

Religious Orders/Communities in the Episcopal Church

By Brother John Huebner, Community of the Gospel

After I became a professed brother in the Church, many individuals asked me about the religious orders/communities in the Episcopal Church. Hopefully this brief explanation will offer some insight about what some refer to as the best-kept secret in the Anglican Communion.

The monastic movement can be traced to the Third Century in the early Christian Church. Most of the monastic movements were started as a response to live a Gospel-centered life of prayer and contemplation. Over time, there developed two distinct forms of the monastic movement that can both be found within the Episcopal Church and throughout the Anglican Communion. There are religious brothers/sister (sometimes known as monks/nuns) who live a contemplative and cloistered life (in a monastery or branch house) of meditation and prayer, and there are religious brothers/sisters who live an active vocation of both prayer and service to others. In both groups, the members take vows promising to live out their vocation, consecrating their life to God, and follow a rule of life based on the Charism (gifts) of their Religious Order/Community. While most orders/communities follow one of these two patterns, a few have a unique structure that combines aspects of both branches. A postulancy program (6 months-several years) is required to explore the community. Then, a novitiate program (1-3 years) is required in which formation activities/training/preparation are required. Throughout both stages, the individual must fulfill certain requirements and be given permission to continue.

In the Episcopal Church, there are approximately 18 traditional Religious Orders and 13 dispersed Religious Christian Communities.

Members of the traditional Religious Orders live in a monastery or branch house, hold their possessions in common, live a celibate life in community, commit themselves for life or a term of years, and vow obedience to their Rule and Constitution. There are age requirements to join most of these orders, and all inquirers must go through a postulancy and novitiate program. Some of these orders offer retreats, spiritual guidance, and sometimes do local mission work. Many make and sell specialty items and offer guided retreats/workshops in order to help sustain the community. Occasionally, members seek employment outside the monastery in order to provide income for the order. Many useful devotional/spiritual resources are available on their individual websites. For a full listing of the traditional Episcopal Religious Orders go to www.caroa.net

Check out a few:

www.ssje.org

www.holycrossmonastery.com

www.orderofjulian.org

www.ctsisters.org

Members of the dispersed Religious Christian Communities live and work out in the world in a variety of careers, commit themselves for life or a term of years, and vow obedience to their Rule and Constitution. They are active in the world and committed to living the Gospel within it (being “in the world, but not of it”). All inquirers must go through a postulancy and novitiate program. There are usually no age or celibacy requirements. Members keep connected by use of the internet, phones, Skype, and attendance at yearly convocations and retreats. Like their brothers and sisters in the traditional Religious Orders, members keep a daily prayer and study schedule. The dispersed Religious Christian Communities are currently the fastest growing segment of the Episcopal Church. Most of these communities have doubled and even tripled in size in the last several years with some groups

experiencing a 10% increase each month in new postulants. Some of the dispersed communities even allow postulants from the ecumenical world while retaining their Anglican identity. Many useful devotional/spiritual resources are also available on their individual websites. For a full listing of the dispersed Episcopal Religious Communities go to www.naecc.us/

Check out a few:

www.anamcharafellowship.org

www.companions-osb.org

www.communityofthegospel.org

www.gregorians.org

Both the Religious Orders and the Religious Christian Communities are sanctioned by the House of Bishops and are addressed in Church Canon Law (Title III, Canon 24, section 1 and 2). Once individuals have been accepted within the community and have taken vows, members of both groups are considered “professed religious brothers/sisters” in the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion. Both branches of the religious life offer oblate/associate programs for laity to support and connect with the community. All religious brothers and sisters have a unique role and presence in the Church, reminding us all to live a Gospel-centered life supported by prayer, reflective study, and service. Many religious brothers/sisters are active in service/missionary work with the homeless, needy, ill, lonely, and the marginalized. They strive and encourage all fellow Christians to live a Christ-centered life and aim to become more like Jesus. They are a treasure of the Church and contribute to its mission.

For opportunities of daily prayer and devotions, check out the following websites:

<http://www-cslosb.rhcloud.com/>

<http://dailyoffice.org>

<http://www.missionstclare.com>

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