

## Customary for the Community of Solitude

### **Article I - Identity**

1. Our Identity with the Camaldolese Benedictines - In living out our monastic vision, we recognize the threefold nature of the Camaldolese Benedictines (The Coenobium, The Hermitage, and Evangelical Life) as being an organizing principle and a standard for our evaluation. New interpretations of how these are lived can be fruitful to their application in our generation, though they can also lead us astray in the understanding of life.

We also recognize that different terms and language have been used over the years to describe aspects of the monastic and eremitical life.

Typically, monks live in a monastic community, in common life or the coenobium. A Hermit lives in a cell or building on his/her own. Usually, hermits live in close proximity to others, but without having all things in common. There is a certain degree of interaction between the hermits and others around the hermitage, though it is somewhat limited. A Solitary or Anchorite is usually someone who lives alone; without others in the vicinity. There is a higher degree of separation from other religious and from the world in general. This life is lived in much more isolation.

We are not totally enclosed, though we each have degrees of separation from the world around us. The neighborhood in which we live and move and have our being is part of our immediate lives. Our immediate families, our spouses, our housemates, our church congregations, and our co-workers provide much of the community afforded by the coenobium, although those around us may not have the same sense of obligation toward living a life in Christ and seeking to reconcile differences as they arise. While many in the Community of Solitude may live alone, they are bound to their local congregations and to the community, resembling hermits more than solitaries.

In evaluating how we individually relate to solitude or to community, we are mindful that we are different individually, and that over time our approach and needs may change. Some will need just enough solitude to be with community, while others will need just enough community to sustain their solitude.

(2) Practice and Witnessing – there are many ways in which we bear witness in the world around us. Most of those are unique to each member. There are some traditional methods of witness which have some common applicability.

### Names within the Community of Solitude

Within the Community of Solitude (CoS), we allow the option of taking a new name at the time one becomes a novice. It is not mandatory. The name is proposed by the person entering the novitiate, not by the community. That being said, there are practical considerations to avoid duplication of names or confusion between members with the same or similar names. It is

advisable to discuss naming with one's mentor and the Guardian Council to determine suitability, both for the name itself (which should be compatible to the names in Benedictine tradition), and for confusion with other names in the community.

### The CoS Habit and monastic garb

Within the Community of Solitude, it has seemed good that we maintain some tradition for our time together as community and maintain habits as identifiable uniforms for ourselves. As an ecumenical community, we are pushing the boundaries of the structures of various denominations, and a traditional habit can be a witness to maintaining tradition while tending toward the innovative at the same time. Thus, we recognize that there are times to wear traditional habits, such as when we are together as community, when we are interacting with other communities, and some occasions when we are in public. We also recognize that other forms of dress may be more practical and provide a measure of witness about our identity in the modern world today.

The primary use of the habit for us will be for our common time together and when we are with other monastics. Habits may also be worn in public, but we need to be aware of the various messages that come from wearing the habit. Since our local church communities are our main place of worship, we do not want the habit to become something divisive in the church life. One reason why we request references from parish clergy (upon entry into community) is to see that monastic witness is not divisive or confusing to the congregation.

#### *CoS Benedictine Habits*

The habit is a black Benedictine habit with tunic, scapular, and black belt (generally to be sized for the individual waist rather than oversized to hang to the ground).

For men, the Professed will wear a scapular with hood. Novices will wear a scapular without a hood.

For women, the scapular will be without a hood. Women may wear a veil, a veil with wimple, or no veil. If a veil is not worn, then they should wear a white bib collar on the scapular. For the Professed the veil is to be black, for the Novices, the veil is to be white.

The habit should be black. Those who choose to have a second habit for summer wear (or wear in warmer climates) may use lighter cloth or may wear a white habit.

The Community may develop a common stock of apparel in varying sizes so that items worn only during the novitiate may be loaned to novices during that time.

#### *CoS Benedictine Cuculla*

Upon renewing vows (three years in simple vows), or at the time of making solemn vows, members of CoS may wear a cuculla for use at Divine Offices or other liturgical functions in community settings. The cuculla has been a symbol of profession in the community, and in

many Benedictine traditions has been one's burial shroud at the time of death. It is an entirely closed, long garment with wide sleeves. For community events, the cuculla should be black. White may be worn in other settings, if appropriate.

*CoS witness shirts or work habits*

In keeping with the more modern witness of our community there are many types and styles of garments which can be simple, practical, and distinctive – all characteristics of the habit over the years. A pullover, hooded shirt is similar to styles of shirts worn in many cultures, but uncommon enough that others may notice and comment. An oversized denim jacket with hood is used by the Camaldolese men's community in the United States as a work habit, worn by many of them throughout the day as they work at appointed tasks. A smaller sized scapular worn over other clothing, perhaps girded by a belt, can also provide something distinctive. A cross may be worn with the simple habit, whether the CoS Cross, a Benedictine Cross, or some other design.

(3) Divine Offices - There are two thousand years of accumulated wisdom and experience in offering up daily prayers from the Christian tradition. They are based on the Scriptural admonition (through the Rule of Benedict), "Seven times a day do I praise you" and, "At midnight, I will arise and give you thanks". Some have found the rhythm of seven offices cumbersome in modern times, and a two-fold or four-fold office may better fit daily routines. The important matter for members of the Community is that they maintain discipline and pray daily as they are able, given their routines, and as it enables them to grow in/deepen their communion with God. At a minimum all members should be praying Morning and Evening Prayers plus some version of Compline daily.

The Rule of Benedict in Chapter 43 states, "Let nothing, therefore, be put before the Work of God." The postulancy and novitiate are times for individuals to begin discerning with their mentors as to what works best for their routine, and to begin learning how to prioritize and regulate their lives so that the Work of God takes priority. Each postulant should work with their Mentor to develop their own Horarium and personal Customary to adapt the Community Rule and Customary to the needs of their situation. The Horarium and personal Customary should be reviewed through the novitiate and periodically thereafter, and be adjusted to meet changing circumstances.

(4) Spiritual Direction – Spiritual Direction is the common term for various approaches to discernment with others about matters that affect us in mind, body, and spirit. Even as Aspirants inquire about the community, it is helpful to find a spiritual director who can help discern God's call and our response. This relationship should continue throughout one's life. It is supplemented by the Mentor during formation in community, but the Mentor does not replace a director. The Professed in the Community should seek out another member of the Community who is a friend to their soul. This relationship may supplement the relationship with an outside spiritual director, or it may ultimately replace that relationship.

## (5) Intercessory Prayer

Members of the Community should engage in periods of intercessory prayer daily, remembering the needs of the Church Universal, the Local Church, the World, and, especially, other members of the Community.

## **Article II - Membership in community**

(1) General considerations for Membership - The Community reserves the right to approve and admit aspirants to Community life, to receive commitments of those prepared for vowed membership, to practice without hindrance those traditions and customs approved by tradition and time which are particular and unique to Religious and Community life. The administration of these particulars will reside with the Guardians, the Council, the Chapter, and Teachers.

While there is no upper age limit, we generally do not accept persons under the age of 25, seeking people who have had opportunities to begin maturing in their faith.

Basic requirements for admission:

- (a) A letter of recommendation from an ecclesiastical authority in the person's Christian faith community is required. This may come from a Bishop or Clergy person.
- (b) If married, a letter of understanding and consent is required from the spouse.
- (c) The applicant should have a relationship with a soul friend or spiritual director for a period of at least six months before application. That person should provide a letter of recommendation.
- (d) Before entering, the Applicant acknowledges in writing that his or her entry into the Community is not to be taken as a work contract of any kind, recognizing that he or she may not claim support from the community while a member and can claim no compensation in the event of his or her departure from the Community.

All requirements will be discussed with Guardians for exceptions.

## (2) Stages of Membership

### Applicants / Aspirants

Those who aspire to life in the Community are encouraged to visit monastic houses and study monastic literature. It is important to gain familiarity with the expression of monastic life in modern times, rather than just reading about past expressions of the monastic life. Aspirants are encouraged to engage in conversation with their local clergy about discernment of their vocation. They should find a spiritual director (ideally, someone who has familiarity with monastic life) and enter into discernment with that director. Aspirants should maintain regular contact with one of the Guardians as part of the discernment. The Guardians will determine the appropriate time for admission to Postulancy.

### Postulancy

The Postulant will begin working with a mentor from the Community. The primary focus will be reading the Rule of Benedict and conversations about the rule and discussions on types and forms of prayer, with a focus on the Divine Office, to aid the Postulant in determining an appropriate rhythm of prayer. Postulants are encouraged to visit monastic houses, as possible, to continue familiarity with the many aspects of life in community and life as a solitary. Postulancy will typically be for a six month period. The Guardians will communicate with the Postulant regarding admission to the novitiate, after consultation with the mentor.

### Novitiate

The Novitiate is a period for more intense prayer, study, and conversations with other members to continue formation in the monastic life. Upon entry to the Novitiate, novices may take a name in religion (in consultation with the Guardians) and may begin wearing the habit. The novice will work through a study program with a mentor. Novices are encouraged to consider spending extended periods of time in monastic houses for formation in the rhythm of prayer and work. The Novice, Mentor, and Guardians (in consultation with the Council) decide when a novice is prepared to take simple vows. The Novitiate will typically be one year for those who have been formed in community life elsewhere, and two years for those who have no community formation.

### Simple Vows

Simple vows in the Community are typically made for a period of three years. Vows are made to God in the presence of others who will pray and support our life. Those in simple vows continue in conversation and formation with other members of the community and begin taking on new responsibilities within the community, including becoming mentors for those joining the community. Those in simple vows should continue a relationship with a spiritual director and begin seeking a Soul Friend within the community. The member in vows should consult with the Guardians when they think it is time to take life vows at solemn profession. The Guardians will consult with the other members in Solemn Vows before approving the taking of solemn vows. Members have the option of renewing their vows for additional three-year periods, if they do not choose to make a life-long profession.

### Solemn Vows

Members in who choose to make life-long vows do so at Solemn Profession. Those who take solemn vows may wear a cuculla at community worship (as may those who renew their simple vows). Those in Solemn Vows should continue in their relationship with a spiritual director and should have an Anam Cara within the community.

(3) Transfer from other communities - As an ecumenical community, we are not under the canons of any one denomination. Canonical standards for transferring between communities are not applicable to our situation. Therefore there are no ecclesiastical legal methods for religious vows to be transferred to the community. Out of respect for Religious Life in its broadest sense, if one is in either simple or solemn vows with a canonically established community, those vows must be dispensed in the way prescribed by that community before one can begin the process of

formal membership in the Community of Solitude. In addition to the letters of reference listed above, a copy of that dispensation is required.

Persons who have been dispensed from religious vows may seek an expedited path to vows with CoS, provided that the dispensation was granted no more than one year from the date of application. An intense six month period of mutual discernment (as opposed to a six month postulancy and one year novitiate) is accompanied by a six month period of simple vows (for those who have been solemnly professed elsewhere) and a one year period of simple vows (if one had been previously in simple vows) before making solemn profession with CoS. It is not appropriate for anyone formerly professed elsewhere to wear the habit and identify themselves as a member of this Community until simple vows are taken.

Those whose dispensation was granted more than a year from the date of application will undergo the normal formation process.

(4) Accountability and Disciplinary matters – As monastics we bring the concerns of the world to God. We are also witnesses of God’s love to the world. Even when not officially representing the church or our community, our actions have an impact on those around us. Thus, we should behave in a responsible manner. We need to be in a proper relationship with our immediate families, our Community, and our local churches. If reports of misconduct are received, they will be dealt with by the Guardians, in consultation with the Teachers, and all who are involved in the matters at hand. Discipline may range from advice and counsel to achieve reconciliation, to expulsion from the Community as the situation warrants.

#### (5) Separation from the Community

We recognize that the changes and chances of life can affect areas of life where we seek stability the most. Thus, we recognize that there are times when people may need to leave the Community. Just as entering the Community should be done prayerfully and with consultation, departing the Community should be done prayerfully and with consultation. Members may seek Leaves of Absence for a period to discern their status in Community. The Guardians will consult with the Teachers and with other Vowed members before granting permission to be dispensed from vows.

### **Article III - Of Community Organization**

(1) Guardians – There are to be three Guardians of this Community who should be in Solemn Vows, or have renewed their Simple Vows. If there are not sufficient numbers of members in Solemn Vows (or who have renewed Simple Vows), then other Vowed members of the Community may serve as Guardians. The term of the Guardian shall generally be three years. Provided the size of the Community allows, a Guardian may serve no more than two consecutive terms at which point he/she shall not be eligible to be Guardian for at least one year. There is no limit to the number of terms a Guardian may serve. At the end of a Guardian’s term (through expiration, resignation, or death), a meeting of the chapter is called for the purpose of holding an election to fill the vacant position. Chapter may be called in person or by teleconferencing, but all eligible members must be notified in advance of the meeting. The method of election shall

be determined by the Guardians. The Brother or Sister elected immediately becomes Guardian of the Community and receives a blessing from the Teacher. If the Teacher is unable to attend the election, the new Guardian will be blessed by the Teacher at the first opportunity.

(2) Teachers – The Teachers of the Community provide a link to the wider church. As Teachers they should be familiar with the monastic life and its place in the church. Teachers provide spiritual teaching and insight to the Community and are guides for the stability of the Rule and Customary. They also can provide a corrective hand to the Community, if problems arise within the Community.

Teachers of the Community shall be elected individually by at least a two-thirds majority of the Chapter on the motion of the Guardians. The term of each Teacher shall not be longer than five years. There is no limit to the number of times a person may serve as Teacher.

Teachers shall be provided with a current copy of the Rule and Customary. Teachers shall be informed of all new Vowed Members, and any dismissals from the Community. Teachers may interview privately each member of the Community. All such interviews shall be privileged and confidential and the Guardian does not have the right to intervene.

(3) Chapter – The purpose of The Chapter is to gather all the Vowed Members of the Community for consultation. The Chapter consists of all Vowed Members of the Community, and all have the right to be summoned to every meeting of the Chapter. Each Vowed Member shall have one equal vote.

Chapter may be held electronically or in person. When Chapter is held in person, Novices may be seated and have voice, but no vote; aspirants may be seated but have neither voice nor vote. Any member under disciplinary action may not vote, and may be refused seating at Chapter by the Guardians. If Chapter is called by teleconferencing, the Guardians will decide whether to include members who are not in vows at the Chapter meeting. Teachers may attend Chapter only by specific invitation of the Guardians.

A meeting of Chapter shall be held annually to discuss the activities of the Community. The Guardians may summon Chapter more frequently if desired. If the Guardians need to consult Chapter in an emergency situation where it is not possible to gather everyone at the same time, consultation by email or other means may be used.

The Guardians are to summon the Chapter and ask for their vote on the following matters: (a) Election of a Guardian, (b) Election of a Teacher, (c) Changes to the Rule or Customary. The Guardians also should seek the advice of Chapter for matters of general concern to the Community and any legal matters which may concern the Community.

One of the Guardians shall normally preside at Chapter meetings. If no Guardians are available, a member of the Guardians' Council may preside. If no members of the Council are available, the most senior eligible Brother or Sister present shall preside. Minutes of all meetings shall be carefully recorded and read at the next meeting. Meetings of the Chapter shall be opened with the invocation of the Holy Spirit. In making decisions, the Community should seek consensus,

but may use the latest edition of Roberts Rules of Order where doing so lends efficiency and effectiveness to Community proceedings.

(4) The Council – The Council consists of the Guardians of the Community and any others who are appointed by the Guardians to hold office or duties which aid the functioning of the Community.

The Council provides additional advice and input to the Guardians on matters of membership (admission of new members, leaves of absence) and other matters such as finances. While ultimately the Guardians make decisions within the Community, the advice of Council will be instrumental in helping the Guardians seek consensus for decision making.

(5) Community Gatherings – Most activities of the Community will be handled electronically. The Guardians will attempt to include as many people as possible for any gathering and meeting.

(a) Quarterly Meetings – the entire Community is invited to attend these meetings. These meetings will be an opportunity for the Community to receive new members and to witness vows of those continuing within the Community. They will also provide for general discussion of issues facing the Community.

(b) Chapter – As referenced above, Chapter is to be called annually, but may be called more frequently. Circumstances may indicate that this meeting will be held electronically, and the Guardians will strive to schedule it so that all may attend simultaneously.

(c) Regional Gatherings – The Community will strive to gather members together physically on an annual basis. All members are invited to these events. Aspirants should also be invited to attend these Gatherings. Given our dispersed nature, there should be at least one event in the east and one in the west of the United States. Other gatherings may be scheduled as members see a need or opportunity. These meetings provide opportunity for prayer, fellowship, and mutual support. While community matters may be discussed, these meetings do not substitute for Chapter meetings, unless specifically called as such by the Guardians, with provision for others to attend business portions electronically.

(d) Triennial Convocation and General Chapter – On a Triennial basis the Community will strive to gather all Members together in one place for a General Chapter meeting, prayer and fellowship.

## Article IV Stewardship

(1) Individual Stewardship - All members are to recognize that they are individually responsible as stewards for their own lives and finances. With gratitude for the gifts given us by God in our individual circumstances, we try to live simply, within our means. We are each responsible for our own legal obligations, such as for mortgages and debt. As citizens in the local community, we are each responsible for the duties and responsibilities of citizenship, including responsibility for paying taxes. **As members of local churches, we are responsible to offer our time, talent, and treasure to the local church.** We invite all our members to discern their level of tithing of their time, talent and treasure. This has been the recognized minimum standard of sacrificial giving to God's kingdom in most churches. While the tithe is seen as "duty" by some, we recall



with St Benedict (RB 7) that things begun out of duty or fear can be transformed to being things done out of Love, for “Perfect Love casts out all fear” (1 John 4:18)

(2) Corporate Stewardship - While the Community holds very few things in common, members are expected to assist with a common community purse, as they are able, when Community needs arise. As situations arise for common Community response to needs, the Guardians, in consultation with Council, will address those needs. Bank accounts, legal corporation structures, and/ or real or material property obtained by the Community will be obtained to meet specific needs. All transactions will be made with transparency and openness to the Community, with regular reporting to the Chapter of financial activities. All transactions are to conform to appropriate legal requirements, including consideration for taxes. All materials or goods acquired with Community funds will be presumed to belong to the Community.

(3) Finances - The primary source of income for the Community will be the gifts of members and friends who desire to support the work of the community. A Treasurer will monitor banking procedures and give accounting of the bank balances and how funds are being used. Funds are not to be used to benefit individual members, but members may be reimbursed for legitimate expenses related to community business, with appropriate documentation.

(4) Rule and Customary – The Guardians are responsible for safeguarding and maintaining the Rule and Customary of the Community. As such they should consult with the Chapter and the Teachers regarding proposed changes to both the Rule of Life and the Customary Practices of the Community. Individual members may propose changes to the Guardians, who shall consider the changes. When the Guardians propose changes, a copy of those proposed changes shall be sent to the Chapter so that all may discuss the implications. Consensus should be sought on any changes, but if put to a vote, it shall require a majority vote of all Vowed Members to add, delete, or change language within the Rule and Customary.