

A Little Rule for The Order of Jesus Christ, Reconciler

The Reason for the Order

For in [Christ] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to God's self all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. (Col 1:19-20 NRSV)

From the first moments of the young Church, the Body of Christ has understood itself to be about the work of reconciliation. This work has taken on many forms over the centuries, but no matter what the form, the essential and foundational faith-claim is an echo of Christ's act of reconciling all Creation to the Creator. Through the Incarnation, Resurrection, Ascension, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are reconciled to one another and to God through Christ, who saves us. Salvation is Reconciliation.

Saint Paul the Apostle was a servant of this Gospel of Reconciliation, and we too commit ourselves as those called to manifest the reconciling work of Christ through a particular asceticism. We, once estranged, continue to see estrangement even among those who name the name of this Reconciler, Jesus Christ. We seek, under and through submission to this Rule of Life, to give over ourselves, our lives, and our bodies to this reconciling work. This Gospel, which Paul served, we feel called to serve in a particular discipline of reconciliation in our time and place as God calls each of us.

From the first, this ministry of reconciliation needed to take place between followers of Jesus and members of the church: Peter and Paul, Apostles, siblings in Christ, called of God of the household of Israel in the flesh, were estranged over the means of having Jews and Gentiles together in one Body, the Church. Today, we are aware of our estrangements from the Body of Christ, as there are seemingly endless reasons for one to be estranged from another. Even as reconciled, we find ourselves then also estranged from God. Even so, we come together to entrust ourselves to the Reconciling work of God in Jesus Christ.

It is to this charism that we are called. From different denominations and traditions, we (perhaps surprisingly) find ourselves about the same work of Reconciliation. Some of us are reconciling members of Christ's Church to each other and Christ himself. Some of us are reconciling that same Church to the World God loves so much. All of us are on a journey of reconciling ourselves to God and to the Church. Whether by virtue of the Ecumenical Movement, the decline of mainline Protestantism in the United States, the burgeoning Emergent Movement, or by some other path, we find ourselves living in the ruins of some thing in some place, on the outside of what once was. Reconciliation is, for us, the only way forward.

We form this order out of our particular time and place and circumstance of church and world. The Order of Jesus Christ, Reconciler is an articulation of the gospel of Reconciliation for our time and place.

Claiming nothing for ourselves, but in living and working together under this Rule, we give ourselves over to the reality of God's Reconciling love. We proclaim reconciliation in the face of continued

estrangement, division, and animosity. We proclaim peace, and in love we offer ourselves - and invite any who are called to offer themselves - to this asceticism of reconciliation.

In this, we humbly seek reconciliation between church and world, between divided Christians, between Christian and the church, recognizing that we also are the estranged who are reconciled only through the blood of the Cross.

Ecumenical

Membership may be drawn from any Christian denomination or tradition; we are not affiliated with any single Christian group or denomination. Members of the order will be accountable to the Order and their own denomination's or group's discipline. We come together for the sake of the Church throughout time and space, seeking the Tradition of the Church in “the democracy of the dead,” as G. K. Chesterton wrote.

Habits in the World

We seek discipline and the habit of being together and living into Christ’s reconciling work. We bear as markers of our service to the Gospel in prayer, life, and action.

Prayer

The Order will provide resources for the keeping of the Daily Office. Among these suggested resources are *Benedictine Daily Prayer: A Short Breviary* and *Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals*.

Members should pray the daily office, particularly Lauds (Morning Prayer) and Vespers(Evening Prayer), and whenever possible to pray the daily office with other members of the Order.

If near a House of the Order, members should seek to pray Lauds or Vespers at the House, as they are able.

The Daily Office should include the reading of Scripture according to a Daily Lectionary.

Members should remember the availability of Vigils as a night office as a way of fulfilling Christ's example of watching and praying.

Members should pray daily for

- all the other members of the Order,
- those with whom we are reconciling, and
- our reconciliation and the reconciliation of all to God and each other through Christ and the Blood of his Cross.

This corporate practice is meant not to replace but rather to augment a member's own personal prayer life. Members should seek to have a personal discipline/life/practice of regular prayer, with meditation and contemplation upon Scripture, particularly the Gospels. Each member should also place themselves under the regular care of a spiritual director. Each member will seek to meditate upon the Gospels and in silence on a regular basis and under the guidance of a Spiritual Director.

What we wear

Novices will be invested with a prayer rope, as a tool and a reminder to pray for the Order and for the Reconciliation of the Body of Christ.

On profession, each member will receive a patch/badge that represents the Order and its Charism.

Virtues

The action of the Order's life in the world is seen in the virtues its members cultivate. The charism of the Order is founded on reconciliation, the goal the Apostle Paul speaks of when he writes of God becoming “all in all” (1 Corinthians 15:28). This charism fosters the reconciliation of all in God through Christ. This reconciliation takes root in the life of individual Christians as they live in relation to God, the world, other Christians, and themselves - and bears fruit in the world.

To this end, members of the Order of Jesus Christ, Reconciler commit to developing particular virtues in themselves, in the Church, and in the world.

Reconciliation

God's desire is to be reconciled to Creation. The narratives of all Scriptures attest to this. From the Garden of Eden to the Matriarchs and Patriarchs, from Moses to the Judges and Prophets, from John the Baptist to the Risen Christ, Scripture witnesses ever more urgently that God desires to be one with Creation.

Just as Abraham sought to spare Sodom, so must the Order work to bring peace and God's reconciling love to the world. Just as Jeremiah urged the people of Israel to circumcise their hearts, so must the Order's members endeavor to allow God's Holy Spirit to transform themselves and all they meet. Just as Paul, who proclaimed the Gospel of Christ crucified to the Gentiles, and Peter were reconciled, so must we be reconciled with each other and God in the proclamation of the same Christ.

In the commitment to Reconciliation, the Order witnesses that we are no longer alone but are part of Christ's loving desire for all people.

The Order and its members live this commitment to Reconciliation through the cultivation of the virtues of Obedience and Humility. These two virtues are expressed in the practice of other, more specific virtues, such as stability, *peregrinatio*, chastity, holy poverty, hospitality, and labor. These more specific virtues, in turn, foster the virtues of Obedience and Humility that help make real the reconciling love of Christ.

Obedience

We are obedient to the call of the Reconciling God and the Gospel of this Reconciliation in Christ. In this we submit to one another, and submit to the various jurisdictions, denominations and authorities through which God has worked and continues to work.

Obedience is not mere submission to authority/ies, but rather a choice to be faithful to God's creative action and one's own individual call. Members of the Order should seek to be obedient to the movements of God's Spirit in the needs of others and their own selves (Acts 5:27-29).

This Obedience is understood particularly in terms of the virtues of Stability, *Perigrinatio*, and Chastity.

Stability

All persons live in community. Whether one feels at home or alienated, we find ourselves in community. Members of the Order of Jesus Christ Reconciler commit themselves to the life of the Order and the charism of Reconciliation. Members also commit themselves to the particular place where they are called and where they find themselves. Reconciliation is made real in the witness of the Order to the work of God in a particular place.

Stability can be cultivated through residence in a House of the Order, active participation in the life of a particular parish or congregation, or a commitment to a specific ministry or vocation of some other kind.

Peregrinatio

In these latter days, however, few live in one community for long. The reasons for this are manifold; economic, personal, and vocational pressures contribute to the movement of individuals and families from one community to another. God is also at work in this movement. Just as members of the Order are committed to stability, so are they committed to *peregrinatio*, or a sense of pilgrimage, in the world. Members are called to where the Spirit leads them.

Peregrinatio is a virtue parallel to stability. Members of the Order are called to hold in tension the demands of stability and *peregrinatio* so that they may witness to the work of God in a place and at the same time recognize that God may call them outward to other communities.

Chastity

True chastity is a kind of openness to the reality of human creation. Members of the Order are called to an honest, healthy, and holy expression of who they are and who they were created to be. This expression ranges from the most public and outward things to the most private and intimate.

While members are expected to be honest, responsible, and holy in all things, members of the Order are called to express their sexuality in ways that are responsible and respectful of others and themselves. As typically understood, sexual intimacy is appropriately shared between two persons committed to life partnership with each other, usually referred to as marriage. Chastity is the discipline of body and soul in regards to sexual intimacy. Whether single or partnered, chastity puts limits on sexual expression so that we see ourselves fulfilled not in another human being nor in sexual expression but in relation to God. Chastity is the means for our sexuality to be oriented toward God. Chastity is also about boundedness around intimacy. As members of the order we must be aware of all our relationships, our roles, and our limits. In taking these virtues we recognize that we limit our options, including in our sexuality and embodiedness. Chastity tells us we have taken on a limit in our sexuality and its expression.

Humility

We offer God's reconciling work in Christ, and we admit we are in need of reconciliation. We are those who recognize God's reconciling work and witness to it wherever we see God at work. We recognize that we do not know God's will beforehand and only seek to offer God's love to all.

Humility is not mere self-abasement, but rather is the acceptance of God's will, our own limitations, and our own responsibility. Humility is seen in the life of the Order in terms of holy poverty, hospitality, and labor.

Holy Poverty

Holy poverty is a generous expansive practice of sufficiency, mindfulness, open-handedness, stewardship, and care-taking. Holy poverty should not be understood in terms of self-sufficiency, but rather in recognition of the interdependence of all persons and all creation.

The embrace of holy poverty calls members to a frequent examination of their practices of stewardship and consumption. Holy poverty helps members to turn away from blind consumerism and toward sustainability and generosity. Tithing, or some form thereof, can be one expression of holy poverty, but also calls us beyond simply a tithe to radical generosity.

Whether members are residents of a House or unattached to a House, all are called to treat all of their goods and resources "as if they were sacred vessels of the altar" consecrated to the service of God (*Rule of Benedict*, Chapter XXXI).

Hospitality

We reconcile through invitation; we admit we are strangers, to welcome the stranger as Christ. Houses of the Order will welcome those who are marginalized to a space of welcome and spiritual life. Reconciliation includes welcoming. All members commit to creating spaces of welcome and openness in which people may experience the reconciling work of God in Jesus Christ.

Labor

Our work of reconciliation may not be the work by which we support ourselves. Paul's witness of tent-making, tells us that supporting ourselves by other means than our ministry is a part of this work of reconciliation. Though, whether our living comes from our ministry or other work, our daily work is a reflection of the call to reconciliation. You don't have to change your job to join the order. Whatever you do is to be a reflection of the common call.... Cf. Colossians 3:17. While some in the order may receive some (financial) support for their work of ministry, we expect that members will have some work by which they support themselves.

Reception and Profession

The Order will not obtain exclusive hold over its members. Members may also be (for example) Benedictine oblates. However, the Order hopes to be more than simply a stepping stone or a waystation on someone's spiritual journey. Members are encouraged to be open to the Holy Spirit and go where God sends them. Membership should ideally be permanent, transcending other distinctions and illuminating other calls, and surviving movements through the Christian landscape and change of denomination or between ecclesial communions.

If one is drawn to this life and the charism of this Rule, joining the Order begins with postulancy, leads to novitiate, and culminates in profession.

Postulancy

Postulancy is a period of discerning of call. A postulant of the Order must be in the least a baptized Christian.

Any professed member may receive a postulant. The member will inform the Order that the postulant is being received, and the Order will be consulted in the reception of each postulant. At the Gathering the postulant will be introduced and affirmed by the Gathering. The same member (ideally) will guide the postulant through postulancy.

Postulancy is an initial period of discernment: an extended period of time in which the postulant and the Order discern together the postulant's call and explore the nature of the Order, its particular asceticism, its relation to Christian faith, and its relation to the postulant's own call. The duration of the postulancy is determined by the overseeing member, in consultation with the Order.

If not already so engaged, a postulant must enter into and remain in Spiritual Direction and participation in a Eucharistic community/congregation. Depending on particular circumstances and life situation of the Postulant, she may be asked to enter into therapy during the Postulancy and before entering the Novitiate.

At the end of the Postulancy, if the overseeing member, the Order, and the postulant agree that the leading of the Spirit is for the Postulant to enter the Order, the Postulant is accepted as a Novice of the Order.

Novitiate

At the beginning of the novitiate the novice takes limited and temporary vows at the Gathering

of the Order, with the knowledge and acceptance of Eucharistic community or congregation. If the novice is a clergyperson, the novitiate should be entered with the knowledge and consent of the appropriate denomination or group authorities.

A novice will have a mentor who is an experienced member of the Order and mentors with the aid and advice of an Abba or Amma of the order. The novice will live with the Rule for one year, continuing under Spiritual Direction and in participation in a Eucharistic community or congregation.

Novices of the Order may be single, partnered/married, or professed celibate, but if partnered/married the novice's spouse must consent to the novitiate. A novice should be involved in or beginning the work she or he feels called into in joining the order.

Profession

If at the conclusion of the novitiate the mentor recommends the novice for profession and the novice is led of the Spirit to take vows, and profession will not be in conflict with any other vows and/or commitments, vows are taken at the General Gathering.

Leaving the Order

God may call us away. Life changes, and we may find the Order too rigorous to maintain. A member feeling a pull away from the Order will first seek out other members of the Order, preferably an Abba or Amma or if a member of a House their Prior, to seek God and discern whether this is a movement of the Spirit or some other cause. If, after a period of discernment, it is discerned that the member is being led from the Order, there will be a sending service at the Gathering.

Patterns and Cycles of Life and Work

Some professed members of the Order will be residents of Houses of the Order, and some will be unattached to a particular House. Each House will be an intentional residential community attached to a worshipping community designated as a public oratory of the order. The worshipping community would be a Eucharistic gathering, whose pastor would be the Prior of the House and whose primary worship would be a Eucharist. These houses would exist to provide hospitality and respite to travelers and a liminal space for those seeking to work out their faith but who are prevented for some reason from entering existing church communities and institutions.

Residence at the house itself can certainly include persons who are not professed of the Order. One purpose of creating community houses would be to offer intentional community life (hospitality) to those who are not/will not become professed of the Order.

To form a House of the Order, there must be at least two professed members of the Order seeking to found the new house of the order, along with at least two others who are willing to commit to living in community house for two or more years. The formation of the House and the plan of founding the House must be presented and approved at the Gathering of the Order. The Rule of the House will be the Rule of the Community of the Holy Trinity. If two or more people are seeking to join the order for the express purpose of forming an intentional community that will become a House of the order, they may form the intentional residential community and take on the Rule of the Community of the Holy Trinity as their Rule of life, as Postulants and Novices, but the community will not be considered a House of the Order until final vows have been taken by at least two members of the prospective House.

Unattached professed members come from various walks of life serving in unique ministry contexts or in congregations as laypersons or clergy. These professed offer and communicate the charism of the Order within their own particular context or congregation.

Each member should have a Spiritual Director. (Other forms of counseling may be required of members as needed. It is key that each member seek to maintain their spiritual, psychological and physical health.) A practice of mutual confession (choosing and having confessors) among/between members of the Order is strongly encouraged.

Each member will be involved in ecumenical service to the universal church in its mission of witness to the Gospel either through a local church or through attendance and leadership (liturgical and otherwise) at the public oratories of a house of the order, and/or living in a House of the Order.

The Gathering, The Abbas, Ammas, Priors, and Conveners

The Order will gather once a year for a time of prayer, discernment, and fellowship at the Gathering. Spiritual leadership in the Order will be exercised by Ammas, Abbas, Priors of Houses, and Conveners of the Gathering. The practical and administrative responsibilities of each are outlined in the Constitution.

The Abbas and Ammas shall strive to live holy lives in harmony with the Gospel and the virtue of Reconciliation. It is their responsibility to pastor the whole Order and encourage all to live out their vocation in truth and holiness. Abbas and Ammas will be, when chosen at the Gathering, assigned an area of oversight in the Order. The Priors will have similar responsibilities to their own Houses. Conveners will be both the administrators and the pastoral and spiritual leadership of the Gathering.