

Hi, my name is Karin Smith. I made Cursillo #59 in 2016 at Our Lady of Florida and sat at the table of Mary, Undoer of Knots. I worship at St. Ignatius and St. Peter. I am married and have 3 adult children. My husband, youngest daughter and I currently live with my 94 year old father.

I was asked to talk about joining a Third Order or lay branch of a religious order. Some places in this talk will ask for your participation. Why did I become a Lay Carmelite? As I'm sure you intuitively know, it's because that is where God has led me. God has slowly been giving me the puzzle pieces.

So I'd like to start near the beginning. I'm a cradle Catholic who went to Catholic elementary and high school (St. Clare and Cardinal Newman). In middle school, I was prompted by the Holy Spirit to start using a grace He had given me, music. Nothing flashy or money-making, just a part of the music ministry at St. Clare, and a community of wonderful musicians who became lifelong friends. It still brings me great joy. How many remember these first church songs I learned on the guitar? "Sons of God" (feel free to sing along) or "They'll Know We Are Christians" or "Kumbaya My Lord" or "Let There Be Peace on Earth". (feel that joy that music brings?) The music leaders at St. Clare (Peggy Krolczyk and Lisa Bucheck) also led a vibrant youth group that was so fun and faith-filled. How many of you belonged to a youth group? My friend and I also played at Cardinal Newman masses, which didn't advance our popularity (seemed so important in H.S.) but at least people knew who we were. Since then I have played at mass most weekends all my life in various parishes. I

feel music ministry has kept me in the church and in such a satisfying way. Thank you God for giving us graces. Puzzle piece number one.

Weekend retreat programs are such great opportunities for growth and renewal. My first was Search, in high school. Then I volunteered for Kerygma (a middle school version of Search). I love retreat centers like the Cenacle in Lantana (now gone) and Our Lady of Florida with private rooms and relaxing outdoor spaces where you can sit quietly with God. One time, as a mother of 3, with a career and pursuing a masters degree, I found myself needing a quiet weekend away. So I signed up for one at the Cenacle and the topic happened to be St. Teresa of Avila's spirituality and I had never heard of her. It was a silent retreat, which I don't think I knew when I picked it, but ended up appreciating. This was the first direct connection to the Carmelites and contemplation. The nun teaching the class took my hand at the end and said "God has great plans for you". There is power in those little affirmations and I have carried that one since, wondering how it will happen. Puzzle piece number two.

But the weekend with the biggest impact on my faith was Cursillo. Judy Collins, who I sang with in the St. Peter choir, encouraged me to attend and was my sponsor. I was drawn by the fact that it was focused on the Holy Spirit but I had no idea how life changing it would be for me. My faith took a huge leap deeper and more fruitful. I loved looking out on the Cursillo community at St. Peter and seeing the love and deep faith on their faces. They really stood out from most of the congregation. And grouping is such a great way to connect and have a group of friends bonded by faith, who encourage each other to get closer to God using a great method: prayer, study and action. Cursillo events, like Day of Reflection or

Recollection, and Ultreyas nurture community, which we are all wired by God to desire.

Puzzle piece number three.

We all have stories of answering the call to serve and we do it in different ways according to the gifts we receive and opportunities provided. I read the monthly parish magazine which Deacon Stephen is doing so well and I am amazed at the stories of what is accomplished with God as our co-pilot.

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28)

One call of the Holy Spirit for me is to do things that lead others to succeed. It started with lots of volunteer opportunities in that St. Clare youth group. I had been a Girl Scout growing up and never forgot the chance they gave me to do things my family never did, like camping in God's creation. When my first daughter was old enough for Girl Scouts I volunteered to help run a troop. That led to 15 years as a Girl Scout leader, going through the Daisy to Brownie to Junior girl scout process twice (2 daughters). A main goal of Girl Scouts is to develop girls who are confident that they can do anything and concerned about "making the world a better place". God was in that all the way and I loved this fun and challenging way to use my organizational skills and provide unique experiences.

When that ended I searched for something else, asking for the Holy Spirit to guide me. I attended training to help with a human trafficking ministry but never had the opportunity to use what I learned. Then I was called to volunteer as a Guardian ad Litem (a voice for children removed from their parents). When I got that call from God, I really questioned

what made me a candidate, thinking maybe later, and he answered me with a song on my way to the volunteer interview. The song starts out with Matthew West ranting about all the terrible things in the world and asking “God, why don’t you DO something?” and then the reply ... “I did. I created you!”. It goes on with:

If not us, then who? If not me and you? Right now. Well, it's time for us to do something.

If not now, then when? Will we see an end to all this pain? It's not enough to do nothing.

It's time for us to do something.

I think that was a pretty clear answer, don’t you? Have you had experience? At the Guardian ad Litem training, it seemed that most volunteers had been in the legal, education or social work fields, but I’m a geologist. What was He getting me into? I have always liked to choose a path that isn’t the one that most people pick, but this seemed a little ridiculous. Well, between the human trafficking training and the families I met in 7 years with the Guardian ad Litem program, my eyes were opened to a world that had always been right there but I never knew and clearly could use help. I used to lock my car doors as I drove across Tamarind Ave on Palm Beach Lakes Blvd. and prayed the light would stay green. Now I was visiting families in apartments within blocks of that intersection and learning about loving and struggling families, just like everywhere else, in the midst of areas I thought so dangerous. That yes was a huge step forward for me as His servant.

I am still in contact with several of the families and during COVID, even helped out one of the mom’s who gave up her daughter and struggled with drugs and worked in a strip club. That’s a long story for another day, but I saw so many ways that God provided for her and

me during the 7 months she lived with us, that all doubt in miracles is gone. I also experienced confirmation that when the Holy Spirit prompts you to do seemingly impossible things, God equips you with what you need. Hard by doable. So good.

I can do all things through him who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:13) puzzle piece four.

But as my faith matured more I thought back on those ways I had served, and I questioned if, as I did that service, I was really loving those I was serving and showing God's presence. Or was I doing it because I liked the activity or God required it of me and I needed to check off another Corporal Works of Mercy box? Now, as I'm embarking on a Kairos Outside weekend as the Music team member, another thing Judy Collins has pulled me into, I know God will show me more (like Carol Raza said in her workshop a couple Sundays ago, more, there's always more) and provide opportunities to connect to these hurting women in love rather than me just checking off the prison work of mercy box. I have come to know for sure that God will love me and I am His child no matter what. I don't have to do all these things to earn His love but because I love Him I want to do what He asks and show His presence to the world. I know these callings are the very best path for my life and I trust that.

So with that background, how did I end up searching for a Lay religious order or Third Order? First question I had was why are they called third order? In general, first order are friars, the second order is nuns. third order can be diocesan clergy and lay people who want to follow a particular rule of life. After some disappointments with the Cursillo community and joining groupings with people who didn't stay committed, I read something about a Poor Clare community that lay people could join. So I researched it. I was attracted

to St. Clare because of my and my kids years at St. Clare school and church. Plus she was a friend to St Francis, who always attracted me with his connection with God's creatures. But it turned out they were not local. Then an article came out in the Florida Catholic about Lay Orders. God was pointing me to another piece of the puzzle. Here was a chance to join a community that would nurture my faith like Cursillo did but required a stronger commitment to the Order's rule and its community.

I eventually learned there were several lay order communities along the east coast of Florida. The Orders often have a name related to the founding saint, like the Franciscans, Benedictines, Dominicans, Augustinians and each identifies with a certain aspect of the life of Jesus. Franciscans talk of poverty and peace, Dominicans of truth and proclaiming the Word of God, Augustinians of love of God and of neighbor, Benedictines of prayer and work. Jesuits are known for their zeal in defending the Church and their obedience to the Pope. Carmelites identify with the presence of God. Their name came from the location where it was first established, Mt. Carmel. I learned that most third orders require several years of formation and then a commitment to attend monthly community meetings and the various daily prayer practices of the Order like mass, Divine Office, Lectio Divina, rosary. During discernment, you take time to learn the charisms of the various orders, identify the one that will 'fit' the best, and determine what motivates you to think God is calling you to that particular Order. Prayer is essential to making the choice.

The closest Lay community I found was the Third Order Carmelites, meeting at Holy Name in West Palm Beach. At the first meeting I visited, the opening prayer was very familiar, the Holy Spirit Prayer, same as Cursillo. They were doing a book study of The Way of Perfection

by Carmelite Teresa of Avila, same saint I learned about years ago on my silent weekend. As I learned their spirituality, I was attracted to the prayer practices that deepen our relationship in God's presence while living an active, busy life in the midst of the world. The 'still small voice' of personal dialogue with the Lord, as Elijah explained. Mary, as Our Lady of Mt Carmel, joins Elijah as Carmelite role models. Contemplative prayer is a gift from God, less dependent upon what we do (like in vocal or meditative prayer) and more on what God does in us. St. Teresa of Avila explains it as a conversation with a friend. Another Carmelite saint, Elizabeth of the Trinity, came to know that the Trinity dwelled within her and she was in constant communication with them and her contemporary St. Therese, the little flower, understood that God does not judge our actions on their greatness, or even their success, but on their motivation by love. All of these Carmelite saints and their words touched deep desires in me. I want all of it, constant awareness of God's presence in me, friendly conversation with God and neighbor, doing everything for love and with love. Those are the charisms of the Carmelites: Prayer, Community, Action.

How much commitment is there for the lay Carmelites, you wonder? There are 3 years of formation with monthly classes in Carmelite Spirituality. The first year is a more general look at the Order, and you may conclude at that point it's not for you. If you want to proceed there are 2 more years of deeper study. I found the content very interesting and thought provoking and the follow up discussion in class added different points of view and experiences. Following your temporary profession after 3 years, you are asked to live the Carmelite life for an additional 3 years before making a final profession. Joan Hayes, a fellow Cursillista, made her final profession this morning. Once a month there are

community meetings (mass + 3 hours of sharing, praying, book study, eating). The Stella Maris Lay Carmelite community I belong to also has a Prayer group, sponsors the annual celebration of the feast of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, and attends occasional retreats. Most action is done individually and many of us are involved in multiple ministries.

Carmelites are not restricted to any one form of action and it can be done in community or individually. It should respond to the needs of the Church and the World, being servants to God's suffering people. Carmelites believe it is not about whether you are overtly 'religious' or pious, but whether your faith motivates you to serve others out of love, as Jesus commands.

One future way I would like to serve is the path of justice, peace and stewardship of God's creation. The Carmelite Order has established a NGO presence at the United Nations. They are also part of the international Laudate Si Movement, who seek *to inspire and mobilize the Catholic community to care for our common home and achieve climate and ecological justice, in collaboration with all people of good will.* During my formation, there was a chapter that discussed how there can never be peace where there is injustice. It's not possible.

The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating or drinking, but of justice, peace and the joy that is given by the Holy Spirit....Let us, then, make it our aim to work for peace and to strengthen one another. (Romans 14:17, 19)

This ministry also calls to my love of the Earth, a call God has nurtured all my life, through Girl Scouts and my career as a geologist and time as a park ranger. I hope to one day make

that a place where I can contribute significant service. In fact, peace is my 'word of the year' this year; peace and justice. What that means for me this year is still being revealed and I'm excited to find out. And this year I was clearly told through prayer to take Mother Cabrini as my 'saint of the year', a new thing for me. She founded her own Order which welcomes lay individuals to share in their mission and spirituality. After a deep study of her life, the attributes that stood out to me are that she did things with a win-win mindset. (hospital for poor and rich with excellent doctors, schools for poor that trained so well the rich wanted their children there also). She helped the marginalized to develop ways to improve their situation, not just take care of their immediate needs. I'm sure there is a reason God wants me to learn from Mother Cabrini.

So all the pieces of the puzzle helped me discern that I was called to be a Carmelite because I seek to be contemplative, aware of the presence of God at all times, and who I encounter in prayer, community and service to others, most often in the ordinariness of everyday life. I know that Cursillo provides a place where the Holy Spirit touches those longing for something deeper and provides an experience of love and joy in a great faith community along with the tools to have a richer faith. I am so grateful to all of you that have nurtured me as you acted as the hands and feet of God. God has more and more plans for me, and you, and continually prepares us to succeed.

I'll close with John 15:16-17

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. ¹⁷These things I command you, so that you will love one another.”