

# **The Constitution of the Companions of St. Luke – OSB**

## **Nature and Polity of the Community**



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PRELIMINARY

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PRELIMINARY

# **The Constitution of the Companions of St. Luke - OSB**

## **Nature and Polity of the Community**

### **I. Our Community and Charism**

1. The Companions of St. Luke (CSL) is a Christian Community established under the constitution and canons (i.e., Title III - Ministry, Canon 14) of The Episcopal Church (TEC) and is a society of Christians in communion with the See of Canterbury. The CSL is independent of any other religious order or community and is identified in its Articles of Incorporation as a non-profit entity.
2. The CSL exists to express, through traditional and contemporary means, religious life under the Rule of St. Benedict and the CSL's Constitution and Customary. It is our privilege as well as our obligation as Benedictines, both individually and when we are together, to pray daily services as part of the Opus Dei (the work of God). In addition, lectio divina (sacred reading) and private prayer are fundamental to our pledge as CSL members to *prefer nothing whatever to Christ*. Our commitment to the CSL's contemplative form of religious life is complemented by our individual ministries that help to heal a wounded world, while respecting the dignity and rights of others and fulfilling our monastic vows of stability, obedience, and conversatio morum suorum (fidelity to the monastic life).

### **II. Membership**

1. The CSL includes vowed members and oblates, who may be married or partnered as well as celibate, and who live in places dispersed across the United States and beyond. Membership in good standing is established and maintained when a person has completed a membership application, has been welcomed by the superior, has made a financial pledge to the CSL and is making a good faith effort to pay that pledge, attends convocation as defined by the Customary, and completes, as applicable, required work including that identified in CSL member formation manuals.
2. Vowed members of the CSL are baptized members in good standing with TEC or churches that are in communion with the See of Canterbury. Oblate members may be baptized members of any Christian church. Companion associates are individuals who have chosen to associate themselves with the CSL in order to enrich their way of life.

3. The CSL reserves the right to approve and admit aspirants to membership, to receive vows of those prepared for profession, to adjudicate internal problems not already stipulated by the canons of TEC, and to practice without hindrance those customs established by tradition and time which are particular and unique to Benedictine religious life. The administration of these particulars will reside with the superior, the CSL Chapter, and the bishop visitor.

### **III. Community Leadership and Core Documents**

1. Guidance and leadership of the CSL is provided by our community's superior, together with designated members, the CSL Council, and our core documents, as defined in Section III.4 below. The character, spiritual duties, rights, and functions of the superior are identified in the Rule of St. Benedict. The superior derives authority and responsibility from the Holy Spirit; this office, therefore, is charismatic in nature and is fully realized through the superior's role as a teacher and spiritual parent. The limits of the superior's authority are set forth in the Rule of St. Benedict, this Constitution, and the CSL Customary. The superior is elected by the community for a non-consecutive, five-year term. If the superior should be removed, resign, or die in office, the temporary governance of the community shall fall upon the prior/prioress.
2. The superior may ask senior members of the community for assistance with work and service for the community. These appointments, to be confirmed by the CSL Council, may include, but not be limited to, a prior/prioress and deans. The people appointed shall serve only during the term of the superior who appointed them. These officers are members of the CSL Council and may appoint committees or work groups to assist the officer.
3. The CSL Council consists of four members elected at-large by the CSL Chapter and the officers appointed by the superior. The CSL Council shall provide guidance to the superior, and the superior shall give careful consideration to the views of the CSL Council before making a decision. To the extent required by state or federal law or by the Articles of Incorporation or other legal documents establishing the CSL, the members of the CSL Council shall become the trustees, officers, and/or board of directors however defined by these legal entities.
4. The community's core documents complement guidance by the CSL leadership and define how we are expected to live both as individuals and as a community.

These fundamental documents support our life with Christ and in some cases are required by TEC as being necessary to maintain the church's official recognition of our community. They consist of: *The Rule of St. Benedict*; *The Constitution of the Companions of St. Luke – OSB (Nature and Polity of the Community)*; and *The Customary of the Companions of St. Luke – OSB (Guidance for the Community and Its Members)*.

#### **IV. Community Meetings and Elections**

1. The CSL community (consisting of professed members, oblates, novices, postulants, and companion associates) shall meet semi-annually at convocations for prayer, study, and fellowship. The community shall convene at least once a year for a Chapter meeting. The superior, with concurrence of the CSL Council, may also authorize regional meetings upon request by a member.
2. Chapter meetings are held to hear reports of concern to the members including financial and budget reports and upcoming events and plans, to elect members of the CSL Council, and to vote on other matters, including selection of a superior. The election of a superior is to be called by the bishop visitor during the final year of the current superior's term or if the current superior dies, resigns, or is removed.
3. All members are considered to be in good standing, unless they have been put on probation by the superior, and they shall have a seat during Chapter meetings. Professed members may vote on all issues raised during Chapter meetings, including the election of a superior and changes to the Constitution. Novices and oblates will have a vote on financial issues and administrative issues only. Postulants and novice oblates have a voice but no voting privileges, except regarding their Council representative.

#### **V. Relationships and Communications**

1. The CSL community, as an expression of new monasticism, serves as a witness to the wider church and world while helping members on their individual spiritual journeys. As a Christian community authorized by TEC, the CSL is required by the rules of the church's Committee on Orders and Communities to have a bishop visitor. The bishop visitor (elected by the CSL Chapter on a motion from the superior) serves as the ultimate guardian of the community and is a key bridge between the CSL and the greater church. Also available to the

CSL community is a chaplain (a non-member priest appointed by the superior) who serves as a celebrant for the Holy Eucharist and participates in Benedictine rites if the bishop visitor is not present.

2. Another expectation of TEC is that communities under its authority adhere to and abide by the church's Safe Church/Religious Community Policy. Accordingly, the superior and the Council of the CSL shall create, maintain, and enforce a Safe Community Policy that prohibits its members from engaging in abuse or harassment (in any form and whether sexual, emotional, or physical) of any person. Further, as a Christian community, the CSL expects its members to exceed this minimum standard of behavior and to rise to the challenge of developing mutually-supportive relationships and healthy communications about shared community interests.
3. The CSL is dependent on the initiative of all members to contribute to development of a nurturing community and to achieve shared interests. As a dispersed (non-cloistered) community, the CSL shall continue to have available for its members an array of communication vehicles that are to include both in-person and technology-based options.

## **VI. Financial Resources and Stewardship**

1. It is a goal of the CSL that all its members will support the community's efforts to manifest Benedictine principles and spirituality through their prayers, talents, and financial resources. It is also expected that the CSL leadership will be accountable stewards of the community's resources.
2. Annual member pledges are not considered as membership dues but as thank-offerings for God's generosity in bringing us together to love and serve Christ in all. It is hoped all members will be thoroughly inculcated with a spirit of simplicity and generosity that balances meeting their individual financial obligations with the needs of the community and care for God's creation.

## **VII. Alterations to the Constitution**

Any proposed alteration to the Constitution shall be laid before the Chapter in writing by the superior. The superior shall set the date of the vote, to be held electronically or at a Chapter meeting, and a copy of the proposed revisions shall



be sent to all professed members no later than ten days before the vote. If the revisions are approved by at least a two-thirds majority of the voters, a second vote on the revisions shall occur at a second Chapter meeting or electronically, at least one month following. If the proposed revisions are again passed by a two-thirds majority vote, the changes shall be sent to the bishop visitor for ratification prior to their incorporation into the Constitution. They then shall become effective immediately.

### **VIII. Dissolution of the Community**

If it is determined by the superior, the CSL Council, or the bishop visitor that the CSL is no longer a viable entity, the superior shall call a special meeting of the CSL Chapter. This meeting shall include discussion. A two-thirds majority vote of those present is necessary for the community to be dissolved.

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