

The Rule of the Order of the Ascension

As of Sept 3, 2010

This is the great deed, ordained by our Lord God since before time began. .by which he shall make all things well. For just as the blessed Trinity made all things out of nothing, so the same blessed Trinity shall make good all that is not well. And how it shall be done, there is no creature beneath Christ who knows, nor who shall know until it is done.

Julian of Norwich

The Mission of the Order of the Ascension

The Order of the Ascension is a Christian community of women and men who have made a promise of stability, obedience and conversion of life, and share a commitment to parish revitalization and the struggle for compassion and justice in our society. We understand ourselves to have an apostolate to parishes with particular challenges for faithful life and ministry. These challenges may arise from within the congregation's own life and history or the sociological and demographic context of the community. We have a special concern for parishes that are poor, working class and minority communities; those in urban, rural and isolated settings; and those that are small, have a history of instability or are longing for renewal as a Christian community.

The Promise

"My promise is to seek the presence of Jesus Christ in the people, things and circumstances of my life through stability, obedience and conversion of life."

The promise is taken for three year periods. The cross of the Order is given when the promise is first made .

The Order as an Instrument of the Holy Catholic Church

The Order of the Ascension offers itself as an instrument of the Holy Catholic Church. We are of and for the Body. We take on in our mission and life a particular way of expressing the Church's nature and mission. So we share in the unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity of the Church. We share in her mission of holy unity. In its life and work, the Order seeks a full expression of the Christian life—in liturgy and service, evangelization and justice, spiritual formation and parish fellowship.

Baptismal Identity, Purpose, and Destiny

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood. I Peter 2:9

Our vocation is not simply to be, but to work together with God in the creation of our own life, our own identity, our own destiny—to work out our own identity in God, which the Bible calls 'working out salvation " is a labor which requires sacrifice and anguish, risk and many tears. Thomas Merton

In considering the challenges facing the Christian Church in the fast moving, urban, technological world of today, there is ground for the thesis that nothing is more urgent for the renewal of the Church than a radical look at the apostolate of the laity. Cynthia Wedel

You are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own for ever. Amen
Book of Common Prayer

Here once more we exhort our sons to take an active part in public life, and to work together for the benefit of the whole human race, as well as for their own political communities. It is vitally necessary for them to endeavor, in the light of Christian faith and with love as their guide, to ensure that every institution whether economic, social, cultural or political, be such as not to obstruct but rather to facilitate man's self betterment, both in the natural and in the supernatural order. And yet, if they are to imbue civilization with right ideals and Christian principles, it is not enough for our sons to be illumined by the heavenly light of faith and to be fired with enthusiasm for a cause; they must involve themselves in the work of these institutions, and strive to influence them effectively from within. John XXIII

The lay person's primary function is out there in the world. There is a problem when the church becomes the primary focus of their lives. I can remember that when I was most unhappy on my job, I was most active in the church. Verna J. Dozier

When the Church baptizes a child, that action concerns me, for that child is thereby connected to that which is my head too, and ingrafted into that body whereof I am a member John Donne

The beginning and end of the life of the Order of the Ascension is in the waters of baptism and the power of God. It is a life shared with the whole people of God. A life that ties us to creation, history, death and resurrection. A life dependent on the Lord who delivers from sin and death, opens hearts to grace and truth, fills with the Spirit, keeps us in the holy Church, teaches us to love, sends us in witness, and brings us to the fullness of his peace and glory. We live in the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This life we share with all his servants is a new life, a transformed life that is sustained in the Holy Spirit and offers us an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and to love the Lord and the gift of joy and wonder in the Lord's works. This community is grounded in the reality of and commitment to the fullness of the ministry of all baptized people. All of this is a sharing in the eternal priesthood of Christ. It gives us, individually and corporately, our identity, purpose and destiny.

Eucharistic Living

It is you who lie upon the altar; it is you, your very life, within the cup, Augustine of Hippo

You cannot claim to worship Jesus in the tabernacle if you do not pity Jesus in the slum. ...it is madness to suppose that you can worship Jesus in the Sacrament and Jesus on the throne of glory, when you are sweating Him in the bodies and souls of His children. ..Now go out into the highways and hedges, and look for Jesus in the ragged and the naked, in the oppressed and the sweated, in those who have lost hope, and in those who are struggling to make good. Look for Jesus in them and when you have found him, gird yourselves with His

towel of fellowship and wash His feet in the person of His brethren. Frank Weston
For the fully Christian life is a Eucharistic life: that is, a natural life conformed to the pattern of Jesus, given in its wholeness to God, laid on His altar as a sacrifice of love, and consecrated, transformed by His inpouring life, to be used to give life and food to other souls. Evelyn Underhill

I have the audacity to believe that people everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality, and freedom for their souls. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Order along with the whole Body of Christ is called to a Eucharistic life. This is life in the pattern of Jesus Christ, a life represented at the altar, and experienced by all Christian communities and each Christian. It is a life of being taken by God, blessed with identity, purpose and an eternal destiny; broken in the living of vocation and repentance; and given in the power of a renewed and sanctified life to be the instruments of his prayer, justice, peace and love.

To be a part of the Order of the Ascension, indeed to be a part of any particular Christian community, is a choice to experience the Eucharistic life in terms of and in the context of community. Life in community becomes for us our path for engaging that Eucharistic life. We trust, by grace, that God takes us and we take one another as companions, even friends. This is a specific form of being taken. Does God intend this for each of us now? In this manner? Corporately and individually we seek to discern an acceptable answer. What we seek, in this path and others, is to allow God to take us fully. To withhold nothing of ourselves from the claims of this vocation. We know ourselves blessed in the vows offered and lived. We seek a blessing in this way of living our baptismal and priestly identity and purpose. In this path we are broken. We die. In the sacrifice, compassion and repentance necessary for our common life and parish ministry, we find ourselves drawn more fully into the image of the broken one. Our anxiety, brokenness and death is finally placed into the hands of God. Our own weakness accepted, we find our strength in the crucified Lord. We may then, and only then, be fit to be used.

In the mystery of Eucharistic living, we lose life to find it. This, for us, is joy. For us the Eucharist brings a special identification with the poor and oppressed. This is a solidarity with all our sisters and brothers. The way of unity with those most broken is sacrifice, a self-offering in our weakness, union with Christ.

Parish Revitalization

A revitalized parish is one in which the individual and corporate implications of the baptismal covenant of the people of God are being worked out. ...A revitalized parish is one in which the whole Faith is taught with diligence and acted on with courage. ...The revitalization of the parish means making the church a place of prayer and the people a praying people. ...It is the people of God engaged actively in their relationship with God, through Scripture, sacraments and prayer, and engaged in their work in family, neighborhood and workplace, in service to the poor and oppressed which is the sign of the coming of the kingdom. Emmett Jarrett

The story of every parish should be a love story. ..One possible definition for a parish is that it is God's way of meeting the problems of the unloved. This meeting between God and the unloved, the unwanted, takes place in the preaching of the Word, in the Sacraments, in the social life of the parish made possible by the climate of acceptance which is engendered by those who have been baptized and confirmed in the Catholic faith. One of the main tasks of the parish priest is to train the militant core of his parishioners in such a way that they understand as fully as possible the true nature of a Christian parish.

Kilmer Myers

So you think that because of her weaknesses Christ will forsake her? The worse his church and ours is marred by our failures, the steadier he will support her with his tender care.

He could not deny his own body. Helder Camara

Our hope is that the fruits of our companionship and learning will benefit our parish communities. Professed members are expected to receive training in parish development. Parish development is establishing the structures, processes and climate:

◆ That will provide a full expression of worship, doctrine, action and oversight that is rooted in our tradition;

◆ That will nurture the Christian life of people at all phases of maturity, coach and equip those of apostolic faith and practice for their ministry, and encourage all in a movement toward a more prayerful, disciplined and compassionate Christian life;

◆ That will renew people in their baptismal identity and purpose and send them, in Christ, into families, work and communities.

The development of a parish is a process of entering more deeply into the life of Christ and the nature and mission of the Church. A parish is being renewed as it enters into and reflects the mind, heart and work of Christ. A parish is being renewed as it enters into and reflects the unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity of the Church. A parish is being renewed as it pursues the mission of holy unity. Parish development is our striving, as a community of Christian people, toward God. It is not primarily something we do, or create, or make happen. It is the way in which a parish, a local manifestation of the Holy Catholic Church, shares in the Divine Life. It is living the Christian life, not simply as individuals, but as a people.

The movement of a parish into a comprehensive and deep expression of the Christian Life is the result of years of striving, submitting and molding. It is the responsibility of clergy and lay leaders to monitor the life and ministry of the parish and to take initiative in increasing the faithfulness and effectiveness of that life and ministry.

The Promise: Stability, Obedience and Conversion of Life

For stability means that I must not run away from where my battles are being fought, that I have to stand still where the real issues have to be faced. Obedience compels me to re-enact in my own life that submission of Christ himself, even though it may lead to suffering and death, and conversatio, openness, means that I must be ready to pick myself up, and start .all over again in a pattern of growth which will not end until the day of my final dying. And all the time the journey is based on that Gospel paradox of losing life and finding it. ..my goal is Christ. Esther deWaal

As the "rites of passage" approach {Clothing, Annual Vow, Life Profession}, the questioning often intensifies and appropriately focuses on one essential concern: Am I, beyond the joys and pains, crises or celebrations, finding myself challenged. enriched, more alive in this way of life,. or am I feeling frustrated, disillusioned, restricted and somehow diminished? Ellen Stephen, OSH

But a covenant is a blessed commitment; you could not tell until the end whether it worked, what was its nature its mystery, its power. Sara Maitland

We take a three year promise of stability, obedience and conversion of life. This promise is the commitment we see as necessary in the fulfillment of our baptism and as we pursue the mission of the Order .

Stability

What is it then to be stable? It seems to me that it may be described in the following terms: You will find stability at the moment when you discover that God is everywhere, that you do not need to see him elsewhere, that he is here, and if you do not find him here it is useless to go and search for him elsewhere because it is not he that is absent from us, it is we who are absent from him. Anthony Bloom

Community is that place where the person you least want to live with always lives. ...And when that person moves away, someone else arrives immediately to take his or her place. Parker J. Palmer

We must endeavor to carry on our work. ..God expects this of us. The Church at home, which sent us out, will surely expect it of us. The universal Church expects it of us. ..The people whom we serve expect it of us. We could never hold up our faces again, if for our own safety we all forsook him and fled, when the shadows of the passion began to gather around him in his spiritual and mystical body, the Church in Papua. . Philip Strong to the Clergy, 1942

We seek the stability of Christian community. In the bonds with one another, in Christ, we find an awareness and stillness. This is a stability that has to do with particular people who share, and plan to share, a mission, identity, and history.

We seek the stability of what John Keble called "the trivial round, the common task", which he assures us is the place within which the opportunities exist "to bring us daily nearer God." We are touched by God in the ordinary, given, routine ways of our life. God is in the midst of us.

In Matthew it is written that "he who stands firm to the end will be saved" (10:22). This calls for the formation of virtues in each of us and in our corporate life: virtues of patience, courage and hope.

Stability is a decision not to run away from ourselves, those closest to us, and the "givens" of our lives, but to seek God in those places and people. In this we will join our Lord in His passion and His joy. In this we may discover an inner stability, a stability of the heart, rooted and grounded in His love.

Our stability is a ministry to each other and a witness to others. We develop an orderly and stable pattern of Christian life arranged around prayer, study and work. Adequate time is taken for friends and family, rest and recreation. In the overall pattern of our life, and in

each aspect of life. we desire to reflect a disciplined sense of order and stability.

We are accountable to one another. Members are called, in charity, to speak directly and honestly to each other. Members do not presume to defend another in the community. We are to be slow to anger, quick to restore relationship, and are not to allow the sun to set on resentment or anger without an attempt to address the difficulty.

Members seek help when needed so they may strive toward a deeper stability in relationships, family, parish and "the Order. We seek a stability in which the diversity of communities and their demands are unified in "one Lord, one Faith and one baptism."

Among the ways we might open ourselves to stability are:

◆ Learning to accept this particular community, friend, place, time. It is learning to be where we are. To attend to what is before us and so open ourselves to wonder and mystery. The alternative is to give ourselves to illusion, boredom, resentment, and death.

◆ Learning to "ground" ourselves, bringing our attention back to the present, noticing our fear and anxiety, opening our souls to the fire and love that can purify our intentions and cast out our fear. This involves a commitment to make oneself "at home" with this person, this place, this event, not waiting for another to do it for us. When we are the "host" we are called to practice hospitality, making a place for the visitor and stranger. When we are the visitor, we give thanks for whatever hospitality we receive; approach any complaint we may have with great care for the failings and dignity of those who serve us; accept that even as the strange we may make a place for ourselves. This means, of course, that for our relationships with others to be stable and open to joy, we need to be at home with ourselves.

◆ Praying that we might develop within ourselves the virtue of perseverance. Learning to endure under pressure and stress, even in suffering. Asking for a "steadfast spirit."

◆ Seeking to understand how we run away, and why we run. Exploring the grumbling of our own hearts, listening with tenderness so we might accept responsibility for it. We want to learn the ways in which we build unrealistically high expectations for others and ourselves. We need to notice how we look to togetherness and intense activity in community as ways to escape our loneliness and the real community of limitations and weakness in which God's compassion flows.

Obedience

The proper meaning of holy is a thing offered to God. John Chrysostom

He was made obedient even unto death. Philippians 2:8

I shall cleave to thee with all my being, then shall I in nothing have pain and labor and my life shall be a real life, being wholly full of thee. Augustine of Hippo

A Christian martyrdom is never an accident for saints are not made by accident. Still less is a Christian martyrdom the effect of a man's will to become a saint, as a man by willing and contriving may become a ruler of men. A martyrdom is always the design of God, for his love of men, to warm them and to lead them, to bring them back to his ways. We thank thee for thy mercies of blood, for thy redemption by blood, For the blood of thy martyrs and saints shall enrich the earth, shall create holy places. From such ground springs that which forever renews the earth. Though it is forever denied. T.S. Eliot

*In your hand we rest
In the cup of whose hand sailed an ark
Rudderless, without mast.
In your hand we rest
Who was to make of the aimless wandering of the ark
A new beginning for the world.
In your hand we rest
Ready and content this day. Alan W. Jones*

Our way is finally Christ's way: "I came not to do my own will, but that of Him who sent me." In communion, listening and discernment we will seek God's will. In communion, hope and decision we will seek to obey and act. We bear the seal of Him who died. This is our identity and purpose. An obedience that is not grudgingly given, that does not foster a grumbling in our hearts.

Members take responsibility for their own spiritual life in a manner that fits their situation, reflects the Promise and our common commitments, and includes listening for the wisdom of God, others, in creation and in the longing of our own heart.

Professed members may wear the cross or medal of the Order. They may wear the gray Anglican cassock of the Order .

Conversion of Life

God did not abolish the fact of evil. He transformed it. He did not stop the crucifixion. He rose from the dead. Dorothy Sayers

*And all shall be well and
All manner of things shall be well
When the tongues of flame are infolded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one. T.S. Eliot*

See, understand, enjoy, said the Gnostic,. repent, believe, love, said the Church, and if you see anything by the way, say so. Charles Williams

Ihave the impression that God knows the importance of humility for man. He knows our weakness, our pride, and. ..He purposely sets in our path each day four or five humiliations, and in the course of our life, four or five great humiliations. If we do not comprehend them, if we do not accept them, it is a serious matter. But if we accept them, then we learn the generosity of God. Helder Camara

The total gift of one's being and of one's whole life is the will to live and work with Christ. which also means to suffer and to die with him in that terrible death from which the life of grace issues forth for humanity. Teresa Benedicta (Edith Stein)

The new person is like a garment made to cover the individual believer. ..It is impossible to become a new person as a solitary individual. The new person is not the individual believer after he has been justified and sanctified, but the Christian community, the Body of Christ, Christ himself Dietrich Bonhoeffer

To be part of the Order, indeed to be baptized, is to be committed to transformation. The vows of baptism and of this community are toward the transformation of our own life, our relationships, our families, this society. We know ourselves to be "strangers and exiles on the earth. ..seeking a homeland. ..a better country." (Hebrews 11:13-16)

It is in the context of stability and obedience that we are confronted with demands and pressures calling us forward into an encounter with ourselves. The struggle in the world and the struggle in our soul is one struggle. In that struggle, a deeper inner stillness is to be discovered as a gift, a gift of the kingdom of God. in solitude we can see what our good Lord offers us.

We look for an awareness of God's presence in this new place. The parish changes, our bodies begin to change, the wider Church renews and is different, a friend moves, new ways come to the Order--we face continuous change.

We pray for an openness to the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church and ourselves--an openness to change in the Church and in the Order. an openness to joy. So in that joy we "press on for what lies ahead" (Philippians 3:13). We seek to live in the trust that God is in the new place.

We may open ourselves to this life-long process of transformation in many ways. Among those ways are:

- ◆ A giving of ourselves to the present, to today's demands and possibilities; striving to take practical action here and now.
- ◆ A living with our own death before us. Possibly using the pastoral offices related to illness and death as sources of meditation, praying for an openness to death and resurrection. We seek silence and solitude so we might know our loneliness, learn to depend on God and find a way to be with ourselves. We listen to the advice of St. Benedict to "keep your own death before your eyes each day ." In this we are prepared for ministry, and to open ourselves to a deeper and larger life.
- ◆ A responsible preparation for the future; striving, with others, for vision and for the sense of direction and plans to act upon that vision. Learning the skills and knowledge we need for the task.
- ◆ A commitment to our own maturity. Pursuing and opening ourselves to maturity in faith and practice, maturity in our emotional life, and maturity in our competence to perform the "work we have been given to do." Seeking to accept responsibility and take action so we might console, understand and love rather than grasp, blame, and nurture our projections upon others.
- ◆ Praying that our good Lord will use the Order as we are, with whatever love, gifts, skills or weakness we have. Ours is a task to offer what we have to offer; now, in the concrete, immediate situation in which we live. Praying that we will be relieved of any futile grasping to protect ourselves, and of anxious attempts to ensure a future existence for the Order. It is God's business to decide how long we will be of use.
- ◆ Each Professed member is encouraged to find some specific means to respond to the

"Reign of God as justice and peace." This may include associating ourselves with at least one group striving for justice and peace in our world.

Membership

Membership is open to laity, bishops, priests and deacons; to baptized people of any Christian communion.

Applicants are admitted to the Order by a majority vote of all Professed Members.

Applicants engage in a discernment period of at least five months during which they:

- ◆ Reflect on the Rule.
- ◆ Develop an understanding of the relation between the Promise and their life.
- ◆ Have at least one long conversation with a sponsor from among the members about the Rule and Promise.
- ◆ Engage in a process of reflection on the effect of joining the Order.

Among the matters the applicant and the Order will want to consider for discernment are:

- ◆ Is there obvious common ground between the person's and the Order's orientation to parish life and ministry and the spiritual life?
 - ◆ Does the person have an adequately disciplined spiritual life, and sufficient self-esteem and support from colleagues, family and friends, so as to be able to benefit from what the Order does offer in vocational support without holding to unreasonable expectations of the support such a life will provide?
 - ◆ Does the person work well with others, openly receive and use information on the effect of his or her behavior on others, follow through on commitments, receive guidance from others, take initiative in relationships and work?
 - ◆ Is membership in the Order likely to have beneficial effects on the person's work, family, friendships?
 - ◆ What effect does relationship with the Order appear to be having on the person's spiritual life and sense of vocation?
 - ◆ What does the person bring to the Order?
 - ◆ To what extent is the person making an act of free commitment, choosing to devote energy in this way and pattern? To what extent is the commitment "clouded" and divided?
- Applicants are admitted and take the Promise at the first common life gathering following the five month discernment period. Members are dropped from membership if they miss two common life gatherings in a three year period and may be removed by a vote of two-thirds of all Professed Members.

Our Common Life

There is nothing a Christian can claim of personal significance. Everything that I am, that I do, everything that I have ultimately is corporate. ...If you stand out in a crowd it is only because you are standing on the shoulders of others. Desmond Tutu

Bless all those whose lives are closely linked with ours, and grant that we may serve Christ in them, and love one another as he loves us. Book of Common Prayer

Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude, Love does not insist on its own way, it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. I Corinthians 13:4-7

O Raphael, lead us toward those we are waiting for, those who are waiting for us: Raphael angel of happy meetings, lead us by the hand toward those we are looking for. May all our movements be guided by your light and transfigured with your joy. Flannery O'Connor
God has so ordained things that we grow in faith only through the frail instrumentality of one another. John of the Cross

Community life is made up of a lot of small things. It is the small courtesies that matter. Basil Hume, OSB

There are many expressions of the community's corporate life. We share a common mission, promise, spiritual discipline, and symbols. In all this we share an identity and purpose. Professed Members usually participate in a five day gathering each year for spiritual retreat, continuing education, social time and business. The weight given to the elements may vary from year to year.

The gathering normally takes place beginning on the Monday after Ascension Day. The Presiding officer or another appointed by the Presiding Officer provides the customary for worship. The gathering includes a daily Eucharist, a form of the Daily Office and a number of common meals. There is a travel pool in which all participate so as to equalize transportation cost.

Members make a yearly offering toward the administrative costs of the Order. Members may also invite each other to share opportunities for retreat and education at other times. As appropriate. Professed Members may arrange to visit each other's parishes, joining in the worship, work and common life. Those living in the same area may work out a specific plan for themselves. Others are encouraged to seek opportunities as they travel. Professed Members try to provide hospitality to one another and invite visiting members. to celebrate, assist or preach in any liturgy during that visit.

Members share their vocational plans with other members seeking their discernment and prayers.

Our Common life as an Order is bound up with the common life of all people, especially the poor and oppressed. We seek to look at our culture, social order and parishes from the perspective of the poor, outcasts and oppressed; to seek to understand matters of public policy in terms of how it will affect those most powerless; and to be in solidarity with the struggle for justice.

Professed Members are called to regular intercession for the Order, each person associated with the Order, and the suffering of humanity. The community is called to reflect God's will for all people as a society of love. The community is called to reflect and participate in the self-giving love of the Holy Trinity.

Spirituality

Members are invited to reflect regularly on the following themes.

A Priestly Spirituality

...To be with God, with the people on your heart. Michael Ramsey

The priest is, before all things, a Christian soul given to prayer, that is, to the disciplined practice of the presence of God centered in the Eucharist and grounded in a daily rule of office and silence. Eleanor McLaughlin

As a pastor, I am obliged by divine decree to give my life for those I love--for all Salvadorans, even . for those who may be about to kill me. ..Only in undoing itself does the

grain of wheat produce the harvest. Oscar Romero

Any authentic priesthood must derive from an inner core of silence, a life hid with Christ in God ...Only those who are at home with silence and darkness will be able to survive in, and minister to, the perplexity and confusion of the modern world. Let us seek that dark silence out of which an authentic ministry and a renewed theology can grow and flourish.

Kenneth Leech during the 1988 retreat

The Blessed Virgin Mary

We might begin with meditation upon Mary, who as Theotokos, has provided Christians since the patristic era with an inexhaustible icon of the Church, Mother of believers, whose vocation is carrying and bearing Christ to the world. As such, Mary is an exemplar of the priesthood, fruitful in the works of the Spirit. She is also every Christian soul who knows what it is to be invaded by God, to be fearful of divine favor, to suffer through compassion, to have one's own soul pierced to surrender. Julia Gatta

By the cross of Christ stood the holy Virgin-mother ...Now she was put to it to make use of all those excellent discourses her holy Son had used to build up her spirit, and fortify it against this day. Now she felt the blessing and strengths of faith, and she passed from the griefs of the passion to the expectation of the resurrection, and she rested in this death, as in a sad remedy, - for she knew it- reconciled God with all the world. But her hope drew a veil before her sorrow, and though her grief was great enough to swallow her up, yet her love was greater, and did swallow up her grief Jeremy Taylor

He brought our blessed Lady to my mind. In my mind I saw her as if she breathed--a simple, humble girl, not much more than a child, the age she was when she conceived. God showed me, too, in part, the wisdom and truth of her soul, so that I understood the reverence she felt before a simple soul that he himself had made. And it was this that made her say so humbly to Gabriel, 'Behold God's handmaid.' By this I know surely that she is higher in worth and grace than anyone that God had made- For no one that is made is above her, except the blessed humanity of Christ. Julian of Norwich

The Virgin Mary is the Christian prototype of all little people. In the Bible, virginity stands for the impossible. It meant humiliation, failure, barrenness, futility; the virgin had no future and was despised for her emptiness and waste. Kenneth Leech

The Ascension

I don't worry about the wounds. When I go up there, which is my intention, the Bid Judge will say to me, "Where are your wounds?" And if I say I haven't any, He will say, 'Was there nothing to fight for?' Alan Paton

*I searched for thinkers and for prophets
who wait by the ladder to heaven,
see signs of the mysterious end,
sing songs beyond our comprehension.*

*And I found people who were restless, orphaned, poor,
drunk, despairing, useless,
lost whichever way they went,
homeless, naked, lacking bread.*

*There are no prophecies.
But life
performs in a prophetic manner;
the end approaches, days grow shorter;
You took a servant's form -- Hosanna
Maria Skobtsova*

The Holy City

*Then / saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And / saw the holy city, new Jeru3alem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and / heard a loud voice from the throne saying 'Behold the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them; He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away. ' And He who sat upon the throne said, 'Behold, / make all things new. " Revelation 21:1-5a
The issue for the Episcopal Church in the city is not survival but faith. At the heart of every congregation must be a converted and prayer-full pastoral community, in which the biblical and theological experience of Jesus as Lord is nurtured in prayer, sustained by study of the scriptures, and expressed in a serious effort to discern and bear witness to the gifts of the Spirit which God has bestowed uniquely on that community and those individuals who make it up. Arthur Walmsley*

Friendship and Vocation

This abides-that the everlasting house the soul discovers is always another; we must lose our own ends-we must live in the habitation of our lovers, my friends shelter for me, mine for him Charles Williams

I love all men, in you for your sake, though not as much as / ought or as / desire. / pray your mercy upon all men, yet there are many whom / hold more dear since your love has impressed them upon my heart with a closer and more intimate love, so that / desire their love more eagerly-/ would pray more ardently for these. Anselm

I don't want my friends to just accept me as I am; God Lord I hope they love me more than that. I hope they demand more of me. I want my friendships to be both relaxing, yes; but

bracing, challenging, stretching. ..for the enlarging of the heart. Alan Jones
Love is not something just to be enjoyed by two persons, you and me. Love means we have the same orientation, look toward the future together and step forward together. It is this kind of love which is adequate to enable people to be mutually encouraged, mutually spurred on, mutually supportive, and together become co-partakers in God's creative process. K.H. Ting

This is a princely friendship of our courteous Lord, that He looks after us tenderly even while we are in sin. He teaches us secretly and shows us our sin by the kindly light of mercy and grace. ..Then our courteous Lord shows Himself to the soul with gladness and delight, with welcoming friendship, as if the soul had been released from pain and prison, saying tenderly: 'My darling, I am glad you have come to me. I have been with you always in all your sorrow, and now you see my love and we are joined in joy. Julian of Norwich
Your Order grows out of the friendship of men and women who have worked together in ministry. A religious community is a community of friends. And all Christians have friendship with God as their ultimate vocation and end. Do not be afraid to follow the vocation wherever it leads, to follow Christ to Calvary and to the mount of the Ascension, into the life of God. Today you dare to accept the friendship to which Christ calls you, to share in the life of the Blessed Trinity. Don't be afraid. You will receive power to do the work Christ calls you to, the work of the Kingdom of God. Emmett Jarrett
Sermon during the Mass and taking of the Promise 1988

*But O my friend!
My friend indeed
Who at my need
His life did spend.*

*Here might I stay and sing,
No story so divine;
Never was love, dear King,
Never was grief like thine.
This is my Friend*

*In whose sweet praise
I all my days
Could gladly spend. Samuel Crossman*

The Christian Life

To be a Christian, to be en Christo, is to be part of an organism, a new community, the extension of the Incarnation. Kenneth Leech

*To see thee is the End and the Beginning
Thou carriest me and thou goest before
Thou art the Journey and the journey's End.*
Attributed to King Alfred

Holiness is the brightness of divine love, and love is never idle; it must accomplish great things. Love must act as light must shine and fire must burn. James Otis Sargent
Huntington, OHC

Worship, doctrine, evangelization, service, stewardship are all part of the Christian covenant. They are essential expressions of the Christian life. What we do it all for, what God does it all for, is union and participation in the life of God.

Christian Life is life lived in Christ: "Christ in us and we in him." Christ comes to us and we seek Christ in worship, doctrine and action. Each is a passageway into a transformation of life, directed toward our union with the heart, mind and work of Christ.

Worship, doctrine and action are the means by which we participate in the life of Christ's Body, the Church; in her unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity. They are the means by which we participate in the Church's mission, "to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ." We are restored to unity as we are drawn into the prayer of Christ, the mind of Christ and the work of Christ. In prayer, study, and work we become instruments of his holy mission. Through his baptized people he shares his life and draws all people to himself.

The Christian Life can be compared to a piece of fabric with three primary threads: all the threads must be strong and in a proper relationship if the whole piece is to have its full strength and beauty. Worship, doctrine and action are the essential and central elements of Christian living. They are interdependent. Weakness or distortion in one element eventually presses toward weakness or distortion in the others. Faithfulness in each presses toward faithfulness in the others. We grow in the Christian life as we open ourselves to a proper expression of each element, the strengthening of each, and the mutual exchange among them.

The Anglican bishops spoke of this pattern of life at Lambeth in 1978: "This inextricable fusion of worship, of doctrine, and of action constitutes the distinctive contribution the churches of the Anglican Communion desire to make to the Universal Church of God in Jesus Christ." Martin Thornton points to it in *The Rock and the River*: "Moral action only flows from doctrinal truth by grace and faith, that is through prayer."

The parish as a corporate body needs to live these essentials of Christian life and ministry so that it becomes a "holy environment," a setting in which God's people may seek after him and find him.

Worship

Our recent renewal in liturgy in the West has tended to eliminate rather than emphasize the element of leisure for God. We have reduced our liturgical worship to bare structures which, however essential, have left us with cerebral, concentrated 'work' liturgy. ...We can

learn from our Orthodox brethren through the richness of a liturgy that involves the whole person. ...As the deacon says in the Orthodox liturgy, 'Now it is time for God to act' ., , and in this action of God, room is left for our whole being to expand into an unself-conscious realization of what life is really about. It is here that we learn the art of arts; the science of sciences: standing before God. Mary Clare, SLG

Seven whole days not one in seven I will praise thee; e 'en eternity's to short to extol thee. George Herbert

And all this built to provide a canopy over the acts of a worshipping community of believers, an organization of space in which movement and music, word and sacrament, can be presented with dignity befitting an action which is nothing less than a celebration of the Christian understanding of the meaning and mystery of being alive and being human. A cathedral is a theatre for a kind of liturgical dance to the music of time and the hidden harmonies of God.

A cathedral is both a protest and a proclamation. ...a protest against all ideologies and political systems which deny or diminish the spirituality, dignity and true liberty of human persons, and a proclamation of the Christian Way as an invitation to pilgrimage, an offered route by which human beings can find help in their search for the answer to their fundamental questions: 'Who am I?' 'What may I hope?' 'What should I do?' Sydney Evans

Prayer is the test of everything; prayer is the source of everything, 'prayer is the driving force of everything; prayer is also the director of everything. If prayer is right, everything is right. For prayer will not allow anything to go wrong. Theophan the Recluse

The longer I live the more connected my prayer, Bible reading, sacramental life, struggle for justice and ministry become. They are one prayer in Christ. Whenever, because of neglecting my prayers or because of a heavy blow, I am finally almost without hope, I kneel down and ask God's help and have always received that help. I believe more and more in grace. I find Christ present in the struggle, pain, sense of betrayal, and occasional victory, which is part of the fight for the kingdom. It is not so much praying in order to be strong for the struggle, as it is being spiritually alert enough to find Christ in the matrix of life, to be able to catch a glimpse of the kingdom in the midst of horror because you know the pattern of the kingdom through the liturgy. Paul Moore, Jr.

Our worship tradition as Episcopalians is based on a three-part structure. Martin Thornton calls it the Catholic Threefold Rule, Michael Ramsey refers to it as the Benedictine triangle. The three elements, Eucharist, Daily Office, and Personal Devotions, comprise the fundamentals of a disciplined Christian spirituality in the Anglican tradition.

The use of this threefold Rule can help us move away from the attempt to base our prayer life on a self-made, unintegrated list of "rules" toward an integrated Rule grounded in the Book of Common Prayer.

It is as a parish, as a local expression to the Body of Christ, that we may fully participate in and offer this threefold pattern. As individuals, we will at times participate in and offer this pattern and so carry others in prayer. At other times we will be carried.

We celebrate the Church's feast days with the Holy Eucharist and often some form of fellowship. The Eucharist is the principal act of worship on all Sundays, Ascension Day, All Saints' Day, Christmas, and the Epiphany. The Fasts of Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are observed by eating less food, and the Days of Special Devotion are observed by abstaining from meat and/or special acts of discipline and self-denial. Such disciplines are

offered to the glory of God and as a means of self-oblation, bringing in to our own selves the commitment we have as baptized Christians. The Daily Office is offered in an appropriate way each day. In these matters and all others having to do with our prayer life we look to the Book of Common Prayer as a gift of our Lord for the sanctification of this community and our parishes.

Worship is to have priority attention among our efforts. We strive to prepare carefully in solitude and hospitality. We gather without delay. All is done in a manner that encourages the participation of the congregation; provides for the special ministries of laity, bishops, priests and deacons; and is offered in a gentle and orderly liturgy that participates in the divine mystery.

In the Office we maintain a moderate pace, allowing silence after the readings. We sit for the psalm, which is read alternately with a distinct pause at the asterisk, concluding with "Glory to the Father" during which we rise or bow "in honor and reverence for the Holy Trinity."

Doctrine

One must train the habit of Faith. The first step is to recognize the fact that your mood changes, The next is to make sure that, if you have once accepted Christianity, then some of its main doctrines shall be deliberately held before your mind for some time every day.. That is why daily prayers and religious reading and church-going are necessary parts of the Christian life. We have to be continually reminded of what we believe. C.S. Lewis I yearn to understand some measure of your truth, which my heart believes and loves. For I do not seek to understand in order to believe, but I believe in order to understand.

Augustine of Hippo

The Bible has given me all the help it can by offering me the story of God acting in history. The Bible cannot tell me what to do on Monday morning, because the Bible tells me that there is a God who calls me to humanity, and my humanity means that I have to make decisions and live in the terror of making those decisions. Verna J Dozier

We are called to the transformation of our minds; to have in us the mind of Christ; to see our lives and our world through the eyes of Christ. Concrete ways for this transformation to occur are offered by Our Lord, within and through his Church, in the Scriptures, in the Catholic and apostolic Tradition, and in the Holy Reason of his people. As Anglicans we give authority to those teachings that we can recognize in the Scripture, have come to be generally accepted in the Church through many centuries, and can withstand the test of human reason in each age.

Our concern is to be formed in Christ. The issue is: what will we allow to influence and shape us on a regular and frequent basis? Formation includes the development of habits of prayer and behavior that flow from who and whose we are in Baptism. Formation also includes the way we think and decide. We are called to live a pattern of life in which the Church's sources of authority are engaged on a regular and frequent basis. Our task is to allow Scripture, Holy Tradition, the wisdom and knowledge of the larger human experience, and our own reason, to speak to our experience so we might discern and respond to the movement of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Time needs to be provided for the prayerful reading of the Scriptures, the Rule, and other spiritual works.

Action

Real love to Christ must issue in love to all who are Christ's, and real love to Christ's poor must issue in self-denying acts of love toward them. Edward Pusey

Those whose religion is related to power seem to seek to lessen the burdens of the poor, but the powerless seek a new reality reference, desiring only a full release from poverty. Those whose religion is related to a culture of power work to make our prisons as deeply humane as possible but those victimized and imprisoned by a culture of power want the prisons opened. Nathan Wright

Our problem is not that we take refuge from action in spiritual things, but that we take refuge from spiritual things in action. Monica Furlong

If the Church is to speak prophetically in and to the political order, it must do so on the basis of sound theology and profound prayer as well as accurate data and careful analysis. Kenneth Leech

Nine-tenths of the work of the Church in the world is done by Christian people fulfilling responsibilities and performing tasks which in themselves are not part of the official system of the Church at all. William Temple

The old I. W. W. slogan, 'An injury to one is an injury to all,' is another way of saying what St. Paul said almost two thousand years ago. 'We are all members of one another, and when the health of one member suffers, the health of the whole body is lowered.'

..One of the greatest evils of the day is the sense of futility. Young people say, 'What can one person do? What is the sense of our small effort?' They cannot see that we can lay one brick at a time, take one step at a time, we can be responsible only for the one action of the present movement. " Dorothy Day

Christian action is participation by the People of God in the work of God as he draws men and women into deeper relationship with himself, into service to others, and into responsible participation in the care and ordering of his creation. To be a Christian is to be a servant, evangelist and steward. This is most properly understood as a way of being rather than as a list of things to do. Those shaped over the years by participation in the life and ministry of Christ's body, nurtured by Word and Sacrament, grasped again and again by Mercy and Glory, become his light and salt and leaven. Martin Thornton touches on this in *Spiritual Direction*: "...Aquinas got it right: prayer is 'loving God in act so that the divine life can communicate itself to us and through us to the world.' Christian action is not action of which Jesus approves but action that he performs through his incorporated, and therefore prayerful, disciples."

The context within which we are servants, evangelists and stewards is our daily life and work. Because of who we are in Christ, we are --in our work, community and family -- instruments of his compassion, his inviting, and his order. We may be more or less faithful and effective at this; we may have a great deal of growing to do. But however we are, we are his, his people, his instruments. He will use us in and for his love.

The particular way in which we are servants, evangelists and stewards will depend on the needs and opportunities present in our work, family and neighborhood. It will also take on a particular shape due to our vocation and our gifts. The parish is to facilitate an awareness of and support for the lay apostolate of service, evangelization and stewardship, while also engaged in a corporate expression of each of these aspects of Christian action.

Oversight

All who are superiors should consider in themselves not the authority of their rank but the equality of their condition, and to rejoice not to be over persons but to do them good.

Gregory the Great

We have noted time and again the phenomenon in which the top leadership in an

organization does not assume its rightful authority, with the result that others in the system are not able to assume their authority. Roy M. Oswald

Since He has given you authority and you have assumed it, you should use your virtue and power; and if you are not willing to use it, it would be better for you to resign what you have assumed; more honor to God and health to your soul would it be. Catherine of Siena

The goal of ordained ministry is to serve all the other ministries. Michael Marshall

Oversight is the task of facilitating a Christian community as a whole into a full and strong participation in the Christian Life. It is the work of bringing and preserving a proper order in the Body, the enabling of a "holy order." The first sign of holy order is love for one another shown in consideration, compassion, mercy and forethought.

The concern of oversight is to develop, not just maintain, the community. The development is to be congruent with the nature and mission of the Church. Development is concerned with the climate of the community as a whole, with the unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity of the community. Members offer their vision to the community without insisting on its adoption. It is laid on the altar so God may reshape it.

The Presiding Officer offers direction and vision to the community without insisting on its adoption. It is laid on the altar so God may reshape it. The Presiding Officer strives to understand the community's thinking, concerns, feelings, fears and longings. In leading, there is a responsiveness to the possibilities and limits of the person, not asking for more or less than the person can offer.

Three focus areas --spiritual direction, enabling a transforming community, and institutional management and administration --serve to integrate, root, and stabilize the community in the Catholic Faith and the Christian life. Each area will have individuals and groups that will have some share in the oversight task.

The Presiding Officer may dispense a Professed Member from all or some obligation of the Rule for periods up to six months. Chapter may dispense from such obligations for no more than an additional year. Such dispensations are either of a temporary pastoral nature or for the purpose of vocational discernment. Chapter may fully dispense Professed Members. Chapter may dismiss Professed Members.

Our oversight has the purpose of advancing the "holy order" of Christ. We are to enable a life in which people may rest in God, offer their lives to God, give themselves to the mission they share in the Body of Christ, and so be transformed more and more into his likeness. We are to enable a life that is a Eucharistic life.

An Integrated, Responsive and Stable Christian Life

Three helps in living an integrated, responsive and stable Christian life of worship, doctrine and action are:

Openness to spiritual dependence and guidance: Openness to our own experience, a willingness to reflect on it, to seek the movement of the Holy Spirit in it; openness to the notion that for all eternity I am called to growth in his love and service; and openness to having some setting for exploration of and guidance in the spiritual life. This involves an acceptance that we are dependent on God and that this dependence is mediated in and through other people, e.g., priest, others in the Order, spouse, friend, parent, spiritual director, or a support group.

Establishing a rule of life: We can give ourselves to an intentional pattern of Christian discipline which expresses the faith and practice of the whole Church in our own lives. A

rule is a description of how each of us will participate, at this time in our life, in the Church's mission through worship, doctrine and action. Our rule of life conforms to the Rule of the Order. This involves accepting responsibility for the ordering of our own spiritual discipline.

Life in Christian community: We need to give ourselves to a specific expression of the Body of Christ. We need to be part of a parish church, a particular community of the People of God who worship, learn and act in Christ. We also choose to be part of this Order. With these other people we participate in the holy exchanges of the Body: forgiveness received and given, intercession for and with the living and the dead, and burdens and joy shared. In those exchanges we may recall and know that we must lose life to find it. This involves accepting our interdependence with others.

Governance Of The Order

"Domne, I'm not -certain"

"You can croak anyhow, eh? Are you going to submit to the yoke? Or aren't you broken yet? You'll be asked to be the ass He rides into Jerusalem, but it's a heavy load and it'll break your back, because He's carrying the sins of the world. "

"I don't think I'm able. "

"..Listen, none of us has been really able. But we've tried, and we've been tried. It tries you to destruction, but you're here for that. This Order has had abbots of gold, abbots of cold tough steel, abbots of corroded lead, and none of them was able although some were abler than others, some saints even. The gold got battered the steel got brittle and broke, and the corroded lead got stamped into ashes by Heaven. Me. I've been lucky enough to be quicksilver; I spatter, but I run back together somehow. I feel another spattering coming on, though, and I think it is for keeps this time. "what are you made of? What's to be tried?"

"Puppy dog tails. I'm meat, and I'm scared."

"Steel screams when it's forged, it gasps when it's quenched. It creaks when it goes under load. I think even steel is scared. Take half an hour to think? A drink of water? A drink of wind? Totter off awhile. If it makes you seasick then prudently vomit. If it makes you terrified, scream. If it makes you anything, pray. But come into church before Mass, and tell us. .."

", , .If they want me, honorem accipiam. "

The abbot smiled "You heard me badly. I said 'burden " not 'honor. ", "Accipiam. "

"You're certain?"

"If they chose me, I shall be certain. "

Walter Miller, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*

The Presiding Officer and Chapter have oversight of the Order .

The Chapter is the governing body of the Order of the Ascension. Chapter consists of all Professed Members. Each has voice and vote. Each is expected to take a full share in the business of the Order. The Chapter is to strive for the formation of a common mind through submission to the mind of Christ and mutual submission to one another in Christ. The Order of the Ascension is related to the Episcopal Church. An Episcopal visitor will be selected by Chapter and function in accordance with the Canons and as provided in the

Order's Constitution.

If the Order establishes provinces each will have its own Chapter, Presiding Officer and Episcopal Visitor. Each may revise its own Constitution by majority vote. The Rule would be subject to revision by two-thirds vote of the Chapter of each province.

Chapter may change the Rule by two-thirds vote. Such a change requires the action of two consecutive chapters. If such an agreement is not present, we will engage in a formal discernment process striving to have all heard and valued. We want to forego an insistence on our own views and give the time and patience necessary for the Holy Spirit to lead us. The Constitution may be changed by majority vote of Chapter. The Constitution must be in conformity with the Rule. Chapter may temporarily waive a portion of the Rule by a majority vote.

The Presiding Officer is to provide general oversight and is to take initiative for the development and maintenance of the Order's life and ministry. The Presiding Officer is elected by the Chapter for a term of four years which is renewable. The Presiding Officer, in consultation with Chapter, appoints other leaders as provided in the Constitution. They are accountable to the Presiding Officer. We offer the Presiding Officer our support and compassion. We seek the Lord in the Presiding Officer. The Presiding Officer engages in daily intercession for the Order and those associated with the community. The Presiding Officer seeks the Lord in the community.

We are called to be open to evolution in the Spirit. We seek to understand how we may faithfully serve the Church in this generation.