

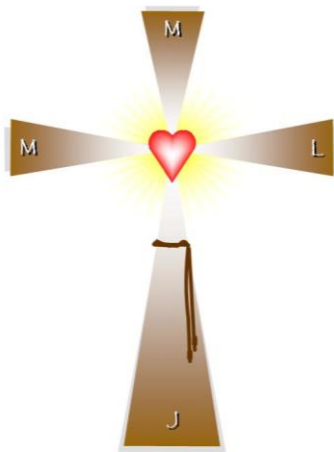
# **The Customary of the Community of The Gospel, LLC** (The Rule of the Community)

This document reflects Community life. (The Constitution represents the legal operations of the Community.) Together they constitute the “Operating Agreements” of the Community.

## **Mission of the Community**

The Community of the Gospel (CG) is a dispersed monastic community for the Lord’s Service established and recognized under the Canons of The Episcopal Church. We are a Christian Community whose members respond to the Gospel message by living a vowed monastic life of prayer, study, and service in the secular world. This is monasticism of the heart based on an unconditional devotion to Christ. The Community provides structure and support for Members in their Work, which is to live our vows. Our personal missions are to know, love and serve the Lord our God in our own unique ways, wherever we happen to be, with the support of Community Members, our home congregations, and our local support teams.

May our efforts be joined with those everywhere to further the knowledge and compassion of the Gospel in fulfilling the Great Commission: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.” *Matthew 28:19-20*



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## **I. COMMUNITY**

### **I. a. Community Defined**

A community is two or more people united by a common purpose or cause. This Community is united under the banner of Christ, to come to know the way of life that he would have us live. True Community exists within the heart and soul of each Member and will not be based on marital status, age, academic achievement, sexual orientation, race, or economic status.

This Community is a society of Christians in communion with the See of Canterbury, who voluntarily commit themselves for a term of years, to obedience to their Community's Rule (Customary) and Constitution. (Title III. Canon 14 Sec.2)

The Community of the Gospel sees all of God's creation as its ministry. Our ministry begins with ourselves and then moves into the world around us wherever we happen to be. As we come to know our True Selves as God made us, growth and healing happen within us, which then spread outward to others. The variety of our personal ministries enhances the expression of God's presence in the hearts of His children everywhere.

### **I. b. Building Community**

The Community of The Gospel is a dispersed community meaning that Members live apart from each other, living and working in the circumstances to which God has called them. Even though geographically dispersed, the Community is spiritually cloistered, as Members carry the presence and love of Christ in their hearts wherever their Personal Mission leads them. The ancient *Historia Monachorum* tells us, "Though they be divided in their dwelling, yet do they abide bound and inseparable in spirit and faith and loving-kindness."

These words express our common goal, our common desire to be in union with God. We want to know, love and serve the Lord in the way that He has uniquely made us. By using our gifts in His service, great joy and happiness may be found. So, though we live apart, we have unity of mind and spirit. Our hearts are one. We express this unity in frequent communications among the Members as we share our stories, journeys, and blessings to help each other along the way. We meet as often as we can in person; and in our daily prayer we affirm our connectedness.

This Community's life is a particular form of Christian living which is characterized by daily prayer, the study of Scripture and other texts, personal service to others, a degree of separation from worldly concerns, and a measure of silence.

All Members live a chaste and holy life. The Community is comprised of Brothers and Sisters living as single celibates or in honest, committed relationships.

Members may choose to live together in a common habitation. These arrangements are not regulated by the Customary or Constitution of the Community of the Gospel, other than the decorum expected of its members. As Members of the Community, their conduct shall be in accord with the values and principles of the Community, but the management and details of their living situation are autonomous.

### **I. c. Our Symbol**

The symbol of our Community flows from our values and mission. The blazing heart at the center of the cross symbolizes our foundation in the heart of Christ, and His presence within us. The Four Gospels stretch forth from this foundation as the key scriptures from which we live. The Gospels and the love and compassion of Christ pierce the heart of each of us. Each of us strives to know, love, and serve the Lord in our own unique way, and yet be a part of the total body of Christ.

### **I. d. Our Charism**

The charism of a community is the spiritual gift of that community; it is the way in which the Members of the community express their response to God's love for them. It is used for the service and building up of the community. It is why they exist; it gives them their identity and defines their mission. The purpose of the charism is to benefit all people of God with whom we come in contact, not only those in the Community.

“There are many different gifts but it is always the same Spirit; there are many different ways of serving, but it is always the same Lord. There are many different forms of activity, but in everybody it is the same God who works in them all.” *I Corinthians 12: 4-6*

It is not just one type or category of service that we seek, for we are all called to do some special thing for God every day, often in the smallest way, wherever we happen to be. As we become more who God made us to be, we are better able to know, love and serve Him in unique ways.

We begin by living our vows. This deepens our experience and relationship with Christ. This relationship then transforms us, heals us, and makes us more self-aware. Christ is our only healer, our teacher and guide through the Holy Advocate within us. Where he leads us can be challenging, but always brings ultimate joy. This, then, leads us into our unique service in response to this ongoing transformation.

The charism of this Community, then, is to live a set of monastic vows that lead to personal transformation at the hands of Christ, which results in a unique response of love to all of God's creation.

## **II. VOWS and VALUES**

We seek to fulfill the purposes for which God made us; and we come to this awareness by living an interrelated set of monastic vows in the unity of this Community.

Friendship, love, communion with others – and through others – together with God, are the core of all that we value most. We treasure our interior connection to and appreciation for these values, and we work to help others experience, as we do, the joy and delight that comes from living out our vows.

### **II. a. CORE VOWS**

Living out our Core Vows is the Work of the Community. They represent the key blend of an active and a contemplative life. Living these values helps to heal us, to mend our brokenness so that we can reach out and help others. Our Core Vows are: Prayer, Study, and Service.

## 1. Prayer

Prayer is the center of our life; our prayer life is part of the Work we do as Monastics. It is out of this understanding that our apostolate takes its form.

We enter into our prayer with devotion and holy awe. We anticipate something other than what is familiar to us. We reach with our heart to enter into the majesty of the mystery to give praise and thanksgiving to God.

Because of our differences in lives and responsibilities, it may not be possible for all Members to always adhere to their prayer schedule. While every attempt should be made to be faithful to what we set out to do, it should not become a burden or a place where guilt should arise if our intention is delayed because of events outside of our control.

To optimize our prayer time, it is very important to choose a time that the house is quiet and limit disturbances by turning off phones and other electronic devices.

Because our Members live in locations across the land, a sense of detachment can occur. This feeling is minimized when the Offices are said with the Community in mind. Keeping others in mind during prayer helps bring continuity and spiritual union across the miles.

### **Types of Prayer**

Members may use a wide variety of styles of prayer in their prayer life. Some may add the Angelus to their Daily Office, others say the Rosary, still others may pray the Stations of the Cross. Members are not limited to one set of prayers.

An important aspect of our Formation in the Community is finding a type of prayer that works. This varies from one individual to another, and varies for an individual as they grow in grace. The number and types of prayers that we offer is less important than the sincerity with which we offer them. The formation process will help us build a disciplined rhythm into our lives that works for our growth.

### Prayer Book (updated 10-28-17)

The Community's prayer life is based on the latest edition of Book of Common Prayer (BCP) of the Episcopal Church. Members may use other prayer books and resources for their private prayer life, but when meeting as a Community, such as at Convocation or other Community gatherings, the BCP is used to guide our time in prayer together.

### The Daily Office

The Daily Office is found in the Book of Common Prayer. It includes: Morning Prayer (Matins), Noonday Prayer (Diurnum), Evening Prayer (Vespers), and Compline.

### Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina is a special kind of prayer that we use to enhance our relationship with God. It is designed to lead us into God's presence. Though lectio usually occurs outside of the Divine Office, lectio divina is tied to the Divine Office and is integral to our life of devotion to Christ. Lectio is encouraged for all of us, it can be done in any environment: the chapel, a sunlit

corner of a room, that old stuffed chair in the attic or basement, or any other space where God can reveal and embrace His creation.

### Centering Prayer

The practice of centering prayer is an excellent form of contemplative praying and is recommended to the Members of the Community.

### Greater Silence

The Greater Silence means not only cessation of talking, but making as little noise as possible; no electronic devices, closing doors quietly, walking about quietly. After a busy day filled with responsibilities, expectations, accomplishments, disappointments, tension, and joys, Members need this time of relative calm and relaxation. The Greater Silence may begin immediately after compline, and continue to matins the next day. It is understood that one's life style and home situation may present challenges to keeping the Greater Silence.

## **2. Study**

Study is a key vow because it builds the foundation for our spiritual and personal growth. It is *reflective* because the insight, knowledge, and wisdom we gain from it serves to enhance our relationship with Christ, which in turn, builds our prayer life and our service to others. A plan of reflective study should lead us toward becoming who God made us, so that we can come to know, love and serve God in our own unique way. It is a quest to learn more about ourselves and about life so that we become more effective at serving God.

As part of our membership in the Community, we participate in an ongoing Formation program under the direction of a Formation Guide. Reflective study links our three core vows together and keeps us steady on the path of healing and growth.

The Community maintains a booklist of helpful titles. This booklist is regularly updated and annotated by the Members becoming a helpful resource for all of us in our studies.

## **3. Service - Personal Mission**

Our Service, or Personal Mission, can be anything that serves God. It's best offered when it's based on some gift we have been given. Sometimes this mission is simply prayer. Sometimes it's teaching others, or building roads so that goods and services can be moved from place to place. Sometimes it's an art form so that we come to appreciate the beauty in this world, or sometimes it's simply washing dishes so that when we next use these utensils they remind us of the gifts we receive from God. Many Members find the expression of their service and mission as being part of their local parish or congregation. Any service, when it comes from the gifts that God gave us, and we return in service to God, is as important to God as the formation of a galaxy.

## **II. b. LIFE VOW OF STABILITY** (Added 4-7-13)

### 1) BASIS

At some point in a Member's journey, he or she may receive a prompting of the heart to make a life commitment to the monastic way of life as represented by the Community of the Gospel. This is a personal decision of the Member following a period of careful discernment and discussion with the Member's spiritual development team, Guardian, life partner, and Council. This is a very personal covenant between one's soul and God, through the expression of this monastic Community.

The Life Vow of Stability responds to this need. It contributes not only to the stability of the member in his or her spiritual journey, but also adds to the validity and stability of the Community as other Members see this type of commitment toward the longevity and maintenance of the Community.

It must be understood that this is an ancillary (not a progressive) vow, and yet a serious commitment to God and the Community. It adds no special privileges or spiritual prowess, and Members not electing to offer this vow are in no way deprived of any rights or regular privileges as a Member of the Community. It is entirely a personal choice, and not part of one's regular spiritual progression. This vow is, therefore, a unique variation on the Benedictine vow of Stability to one's monastic community and one's relationship with God

### 2) KEY POINTS regarding the Life Vow of Stability:

1. Normally a Member would not be eligible for this vow until after spending about 5 years as a Professed Member (which is above and beyond time spent as a Postulant and Novice), but may be adjusted under special circumstances for a Member by the Guardian after consultation with the Council.
2. Other evidence of Commitment and Stability to the Community must be evident, such as:
  - Ongoing financial support of the Community's operations
  - Regular attendance at Convocations
  - Activities that advance or enhance the understanding of the monastic way of life, and CG in particular
  - Regular involvement with CG activities
  - Evidence of support of other members' spiritual journeys
3. There are no special privileges afforded to those making this Vow (such as special seating, differences in celebration vestments, or any other preferential treatment)
4. This is not to be considered a step in spiritual progress or prowess, but a horizontal decision of commitment to the Community's Charism that adds stability to one's own life, and that of the Community
5. Annual renewal of underlying Core Vows (Prayer, Study, and Service) still occurs
6. The member may wear a plain gold band on their right hand as a symbol and reminder of this commitment; Life Vowed members will be so listed in the Member Roster
7. Life Vows are optional; there is to be no expectation that a member offer this vow
8. Special dispensation – Due to the serious nature of this type of Commitment, release or removal from this vow would normally follow consultation between the Member and

Guardian, Chaplain, and Bishop Visitor. Dispensation is reviewed by the Council, and final approval by the Guardian and Bishop Visitor. Final dispensation is made by the Bishop Visitor.

### 3) PROCESS

The following steps should be taken when a Member feels called to make a Life Vow of Stability. These steps are to be used as guidelines, and may be adjusted by the Guardian depending on the situation of the Member so called:

1. The Member recognizes the calling to make this Life Vow, then consults with the Guardian to determine eligibility and intention
2. A period of prayer and discernment with the candidate's spiritual direction team follows
3. The Member may be asked to complete specific discernment activities (prayer, reading, etc.)
4. Member then petitions the Council with a declaration of understanding and intent
5. Council reviews the petition against criteria and further examines the Member as needed
6. Guardian approves or defers the request after consultation with Council
7. If deferred, Council meets with the Member to discuss
8. If approved, a special Rite of Life Vow of Stability is scheduled, the form and content of which can be altered to suit the occasion, but would normally be conducted in the presence of a priest or bishop.

### 4) IMPACT TO MEMBER

A Member who completes the Life Vow of Stability...

1. remains subject to the Community's disciplinary rules
2. may wear a plain gold finger ring signifying the commitment
3. will be listed as Life Vowed in the Community's Member Roster
4. continues to advance the monastic way of life in Christ as they are able
5. continues to promote the Community of the Gospel to the Church and public as appropriate
6. agrees to financially support the Community as their state in life permits
7. may make a bequest to the Community as their state in life permits
8. may be invited to serve on the Community's Corporate Advisory Board
9. may be interred in monastic vestments
10. needs special dispensation from this vow as outlined in 2) above



## II. c. SUPPORTING VALUES

We supplement our Core Vows with these Supporting Values:

### 1. Worship

Members regularly attend the church of their choice, receiving the Eucharist as it is available. It is through community worship that we become a part of the larger Church, and realize the extent of God's Grace.

### 2. Guidance

Members are encouraged to build a spiritual direction team to help them on their journey. This team can include spiritual directors, pastors, therapists, physicians, friends and support groups. They are part of how God speaks to us.

### 3. Simplicity

Members strive to live as simply as possible. The purpose of simplicity is to keep our heart free and clear of all encumbrances so that our focus is on the most valuable of all possessions, our life in God Himself. By not consuming more than we need, we leave more for others and live lightly on our planet.

Throughout all of Scripture, it is made abundantly clear that God was not only the Creator of life but also the Sustainer of his creation. God wants us to have the things of life that are needed and be proper stewards of His Creation in all its manifestations.

According to the Canons of the Episcopal Church for Christian Communities, and wishing to be spiritually at one with the example set by the early Christian community, all Members of the Community *spiritually* renounce all possessions that hinder their progression toward God. Members may continue to hold personal property in their own names, but must understand that they are stewards of this property that really belongs to God.

### 4. Fidelity

We treat others and ourselves with respect, dignity, and justice, in keeping with our Baptismal vows. It is the understanding of the Community that all Christians have been called to live a life of responsibility and accountability through their Baptismal vows.

Baptismal vows and the teachings of Christ form the nucleus of what fidelity means. Each Member has a special obligation to hold creation and its universal family sacred. Like all sacred things, special attention is made in how we approach, touch and care for others. We recognize that Christ dwells within the hearts of each of us, and act towards others as though they are Christ Himself.

## **5. Community**

Members are strongly encouraged to interact with each other, pray for the Community, attend Convocations whenever possible, and support each other's journey. Each Member commits to responding promptly, respectfully, and fully to any communication from another Member.

## **6. Giving**

In keeping with age-old traditions and the desire to share our blessings with others as needed, Members are encouraged to work toward tithing of their resources. It is the duty of every Member of the Community to support this Community with their prayers, skills, talents, and financial resources to the extent that they are gifted and able. Some cannot contribute much, and others can contribute more. A Member's tithe may include: local church communities, this Community, and local, national, or international causes that spread the love and compassion of God. Each Member may be moved to support a different cause.

## **7. Health**

Members strive to live as healthy a life as possible. We need to learn what is best for our bodies and minds in terms of safety, nutrition and exercise, and work toward optimizing our health so that we can effectively serve God in our prayers, studies, and mission. We recognize that we are God's temple and that each of us has a unique responsibility as custodians of His life giving force.

## **8. Present Moment Awareness**

Over time we learn to live in the present moment, leaving the past to God's mercy and the future to His providence. Becoming aware of our attachments, beliefs and desires will help us to know our true selves, and thereby come to know, love and serve God better.

# **III. MEMBERSHIP**

## **III. a. Our Leader – Christ**

Christ is the center of our spirituality. The sacred Scriptures, the Bible, reveal Christ and our connection to Christ. The story of Jesus Christ is revealed to us in the Gospels. We, as Members of the Community of the Gospel strive to follow Jesus' example. Jesus showed us how to live our lives as Christians. He is our model, our exemplar.

It will be the custom of this Community to leave an empty chair in a prominent place at all meetings and gatherings of the Community to signify the presence of our Leader.

### **III. b. Postulants**

Postulants (people desiring to become Members) may be asked to do the following:

1. Become familiar with all the contents of the Community Web Site;
2. Speak with a current Member about what it's like to be part of CG;
3. Attend a Convocation, if possible;
4. Read the Constitution and Customary;
5. Discuss the idea with your spiritual director and pastor;
6. Discuss the idea with your spouse or partner;
7. Pray and discern about it;
8. Read an assigned book about how to live a monastic style of life as a lay person;
9. Write a brief spiritual autobiography.
10. Speak with the Guardian.

Normally the Postulancy will not be less than three (3) months, and shall not extend more than a year unless circumstances so suggest. The length of the Postulancy period for each person is set by the Guardian.

Members of other Religious Orders, Communities, or clerics may become Members of this Community provided neither situation is compromised in any way.

Persons presently or recently a Member of another religious order or community may, at the discretion of the Guardian with advice from the Council, be received directly into the Community of the Gospel as Professed Members or their Novitiate may be substantially reduced.

### **III. c. Oblates** (added 6-4-12)

The Oblate membership category is available for those who have successfully completed the Postulancy period, but who prefer not to make the commitment of a Novice that leads to Professed life. While Oblates still build and follow a Rule of Life based on Prayer, Study and Service, they follow a less-structured monastic practice that may be more easily integrated with their present life style.

Postulants become Oblates upon successful completion of the Postulancy, filling out an application with the Community, undergoing a basic background check, and offering their Promises of Prayer, Study and Service in a prescribed Rite. Oblate Promises are renewed annually.

All Oblates are expected to:

- Become familiar with the Community's Constitution and Rule (Customary);
- Build and follow a personal Rule of Life;
- Work with a suitable spiritual director;
- Build a pattern of Prayer (at least one Office daily);
- Design a plan of study with their Formation Guide;
- Shape a personal mission;
- Attend Eucharist/Communion regularly;

- Attend at least one Convocation every 5 years;
- Discern if a continued relationship with the Community is appropriate;
- Submit quarterly Embertide reports to their Formation Guide about their journey.
- Other activities as agreed to with the Oblate's Formation Guide.

All Oblates are encouraged to:

- Journal daily
- Attend personal retreats
- Assemble an expanded spiritual formation team
- Attend all Convocations

Oblates are addressed as “brother” or “sister” in the Community, but may not use this title outside the Community. They may use the "Obl/CG" designation. Oblates may attend Chapter meetings and have voice, but may not vote.

### **III. d. Novices**

If a Postulant feels called to this Community after successfully completing the Postulancy, he or she will be sent an application to complete. When the application is returned it will be reviewed. Upon acceptance, the new Novice will build a Formation Manual and be assigned a Formation Guide.

Members of this Community spend their first one to three years as Novices if on the vowed path. This is a time for them to become familiar with the Community to see if it feels right. They will be following a formation plan that includes being involved in community interaction, building their lives around the Community’s values, and shaping their own Rule of Life.

Novices are addressed as “brother” or “sister” in the Community, but may not use this title or the CG designation until they become Professed Members. Novices may attend Chapter meetings and have voice, but may not vote.

The Community determines “seniority” by initial entry date into the Community. Seniority is only used for Constitutional purposes when required, and does not determine seating arrangements in choir, or any other visible structure.

Age, education, and clerical status does not inhibit nor promote higher seniority. The Guardian at his or her discretion may move an individual to a higher seniority if in the Guardian’s estimation the move would enhance or protect the spiritual life of the Community.

### **III. e. Full Members - Profession**

At the end of the Novitiate, if the Novice and the Guardian feel that a continued association would be blessed, the Novice may ask for full commitment to the Community. Upon the approval of the Guardian and Council, he or she is received as a Full Member - Professed of the Community and has voting rights on issues affecting the general welfare of the Community.

Upon being received as a Professed Member of this Community, the person received may take a religious name with the approval of the Guardian. The Member's secular name must still be used for all secular legal purposes, but their religious name becomes the standard in community life and may be used in regular public life. Professed Members may use the designation "CG" following their names if they so choose. An example would be, "Sr. Mary, CG"

All Members continually strive to be responsive to others' needs, pray for each other and for God's grace for the Community, and work to incorporate the Core and Supporting Values into their lives.

### **III. f. Vows**

The Baptismal Vows form the basis for the vows of this Community. At the time of reception into the Community as a Novice, and again when the Novice makes Profession, the person renews the Baptismal Covenant.

In addition to the renewal of the Baptismal Vows, each Member is invited to renew his or her commitment to Christ, to the Community, to its Rule, to its Constitution, and to each other at an appropriate time during every Convocation.

The form of the initial commitment to the Community may be expressed in a creative way by the individual as long as it contains the appropriate sincerity and reverence. It may be done in prose, poetry, music, art or another suitable format.

Renewal of one's Baptismal Vows and Community Commitment should also be expressed in some manner at the Member's local congregation. It is important that the local congregation understand the Member's connection with the Community, and that the local congregation be asked in some manner to prayerfully support the Member. Recognizing that each Member's local situation will vary, the expression of this renewal may take different forms. Some options are:

- Renewal of Vows as part of the liturgy,
- Private renewal with the priest or pastor,
- Announcement in the congregation's newsletter, and/or
- Some other appropriate form suitable to the situation.

### **III. g. Separation from the Community**

Members are free to leave the Community at any time following consultation with the Guardian.

#### Leave of Absence

The Guardian has the authority to grant a leave of absence to a Professed Member. There shall be a written statement of the length of absence granted, which shall not exceed three years, nor shall the total period of absence, even if extended, exceed three years. The statement shall include any conditions upon which the leave is granted. The Member remains subject to the authority of the Guardian and retains his/her rights throughout the time, although he/she may wish to waive certain Chapter rights if his/her absence is for an extended period.

#### Inactive Status

A Professed Member may be deemed unable to exercise his/her rights and obligations as a Member of the Chapter for reasons of health or other unforeseen circumstances. A petition explaining the inability of the Professed Member to exercise his/her rights and obligations as a Member of the Chapter and the reason for their inactivation shall be drawn up by the Guardian and presented for review by the Council. The Guardian will then determine whether the Member should be placed in an inactive status. The Bishop Visitor and the Chapter shall be notified. Should the situation change, the same procedure shall be used to restore the Professed Member to his/her rights and obligations as a Member of the Chapter.

#### Disciplinary Action

Any Member may be subject to dismissal for incorrigibility, bad conduct, entailing disobedience, willfulness, and insubordination; the Guardian, with the Council, is to make every endeavor to correct the erring Member.

If, however, the Member proves him/herself irreformable, the Guardian shall lay the matter before the Council, before which the Member shall be given the opportunity to make his/her defense. Careful minutes of this meeting shall be sent to any Members of the Council who are unable to attend. The Bishop Visitor shall be notified of a dismissal.

Upon leaving the Community, a Member relinquishes all rights to reimbursement for expenses paid or compensation for lost time in the work place. This is because a voluntary commitment was made to the Community with its common understanding of community and the sharing of one's stewardship.

Dismissed Members may request to be restored. The restoration should never be considered automatic. Rather the dismissed Member needs to demonstrate a desire and willingness to amend his/her way and fully comply with the requests of the Community. Restoration may be based on psychological and other evaluations. The dismissed Member assumes all responsibility for expenses associated with the evaluations.

### Seniority

If a Member is dismissed and then readmitted or is on inactive status for a time, the seniority of that Member may be adjusted by the time away from the Community at the discretion of the Guardian with the advice of Council.

### **III. h. Friends of the Community**

Some people, for any of a variety of reasons, may not feel called to become Members of the Community, but still want to support its work and be involved to some extent. These people may become Friends of the Community. These people:

- pray for the Community,
- will be prayed for by the Community,
- may attend Convocations,
- receive regular general communications from the Community (such as a Newsletter),
- may communicate freely with any Member of the Community, and
- support the Community with their time, talent and financial resources as they are moved to do so.

The Guardian, with the advice of Council, determines the roster of Friends of the Community.

### **III. i. Chaplain**

Upon consultation with the Council, a Chaplain will be appointed to serve the Community. The chaplain is to be a priest within the Episcopal Church, not a Member of the Community, whose role will be to:

- serve as a spiritual advisor to the Guardian;
- serve as an advisor to the Council;
- serve as confessor to Members as they desire;
- offer Mass at Convocation if present;
- open and close business meetings with prayer offerings.

### **III. j. Formation**

All Members are considered to be under continuous formation. Essentially, each Member (including the Guardian) is assigned a Formation Guide who assists with this process. Formation Guides may be rotated from time to time to enhance one's formation journey. All our Members are encouraged to:

- Build a Rule of Life – a personal expression of how they live out the values of the Community. The Rule of Life grows and changes over time, and helps solidify ones growth and direction.
- Journal – Members are encouraged to jot down the events of the day, and reflect on the blessings and challenges. This self-examination (called Awareness Examen in the Ignatian tradition) is very helpful in watching personal growth day by day, and can be a great resource for spiritual direction.
- Attend Retreats – Members are encouraged to make several personal retreats throughout the year. These can take several different forms, such as silent retreats or directed retreats. There are many retreat centers to choose from, so it is best to visit several to find the one that suits your needs.

During the Novitiate, Members become familiar with the Community and discern whether or not a continued association with the Community is appropriate. The Formation Program for Novices includes, but may not be limited to:

- Become familiar with the Community's Constitution and Rule (Customary);
- Begin developing a personal Rule of Life;
- Assemble a spiritual formation team;
- Build a pattern of Prayer;
- Design a plan of study;
- Shape a personal mission;
- Attend Eucharist/Communion regularly;
- Attend at least one Convocation prior to profession, unless excused because of special circumstances;
- Discern if a continued relationship with the Community is appropriate;
- Speak monthly with a Formation Guide about their journey;
- Reflect on their Spiritual Autobiography as an evolution of their life with God.

Professed Members continue their formation, as it is an ongoing blessing. Formation for Professed Members includes:

- Annual review of the Constitution and Customary;
- Continue development of a personal Rule of Life;
- Continue working with their spiritual direction team;
- Continue in their vows of prayer, study and service;
- Attend Eucharist, Convocations, and retreats as able;
- Work with a Formation guide;
- Take greater roles of responsibility within the Community.

### **III.k. Vestments**

As a Christian Community, our main habits are “habits of the heart.” The attention we draw to ourselves should be because we treat others as though they were Christ. Our everyday habit is the external behavior we exhibit toward others and toward ourselves in keeping with the love of Christ in our hearts. While we wear no distinguishable clothing in day-to-day activities, we ask our Members to dress simply in keeping with our value of simplicity. Any Member may choose to wear a respectable neck cross in the style of his or her choice.

We do, however, recognize the value in wearing certain vestments in situations that may emphasize the importance and sacredness of the occasion. These vestments shall be known as "Celebration Vestments" and not daily "habits" since their use is limited to unique situations. The wearing of celebration vestments is not required.

Professed Members *may* wear the Community’s Celebration Vestments when:

- offering Matins and Vespers in private settings where it is appropriate to do so,
- during the Eucharist (especially if serving at the Altar) with the permission of local clergy,
- engaged in special services, such as for the reception of new Members or where Novices make Full Profession,



- engaged in other special sacramental services and occasions where the wearing of the celebration vestments enhances the occasion and does not draw undue attention or concern from others.

The celebration vestments are not to be worn during local parish/church activities or at any time on the premises of the parish/church without the permission of the local priest/pastor. They will generally not be worn at Convocation for the Daily Office.

The colors of the celebration vestments are earth tones, to remind us that “dust we are, and to dust we shall return.” Awareness of our limited time here creates the urgency we need to do our prayers, study, and service, but also reminds us of the transitory nature of life, and that we will serve and be in the presence of God eternally.

The Service Alb: Wearing of the white, or off-white (ivory or flax) alb is a demonstration of simplicity and unity among all Members, symbolizing that we are all brothers and sisters in the Lord; one Parent, one family. Postulants approaching the Novitiate or Oblation will be given instructions on where and when to obtain an alb, which is first worn by the Member at his/her reception as a Novice or Oblate.

The Rope Cincture: Binding the alb and scapular with the rope cincture reminds us that we are bound to the service of God through our prayers, study and service.

The Scapular: Covering the alb and cincture of the Professed member is the brown hooded scapular which serves two purposes: the scapular apron reminds us of the work we are to perform for others in the service of Our Lord, and the hood reminds us to focus on each and every moment, leaving the past to God’s mercy and the future to His providence.

Oblates may wear a brown hoodless scapular after a prescribed length of service. The period of service will usually be two years, but may be shortened or lengthened upon approval by the Director of Oblates and Guardian.

Comfortable shoes or sandals are worn as part of the vestments. The Community neck cross may be worn with the vestments, but any appropriate neck cross is acceptable. Prayer shawls or stoles are not worn with the celebration vestments. All celebration vestment styles and colors should be within the intent and purpose of the Community and in the spirit of these guidelines.

Costs of the alb, cincture, scapular, and foot wear are borne by the Member, unless special arrangements have been made with the Guardian.

### **III. 1. Positions – the Guardian and Assistants**

#### **Our Guardian**

The Guardian is empowered to distribute leadership and share administration throughout the Community by choosing officers and allocating specific areas of responsibilities to the Members. All of the Brothers and Sisters are accountable to the Guardian in the exercise of their responsibilities.

The Guardian is responsible for guiding the Community in planning and decision making. He or she presides over meetings of the Chapter and Council in which decisions are made. He or she makes sure that less formal decisions are made with appropriate discussion and consultation. The Guardian has the freedom to make various decisions about Community policy and polity on his or her own authority. The Guardian serves the Community as chief interpreter of this Customary.

Various people assist the Guardian in the discharge of his or her responsibilities to the Community. The Guardian can create positions as needed, and with the advice of Council, appoint people to fill them. Some of these positions are outlined below.

#### Deputies

Deputy Guardians assist the Guardian in his or her duties as assigned. The senior Deputy Guardian assumes the responsibilities of the Guardian if he or she is unable to discharge them until another Guardian is duly elected and appointed.

#### Secretary

The Secretary of the Community is also the Secretary of the Corporation. He or she shall, in consultation with the Guardian, make the necessary arrangements for the calling of a Chapter Meeting and the drawing up of an agenda. The Secretary takes the minutes at Chapter and Council meetings and sees to their timely distribution.

#### Treasurer

The Treasurer of the Community is also the Treasurer of the Corporation. The primary responsibility of the Treasurer is oversight of the financial operation of the Community. This may not involve the day-to-day financial operations, but it is the responsibility of the Treasurer to prepare all financial statements and to see that proper financial controls are in place.

#### Formation Guides

The Formation Guides have the responsibility of overseeing the formation process of the Members assigned to them. They contact these Members on a regular basis, review their

progress and give guidance as needed. Everyone in the Community is assigned to a Formation Guide.

#### Newsletter Editor

This person will help present the Community to the larger world by editing a newsletter to appear on a regular basis.

#### Convocation Manager

This person is responsible for all the myriad details of arranging a Convocation for the Community.

#### Webmaster

This person is responsible for the maintenance of the Community's website.

### **III. m. Convocation**

The Community will try to gather at least once each year for Convocation. Convocations are a time of sharing, of getting to know each other, meeting face-to-face with Formation Guides, and, most importantly, a time to join together in Communal Prayer.

The time and place may vary. Attending Members will each pay their own travel, room and board expenses. Financial support may be available to assist those who otherwise would not be able to attend. Members are strongly encouraged to attend at least one Convocation each year.

Members of the Community in Holy Orders (Deacon, Priest, or Bishop) may be asked to assist the Community in sacramental celebrations.

### **III. n. Issues of Abuse**

The Community holds all of God's creation as sacred, especially those made in his image. Any assault made verbally or physically against another Brother or Sister is considered an assault against God.

It will be the responsibility of the Guardian to ascertain details of the encounter and make decisions immediate to the circumstances.

Every effort should be made to apply the Gospel to the event, seeking restoration and healing for the individuals and the Community. It will be the Guardian's responsibility to secure the following:

- Understanding of facts of all involved.
- Determine the authenticity of the situation.
- Seek mutual forgiveness.

- Support the above with acts of contrition.

Any Member not willing to act in good faith and support the restoration process will be separated from the Community and lose all rights as a Member of the Community as outlined by the Constitution and this Rule. At the determination of the Guardian, and in consultation with the Council, the Guardian may dismiss the offending Member.

Members are expected to participate in some accepted form of Safe Church Training through their local Diocese, Synod, church body, or place of employment.

#### **IV. FINANCIAL ISSUES**

Community Members are expected to examine their personal situation and offer financial support to the extent that they are able to address the costs of the Community. It has been the history of Religious and Christian Communities to share in supporting and maintaining the existence of the Community. It all seems to work out well, especially if there is open and honest communication among the Members and a zeal toward the Community's mission is evident.

##### **IV. a. Budgeting**

It is the custom of this Community to advise all of its Members as to the costs of operating the Community (without divulging sensitive information).

Budget planning for the Community will be done no later than the autumn of the year preceding the target budget year. The membership will be made aware of projected costs of operating the Community and will be asked to discern what they can do to support it.

For the purposes of sustaining the budget, Members are urged to make a pledge to the Community for the coming year based on their knowledge of the budget and their individual ability to contribute.

Budgets are open to any Novice or Professed Member for inspection and review. Individual donations, however, are open only to those with a specific need to know.

Funds donated to the Community that are in excess of the ad hoc expenses may be placed in a Guardian's Discretionary Fund. These monies will be used at the discretion of the Guardian to help those in need and assist Members with the costs of their formation program or attending convocation.

##### **IV. b. Income and Gifts**

Gifts of any kind, for any reason, at any time, made by outside sources or by a Member of the Community, become at its giving, the property of the Community and therefore not refundable or returnable.

Members are asked to remember the Community in their wills. Additions or alterations of such bequests should be made known to the Guardian.

Additional information regarding income and gifts is contained within the Constitution of this Community.

#### **IV. c. Expenses**

Expenses for Convocations will be tracked separately since the costs are generally borne by the Members attending.

Information related to the handling of expenses of the Community is contained within the Constitution.

#### **IV. d. Tithe by the Community**

The Community will tithe 10% of its undesignated income to other worthy not-for-profit organizations.

#### **IV. e. Reporting**

The Community has an “open book” policy by which the accounting documents (with the exception of individual giving records) are open to review by any Professed Member during normal hours of operation.

Additional information regarding reporting policies is contained within the Constitution of this Community.

#### **IV. f. Community Property**

Members of the Community view that they are stewards of the property that is titled in their own name, but that God is really the owner of all. We must care for the property within our control and use it to meet our basic needs and the needs of others.

Additional information regarding property is contained within the Constitution of this Community.

## V. ALTERATIONS TO THE CUSTOMARY

Suggested changes and alterations to the Customary shall be collected by the Guardian and will usually be presented at a Convocation Chapter meeting for consideration. If, in the opinion of the Guardian and after consultation with Council, the change merits immediate consideration, the Guardian may discuss and collect votes from Chapter through telephone and electronic mail.

Any proposed alteration to the Customary shall be laid before the Chapter, absent Members having been informed, and after due consideration and discussion, it shall be voted upon, absent Members voting by proxy. Changes shall be passed and take effect immediately if they receive at a least two-thirds majority of the votes cast. Voting may be by voice. It will be the Guardian's responsibility to revise and present to the Community revisions to the Customary and to notify the Bishop Visitor of said changes.

The Guardian may freely correct typographical errors found in the Customary or make minor adjustments to wording to clarify intent after consultation with Council. When these types of changes are implemented by the Guardian, s/he will inform Chapter of same and redistribute corrected copies to Community Members and the Bishop Visitor, and may post the corrected version on the Community's website.

Changes to the Customary shall be indicated in the document with the date of acceptance of the change.

History of Alterations:

8-1-10 Celebration Vestments adopted.

7-11-11 Under Core Vows\Prayer\Types of Prayer: CG Prayer Book may be used at Convocations.

11-1-11 Membership names changed: aspirants to postulants, associate members to novices and full members to professed.

11-1-11 Under formation section, novices must have attended at least one Convocation prior to profession, unless excused because of special circumstances.

1-1-12 Community designation changed from "CTG" to "CG".

5-13-12 Oblate membership category adopted by Chapter at 2012 Convocation. Section III.c. Oblates added 6-4-12.

3-19-13 Life Vow of Stability approved by Chapter. Section II. b. added for 4-7-13 version of Customary; Previous Section II.b. became Section II.c.

9-27-13 Section III.k. Vestments changed to allow Novices to wear an alb and cincture. Also added a hoodless scapular for Oblates under prescribed circumstances.

6-25-17 Spelling and punctuation, including Oxford commas, were updated.

10-28-17 Under Core Vows\Prayer\Types of Prayer: BCP is the official Prayer Book of the Community.