

The Rule of the Community of Solitude

Article I - Of Identity

- (1) We are to be known formally as the “Community of Solitude,” abbreviated as CoS.
- (2) In adopting this identity, we recognize that we are a Community, comprised of several members and we are devoted to seeking Solitude in our individual and common life.
- (3) Our purpose is to provide to our members a guided experience in monastic-style living while still remaining in their current home, family, and job situations. The Community provides structure and support for members as they live by three Values: Prayer, Study, and Personal Mission to serve the Lord our God wherever they happen to be.
- (4) Our Identity is rooted in the Scriptures and the early Teachers of the Church, especially those involved with the desert and monastic traditions, especially that of the Camaldolese Benedictines. Specifically, we follow the Rules of St Benedict and St Romuald, as we understand them for our current situations.

We must remember to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22). And Benedict admonishes us that we each carry out this mandate very aware of our own faults before God, since "The first degree of humility, then, is that you keep the fear of God before your eyes and beware of ever forgetting it." (RB 7)

- (5) Our calling is not to traditional, geographically-bound, communal life, as found in most communities. What differentiates the eremitical tradition from the coenobitic life is its physical independence. But being alone has many spiritual dangers – it is very easy to leave the “narrow way” and begin following our own fancies. Monastic literature is full of such warnings. St. Benedict does not spare them, but calls them a “most vile class of monks”. He called them “Sarabaites” and they are the ones who “have been tried by no rule.” His warnings are especially pointed: “Living in two's and three's, or even singly, without a shepherd, enclosed, not in the Lord's sheepfold, but in their own, the gratification of their desires is law unto them; because what they choose to do they call holy, but what they dislike they hold to be unlawful.” (RB 1)

For the protection of our immortal souls, therefore, this community eagerly embraces the Camaldolese approach for living both a solitary lifestyle, a common rule, and knowing ourselves as belonging to one sheepfold.

Our community seeks to create a space where the individual can engage in the hard work of following the Lord every moment of the day, while at the same time being supported by a community of like-minded workers. We do share a common life of prayer and are united with each other in the recitation of the Divine Offices, *Lectio Divina*, meditation/contemplation, and

intercessory prayer as well as in the common study of those teachers and masters that have gone before us, especially the writings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, and the Camaldolese saints.

(6) As we seek to be a new expression and witness of God's love in the world, we are seeking to cross boundaries of Christian denominations which have sometimes separated us. As a community, we deliberately seek to be ecumenical, embracing members from many denominations who seek to follow Christ through this Community. While individual members honor the canons and values of their own denominations, as a Community we will not come under the canons and structures of a denomination if those canons have a limiting effect on some of the other members of the community.

The community holds the expectation that individual members will continue to be active in their local churches and denominations.

(7) Our guide in life, first and foremost, is Holy Scripture. We search without tiring for a closer union with Our Lord. To achieve this we have found it beneficial to be organized in the manner set out by the Rule of St. Benedict, but following the eremitical structure outlined by Sts. Romuald and Paul Giustiniani (the founders of the Benedictine Camaldolese and the Camaldolese Hermits of Monte Corona respectively), especially St. Romuald's Brief Rule:

1. Sit in your cell as in paradise.
2. Put the whole world behind you and forget it.
3. Watch your thoughts like a good fisherman watching for fish.
4. The path you must follow is in the Psalms — never leave it.
5. If you have just come to the monastery, and in spite of your good will you cannot accomplish what you want, take every opportunity you can to sing the Psalms in your heart and to understand them with your mind.
6. And if your mind wanders as you read, do not give up; hurry back and apply your mind to the words once more.
7. Realize above all that you are in God's presence, and stand there with the attitude of one who stands before the emperor.
8. Empty yourself completely and sit waiting, content with the grace of God, like the chick who tastes nothing and eats nothing but what his mother brings him.

(8) We serve our community and the world through our life consecrated to prayer, silence and solitude. But these are tools and disciplines, not ends in and of themselves. Their function is to create a space for a deeper and more constant conversation with God.

8.1 Prayer

More accurately we should say “prayerful presence”. We aim to pray always as the Apostle Paul suggests. The concrete details of how to prayerfully maintain the presence of God during work or interactions in the world must be addressed individually. There are no formulas for this.

8.2 Silence

Even with our mouths closed, we are hardly ever silent. Our eyes dart to and fro, our mind races forwards into a fantastical future, and backwards into an imagined past. We are hardly ever just present to the moment. Yet it is in this very moment where silence and healing are to be found. So our work is to constantly strive to be where Christ is, here and now.

8.3 Solitude

Through the other disciplines of praying the offices, prayerful presence, silence, and meditation, we begin to enter more deeply into solitude; of simply BEING in the presence of God, whose Holy Name comes to us as “I AM”. Our disciplines lead us to the point where we can join the psalmist in saying, “But I have calmed and quieted my soul” (Psalm 131). Over time, we learn to carry this attitude in our hearts wherever we are.

8.4 Practices and Witnessing

As we engage these practices to deepen our relationship with God, we recognize that the relationship we cultivate is not ours alone, but something to be shared. Even in that recognition, we see that there is a tension between living the quiet, hidden life with Christ, and with being a witness in the world. While the ultimate witness to the world is for them to see that our lives have been transformed, there are some practices that contribute to the witness to the world.

The Holy Scriptures reveal that many people have taken a new Name when they have encountered transformation in the presence of God. Choosing a name in community is an optional way to express new identity to the world.

Traditionally, monastics have worn simple clothing that can be easily cared for. They have also worn something that is common for all members. The habit can be a distinctive witness of our life in Christ to the world, but it can also be a distraction for others and an obstacle for their vision of who God is. Each member should distinguish between the times and places when the traditional Habit is worn or whether a simpler, distinctive, modern mode of garb would provide a witness.

8.5 The Divine Offices

While being alone in solitude and sitting in the presence of God is of great value, the spiritual discipline of keeping the hours of the day with the Divine Office is a good discipline and unites a scattered community in prayer and common practice. There are many versions of daily prayers and offices available for use, and each member of the community should choose a routine that meets their own style of prayer and daily routine.

8.6 *Lectio Divina*

Lectio Divina (Holy Reading) provides a spiritual discipline to “Read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest” the Scriptures and spiritual writings. It is a way for us to chew on God’s word, while we are alone in God’s presence.

8.7 The Sacraments

In embracing many denominations within our community, each member must be in deep relationship with the teaching of their own denomination. We expect all members to be baptized

and to recognize that our monastic vows do not replace the baptismal vows we have made, but supplement them. The sacraments are vehicles of grace that assist us on our journey with God. Observing the denominational disciplines regarding the Holy Eucharist, Penance, and Healing is of benefit. We should also be mindful of the teachings and observances of Marriage and Ordination, for those who are also called to benefit from those Sacraments.

8.8 Spiritual Direction

An ancient practice for monastics, and for many in the rest of the church, has been to seek spiritual counsel and wisdom from someone who has wisdom and experience in living a disciplined life with Christ. These Soul Friends, or elders, or spiritual directors can help us discern times when our false self is an obstacle to growth and transformation in Christ.

8.9 Vows

The vows that we make before God are intended to help us focus on the important elements of our lives. While we keep the traditional monastic vows of **Conversion of Life, Stability, and Obedience**, we recognize that as a modern, non-residential community, these vows take on slightly different significance than for those in traditional style communities.

Our **Conversion of Life** is the transformation we undergo as we recognize that we are a “new creation” (2 Cor. 5) and that we are to continue to grow into the image of God who created us.

Our **Stability** is not to a geographical place, or monastery, but stability in Christ. While we recognize that stability of place allows us to enter into solitude more deeply, the stability in Christ is something we carry with us wherever we go. We also recognize that there is stability in relationships with other members of the community, who assist us in our spiritual life and journey.

Our **Obedience** is not the “submission” to authoritative figures around us, which is a more recent connotation of the word. Rather, as in the Rule of Benedict, Obedience is related to Listening; a Listening that demands a response from us. We Obey (listen) for God’s voice, recognizing that our disciplines of prayer, meditation, solitude, and conversations with our Soul Friends can help us recognize God’s presence and respond to it.

Article II - Of Membership

(1) As we are all one Body through the sharing of one Bread, we seek others who are of a like mind when it comes to the universality of the one God, in three persons. A desire for a deeper union with God through traditional monastic practices is essential regardless of one’s denomination.

Monastic vows do not replace Baptismal Vows, but are to be seen as an extension of those vows. The Community does not seek to replace the local community, but to allow more contact with those living a similar life to provide additional encouragement and support.

One must be a baptized, practicing and faithful member of a Christian Church (defined as a church which accepts the Nicene Creed as foundational to Christian identity), and practice

sacrificial giving to that church, giving of their time, talents and treasures. All members of the Community of Solitude are expected to continue their relationships with the local church while members of the Community.

(2) Stages of Monastic Life

As we come to the monastic life, we recognize that there are stages of growth, akin to our maturation as human beings. One who aspires (hopes) to join the community enters into conversations with members of the community as an Aspirant to learn more about the monastic life. A Postulant (one who makes a request of community) enters more closely into relationship with the community in keeping a simple set of daily disciplines in prayer. A Novice (newcomer) is one who is still learning the basic elements of the monastic life and the disciplines it entails. Through all of these stages, both the community and those joining the community are discerning whether the life in community is an appropriate response to God and should be continued. Those who determine that they wish to continue on this journey with God in the Community of Solitude may then make (Profess) Vows to God, first on a temporary basis, and then, as permanent or solemn vows.

Article III - Of Community Organization

(1) As a community, we seek to honor the traditions of the past, while recognizing that changes of time affect how we implement the wisdom from the past. Human nature does not tolerate egalitarian models or autocratic forms of expression for great lengths of time. Yet, there are practical matters of organization and administration that need attendance for community well-being. Thus, we seek to express traditional forms of monasticism in a new era and with new modes of leadership. We trust that the Holy Spirit will speak through the collective wisdom of a group leadership, called Guardians.

(2) Leadership of this Community is vested in the Guardians, not individual members or traditional hierarchical models of Abbots or Superiors. The Guardians will consist of three Vowed Members of the Community and will be elected by the Vowed Members of the Community at a meeting of Chapter. They should be members who are solemnly professed, or who have renewed their simple vows, unless situations otherwise dictate. As with all members of the Community, the Guardians will be addressed as Brother or Sister, depending on gender. As Guardians, they are to guard the traditions of the community as we currently perceive it. The Guardians are responsible for the effective and efficient operations of the Community to fulfill its mission and vision. The Guardians also provide oversight and accountability while maintaining the Rule and Customs of the community. The Guardians may appoint other leadership positions with a seat on the Council. While the advice of the Council or the Chapter is sought and listened to, ultimate decisions will be made by the Guardians.

(3) The Community will seek the council and direction of leaders outside the community, known as Teachers. Teachers are intended to help us remain faithful to our mission as expressed through the Rule. They are a connection with the wider Church (churches), and help fulfill a similar function to the role of Bishop Visitor or Protector in other communities.

As an ecumenical community, the Community of Solitude is independent of the canons (rules) of any of the churches to which its members belong, being ruled solely by its Rule, Customary, and the regulations agreed upon by the Guardians.

That being said, the Community is part of the Church Universal, and it is therefore important that it maintain its ties with the Church through the office of one or more Teachers (an ordained priest or bishop of any denomination).

(4) Chapter has been a way for monastics to gather as community to Listen. In Listening to the Rule, they are able to ponder the Rule and make decisions for the common welfare of the Community. As a community that is scattered throughout the world, Chapter takes a different form and frequency than in residential communities, but the intent is still the same: To Listen and Respond.

To deal with the scattered nature of Community, meetings may be held by teleconferencing or may be held in person. The Guardians will strive to hold Community Gatherings regionally on an annual basis, mindful that members may have constraints on their travel budget. Other meetings may be held by teleconference. Guardians will determine the frequency of Community Meetings for all members, and frequency of Chapter that involve Vowed members.

(5) The Council will advise the Guardians in situations where the full chapter is not required. The Council will consist of those in various leadership positions chosen by the Guardians.

(5) The Guardians, the Council, and the Chapter should strive to work by consensus, which can take time to achieve. If there are matters that are time sensitive, and consensus cannot be achieved, parliamentary procedures, such as Robert's Rules of Order, may be used.

(6) In embracing a new form of non-residential community life, we recognize that it is impractical for all to gather physically for Chapter or other meetings on an annual basis. The Community will strive to maintain the sense of common unity through various means of communication which range from physical, personal gatherings of the entire community, to electronic communications.

Article IV - Of Stewardship

(1) We are called to be stewards of the gifts that God has given us, both materially and spiritually. Unlike traditional communities that have all (or most) things in common, we recognize that each member is responsible for his or her own livelihood and does not rely on the community providing for the individual needs. Each member should recognize that they need to live within the means they have at their disposal and use those gifts with gratitude for the glory of God.

(2) In those situations where there are common goods, a common purse, or community property, the Guardians are to ensure that all transactions are engaged with transparency and give an accounting to the community about those common goods.

(3) Any legal structures employed to facilitate the working of the community, such as bank accounts or corporate structures, will be engaged according to the laws of the appropriate jurisdiction. The structures used should be designed to facilitate the spirit of the Rule of the Community of Solitude.