



800 years

A Living Text for Today

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Formula Vitae: a living text for Carmel today
800 years of Papal Recognition (1226 – 2026)
Five moments of prayer and reflection for communities

Dear sisters and brothers in Carmel,

This year we are celebrating 800 years of papal recognition of the Carmelite *Formula Vitae*. This was a key moment in our early history and is an important anniversary to celebrate.

Celebrating a vital moment

Both General Councils considered the importance of this year for the Carmelite Family at our joint meeting in March 2026 and wish to celebrate it in various ways. Both General Councils are planning a number of initiatives in the coming months.

Indeed, we believe that it would be fruitful for the entire Carmelite Family to reflect once again on our Carmelite Rule and see it as a living text for today. Earlier this year, the General Council commissioned Míceál O'Neill OCarm to compile a series of **five moments of prayer and reflection** for this anniversary. (For convenience, we asked that he would use the text of the Rule as it was finally modified as the basis for these reflections.)

As we enter the final months of this anniversary year, each community of friars, nuns, Third Order and other groups in the Order is invited to take these reflections and use them over several community meetings. You may find additional ways within your local contexts to celebrate this anniversary.

Understanding the context

It is important to understand the context of what happened 800 years ago. At some point in time, the hermit-brothers living on Mount Carmel decided to undergo a more formal organisation. They asked St Albert of Jerusalem to set down their way of life along the lines they were already living. We know that sometime between his arrival in the Holy Land in 1206 and his murder in 1214, Albert wrote the *Formula Vitae* for them.

Yet, an unforeseen problem arose. The Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, wishing to limit further diversification of religious life, obliged new orders to choose one of the already approved rules. This led towards a general amalgamation of religious orders. Thus, using the legislation of the Fourth Lateran Council as an excuse, Carmelites were sometimes refused permission to preach in public venues.

Even so, the Carmelites defended their position with the fact that their *Formula Vitae* came before the prohibition of 1215.

Pope Honorius III (*Ut vivendi normam*)

Subsequently, the hermits of Mount Carmel made contact with the Holy See in order to secure their legal standing. On January 30, 1226, Pope Honorius III's *Ut vivendi normam*, addressed to the "Prior and hermit-brothers of Mount Carmel," formally accepted the Carmelites' claim to have received their Formula of Life before the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215. This document recommended Albert's *Formula Vitae* granting an indulgence to those who accepted that way of life as obligatory.

Ut vivendi normam (1226) could be considered an acknowledgement or an implicit approbation (but not a "confirmation" in the proper sense) of the Formula of Life. Although it did not formally recognise the Carmelites as religious, in the proper sense of that term, *Ut vivendi* implied that their regular observance of the norm of life given by Albert gave them a canonical status different from that of ordinary laymen. Had the Carmelites been formally recognised as Religious at this point, they would have been obliged to accept "one of the rules approved" by the Fourth Lateran Council.

Building the Carmelite Family

Over the subsequent centuries, Carmelites have spread throughout the world. There are now two branches of Carmelites: The Order of the Brothers of Our Lady of Mount Carmel (OCarm) and the Order of the Discalced Brothers of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel (OCD), fruit of the St Teresa of Avila Reform. Together these two branches are a 'family of families' made up of several thousand Carmelite friars, nuns, members of the Third Order, affiliated congregations of sisters and brothers, and very many people who feel a spiritual bond with Carmelite Order – often most especially through the wearing of the Scapular.

Every member of this family owes their origin as Carmelites to the *Formula Vitae* written by St Albert of Jerusalem which was first given papal recognition 800 years ago by Pope Honorius III in *Ut vivendi normam*. It was an important milestone of the journey of Carmel: a journey which continues today.

A key moment

While it did not completely and permanently resolve all the issues that Carmelites faced – and the text was modified on a small number of subsequent occasions – Pope Honorius III's *Ut vivendi normam* in 1226 was the first recognition by the pope of the group of Carmelite hermits. Pope Innocent IV gave final approval to the Carmelite Rule in 1247.

This would be considered a key moment even without the problems that the hermit-brothers were facing through the decisions of the Fourth Lateran Council. It takes on an even greater significance because of that initial struggle.

We invite you to celebrate this important anniversary and to see the Rule as living text for today.

In Carmel,



Desiderio García Martínez OCarm,
Prior General.