

GUMBO/POTLUCK ANALOGY

ONGOING FORMATION
SR. LIBBY DAHLSTROM — VISITATIONS 2017

The Gumbo ingredients you add to the “pot” are the significant passages that you’ve underlined as you read the homework assignment before you get to the meeting. In the making of Gumbo, the ingredients include a variety of foods that will be put together and cooked to produce a wonderful meal that is never the same from one Gumbo to the next. This is because the ingredients are somewhat different each time the dish is made. You will see this is also true for the spiritual mix that will be put together in the Ongoing Formation session. Each session will not be the same as the previous one from one Community Meeting to the next. Each will have its own “flavor” and ability to nourish. However, each member has homework and in order to make the Spiritual Gumbo, the homework must be done or you will have limited ingredients with which to “cook.” If you are invited to a Potluck, you would never fail to bring something or you would be considered a “freeloader,” a “moocher” or worse! So it is with Ongoing Formation. **The homework for each person is to read the assigned pages BEFORE the day of the meeting and underline ALL of the significant ideas that touch them.** Each member needs to take seriously the obligation to do the homework. All of those underlined passages will become the (spiritual) ingredients forming the basis for the 1½ hours of Ongoing Formation for that month’s community meeting. (**Note:** if someone is absent for a meeting, it is that person’s responsibility to find out what the assignment is for the next month’s Ongoing Formation.)

Format for the Ongoing Formation segment of the meeting: (*making spiritual Gumbo*)

Preliminary: IF there are 10 or more members present, get into small groups of 5 or 6. These small groups need to be formed in a RANDOM way each month. Decide who will be the first person so that all will know when a circle has been completed.

STAGE ONE — basic idea is to read aloud all the significant ideas that have been underlined by the members of the group

- a) First person notes a page number and indicates where on the page the underlined idea is located. All in the group find the page and **mentally read** the sentence(s) as the person reads the idea aloud, with no discussion or explanation. This puts this idea into the symbolic “gumbo pot.” Everyone in the group puts a mark of some kind (e.g., a dot or circle) in the margin

next to what the person read aloud so that after all the ideas have been noted/read aloud, you will know what’s been added into the “pot.”

- b) The next person in the circle does the same process with one of his/her underlined ideas. This does not need to be “in order” of assigned pages; the next person can choose to note an idea from any of the assigned pages in random order.
- c) Each person notes/reads aloud one underlined idea per turn, and the group is to go around the circle 3 times.
- d) After 3 rounds, the question is asked: “Does anyone else have anything underlined that has not yet been noted/read aloud?”
- e) Stage One is completed when everything that anyone in the group has underlined has been added to the “pot.”

STAGE TWO — basic idea is to hear insights about some of the ideas that have been noted/read aloud in the first stage...

- a) The first person will pick any idea that has been read aloud and is “in the pot” and SAY SOMETHING about its significance to living the Carmelite vocation for you. This is to be stated in only a few sentences; it’s not meant to be a comprehensive presentation or anything like that. It’s meant to be an idea or insight regarding its connection to Carmelite spirituality. NO discussion.
- b) Go around the circle 3 times; say something about only one idea per turn. You may choose ANY idea that has been noted/read aloud; it can be an idea you put in yourself, or one that someone else put in, or any idea that someone else has chosen.

STAGE THREE — this stage corresponds to “eating and savoring the gumbo” — FREE-FLOWING, IN-DEPTH DISCUSSION

- a) Now is the time to actually discuss ideas and insights that have surfaced in the first two stages. Anyone can bring up an idea/insight for in-depth, free-flowing discussion. NO MORE GOING AROUND THE CIRCLE IN TURN.
- b) The task is to “go deep” into the meaning; the task is NOT to try and “cover” all the ideas that have been put in the “pot.”