

Constitution of the Companions of St. Luke – OSB

Proposed Revisions for ratification - September 2007

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I Nature and Polity of the Community

A. Community defined

1. The Companions of St. Luke exists to promote Religious life under the Rule of St. Benedict and to witness through traditional and contemporary expressions the values of Religious life within the Episcopal Church.
2. In the Episcopal Church a Community is a society of Christians in communion with the See of Canterbury, who voluntarily commit themselves for life, or a term of years, to obedience to their Rule, Customary and Constitution. Vowed members from other faith communities who are in Full Communion with the Episcopal Church are not bound to the See of Canterbury.
3. Religious life is a particular form of Christian living which is characterized by a degree of separation from worldly concerns, common celebration of the Divine Office, a measure of silence, individual prayer and private reading of Sacred Scripture.
4. Members of the Companions of St. Luke vow stability to their Community, conversion of life and obedience to the Rule of St. Benedict, Customary and Constitution. All members are to live chaste and holy lives. Single members are asked to refrain from sexual activity. With the permission of the Superior, an individual may incorporate celibacy as a response to Gods' call and love. Spiritual renunciation of private ownership is understood at all levels of progression but is implicit at Solemn Vows.
5. The Companions of St. Luke is spiritually cloistered, for each member carries the monastery in his/her heart even when away from the Abbey.
6. The Companions of St. Luke is comprised of Brothers and Sisters who are chaste. Within the canon of the Episcopal church individuals may choose to live alone, in community, as a single,

as a celibate, or in vowed relationship.

7. The Companions of St. Luke, its motherhouse - the Abbey of St. Benedict, is conventual or independent of any other Religious Order or Community.
8. Other Companion houses can be established with the permission of the Bishop of the Diocese, approval of the Superior and consent of Chapter. They shall remain under the authority of the Abbey of St. Benedict.
9. The Companions of St. Luke reserves the right to approve and admit aspirants to Community life, to receive vows of those prepared for Profession, to administer the Reserved Sacrament when a priest is not available to celebrate the Mass, to adjudicate internal problems not already stipulated by the Canons of the Church, to practice without hindrance those traditions and customs approved by tradition and time which are particular and unique to Religious life, and to raise-up within our own jurisdiction deacons and priests with the consent of the Diocesan and Bishop Visitor. The administration of these particulars will reside with the Superior, the Chapter, Bishop Visitor and Diocesan.

B. The Superior

1. The character, duties, rights and functions of the Superior are contained in the Rule of St. Benedict. The Superior whose title is Abbot/Abbess derives his/her authority and responsibility from the Holy Spirit, therefore, is charismatic in nature, and is fully realized through his/her role as “teacher” and “spiritual father/mother.” The limits of the Superior’s authority are set forth in the Rule of St. Benedict, Customary and Constitution.
2. Except for the founder whose term as Superior is to death, the term of his/her successor shall be eight years. There is no limit on the number of terms he/she may serve.
3. At the end of the Superior’s term, a meeting of the chapter is

called for the purpose of holding an election.

4. If the Superior should resign or die in office, the temporary governance of the Abbey and Community shall devolve upon the Prior/Prioress. If there is no Prior/Prioress, the Chaplain of the Community will call the Abbot's Council into session using whatever mode of communication is most available. The Abbot's Council having reached consensus, will immediately appoint a person who will act as "Guardian" until election of a new Superior." The Guardian need not be from the Abbot's Council. With the assistance of the Chaplain the newly appointed Guardian shall inform the Bishop Visitor of the vacancy and summon a meeting of the Chapter for the purpose of electing a new Superior. This event may coincide with the next Convocation.
5. All members of the Community shall be summoned to this meeting. The Chapter made up of professed members shall vote in person or by proxy. The proxy, a professed member not under probation, will be made known to the Prior/Prioress and Chaplain by paper or electronic form. If there is no Prior/Prioress the Guardian and Chaplain will be informed in like manner.
6. On the day appointed for the election, the Community and Chapter shall assemble following the Eucharist. The Bishop Visitor shall preside at the election and shall function as chief teller. He/she shall be assisted by a member of the Chapter chosen by him/her. Both shall be bound by the strictest secrecy.
7. Ballots shall be distributed, each member of the Chapter receiving one ballot except for any who act as proctors each of whom also receives a ballot for each proxy they hold.
8. On these ballots the names of every member of the Chapter shall be printed in a column widely spaced. From this, before voting, each member shall carefully detach his/her own name, proctors detaching the names of their principals. These shall be collected

and checked by the Bishop Visitor in order of seniority in the Community, proctors surrendering the names of their principals and naming them at the appropriate place in community rank.

9. Each member shall then detach the name of the Brother/Sister he/she wishes to elect as Superior, proctors detaching the names of those designated by their principals in the appropriate order. Votes shall be placed in a vessel and discarded ballots in another container provided. None but the Bishop Visitor and his/her assistant may examine these papers, and they are responsible for the confidential destruction of these papers after the election.
10. The Bishop Visitor and his/her assistant shall count the votes and announce the results.
11. For an election on the first ballot, it is required that a Brother/Sister receive at least two-thirds of the valid votes cast. Abstentions are regarded as invalid votes when tallying the proportion of votes cast and are not counted. Should this ballot, or any subsequent ballot, reach a conclusive result, only the name of the Brother/Sister elected shall be announced. If the ballot is not conclusive, the senior teller shall announce the names of those receiving votes together with the number of votes cast for each.
12. Should the first ballot prove indecisive, a second is to be held in like manner.
13. Should the second ballot prove indecisive, a third is to be held and votes may be cast only for those two Brothers/Sisters who received the most votes at the second ballot. In the event of a tie for second place in the second ballot, the name of the one who is senior in community rank is to be preferred. In the event of a three-way tie for first place in the second ballot, the names of the two who are senior in community rank are to be preferred.
14. After the third ballot the name of the Brother/Sister who has received a majority of the votes cast is announced. Votes for an ineligible candidate, as may occur as a result of proxies, are

invalid and not counted. In the event of a tie, the Brother/Sister who is senior in community rank is chosen.

15. Following the announcement of the result of a decisive ballot, the Brother/Sister elected signifies his/her acceptance or refusal of the office of Superior.
16. Should the Brother/Sister elected refuse, the balloting shall begin again as at the first ballot, all votes subsequently cast for this Brother/Sister being invalid and not counted.
17. Should the Brother/Sister elected accept, he/she immediately becomes Abbot/Abbess of the Community.
18. The Community shall assemble in the chapel or oratory and the Bishop Visitor shall lead the Abbot/Abbess to the his/her chair and give him/her, his/her Episcopal blessing. Each Brother and Sister in turn, following seniority, shall present themselves to the Abbot/Abbess, acknowledging his/her election and asking for his/her blessing.
19. If the Superior elected is not the Superior who has been in office, a time shall be set for a Public Blessing of the Abbot/Abbess by the Bishop Visitor. The Abbot/Abbess will receive all the symbols of a monk-bishop as did the Founder.

C. Department Heads

1. The Superior may appoint individuals and committees and delegate to them authority for the efficient functioning of various departments. The Superior is free to dismiss or appoint Department Heads as he/she pleases but should avoid the difficulties caused by frequent and unreasonable changes in these offices.
2. Departments may vary from time to time and the same Brother/Sister may hold various offices. Some of them are described in the Constitution and others in the Rule of St.

Benedict. The Superior shall decide the question of what offices need to be filled at any particular time.

3. Following the admonition of the Rule of St. Benedict, the Abbot/Abbess will confer with the Abbot's Council from time to time and seek their counsel regarding significant issues before the Community. Ultimately, the daily running of the Abbey and Community is that of the Abbot/Abbess. When a Prior/Prioress is appointed, many of the routine decisions of the day for both Abbey and Community will devolve to the Prior/Prioress. He/she will work with various administrators, chairs and committees as directed by the Abbot/Abbess. The Abbot's Council can include but not limited to: the Formation Master, both vowed and oblate, special advisors, counselors to the Abbot/Abbess, and chairs of committees. The number of persons invited to Council is not set and may vary depending on the need of the Abbot and Community.

D. The Chapter

1. The Chapter consists of all members of the Community who are Professed, and all have the right to be summoned to every meeting of the Chapter and to speak and to vote as outlined in the Constitution. All shall have one equal vote. Postulants, novices, oblate-novices and oblates are to be seated and have voice, unless under discipline. Oblates are represented by the Director of Oblates, two Oblate Formation Masters and one appointee by the Abbot/Abbess. Having 4 votes, Oblates may enter into caucus prior to a vote and present their views to their representatives. These views are then translated into 4 votes at the time of voting. Those not professed may not vote. Professed under probation may not vote.
2. The Superior shall be bound to summon Chapter at least annually and may summon it more frequently if desired. Chapter is required to vote on issues that impact the whole community and those placed before them by the Abbot. These may include, but certainly not limited to:

- a. Any alienation of property
- b. The election of a Bishop Visitor

The Abbot/Abbess in consultation with Formation Masters will determine:

- a. Admission to Profession.
 - b. Granting of a leave of absence.
 - c. Dismissal or dispensation of vows.
3. There must be no unauthorized disclosure of the proceedings of Chapter. The Superior may wish to inform members of the Community who are not members of the Chapter of certain discussions and decisions of the Chapter. He/she may delegate this responsibility to another member of the Chapter.
 4. Minutes of all meetings shall be carefully recorded and distributed by electronic form prior to Chapter. If needed, revised Minutes will be distributed by electronic form in enough time for them to be read and acceptance at Chapter. It is important that the Minutes to Chapter be archived in a safe place. The setting of the agenda is the responsibility of the Abbot/Abbess. The Community should be given the opportunity to add important points of discussion to the agenda.
 5. Meetings of the Chapter shall be opened in the manner of ordinary business meetings. The Superior shall normally preside at Chapter meetings. In the absence of the Superior, the Prior/Prioress shall preside. If these positions are not filled, the Abbot/Abbess will appoint a moderator.

E. Property

1. According to the Canons of the Episcopal Church for Religious Communities, and in a desire to reflect the admonition set by the Rule of St. Benedict, and wishing to be spiritually at one with the example set by the early Christian community, all members of the Companions of St. Luke are required to spiritually renounce all possessions that hinder their progression toward

God, this is implicit at Life Profession.

2. It is the duty of every member of the Community to support the Companions of St. Luke with their prayers, skills, talents, and financial resources.
3. Members who live within Community houses are required to support that house with their monthly income. Each house shall tithe a portion of their income to the motherhouse – the Abbey of St. Benedict. Each house shall provide an adequate stipend to those living in community. Each house shall provide time and monies, as are available, for members to make retreats and other forms of health providing experiences.
4. Members who live apart from the Abbey or sister house are required to support the Companions of St. Luke at a level of not less than 5% of their gross earning, contributed monthly.
5. Dispensation or adjustment of numbers 3 and 4 can only be approved by the Superior.
6. Members may be dismissed by the Superior for the lack of support required above [no. 3, 4, and 5].
7. Spiritual renunciation of “things” is key to our understanding of spiritual growth. Jesus says to his disciples: “Take no shoes, clothes, money bag with you.” Go with only peace to offer to the town or house. Where you are welcomed, eat what is placed before you. Trust God to provide.

It is our hope that after years of formation the benefit of having less is more. Prior to Solemn vows, consider what you might want to leave to your spiritual home/community and document that intention.

8. Inform the Superior of your intention and provide a signed copy of your wishes.
9. In the case of legacies, stipends, trusts, endowments and all

other gifts not directed or assigned, the Community shall seek competent legal advice on how best to invest and protect such gifts.

10. Any gift or donation, however defined, given during aspirancy, postulancy, novitiate, annual vows and solemn vows, is the property of the Companions of St. Luke, and is not retractable.
12. In the event of dissolution of the Companions of St. Luke, the assets and property, not personally held, are to be administered by the Board of Directors, as described in the By-Laws of Corporation of the Companions of St. Luke, Chicago, Illinois.

F. Alternations to the Constitution

1. Any proposed alteration to the Constitution 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. It shall be passed if it receives at least two-thirds majority of the votes cast.
2. It shall then be laid before the Chapter again at next Convocation, and be voted upon as before.
3. If it is again passed by at least two-thirds majority, it shall be sent to the Bishop Visitor for his/her ratification. When his/her consent in writing has been received, the Chapter shall be informed of it at a meeting or by modern technology as soon as practical, and the amendment shall then become an integral part of the Constitution, displacing or annulling any relevant part thereof.

II. Membership in the Community

A. Postulancy

1. Postulancy is a probationary period for a candidate before entering the Novitiate. The time of the Postulancy shall be

approximately six months. The Superior may shorten or lengthen this period as appropriate.

2. A candidate is admitted to Postulancy by the decision of the Superior.
3. The Postulant is required to present certificates of Baptism, Confirmation, and when applicable, ordination. In the absence of original documents, letters of confirmation or duplicates may be accepted from varying institutions. The postulant shall have the recommendation of a priest and two other individuals who know him/her well and shall have been examined by a physician within one year of entry. If he/she has been married, he/she must present a statement from his/her Bishop or civil court stating that he/she has no marital obligations. Vowed partners of a candidate must meet or correspond with the Superior and have his/her permission before entering Postulancy. The partner must be under no illusion regarding the seriousness of this commitment to Christ and must state so in writing, giving their support of this new relationship.
4. During the Postulancy, the postulant is under the direction of a Formation Master, who will report to the Superior on the postulant's progress.
5. Before entering the Novitiate, the postulant is personally responsible and acknowledges in this reading that his/her entry into the Community is not to be taken as a work contract of any kind, recognizing that he/she can claim no compensation in the event of his/her departure from the Community.
6. The postulant is free to depart the Community at any time after consultation with the Superior. The Superior has the authority to dismiss any postulant having conferred with the Formation Master and notifying the Abbot's Council.

B. The Novitiate

1. The purpose of the Novitiate is to strengthen his/her recognition

of Religious vocation, that he/she begin to love the spiritual nature of community life in its varying forms and to experience it in practice so that his/her intention and suitability may be tested.

2. Having conferred with Formation Master a postulant is admitted to the Novitiate by the decision of the Superior. The postulant must not be less than 21 years of age, under vows in another Religious order or community, or entering the Community by otherwise fraudulent means. The Clothing of the habit shall take place at the time appointed by the Superior.
3. The length of the Novitiate shall be approximately two years. The Superior may shorten or lengthen the Novitiate.
4. The Formation Master is to discern and test the vocation of the novice and invite him/her further into the Religious experience. Instructing the novice is primarily the responsibility of the Formation Master, under the watchful eye and authority of the Superior. The Formation Master will report to the Superior on their progress in the Religious life.
5. The novice is free to leave the Community after consulting with the Superior. The Superior has the authority to dismiss any novice after conferring with the Formation Master and notifying the Abbot's Council.

C. Annual Vows

1. Nearing the end of the Novitiate, the novice must inform the Formation Master whether he/she wishes to petition the Superior to make Annual Vows. The approval of the Formation Master is required before presentation to the Superior. The petition should be before the Superior no later than two months prior to profession. The petition should be in the words of petitioner and can be in either paper or electronic form. It is appropriate that Annual vows be made during the Eucharist.
2. The period of Annual Vows shall be three years.

3. During this period the Professed will enter a Self-Directed-Study-Project that will be monitored every 3 months for three years. The Mentor having oversight of the projects will file a report to the Superior regarding progress made. There is an expectation on the part of the Superior that the work submitted will reflect the promises made at Annual vows; that is, a deepening of one's spiritual journey.

The purpose of this project is not about conferring degrees or earning badges. It is about taking an opportunity and running with it. Your effort and openness to the experience will be reflected in your study.

4. Upon completion of the Self-Directed-Study-Project, the Superior will confer with the Mentor regarding the overall project and its outcome. A sample of the project should be submitted with the petition to the Superior before advancement is granted.
5. The Abbot/Abbess has the authority to dismiss a person in Annual vows at any time having conferred with the Abbot's Council and the Bishop Visitor.

D. Solemn Vows

1. The Professed will submit a petition in their own words requesting Solemn Vows. The petition should be before the Superior no later than two month's prior to Solemn Vows.
2. Solemn Vows are intended for life.
3. The profession shall take place at the time appointed by the Superior. It is appropriate that Solemn Vows be taken during the Mass.
4. It is the responsibility of the Professed to purchase the cuculla that will be presented during Solemn Vows.

E. Separation from the Community

1. A leave of absence may be granted to any professed member of the Community by the Superior after conferring with the Abbot's Council. A letter from the petitioner giving reasons for the request of absence should be kept by the Superior. Any conditions placed on the petitioner should be noted and understood by all concerned. The Absence shall not exceed three years. The Religious remains subject to the authority of the Superior and retains his/her Chapter rights throughout the time, although he/she may wish to waive certain Chapter rights if his/her absence is for a long period.
2. Secularization, the abrogation of Religious Vows, brings about the return of the Religious to the secular state. This may be an act of mercy to the individual or a step made necessary by circumstances imposed by authority.
3. A person in Solemn vows may be dismissed for incorrigibility, bad conduct, entailing disobedience, willfulness, and insubordination; and the Superior, with the aid of the Abbot's Council is to make every endeavor to correct the erring Religious.
4. Proceedings for Secularization may be initiated by the Abbot on behalf of the community, or by the Religious. Careful records of all proceedings are to be kept. In the case where the Abbot is requesting secularization on behalf of the community, he will make his findings known to the Abbot's Council. The Religious has a right to offer defense. The Abbot's Council will make a recommendation that will be forwarded to Chapter for secularization. The Bishop Visitor shall be notified of this Secularization and asked, for his ratification. Before granting such ratification, the Bishop Visitor may make such inquiry as

he/she deems necessary. His/her ratification dispenses the Religious from his/her vows and abrogates his/her rights and obligations as a member of the Chapter.

5. In the case where a person has taken Solemn Vows and no longer feels that he/she can be faithful to them, the Religious can petition for release. The petition would come before the Abbot, proceed to the Abbot's Council and then move to Chapter for approval. The Bishop Visitor may make inquiry as he/she sees fit before dispensing the Religious from their vows.
5. Any Religious in Solemn Vows having exhausted the normal process of the Community may seek redress in accordance the Canons of the Episcopal Church.
6. A Religious in Solemn Vows 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 Religious to exercise his/her rights and obligations as a member of the Chapter shall be drawn up and presented to the Abbot and then to the Abbot's Council. At least a two-thirds vote is required for acceptance of the petition. The Bishop Visitor shall be notified and asked for his/her ratification. Before granting such ratification, the Bishop Visitor may make such inquiry as he/she deems necessary. His/her ratification suspends the Religious from his/her rights and obligations as a member of the Chapter. Should the situation change, the same procedure shall be used to restore the Religious to his/her rights and obligation as a member of the Chapter.

F. Oblates, novice Oblates

1. The vocation of Oblation from the beginning of Benedictine life has been an important expression of Religious life. It is the belief of the Companions of St. Luke that Oblation is in itself an authentic vocation equivalent to vowed life as defined by its own tradition and history.

2. Upon acceptance, the novice Oblate enters into a one year formation process. The Director of Oblates will report every three months to the Superior regarding their charges progress.
3. At reception a priest or pastor may receive the intention of the Novice Oblate if the Superior is not available or if the prospective novice Oblate is not able to attend Convocation.
4. Upon completion of the formation process, the novice Oblate will submit in writing their desire to continue to Oblation. The Director of Oblates will forward this request with their recommendation to the Superior.
5. The Superior will set the date of Oblation. In circumstances where the prospective-Oblate is not able to attend Convocation, a local parish priest may receive the Oblation but can not name him/her. The reading of promises and the naming of the Oblate should occur at the next possible Convocation. Certificates appropriate to the Oblation will be forward to the priest. Full Oblation should be made during the Mass.
6. Oblates and Oblate-novices have seat and voice at Chapter.
7. A novice Oblate may leave the Community at any time after consultation with the Director of Oblates and the Superior. The Superior has the authority to dismiss a novice Oblate, Oblate at any time after conferring with the Abbot's Council and the Director of Oblates.
8. After consulting with the Director of Oblates and notifying the Abbot's Council, the Superior may dismiss an Oblate at any time.
9. Entry date into the Community will define their seating among the Community at the Divine Offices.

10. Oblate-novices and Oblates are required to pledge not less than 5 % of their yearly income on a monthly basis. The Superior can adjust this amount upon recommendation of the Oblate Master.

III. The Relationship of the Community to the Larger Church

A The Bishop of the Diocese

If the Bishop of the Diocese is not the Bishop Visitor of the Community, he/she shall, on the occasion of a vacancy in the office of Bishop Visitor, be informed by the Superior of the vacancy within one month of its occurrence. During the vacancy the Community may request the Bishop of the Diocese to fulfill any duties that would normally fall to the Bishop Visitor.

B. The Bishop Visitor

1. The Bishop Visitor of the Community shall be elected by at least two-thirds majority of the Chapter on the motion of the Superior.
2. The term of the Bishop Visitor shall be for five years. There is no limit to the number of times a Bishop may serve as Bishop Visitor. If he/she is not the Bishop of the Diocese, his/her appointment must have the sanction of the Bishop of the Diocese.
3. It shall be the duty of the Bishop Visitor to carry out a visitation of the Community at least once every five years.
4. The Bishop Visitor is the ultimate guardian of the observance of the rule, Constitution and approved customs of the Community. No change in the Constitution shall be lawful which has not the written sanction of the Bishop Visitor.
5. Presiding at the Chapter of Meeting to elect a new

Abbot/Abbess and the Public Blessing of the newly elected Superior rest with the Bishop Visitor, but he/she has the right to nominate another Bishop to act for him/her.

6. The Bishop Visitor shall have power to receive appeals from any member of the Community without hindrance from the Superior. On receipt of such an appeal he/she shall him/herself appoint a time and place for the hearing of the appeal convenient to all parties. The Bishop Visitor shall make no decision without consultation with the Superior and Abbot's Council.
7. The Bishop Visitor shall be informed of all Professions to Life Vows, and any dismissal or Secularization of one in Life Vows which requires his/her ratification.
8. Notice must be given to the Community of the Bishop Visitor's intention to hold a Visitation in sufficient time for all necessary arrangements to be made.
 - (a) The Bishop Visitor shall be helped in his/her Visitation by one or more assistants, one of whom should be a Religious. The Visitor shall be provided with:
 - (i) A copy of the Rule, Customary and Constitution, revised and up to date.
 - (ii) A list of all members of the Community.
 - (iii) Financial records of the Community for the previous year.
 - (b) During the course of the Visitation, the Bishop Visitor and his/her assistants individually will interview privately each member of the Community. Arrangements shall be made so that any member of the Community not in residence at the Visitation may be interviewed by the Bishop Visitor. All such interviews shall be privileged and confidential and the Superior does not have the right to intervene.
 - (c) After the Visitation, the Bishop Visitor shall prepare his/her Charge. This may be delivered as an address to the Community or be sent by post. There should be sufficient copies of the Charge for each member of the Community

to have one.

C. The Confessor Extraordinary

The Superior may appoint a Confessor Extraordinary for the Community. The Confessor should not be a priest of the Community. He/she shall visit the Community from time to time, and any member of the Community who wishes to do so may see the Confessor Extraordinary to make his/her confession or to have a conference.