



# Carmelite Review





# "BRINGING FORTH THE REIGN OF GOD FROM THE MOUNTAIN OF CARMEL: A VIEW AFTER 6 MONTHS"



From left: Postulants Olivia Steback of Hanover, Pennsylvania, and Cecilia Ashton of Catonsville, Maryland, at the chapel of the Carmelite Monastery of the Sacred Heart in Baltimore, Maryland.

BY CECILIA ASHTON, POSTULANT, BALTIMORE CARMEL

**O**n April 13, 2013, Olivia and I entered the Carmelite Monastery of the Sacred Heart in Baltimore, Maryland.

Entrance is the beginning of our time as postulants and is the first of four stepping stones on the journey to becoming a solemnly professed Discalced Carmelite nun. The postulant year is a time to live and pray with the community as we continue our discernment.

I am 36 years old, a native of Catonsville, Maryland, and I come to Carmel after having practiced dentistry in Columbia, Maryland, for 10 years. I really liked being a dentist and it was difficult for me to leave my patients. As you can imagine, it was not a decision that I took lightly. It took me six years from the time that I discovered the monastery until I was able to enter. During this time I spent weekends at the monastery and worked during the week. It was a good way for me to get to know the community and to learn about the life of a Carmelite nun. Finding satisfaction and enjoyment in my work as a dentist in many ways confirmed my desire for this life.

The life of a Carmelite nun is, by today's standards, quite radical as we are called to a life of enclosure where we

continually plunge the depths of the mystery of God. Central to this life is our single-minded focus on God in prayer. Through our prayer we are drawn out of ourselves and into that sacred space where our prayer connects us to the lives of ordinary people all around the world. I am here because this is where I feel God has called me. I do not understand it fully; I continue to trust God and to live evermore deeply into this awesome mystery. I have a great desire for the Carmelite life of prayer and a profound love of God. There is a knowing within me that is, on its deepest level, inarticulable.

My transition to this life has been met with a few challenges, one of which has been adjusting to communal living. Living with 15 other women is an incredible gift and at times, it can be an opportunity for growth. We live, work, pray, and recreate together. We are a multi-generational and multicultural community; our oldest nun is 93 and our youngest postulant is 34. Collaboration and compromise, learning where everything goes in the kitchen, and who is responsible for what, are all part of adjusting to living in community.

The past four months have been very good. I have been able to settle in and enter into the rhythm of our life of prayer. It feels as though this is my home and I am comfortable, content and at peace here. Most importantly, there is a joy that radiates from within, a joy that I find only in God.


The daily living out of this life is a balance between prayer, solitude, community, and work. Together we share in the work of the monastery. Our main work is prayer, it is the reason we are here. Therefore prayer always comes first. Since Olivia and I are in formation, our studies are the second most important form of work for us. Thus far we have studied the Carmelite Rule and had a course on Carmelite History. In preparation for the 5th centenary of the birth of Saint Teresa of Avila, we are reading *The Book of Her Life* with several members of our community. We also have a class on chanting the Divine Office, as well as voice lessons.

Next comes the work that aids in keeping our monastery clean and beautiful. I work outdoors with several of the other nuns helping to care for our grounds, which comprise 26 acres. I also help with the cleaning of the chapel and kitchen. As you can see there is plenty to keep me busy!

You might be wondering, what kind of person becomes a Carmelite nun? The best answer I can give is, the one whom God calls. We are all so different. Our interests and our backgrounds are diverse, which brings a richness to our life. The common bond between us is our passionate love of God, our love for one another as sisters, and our belief in the apostolic nature of prayer. We believe that our work of prayer, and our care for one another and for those who call on us, matters and makes a significant contribution to the life of our Church and our world.

Transformation; nothing less than that could have brought me to where I am today. From what I have come to understand, it is what lies at the heart of this life. Informing and transforming our hearts, our desire, and ourselves. This flame of love we desire both wounds and heals us. It strengthens us and burdens us; molds and shapes us. It is a continual dying to self and rising with Christ. In the end, it is not even for ourselves that we do this, for we believe that the fruit of this relationship and the transformation of our own lives will indeed transform our world and aid in bringing forth the reign of God.

To anyone who may be considering religious life, I offer the words of Catherine of Siena, "Set aside every fear, and trust."

The next step for Olivia and me is deciding if we will continue in the formation process and enter the novitiate. When a woman enters the novitiate she officially becomes a member of the community and receives the title Sister. In the tradition of our community, she receives a white robe to be worn during times of communal prayer. Please pray that we will be given the grace, the faith, the resilience, and the tenacity to respond generously to God's call. 

*If you are between the ages of 18-35 and are curious to know more about our life, we invite you to contact a member of our vocation team. Sister Judy Long: 410-823-7415 ext. 329, or Sister Monika Bies: [monika@baltimorecarmel.org](mailto:monika@baltimorecarmel.org)*