

Our Rule of Life

The following Rule of Life are specifically meant for those who have joined together with OES in choosing the Hermetic, dispersed model of monastic expression.

The influences that have contributed to this Rule are centuries-old and have been implemented to form a basic Rule of life that is inclusive and that provides a foundation for one's own monastic expression within the context of his or her private hermitage, cluster, or cell.

For those who intend to pursue monastic vows with OES, this Rule of Life for the Professed must be observed in the daily life and practice of each monk or nun, however one may also follow other Rules of Life found to be appropriate to their own way of faith, in addition to the OES Rule.

Regardless of the path of faith that you follow (or are led down by the Spirit), it is our hope that the resources found in the work of text will provide you with the guideposts which will assist you in remaining on the the path that lies ahead of you.

Remember that our human state is not one of perfection, therefore mistakes will be made, doubts will be raised, and even confusion will be experienced. There are, at your disposal, brothers and sisters who have traveled this path and have gained wisdom which may help comfort and direct you in your time of need; you are encouraged to reach out to one or more of them, should you require such assistance.

Rule of Life for the Professed, OES

The Order of Eremitic Servants (OES) is an interfaith monastic order of men and women who have freely chosen to dedicate themselves to the practices of prayer, contemplation and the charitable, compassionate service of others. It is both an enclosed and dispersed community, in that each makes his or her own dwelling a monastic cell, and that some may choose to come together to form small clusters, henceforth to be called hermitages or monasteries.

As a monastic community, our primary goal is to alleviate the suffering caused by religious intolerance. We strive to promote peace and understanding through inter-religious dialogue, pastoral care, education and works of charity.

It is our hope that this expression of consecrated life together will serve as a witness to others that religious differences should not prevent the cultivation of genuine peacefulness between people of varying faiths.

Because of our interfaith nature as a community, we recognize that the practices of each monk may vary according to his or her spiritual path. It is, therefore, with some misgivings that we should presume to determine how others conduct themselves, however for the sake of fairness and to strengthen our bonds as a community, we have set forth the following Rule of Life for Professed Monks and Nuns.

This Rule of Life is intended to be the foundation upon which each individual will build his or her own monastic observance, appropriate to the individual's path of faith. Its

terms are very bare-bones in order that the very essence of our shared monastic way is built on inclusiveness for both the novice and the veteran monk or nun.

It is our intention as a community to allow the individual to determine the level of austerity of his or her own monastic practice. Each person may choose, but is not required to implement additional observances and vows appropriate to their expression of a life consecrated to prayer and joyful service.

On the Kinds of Involvement With This Order

As a community, we officially recognize 3 kinds of formal involvement:

- **Associates** This is an official recognition of those who wish to volunteer either time or resources to aid in the work that this community does, but who do not wish to pursue any form of monastic vows.

- **Oblates** Our Oblate program is for those who wish to be formally associated with our community and incorporate our community values into their secular lives.

- **Professed** These are the men and women who have been tested and who have chosen to take on the full responsibilities of our monastic way of life by adherence to our Rule and the profession of our communal monastic vows.

On Who May Be Professed

In our vocation as stewards of peace, we are bound to honor the dignity of every human being. We embrace the belief that all people should have the opportunity to follow a spiritual path that is both life-giving and joyful, and that inspires one to act out of compassion for others. With this in mind, we strive to cultivate a way of life that is free from self-serving ideals, such as religious intolerance or the idea that there is such a thing as the superiority of one religion over another.

OES does not preclude anyone from pursuing the process of monastic profession based on race, gender, sexual orientation, familial status or disability. In this way, we seek to recognize that none of us can truly know the mind of The Divine, and therefore we do not presume to judge another according to our own limited ideas of what

holiness may look like.

In order that the overall well being of this community may be cared for, we do require a few minimum standards of conduct of those seeking to test their vocation to the monastic life with this community.

Any applicant wishing to formally associate with us, regardless of the level of formal association, must meet these few simple requirements:

- Applicants must be at least 18 years of age.
- Applicants must not have been convicted of a crime involving violence or sexual misconduct within 5 years of their date of application.
- Applicants must be free of addiction to drugs and/or alcohol.

We feel that these requirements are modest and not overly exclusive. It is our intent that meeting the few requirements mentioned here will prepare an applicant for the long journey that they will be undertaking, beginning from a place of self-awareness and honesty.

The formal association process begins with the submission of a completed application form, which must also include a recent picture of the applicant.

Once the application form has been submitted, accepted and reviewed, the applicant will be contacted by the formation director who will discuss an appropriate course of action to prepare the applicant for formal association, the Oblate program, or the profession of monastic vows.

When the initial application process has been completed,

both the community and the applicant can become better acquainted with one another. This is the period of time intended to test whether or not the two are a good fit for one another.

As mentioned above, someone who has already made a profession of vows will provide the applicant with guidance and help ensure his or her own personal accountability both on an individual and community level.

The Profession Process

Each person seeking to pursue either the Oblate program or full monastic vows with us is required to undertake a program of study, reflection and dialogue with the aid of a mentor who has been assigned to serve as their guide in preparation for the profession of either Oblate or Novice vows.

Dedication to the study of theological, sacred and monastic texts and disciplines is one of three essential disciplines that foster a well-balanced monastic life. In order that a person may be open to the continual process of growth and change, regular study and reflection must be incorporated into their daily life and practice.

The two remaining disciplines that help to maintain a holy monastic observance are prayer in its various forms, and work, which safeguards the individual from stagnation and idleness.

It should be stressed that adjusting to a monastic way of life impacts each person differently. Some will require more time than usual to settle into their newly adopted way of life; some will require less. Whether a person has chosen Oblate or full monastic vows, it is the duty of their mentor to assist them in the continual examination of the self and one's personal intentions throughout the preparation process.

The usual length of time before an applicant takes the next step toward monastic profession is between 6 months and one year. During this time, the applicant will be expected to (with the aid of their mentor) develop and adhere to a daily

routine involving prayer, work and study. This also applies to those seeking Oblate vows, however the expectations during this time of preparation are far less rigorous than those seeking Novice profession.

Once an applicant has completed his or her initial trial phase, commonly referred to as the 'seeking' period, they may choose to proceed with the next step toward formal vows. Should the person choose not to proceed, or to change the type of involvement with this community, there should be no animosity fostered by anyone because of such a decision. This rule also applies to any stage of monastic profession, as well as to those who are found to be unfit for our way of life.

If an applicant chooses to move forward with the process of profession, they will be called upon to make temporary monastic vows known as Novice or Novice Oblate Vows.

At this point, the applicant is officially recognized as a monk, nun or oblate, and will be expected to pursue a more rigorous program of study and reflection, as well as develop a personal monastic observance to be followed in addition to this Rule of Life.

The Novice monk or nun is now permitted, but not required to clothe in an appropriate monastic habit (detailed later in this Rule).

It is customary for men to maintain shaven heads and to leave their beards uncut, and for novice nuns to cut their hair short, however we feel that this is not required as part of one's expression of devotion.

With the continued guidance of their mentor, the novice or novice oblate will be expected to undertake a specific ministry which is appropriate with regard to their path of faith, life experiences and areas of expertise.

There is a set course of formation that is metered out into monthly assignments, due by the last day of each month. These assignments are designed to arouse both educational experiences and deepening levels of self-examination. These assignments will help to prepare the candidate for profession of oblate or monastic vows, however it should be stressed that they can only provide the skills that will become part of one's consecrated life if they are completed with sincerity.

The initial period of novice formation is to be no less than one year and no more than five years. At the end of the novice period, those choosing to proceed into the next stage of profession are required to give a formal account of the what they have learned throughout their Novice formation, their daily monastic or oblate observance, their works of service and their motivation for proceeding with the formal profession of regular vows.

If both the Novice and the community are in agreement that sufficient progress in regard to the adjustment to the monastic or oblate way of life has been made, the Novice may then proceed with the profession of Regular Vows, which may be renewed yearly.

At the time of profession, those who are pursuing vows as monks or nuns will be clothed in the second layer of the monastic habit (such as a scapular, Saṃghāti, or other appropriate equivalent).

While the regularly professed monastic is encouraged to continue relying on their mentor, as well as the other professed monks and nuns for continued support and guidance, he or she is now expected to conduct themselves in accordance with their personal monastic observances and the principles defined in this Rule of Life (this also applies in a less stringent way to Oblates).

Continued works of charity and service are required of all professed monks and nuns, but should not place undue strain on one's health or mental wellness. It is essential, in order to ensure the longevity of one's monastic practice, that we should constantly strive to balance self-discipline and forgiveness.

This is not to say that the latter should be used as an excuse for laziness where monastic practices and discipline are concerned, however being overly harsh on the self can be as detrimental to one's vocation to monastic consecration as a lack of discipline in daily life and practice.

After a monk or nun has persevered in his or her Regular Vows for no less than three years, they may choose to make a Solemn Profession of Vows. This means that the Brother or Sister dedicates his or herself to a lifelong commitment of monastic discipline and practice. This kind of commitment is not available to those who are Oblates, however after 3 years of Regular Vows, an oblate may choose either a yearly or a 5 year cycle of the reaffirmation of their oblate vows.

Those wishing to pursue our seminary program will begin

those studies once their first Regular Vows have been professed. The required courses of study require 3 years, which allows for the consecration of a priest at the time that a monk or nun makes their Solemn Life profession of vows.

Those monks who choose to make a Solemn Profession will be clothed in the outermost layer of the monastic habit, appropriate to their path of faith (in most cases this will be a cloak and/or cuculla). This garment is to serve as a symbol of their lifelong commitment, and may be worn during the offices of liturgical prayer, the profession of others' monastic vows and any liturgies which involve or are celebrated on behalf of the community.

The Vows

The word "eremite" refers to one who has taken upon themselves a solitary monastic observance (one might recognize another form of this word, which is "hermit"), and has classically been used to refer to the early Christian monastics known as the Desert Fathers and Mothers, who lived in remote places, either alone or in clusters of 2 to 5 people.

In essence, we are hermits who live in a dispersed manner. There are provisions set forth in this rule for those who wish to live in community, however we have no intention of forming a cenobitic structure of living.

It is a difficult task to maintain a large monastic enclosure that is appropriate to our communal monastic expression. That is not to say that it is impossible, however at this time, each member may be required to live out their observances within their daily life and work, which may

include secular employment.

Although there have been many famous and holy monastics throughout the ages who have held very rigid ideals concerning what is an appropriate living environment for those who have been consecrated to the eremitic way of life, this community actively seeks to be as inclusive as possible while still honoring many ancient and varied forms of monastic living.

It should be stressed here that adherence to one's monastic observances while maintaining a secular job or living in a highly populated area can be difficult. The most concise and widely-applicable statement on this subject was made by St. Francis of Assisi:

“Wherever we are, wherever we go, we bring our cell with us. Our brother body is our Cell and our soul is the hermit living in that cell in order to pray to God and meditate. If our soul does not live in peace and solitude within its cell, of what avail is it to live in a man-made cell?”

Saint Francis of Assisi, *Legend of Perugia* - 80

Should a group of monks choose to live together, the Guardian of the community will appoint one of them to serve as Prior of their shared monastic enclosure. The enclosure itself may vary widely in form, including but not limited to a standard house or apartment, a cluster of single cells surrounding a common chapel and refectory (dining hall), or even a group of apartments in the same building or on adjoining properties.

As an interfaith community, members may choose, but are not required to take vows of renunciation, such as celibacy or the unmarried state. It should be stressed that there should be no difference in treatment or regard between those monks and nuns who are more ascetic in their observances and those who are not.

The primary goal of our modern expression of the eremitic way is to cultivate an attitude of inner silence, prayerful contemplation and charitable, compassionate service to others; not to exert control over the personal ascetic practices of the individual monk or nun.

In this way, a large aspect of personal monastic enclosure for us involves cultivating an attitude of inner silence, self-discipline and humility. We profess the following monastic vows as a community; these are very basic in nature and designed to be the foundation for the individual's monastic observance:

- **Simplicity** – This means that we renounce materialism (also known as a vow of poverty) in order that the many distractions caused by greed and an excess of personal property do not stand in the way of our spiritual growth.

- **Listening** – We lay aside our egos so that we can strive to cultivate an attitude of compassionate listening and inner quietness even in the midst of noise and distraction.

- **Stewardship** – Through works of charity and choosing that which is not self-serving, but that which serves for the benefit of others, we act with responsible and compassionate concern for our surroundings as well as the global community.

These vows are not intended to be overly harsh or burdensome; it is our hope that they will foster internal growth for both the individual and the community as a whole. We feel that these vows aptly reflect our common mission of cultivating peace and understanding in a world that seems to be lacking in both.

Individual monks and nuns may choose, but are not required to profess additional vows deemed appropriate for their own way of faith and monastic observance.

The Monastic Habit

Many professionals are easily recognizable by the uniforms worn while carrying out the work associated with their profession. Monastics throughout the ages have clothed themselves in such a recognizable uniform, which can provide both simplicity of dress and an outward sign of a life consecrated to spiritual discipline and service.

Being easily recognized as a vowed monastic can provide great opportunities for dialogue and by extension understanding, however we must be diligent in guarding against the use of the religious habit as a status symbol or a means to draw undue attention to ourselves.

Just as our individual monastic observances will vary according to our spiritual traditions, our monastic habits may vary in order to reflect those traditions.

While there is a standardized style of monastic habit for this community that can be made for a modest fee which consists of a basic tunic and scapular, we require that if a monk chooses to wear a habit more suited to their own spiritual path, that it meets these few simple guidelines:

- The tunic or base layer should be blue.
- For Regularly Professed monks and nuns the scapular or secondary layer should be dark gray.
- For Life Professed monks and nuns, a Coculla, which is to be white or off-white will be added.
- The signs of the offices of Abbot or Abbess should be a black cloak and a crosier or walking stick which will be chosen or gifted to the Abbot or Abbess.
- Habits are to be kept clean and in good repair.

The cost of obtaining a monastic habit can be high, as sources for such garments are scarce and often secretive. Each monk is responsible for covering the cost of his or her garments should they choose to wear them, whether they are made by someone involved with this community or an outside service.

Prayer and Practice

The individual monastic observance should involve the regular, dedicated practices of a balanced monastic observance mentioned earlier in this rule of life; prayer, work and study.

Each person should strive to cultivate an attitude of silence, prayerfulness and contemplation. It is required that one should observe at least three offices of liturgical prayer or meditation each day, as well as at least one dedicated cumulative hour for study, reflection and self-examination.

The eating habits of professed monks and nuns should be moderate but not strenuous or threatening to one's health. We do not require vegetarianism or abstinence from specific kinds of food or drink, however one should take care that they are not found to be intoxicated or over-indulgent in food at any time.

Meals should be taken at consistent times as each person's schedule allows, preferably directly after periods of prayer or meditation. This practice reflects the ages-old monastic cycle of "pray, eat, work". These meals should be as balanced as possible, and preceded by either a silent or spoken thanksgiving.

It is also important to allow ourselves time to rest; being overburdened can be detrimental to both our physical health and our vocation as monastics. A specific time should be set aside daily to decompress, relax and refuel. It is our custom that this hour of rest and recreation take place after the office of evening prayer has been done and the evening meal has been taken.

In addition to a daily period of rest, a weekly day of rest is highly recommended. Without exception (even for the person serving as Guardian) each member of this community is required to take an annual silent retreat, ideally lasting 72 hours. This retreat may be taken at their current enclosure, an affiliated enclosure, an outside monastic house of their choosing, or other place that is conducive to silence and solitude.

Following the end of the yearly retreat, each person is required to meet with the Guardian to discuss progress, questions, doubts, or any other subject relevant to maintaining a trend of growth of the heart and spirit.

Decorum

Decorum refers to the way in which each monk or nun carries themselves; their speech, their disposition and the manner in which they interact with those around them.

We must always remember that individually, we represent this community as a whole. Our actions and speech must reflect the values expressed in this Rule of Life and must not be unbecoming of us as consecrated monastics.

In being called to a consecrated life of working for peace and understanding, and in the service of the God of our hearts, we must be diligent in guarding ourselves from divisive behaviors, retaliatory actions, rudeness, boisterousness and egotism.

Behaviors such as acting out of anger, unkindness or inconsiderate ways of speech and posture (that is to say carrying one's self in a way that may be perceived as hostile), rudeness, and acts of violence or malice are absolutely unacceptable, and are subject to disciplinary action by the Guardian of the order.

Each of us should strive to be gentle in speech and act with sincerity. We should never be afraid to speak the truth even if we stand alone in the act, however we must never act with the intention of provoking others to anger or violence.

It is a naturally occurring side-effect of a sincerely practiced monastic observance that one's attitude will change over time; many who have come to observe this change report that they are less prone to anger, improper

speech, and rudeness. By the same token, they also observe that they are naturally more attentive to the needs of others, that the act of listening while another speaks is not the burdensome act that it may have previously been, and that thoughtful and kind gestures come with such a natural ease that one might question why they may have been divisive in behavior or speech in the first place.

It should also be stressed that selfish acts are strictly forbidden. This includes solicitation of others for personal gain. Stealing, lying, and other similar behaviors are signals of an internal problem that must be examined and dealt with in order that one may move past whatever issue is the root of such behaviors, so that they may abide in a place of genuine charity and concern for others. There are many approaches to dealing with these things, and all are to be kept confidential between the monk or nun found to be participating in these behaviors and their mentor, as well as the Guardian.

The fact that we are a dispersed order makes it difficult to learn decorum by observing your fellow monks and nuns, however there are many books and other resources available on the subject, should you so desire to study it in-depth. One such resource is a book titled *Monastic Practices* by Fr. Charles Cummings, OCSO.

If you find that you struggle with the development of proper decorum, your mentor should be the first person that you turn to for advice. Should you require assistance beyond what they are able to provide to you, the Guardian will have many resources to assist with your learning process.

On The Housing of Monks

It is likely that as this community grows, there will be those who wish to join together in living within a monastic enclosure. It should be stressed that we are not a cenobitic order; rather we are hermits and as such, the maximum number of those in community shall be limited to 12.

As previously mentioned, we do not require that anyone live in a communal setting, however for the purposes of clarifying an appropriate setting for those with varying life circumstances who intend to enter a communal monastic enclosure, we ask that the following guidelines be adhered to.

The Basic Structure of Communal Living

The monastic enclosure may be located anywhere, such as an urban or rural setting, depending on the ministries and needs of the monks who are to share in communal life there.

Consideration should be given to the location's level of environmental noise, how financially feasible the space will be for those who intend to live there, and whether or not the persons choosing to live there get along with one another.

The ideal model for each monastic enclosure is that of the Carthusian monastic houses; usually having a central building with a chapel, refectory and library, and a cluster of single cells surrounding the chapel house.

If it is not feasible to live in a communal enclosure that follows this model, a house, apartment, or a number of

apartments that are near to each other will suffice.

The sleeping arrangements of the monks who intend to live in a common enclosure may be set up in the following ways:

- If the number of persons exceeds the number of bedrooms, each room may contain up to one set of bunk beds, two study desks and a storage area for each person (such as a foot locker, a small dresser or a set of shelves).
- If any of the people choosing to reside within a given enclosure are married, they may share a private room.
- No bedroom shall have a television in it (an electronic media player with headphones for the purposes of educational enrichment is allowed); this is for the consideration of those who may be in prayer or meditation, or sleep.

Each monastic enclosure must include an area specifically dedicated as the prayer sanctuary, which should be able to provide room for all who reside within the enclosure to observe their prayer offices comfortably.

Each monastic house shall also have a space set aside specifically for communal meals. The eating of meals should never take place in bedrooms or recreation areas.

Watching television or movies, playing video games or other recreational activities must be restricted to a specified time of recreation (usually following the evening meal) and shall be either heard via the use of headphones, or kept at a quiet volume in consideration of those who may be in prayer or meditation.

If the maintenance of the monastic enclosure requires that the monks and nuns residing there be employed in a secular job, the schedule of prayer, chores, meals and recreation may be set in a way that is most accommodating to the majority of those residing there.

In the case of families with children who choose to live in a communal setting, a specific enclosure that is conducive to the health, enrichment and well being of children should be chosen, and reserved only for families who have or intend to have children. There must be a specific room or area set aside as a play space for the children residing there.

On The Office Of Abbot or Abbess

Every community requires both leadership and cooperation in order to grow and thrive. Without these, day to day situations can quickly spiral into chaos, which can cause suffering for some or all of those involved.

It is expected that the monk or nun acting as Abbot will shepherd this community with gentleness, seeking only that which will ensure the safety and longevity of the community as a whole, and that which benefit everyone as equally as possible.

The person holding the office of Abbot is to undertake the this role of leadership with all seriousness and the utmost care, and must fervently strive to exercise discretion, humility, and fairness in all matters. The main role of the Abbot is to provide support and guidance to both individuals and the community as a whole.

Anyone holding the office of Abbot must have already made their Solemn Life Vows, as well as having been recognized by this community as a member of the Clergy.

Any matters which would affect a majority of the community should be discussed openly before a final decision is made by the Abbot. Any decision made by the Abbot may be discussed and questioned, however care must be taken that petty squabbles or self-serving intentions do not take root in place of charity, humility, and peacefulness.

It is important to remember that none of us have achieved perfection; mistakes can and will happen and are to be

corrected in an appropriate manner. The Abbot may see fit to appoint one or more monks or nuns to positions of leadership such as overseeing the formation of novices or managing financial matters.

A person chosen for one of these positions may respectfully decline, in which case the Abbot may choose another candidate.

Should an acting Abbot be repeatedly found to be engaging in actions that would jeopardize the community, a simple majority vote will be called to elect a new Abbot or Abbess.

The Abbot may also choose to step down from their position, should reasons of health or a conflict of interest arise. In such a situation, a new Abbot or Abbess may be elected by simple majority.

In Conclusion

We are, first and foremost, human beings; each of us is subject to both the gifts and the shortcomings of the human condition. We must remember that gentleness, humility and gratitude are markers of a life lived in accordance with spiritual discipline and a desire for holiness.

It is only through constant effort and openness of heart that we may become stewards peace in the world around us. By choosing to dedicate ourselves to this monastic way of life, our very state of being can be transformed from one of egotism and selfishness to one of generosity and spiritual maturity.