very conscious of the many gifted women who have been so faithfully self-giving and generous in the service of CCA. The women of CCA, living and deceased, have willingly given of themselves and their talents to bring to fruition the projects of CCA. Where the fire burns there will be the wealth and beauty of people to feed the flame and keep alive the warmth and glow of CCA activities. I express, for all of us, our deep gratitude to each Sister who over these 40 years have willingly given of their gifts – without you, nothing would have been accomplished.

As we entered the 21st century and experienced a decline in vocations to the Religious life and Carmel, our energies were invested in Vocation encouragement which resulted in the 2000-2001 Vocation Recruitment Workshops here in Columbia, PA.

Our participation in the Theological Reflection Project originated by the Carmelite Generalate in 2001 has manifested our union with all other Carmels as we seek to deepen, in study and dialogue, the essential values of our life in the Church. (Ratio-Nuns' Formation in the Teresian Carmel- 1996-2003)

Sixteen years ago, Sr. Jean Marie of the Cleveland Carmel included these words in her narrative account of the 1993 meeting, which I consider exemplifying the growth of CCA through its many seminars and projects: "...as Carmelite women, we have grown to a maturity that is at home with diversity... (which) could only happen at the culmination of a whole and long history...an historical continuum of Carmelite women who have come to this solidarity,

respect, support and concern for each other since the beginnings of CCA". As an addenda to that insightful manifestation of what is a reality today in CCA, I observe that we Carmelite women, those living and the deceased who pray for us from a better place, we Carmelite women, led by the Holy Spirit who is the patron of CCA, carry a precious tradition into the future with grateful and noble hearts. We carry a flame of hope. God's gift of diversity continues to erupt in our efforts toward unity which enrich the whole Church and world. Truly Jesus is fulfilling in us His words: "I have come that you may have life and have it to the full".

We continue today to rely in hope upon the inspiration of God to bring forth from our shared humble efforts a fidelity, an enrichment and an ever-deepening communion in love that will carry us into a future of hope when "all shall be one" and, ultimately, where "all shall be well". Thank you.

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