

The Rule

of the

SISTERS

of the

LOVE OF GOD

Limited Revision—1996

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THE MONASTIC STATE

All Christians are called through Baptism to sanctification in a life of total commitment to the service of God.

For the monastic this total commitment demands withdrawal in order to fulfil the vocation to follow the way of Christ bound by the Vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience. The monastic way will be expressed either in a life of active ministry made fruitful through prayer, or in one disciplined for the work of prayer on behalf of the world.

Profession under the monastic Vows redirects to God the natural life of men and women in their ownership of things, in their exercise of all creative powers, and in the complete control of all self-interest.

Therefore the Sisters shall regard the Vows as the foundation of their life and of their witness in the Church and to the world, and their requirements shall always be fulfilled in spirit as in letter.

THE AIM OF THE COMMUNITY

The Community of the Sisters of the Love of God has for its aim the glory of God.

It is called to witness to Christ's repairing of human disobedience by the sanctification of its members through their union with the life of the incarnate Son of God. The Sisters shall therefore strive by their discipline, prayer and constant self-oblation to fill up what is behind of the afflictions of Christ for his Body's sake, using their privileges of enclosure and silence as a means to lead them in the power of the Holy Spirit to this union with God through Christ.

Since contemplative life and prayer is the realisation in time of the soul's union with the will of God, the Community also bears witness to the Divine will for unity. For this reason the Sisters shall have the visible unity of Christ's Church as a central theme of their prayer and offering, and while maintaining all that is distinctive in their own life and calling, shall pray especially for the monastic life in all its forms and for the increase and sanctification of the priesthood.

RECONCILIATION

There is in true contemplation an urgency to love God for himself and also a desire that all humankind should be drawn to respond to his mercy, to acknowledge and accept the reconciliation accomplished by, with and in Christ.

To participate in Christ's reconciliation means to open the whole being to God in the common life to which he has called each one, and it will be through this stripping of self that the order and discipline of the individual life will bear the fruits of Christ's victory over sin and death, which is the true end of Christian asceticism.

The Sisters shall gather and hold to God's love the concerns of the temporal and the many requests for intercession which are brought to the Community, for it is through Christ in the fellowship of the Spirit that the wholeness of spiritual power proceeds for the healing of the ills of humanity and the world's disorders.

NOTE: It was the intention of the founders of the Community that the Sisters should be consecrated to this work of reconciliation, with the understanding of their participation in the ministry of Christ's repairing (2 Cor. 5:18–21).

ENCLOSURE

The Community of the Sisters of the Love of God as a monastic community observes enclosure.

The purpose of the enclosed life is the preserving and deepening of prayer. It is withdrawal from the secular estate in answer to the call of God to make possible a more complete offering of the whole self, body, soul and spirit to do God's will and to be the means of extending his love in the world. Within this withdrawal the needs of the Church and the world should be more clearly seen in the light of God.

The practical application of this principle of enclosure, both in regard to those who are permitted within the enclosure and the occasions on which the Sisters may go out of enclosure, shall be stated in the Customary. The Bishop, or at least the Warden, shall have knowledge of, and have given permission for, these exceptions. In emergency the Reverend Mother, the Prioress and the Sisters in Charge of the Houses may act in accordance with the principles laid down in the Rule.

THE MONASTIC HIERARCHY

The Reverend Mother

The Reverend Mother holds her authority in the Community from Christ. In the hierarchy of obedience, therefore, her leadership shall be the unifying source and directive of the common purpose and life of the Community.

The Reverend Mother must remember that more than anyone else she is responsible for the maintenance and exposition of the distinctive spirit of the Community.

The Reverend Mother, Prioress, and Sisters in Charge of the Houses

The principal duty of the Reverend Mother, the Prioress and the Sisters in Charge of the Houses is to lead those under their care with justice and charity, and to maintain a strict and faithful observance of the Rule and Statutes of the Community.

They shall always be careful to set a good example of such observance, regarding themselves as being bound, within the limits compatible with their Office, by the ordinances of the Community.

They shall be careful to keep a strict impartiality in their administration both of those spiritual and temporal goods of the Community of which they are stewards during their tenure of Office.

ENTRY INTO THE COMMUNITY

Those who seek admission to the Community shall always be received with courtesy and sisterly kindness as sharers in a common hope.

From their first entry into the life of the Community, all shall study to develop in themselves the spirit of love, setting the well-being of their Sisters, and the perfection of the Community as a whole, above any personal aims and desires of their own.

It will be within the safe protection of the life thus lived that each will look to find her own spiritual life deepened and enlarged according to the spirit of Jesus Christ her Lord.

Those who are accepted for probation shall be admitted as postulants immediately upon their arrival, that they may have full entry into the enclosure.

They shall during the time of their postulancy be instructed by the Novice Guardian in the duties and obligations of the Novitiate.

NOVICES

Those who are admitted to the Novitiate shall bear in mind its twofold purpose of probation and training and shall, accordingly, be entirely open with the Reverend Mother and the Novice Guardian while they give a cheerful obedience to all that they may enjoin.

The demands of the life shall be accepted readily and joyfully as a means towards the purification of life which may entitle a Novice to hope for the privilege of Profession in due time.

The Novices shall be instructed by the Novice Guardian in the various exercises of the Monastic Life and in the Rule and Statutes of the Community, and in such other matters as she shall consider appropriate to their calling.

The simplicity and thoroughness of a good novitiate is the foundation of the Professed life.

PROFESSION

The Sisters shall regard Profession as a signal token of the love of God, for it is the acceptance of their offering to him by, with and in Jesus Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit.

Great care must be given to preparation for it, and the offering must be thoroughly purified by a wholehearted acceptance of all such discipline as may be imposed, as well as by the zealous development of the virtues of the Christian and Monastic Life.

The Professed shall be careful to maintain the spirit of sacrifice in its integrity, looking forward to, and preparing for, its consummation with the same zeal with which they formerly sought its acceptance. All shall endeavour to unite themselves with our Lord's offering by the daily dying to self, that all their actions, thoughts and words may be permeated with the spirit of sacrificial love. This is the necessary condition of that risen life in which the Professed are called to dwell with Christ.

No one shall be permitted to take the first temporary Vows unless it be her intention to proceed to final Vows if the privilege be granted in due time. Thereafter the offering continues until it is consummated in death.

POVERTY

In accordance with the spirit of their consecration to the mysteries of the life of the incarnate Word, the Sisters shall always keep in mind the Vow of Poverty, while its application shall be welcomed by them as offering fresh opportunities for making real the conditions of this consecration.

Monastic poverty, therefore, is more than a simplification of life in a community of common ownership. It means an entire dependence on Christ, in whom all things are gathered and in whom all things are possessed. This is the holy indifference which is true liberty. Nothing may be possessed for self, and the requirements of poverty shall be recognised throughout the daily life, both in the appointments of the convents and in the conduct of the Sisters. For this reason they must as far as possible avoid asking for dispensations; in the common life all singularity shall be carefully avoided.

No one who enters the Community shall claim anything for her private use, but everything shall be received from the common stock and shall be regarded as belonging to the Community. The careful and reverent use of all Community goods shall be recognised as an essential part of true poverty.

CHASTITY

The distinctive dedication of the Community to the mystery of the Love of God emphasises the dignity and power of holy chastity, and it is in chastity, which is the whole being set on God, that the hidden joy which is beyond all natural attainment will be found. Through it every creative faculty will be submitted to its re-creation in Christ in order that the Sisters may take their part in our Lord's reconciliation, so answering people's selfish and destructive use of their natural powers both over nature and in their relationships with others. For this purpose, mind, body and spirit must be purified by penitence and trained to familiarity with the things of God.

It is by the faithful observance of the Vow, which will include voluntary perpetual celibacy, that the soul of the contemplative will be trained for the vision of God promised to the pure in heart. It is there that all relationships are made perfect both in this world and in the whole unseen world. Herein is the wonder of the Monastic Life and of the whole family of God.

OBEDIENCE

Obedience is the means whereby the human will is re-established in its true purpose to be one with the will of God. It must always be recognised as a free response of love and the means whereby the spirit of sacrifice may be more perfectly attained.

The Sisters must, therefore, seek both to keep themselves free from all self-pleasing and self-will and to make their obedience as complete as possible through all the authorised channels of leadership and in their relationships throughout the Community. This will only be achieved by a faithful and detailed observance of the Vow in small things as well as in great.

No position of authority in the Community shall excuse a Sister from fulfilling the obligation of obedience, but if a conscientious difficulty is felt by any Sister it shall be stated.

SILENCE

Silence shall always be regarded as one of the chief privileges of the Community, for it prepares the way for the union of the soul with the will of God and is an offering of perpetual reverence to his majesty.

It is in silence that the spirit will be trained to deepen recollection and to exercise itself after the likeness of the Seraphim and Cherubim that worship round the throne of God. But it should be remembered that silence must cover all the levels of the conscious life; there must be an outward silence of speech and movement, a silence of the mind for the overcoming of vain imaginations and distractions, and a silence of the soul in the surrender of the will to be still and know that God is God, leading to a silence of spirit which is the preparation for the fullness of contemplation.

Silence should never be made an excuse for lethargy, whether mental or spiritual, but remembrance of the morning's Eucharist, thanksgiving and adoration should fill the silent hours, while the mind brings its own contribution of thought, stimulated by reading and instruction.

Failure in silence is a real failure in chastity, just as failure in humility is a failure in poverty. Silence shall, therefore, be observed with all possible strictness and its spirit faithfully cultivated. It can be broken, not only by speech and gesture, but also by idle curiosity. In order to maintain the spirit of silence throughout the day, the necessary speaking shall be brief and quiet. Silence must be guarded by each for others and none shall invade another's silence thoughtlessly and without real necessity.

THE CELL

Life and prayer in the cell is an essential element in the Sisters' vocation. The Sisters shall, therefore, learn to regard their cell as a place where the Holy Spirit will reveal to them the mysteries of God and manifest to them the compassion and love of the Saviour.

The cell shall always be kept clean and tidy, and its simplicity shall be recognised by the Sisters as a sign of their consecration. No one shall enter the cell of another without leave or stay there longer than is necessary for the purpose for which she has been sent.

Immediately upon rising, every Sister shall make the following act of self-oblation:

All glory be to thee, my God, for that thou art, three Persons, one all holy God, very Love.

My God, I desire to love thee with all my heart, with all my mind, with all my soul and with all my strength. I here renew the consecration of my life to thee in union with the supreme oblation of Jesus Christ my Lord.

THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

Sacramental penance has for its object the purification of the soul for the glory of God, and it should always be accompanied by great watchfulness and care with regard to all known occasions of temptation which generally make the subject matter for confession.

The Sisters shall bear in mind our Lord's will for their perfection, and seek to unite themselves with him in his temptation in order that they may with confidence dispel anxiety or scruples.

After any fault a Sister should instantly turn to God with an act of contrition and, where possible, make an acknowledgement of it. That done she should dismiss all fear and discouragement, nor should the remembrance of the fault be allowed to create an atmosphere of despondency and gloom. She should seek to make amends for her failure by resuming her work and prayer with renewed vigour and watchfulness.

THE EUCHARIST

In the Eucharist the people of God thank God for what he has done and revealed to us through Christ, who is both Word and Sacrifice, with whom we participate, priest and people alike, in the one Sacrifice of the one Body and Blood.

To participate, therefore, in this central activity of the Church's offering is the first duty of the Sisters in order that they may unite themselves with the oblation and satisfaction of our blessed Lord, our great High Priest.

All prayer and offering is in him, and in the eucharistic action all are drawn by the Holy Spirit to be offered by, with and in Christ, in his offering to the Father for the sin and need of the world.

PRAYER

Prayer is the growth of personal relationship between God and the one who prays, the primary purpose of which is the worship of God rather than enlightenment or consolation.

It must be directed so that every faculty is brought into obedience to fulfil the will of God. This requires both time and discipline, and it is through growth in prayer that the true potential of each individual life will be realised.

The Sisters shall remember that they are equally called to offer themselves in prayer, as in their lives, for the sanctification of the world.

The Divine Office

Because of the incorporation of all the baptised in Christ's risen life, the Divine Office is an extension of the holy Incarnation both in worship and in mediation.

The recitation of the Divine Office shall, therefore, always be regarded not only as a fundamental duty in the Community but also as a privilege. The Psalter shall be recited or sung rhythmically and without haste, all the words being carefully uttered, and the greatest care must be given to render the Office with a dignity which unites each individual in the corporate offering.

Strict silence must always be observed from the time of the ringing of the bell and all work should immediately cease, and no one shall enter the Choir after the Office has begun without asking and obtaining leave.

Non-Liturgical Prayer

The prayer which the Sisters carry out in chapel or cell is not regarded as a contrast to, but as a continuing expression of, the corporate offering.

Ideally the whole life is to be made prayer, but there must be times set apart solely for this purpose. Therefore an hour shall be appointed each morning for prayer with a further hour of recollection in the afternoon. In the morning the prayer should be orison, whether the actual form be simple petition, pondering meditation, or affective or contemplative prayer. A greater liberty is allowed in the use of the hour in the afternoon as long as the attention is set wholly on God. Sisters shall consult the Reverend Mother as to their use of this time.

LECTIO DIVINA AND SPIRITUAL READING

The study of Scripture to form the basis of their prayer should be the first charge upon the Sisters' attention in the time set apart for reading. Nothing can take the place of Lectio Divina. In addition, the study of the Church Fathers, spiritual classics, doctrine, and books which help to a more intelligent participation in the Liturgy and Divine Office should be undertaken in order that the Sisters may learn to pray with understanding.

The Sisters shall take care that spiritual reading does not degenerate into a matter of merely intellectual interest or formal duty, and any tendency to pass lightly from one subject to another should be resisted. The exercise of reading should be begun with prayer and carried through in a prayerful spirit.

Sisters should from time to time consult the Reverend Mother about their reading.

INTERCESSION

Intercession is the uniting of the human will to be one energy with the will of God. Contemplation gives both strength and purpose to this, for by waiting upon God to be taught of God, both of the wonder of himself and of his will for the world, the intercessor will see that world in the light of God and, with compassion, will hold its suffering and lack of purpose to his love for healing and restoration.

The power of the prayer will depend not on any intimate knowledge or detailed exposition of the subject matter, but rather on a comprehensive and penetrating sense of the majesty and mercy of him to whom the prayer is made, and of the merits and compassion of him through whom it is pleaded.

The intercessory activity extends to the whole conduct of life in the Community and forms an integral and important part of it. After the example and in the power of the incarnate Lord, every member of the Community should regard her life as called and set apart for this work of mediation and should find in it further inspiration for faithfulness in obedience and generosity in self-sacrifice.

The Sisters are committed to pray for the dead and dying, remembering the countless numbers of those who have passed from this life spiritually uncared for and who are in special need of prayer.

FASTING AND MORTIFICATION

The true spirit of mortification is in the affections and will, for asceticism is not an end in itself but a disciplined training for the renewal of the mind in Christ, to witness Christ in and for the world.

It is the common life that provides the primary means of self-loss. External and physical penances, however, have value in so far as they contribute to that which is more perfect, but the Sisters shall in any case accept with simplicity and generosity any physical discomforts that may come to them through the poverty and strictness of the life.

Fasting and mortification are traditional accompaniments to growth in the life of prayer to which the Sisters are committed.

DEMEANOUR

The demeanour of the Sisters shall reflect true simplicity and joy in God.

As part of the repairing of people's lack of respect for human nature and of their cruelty to one another, the Sisters shall remember the presence of God and his indwelling in any to whom they may be speaking. Therefore quietness, reverence and love shall rule both words and actions.

RECREATION

The Sisters shall regard all recreation as part of the repairing of selfish and irresponsible attitudes towards pleasure. Everyone shall enter fully into the spirit of recreation, contributing to the refreshment and enjoyment of all, and should realise the danger of any form of withdrawal as detracting from the expression of love in the fellowship of the common life.

At formal recreation no Sister shall absent herself without permission. At such time, conversation shall be general and private conversation shall be avoided.

MANUAL WORK

In the monastic tradition manual work has its place in the sanctification of the natural world and is a sharing in the common lot of humankind. Each Sister shall, therefore, accept with generosity and simplicity whatever work is given her, regarding it as completing her offering to God in body and mind. Quietness of movement, recollection of mind and a consecrated energy are all part of this offering.

SICKNESS

Ill-health, pain and weariness should be accepted by the Sisters as a discipline which will enable them to enter more deeply into Christ's re-creation through the Sacred Passion and Resurrection. They should use these experiences as part of the intercessory activity of the Community and make it part of their offering to avoid giving unnecessary trouble. Sickness shall not be made an excuse for undue relaxation of silence or other rule, but suitable means of recreation shall be provided.

A Sister should report anything that seems really prejudicial to her health that, if advisable, some alteration may be made, but she shall in any case accept whatever may be the decision.

Those who tend the sick shall remember that, as St Benedict says, 'Care must be taken of the sick so that they may be served in very deed as Christ himself,' while the sick shall in their turn accept with love and gratitude the care and kindness shown them.

ASSESSMENTS

Monastic custom gives opportunity to the Community to meet together for the deepening of mutual responsibility in the observance of the corporate vocation.

These meetings are an instrument for the increase of charity and for the growth and development of personal relationships within the common life.

THE RULE

Every nun and novice shall have a copy of the Rule for her own use and it shall be the subject matter for prayerful consideration and study.

The Rule when finally accepted may not be altered except by the authority of the governing body of the Community according to the provisions set forth in the Statutes.

THE SPIRIT OF LOVE

As the heavenly city is built of innumerable stones, each possessing its own intrinsic beauty and its own due place, so the living Church of Christ on earth is continually being built by the perfecting of individual souls and their due relationship to one another in the oneness of charity.

This is most especially true in the monastic family, where all depend for their growth in holiness upon the perfection of their relationship to one another in mutual obedience and love.

The Sisters shall pray for each other daily.

They shall always be watchful to use opportunities of unselfishness as far as the obligations of the life of rule admit, bearing one another's burdens and avoiding laying burdens on others to relieve themselves.

No unkind, derogatory or critical words shall ever be used by one Sister of another. When it is part of a Sister's responsibility to point out what is wrong, this shall always be done with courtesy and the firmness of true charity.

In case of need or difficulty the Superior or Sister appealed to shall always attend to the matter with courtesy and consideration.

While the spirit of silence serves to separate each individual life unto God the spirit of love must ever be binding all together in God, that in the unity of the Spirit all may seek their perfection by holy charity.

