

THE FOUNDING DOCUMENT



“For the Sake of the Kingdom”

**THE ECUMENICAL
ORDER OF CHARITY**

PRAYER FOR THE ORDER OF CHARITY

Lord Jesus Christ, you have bound us together in your love and united us in prayer and service. Look with favor on all the Companions and Associates of the Order of Charity. Bless us in the work which you have given us to do and be ever near us to comfort and support us, that we may love and serve together here in the spirit and power of your Gospel, and come at last to your eternal home where, with God our Creator, with you and with Blessed Mary, all the angels and saints, we will live forever. Amen.

THE OFFICIAL PROMULGATION

To All Professed Companions:

By the authority invested in me by The Founding Document and at the direction of the Fourteenth General Assembly, I hereby ratify the publication of *The Founding Document, Sixth Revision*.

This revision constitutes the authorized rule of life for all professed Companions of the Ecumenical Order of Charity.

Given this 14th day of May in the year of Our Lord, 2010.

May peace, love and wisdom abide with us always!

Brother. Mark Elliott Newman, OC
Servant Leader

The Principles

I. PREAMBLE

... Christ is in you, that you may hope in God's glory. (Colossians 1:27)

**In the name of God,
Creator, Redeemer, and Comforter.**

Amen.

In all times and places, the Eternal One calls forth souls to help creation realize its destiny. God so calls us, believers from many Christian denominations, to come together into the Ecumenical Order of Charity. Through living out the principles embodied in our rule of life, The Founding Document, and through the profession of our five unique vows, we dedicate ourselves to becoming active conscious participants in the unfolding of the Reign of God on Earth, co-workers with Our Lord, Jesus Christ, for the sake of the Kingdom.

We come from all walks and states of life; we are men and women; single or married; widowed or dating. We are lay or ordained. We are high school and college graduates, or neither. We come from all professions and experiences; bringing our unique history and the gifts and insights of our particular states in life. God, as master artist, weaves us into a religious community to share the journey as Companions.

We are the Order of Charity, a Christian religious Order intentionally unaffiliated with any individual denomination. By remaining unaffiliated, we commit ourselves to the broad spectrum of Christianity in all its interpretations, creating a home for Christians of all denominations, or none, who wish to journey together the Way of the Christ.

We are temples of the Holy Spirit-soul and body; we hold the sacred Flame that breathes through life in all its expressions. (*I Cor 3:16; 6:19*) This indwelling divine Breath reveals to us the essence of our faith; that we are to love God with all our heart, with all our mind and with all our soul. And, we are to love our neighbors as generously as we love ourselves. The latter becomes real when we treat ourselves as gently as we treat our neighbors.

Taking this to heart, we discover the truth that every event and every thing is part of the unending web of life, and that we are to honor all aspects of this holy creation. By doing so, we live our defining charism of Charity: the open, embracing love of all God has brought into being.

This Founding Document is our compass and unifying force, reminding us that we are friends in equal standing in this unique religious community. *“For in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free” Gal 3:28*

“I have beheld a spark of the Divine in humanity. That spark, the universal and indwelling Christ, must be nurtured as the flickering flame is shielded from the driving rain.”

II. OUR LIFE IN COMMON

I will show you what the one who comes to me and listens to my words and acts accordingly is like: that one is like the builder who dug deep and laid the foundations of the house on rock. The river overflowed and the stream dashed against the house, but could not carry it off,

*because the house had been well built.
(Luke 6:47-48)*

As a gardener plants seeds where they will grow, thrive and fulfill a purpose, so has God done with those called to religious life. The kingdom has been served by hermits and missionaries, cloistered monks and nuns; friars and priests; brothers and sisters living in congregations and societies; as well as Christians from various traditions who come together in ecumenical communities, to live in common lives of prayer, worship and song.

The Divine One has called us to the unique vocation of Charitists. We are planted in the fertile field of the world to live as vowed Religious in varied states of life, in order to bear testimony to God's constant love. We are to be the leaven of the Gospel, renewing awareness of the Holy wherever we work, shop or play. We are to be cool refreshing water for souls stranded in the deserts of life, bringing them closer to the One who loves them so much.

Undergirding our witness in the world are two priceless supports: The Founding Document, our rule of life, and our time in common at General Assembly. With these two supporting pillars, we become living expressions of the defining charisms the All Holy has called us to proclaim to the world: Charity, Ecumenism and Availability.

The Founding Document is the hiker's staff to anchor the step; the compass to plot the way as we walk the journey of faith together as Companions. It provides the structure that binds us to one another as a viable community, wherever and however we serve in God's kingdom. Its words light the path, better illuminating how we should live, work and serve as Religious in the world. Living its words allows the Holy to blossom in us, thereby opening us up to the freedom, joy and responsibility of being human as God intended: becoming mirrors of the Divine.

Wherever we serve in God's kingdom, our bonds of community are fortified when Companions gather for General Assembly. This sacred time of prayer and fellowship, recreation and business of the Order, provide us with refreshment and renewal. It brings us together as the spiritual family of the Order of Charity, stepping out of our day to day routines to settle into an all too brief time where the Spirit can nurture us corporately. It provides memories and insights as the Order grows into what the Holy has called it to be.

When a Companion is not able to attend, the rest of the Community suffers the loss of their particular light. Hence, we encourage each other to make every effort to attend General Assembly, and share the choice blessings that come of it.

III. MISSION

*You shall love Yahweh God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength,
and with all your mind; and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.
(Luke 10:27)*

Religious life is an adventure in faith, made palpably real in the flow of our day to day lives. Our religious vocation emerges from the human search for the Holy in the cycle of birth, life and death, and all that happens after. We search for God's delicate ordering of the universe in order

to participate with it fully. By doing this we live out the defining charism of Availability.

“Here I am, send me!” (Isaiah 6:8)

Charitists keep their eye on the spiritual horizon, constantly searching for the pure and true. The Order of Charity nurtures this renewal, consecration and transformation. It strives to support and guide Companions to live on the cutting edge of the Gospel. This watchfulness is imperative, so that the Charitist vocation does not become a once-a-year event, a hobby or a private devotion, but a daily witness to what the All Holy calls us to be as Companions of Order of Charity.

*“You are the light of the world....your light must shine before others,
so that they may see the good you do and praise our Maker in heaven.”*

(Matt 5:14-16)

We ground ourselves in the two Great Commandments, seeking more spiritually mature ways of thought and behavior, so that by our way of life, we might inspire others to do the same. Because all God’s people are called to be holy, we, as Charitists, must set the example of meeting the Gospel prerogative of Jesus to love as God loves.

Our unique vocation challenges us to demonstrate the fruits of a vibrant interior life, as we daily interact with coworkers, friends, family and strangers. The strength and nourishment of an active prayer life propel us into becoming loving, creative, supportive individuals. As vowed religious, we must daily evaluate the lives we lead and the choices we make, striving to emulate the words and spirit of Jesus, our Way-shower.

Our work-a-day lives as Charitists compel us to imitate the example of the Good Samaritan. As we encounter-people from all walks of life, we respond to their hurts and needs as the Spirit prompts. By remaining open to the Spirit’s leadings, the Spirit provides us with the grace required to -respond compassionately, creatively and with versatility, as we serve our neighbor in need. Our apostolate as Charitists is one of availability, or “ministry of the moment,” wherein the Divine may use us wherever we are needed and for as long as we are needed, just as Jesus demonstrated in the parable of the Good Samaritan. As the blessed George Fox told the first Quakers, “Wander the world and cheerfully serve that of God in everyone you meet.”

Living this ideal of the Good Samaritan, Companions oftentimes hear the call to a particular ongoing ministry. The Order of Charity celebrates the acceptance of this call with the Ceremony of Commissioning, wherein, as community, we honor our Companion’s new responsibility, and promise our spiritual support to his/her apostolate.

The glory of God is a person fully alive. –Ireneaus.

Wholeness in our lives is achieved when thoughts and behaviors clearly demonstrate the values we hold most precious. Obtaining this wholeness starts when we let go of expecting the world to meet our needs, and look for opportunities to meet the needs of others. The Order’s motto proclaims: “For the Sake of the Kingdom,” for our lives are to be channels of service.

When we allow our efforts to be fueled by the Spirit, we foster an environment where daily life is transformed into expressions of peace, love, hope and joy. When we permit Christ Jesus to be the Sovereign of our days, wholeness happens in ways we do not foresee. When our journey reaches its end, we find the Source of our days to be our blessed Destiny.

We look to the Works of Charity as the foundation for this new climate in which we meet the needs of the world:

THE WORKS OF CHARITY

- To feed the hungry
- To give drink to the thirsty
- To clothe the naked
- To nurse the sick
- To visit those shut-off from the world
- To work for freedom, justice and peace
- To instruct the ignorant
- To counsel the doubtful
- To comfort the sorrowful
- To forgive all injuries
- To work for the reconciliation of persons with God, and each other
- To bind up the wounds of the disenfranchised (Matthew 23:4; Isaiah. 61:1)
- To pray for all

Performing these works with compassion and solidarity, we are constantly aware of the interdependence of all living things. It is this holy omnipresence of God in all creation, the Cosmic Christ, which animates us.

Love is the spirit of this order and service is its works.

*And this is our way:
to live together in peace,
to seek truth in love,
and to help one another in joy.
(St. Basil the Great)*

IV. ECUMENISM

*Finally, all of you: have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another,
a tender heart, and a humble mind.
(1 Peter 3:8)*

Our traditions and charisms are Christian, in all their rich variations of expression. Though we Companions belong to a variety of denominations, we always keep Christ Jesus as our reference point. For what unites us, is what dwells within us- we pulsate with the Energy that made the worlds. This holy Presence within yearns for an ever deeper union with us. When we embrace this sacred Presence, all the answers that elude us become apparent.

Just as charity and availability define us, so too does Ecumenism. This charism is fruitful only when we are firmly rooted in our own belief system-when we resonate with what we hold true and dear, doing more than simply reciting our beliefs by rote. When so anchored in faith, we find the freedom and joy of recognizing the Holy in our Companions and what they believe, celebrating the tapestry of different perceptions and beliefs brought together in this Order of Charity. Our differences become our strengths, as we acknowledge one another to be children of God and kindred in the Holy Spirit.

Our charism of Ecumenism is corporately expressed by our intentional unattachment to any one

Christian denomination. By not belonging exclusively to one church or interpretation, we belong to everyone.

Being so grounded in Christianity we are not threatened by other faith traditions. We are better able to perceive and appreciate that of the Divine in them, for God moves among us all. And though it might be proclaimed with different words in those traditions, The Eternal One tells us all to “Do unto others as you would have done to you.”

“In essentials, unity. In interpretation, liberty. In all things, Charity.”

Together, we must construct and maintain a welcoming place where there is room for those who seek to live the Charitist life. The keeping of the Founding Document transforms us into Companions, traveling together as pilgrims bound for heaven.

V. UNITY IN COMMUNITY

*How very good and pleasant it is
when kindred live together in unity!
(Psalm 133:1)*

Human beings since ancient times have thrived more easily when part of a caring community. Humans blossom in an environment that is affirming, structured and supportive. Such an environment is as vital to a Companion’s spiritual life as water and light are to a Companion’s physical life.

We take on the task of building just such a community to unite us across the miles, whether we live in community Houses or alone; with family, friends or significant others. There can be no Order of Charity unless our constant focal point is centered in the words and spirit of Jesus.

Our unity is thus served by our diversity; for by preserving our individuality we contribute to our interrelatedness and interdependence. We confidently turn to one another for encouragement, assistance and support. We know that God’s love is endless and inclusive, and cannot be confined to our own limits of love or tolerance. The living of our vows help us transcend these limitations, so we can more easily respond to Christ’s call for inclusiveness: “This is my command, that you love one another.” *John 15:12-17*

Exclusiveness is the arrogant child of fear and prejudice, and we deprived it of any control when we faithfully live out our vows. We dismantle the hurtfulness of past institutions, and reach out in charity toward all that have God as their origin. As Charitists, we acknowledge the presence of the Cosmic Christ in all creation and all religious traditions, and we place our corporate talents in the hands of the Eternal One to be used in whatever way the Spirit chooses, for the sake of the kingdom.

VI. Prayer and Spiritual Reading

“Pray at all times, as the Spirit inspires you...” (Ephesians 6:18-19)

God seeks an ever deepening relationship with each of us, and beckons us to commune in prayer

with the Divine each day. Our individual prayer routines may differ, for each of us must weave our testimony as Religious with the schedules and demands of active life and work in society. We must, regardless, answer the call to prayer as frequently as possible each day. *“When you are too busy to pray.....you are too busy.” (Mother Theresa of Calcutta)*

“The core of all our work, the calm that provides us refuge at the center of the cyclone of daily life and gives us strength for struggle, (both inwardly in personal transformation, and outwardly in living the creative life,) is prayer.” (Bishop Ikin)

The Spirit calls us to prayer and meditation, and guides us into the most conducive format that will lead us into intimate union with the All Holy. Each Charitist is free to use whatever format for prayer s/he feels led to by the Spirit, be it Grounding Prayer: The Charitist Book of Hours, Venite, or another office book; the rosary or prayer beads; Lectio Divina or spontaneous prayer; expectant Silence or meditation via mindful walking and mindful working. As Charitists, we commit ourselves to accepting the invitation of the Spirit, for the Divine knocks upon the door of our soul, eager to enter in and dwell with us. By means of an active and consistent prayer life, we open the door and welcome the Divine as our constant Guest.

Prayer is an attitude of connection to the Holy that we take on and constantly enrich. The Spirit, through prayer, nourishes us and deepens our union with the Divine. With a focused mind all we do becomes prayer, so that even when we are called away from our prayer times to attend a neighbor's need, prayer continues.

To better enhance this ongoing interaction with the Divine, each of our residences or Houses is encouraged to have a prepared prayer space, an area specially set aside for this daily conversation with the All Holy. Whether it be it a separate chapel or a simple shrine, it should be designed to put the Companions into a frame of mind where we may effortlessly open our awareness to the Presence that surrounds us with arms of welcome.

We own nothing, but are stewards of all we use, including our bodies. We honor the gift of flesh by feeding and exercising, resting and maintaining them. Our souls require the very same loving care, and we do so with spiritual reading frequently-daily if possible. Whether it is an afternoon of reading or only a few lines to reflect on throughout our day, it is a necessary and rewarding practice. Done faithfully, it bears fruit when we most need it.

VII. Religious Clothing

“Therefore, put on the whole armor of God...” (Ephesians 6:13-17)

Reunion with God-our source and destiny, is the unspoken and oftentimes unrealized yearning of all living beings. Its achievement brings wholeness, fulfillment and everlasting happiness. This reunion is the goal of individual Companions, of the Order, and of all creation. To neglect its pursuit would be to deny the Founding Document, the means by which the Eternal One guides the Order of Charity.

If we are to be effective Religious in the world, our commitment to the Charitist way of life must be visible to everyone, including us. Our religious lifestyle and the Works of Charity are the primary sources of instruction and witness to others. Because of them, many will come to us for answers or direction; they will come for us to bind up their wounds of heart and spirit; they will

come for us to soothe the bruises left by disenfranchisement. Our accessibility to them will be the instrument by which the All Holy will unlock their hearts and heal their pains.

This commitment is not easy; it puts our personal resources of time, energy and knowledge at their disposal. This great sacrifice opens us up to serve as channels of the Divine. By the use of distinctive religious garb we identify ourselves as consecrated Religious, dedicated to being available to others' needs.

The habit visualizes that we stand before God as equals in community; it links us to the Religious of centuries past and yet to come. It manifests the decision that we have chosen to be fellow pilgrims, sharing the Journey as Companions in the Order.

The traditional habit of the Order of Charity is an ankle length light gray tunic: the pilgrims' garb of times past; a black scapular with attached stiffened hood: the apron of monastics, used while providing service whether skies were fair or stormy; a black woven cord with five knots representing the five vows we make, with a slip knot that represents the Founding Document, for both serve the same purpose: to hold everything together. Finally, the distinctive medallion of the Order worn about the neck: a silver medal with the Charitist emblem of a human figure, arms raised to the heavens. It symbolizes our aspiring soul's ever striving for reunification with the Eternal, which restores us to the image of God. For those Companions who so desire, a rosary or crucifix may be suspended from the cord on the left side, opposite the knots. Companions who have professed life vows wear a simple silver ring on the ring finger of the right hand. Because of its meaning and impact, the habit is used whenever we gather for General Assembly.

The contemporary habit of the Order of Charity consists of black trousers and gray shirt for men and black trousers or skirt and gray blouse for women. The shirt worn may be clerical, with collar, or contemporary, with or without a tie. The medallion or lapel pin of the Order is also to be worn. The contemporary habit may be worn at General Assembly but the traditional habit is preferred.

Use of the habit must resonate with the work and journey of each Companion, so its use at all other times is optional. When appropriate and agreeable, wearing it for ministry, or at home, is strongly encouraged. The use of the Order's medallion or medallion lapel pin is strongly advocated to be worn at all times. Whenever a Companion is representing the Order on official community business, either the traditional or the contemporary habit is to be worn.

The Vows

*So I shall always sing of your name,
fulfilling the vows I have taken, day after day.
(Psalm 61:8)*

Our deepest desires motivate us to seek God, and surrender into the hands of the All Holy our whole life and all our heart. The vows are the avenues by which we do exactly that. They consecrate us for our unique mission: to bring others to union with the Light that dwells within each of us and illuminates all creation. The virtues we challenge ourselves to emulate are found in the Beatitudes. Thus our vows spring from the promises of Christ Jesus, to whom we commit our ways and lives.

The vows we make as Companions of the Order of Charity are Simplicity of Life; Purity of Heart; Obedience; Non-Violence; and Universal Citizenship. They do not proclaim goals already achieved, but solemn promises to relentlessly pursue the virtues they proclaim.

Our days are thus consecrated by their pursuit; it compels us into the spiritual audacity of manifesting them in every facet of our lives. A vowed life means a life focused on daily revaluation and renewal; on metanoia. We allow the words of the Founding Document to inspire us on how to better become the vows we profess. By so doing we radiate the virtues we seek. Though a candle shares its flame with other candles, its own light is not diminished. With the spreading of the light, the darkness can do nothing but withdraw. Like that candle, when we share the blessings of the vows we have made, we bear witness to the faith we profess, attracting those who yearn to step out of the darkness.

The vows commit us to a public covenant between God and all we are. No other authority can enter as intermediary in that sacred relationship. On behalf of all Companions, the Servant Leader receives our vows.

I. THE VOW OF SIMPLICITY OF LIFE

*Happy-fortunate-blessed are those who have the spirit of the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
-Matthew 5:3-*

All that we possess comes to us from God, and we are only stewards of what we receive. Realizing this truth, we must use our goods in the best ways possible, dedicating our resources, possessions and abilities to the betterment of creation. Practicing generosity releases us from the false security and slavery of a consumer mentality.

Our lives as Charitists should be known by simplicity and sharing, celebrating the promise of each day with gladness. We strive to avoid waste and limit extravagances, providing for our physical and spiritual well being and health. This vow graces us to empty our lives of unbridled consumerism, and cast off the useless burdens and pressures of society; knocking down the

artificial barriers of privilege built on money, status and possession.

By this vow we reverence our holy mother Earth and all she provides. We will not exploit her, using only what we need, so that we may share her bounty with the rest of the world. We acknowledge our dependence on her and on everyone else that shares this planet. We seek ways in which we may share the benefits of this interdependence, so that all may share to continue the circle of sharing.

*Give me neither poverty nor wealth;
provide me only with the food I need.
(Proverbs 30:8)*

II. THE VOW OF PURITY OF HEART

*Happy-fortunate-blessed are those with a pure heart, for they shall see God.
-Matthew 5:8-*

The grace of Purity of Heart shepherds our intentions, attitudes, motivations and relationships. It seeks to transform our life into active love for others, because it focuses on our ethical and moral behavior. We treat others carefully and honorably, acknowledging the inner Light that dwells within them. We cultivate the disciplines of forgiveness and trust, in order to obtain the blessings of right intentions and right mindfulness in our dealings with others. We are guided by the words of Christ Jesus: “Be innocent as doves, and wise as serpents,” realizing that while others may not have the mindset we have, we are still to respect them as children of God.

By this vow we surrender ourselves, heart, mind and body, to God's service and the up building of creation. We live this vow by performing the Works of Charity. Purity of Heart places us, as Companions and community, into the arms of Everlasting Love.

*I love you just as God loves me; remain in my love.
(John 15:9)*

III. THE VOW OF OBEDIENCE

*Happy-fortunate-blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice-
for uprightness and right standing with God,
for they shall be satisfied.
-Matthew 5:6-*

Obedience (from the Latin *ob* + *audire*, to listen to) does not mean just listening to an outside entity; it means following our own inner Authority. When we listen to our own inner Authority with reason and compassion, utilizing constant study and prayer, we find the will of God. That Authority is the inner Light, the presence of God within us, our connection to the Divine.

We, individually and corporately, place ourselves in unity with the Founding Document, allowing it to provide the structure, guidance and answers we need, in order to function as a viable, thriving

religious community. This empowers us to be accountable for our actions, since wherever we are, we are the face, words and attitude of the Order of Charity. We are thus responsible for the improvement, reputation and sanctification of the community, both within our Houses and in the Order at large. This vow binds us to obedience to the Founding Document; the decisions of the General Assembly; and most of all, to the promptings and leadings of our Inner Light.

Listen to me, you that pursue righteousness, you that seek God. (Isaiah 51:1)

IV. THE VOW OF NON-VIOLENCE

*Happy-fortunate-blessed are the gentle, for they shall possess the land.
Happy-fortunate-blessed are the merciful, for they shall find mercy.
Happy-fortunate-blessed are those who work for peace, they shall be called children of God.
-Matthew 5: 5; 7; 9-*

We acknowledge our place in the Web of life, knowing that this fragile web unites all of God's creation. By this vow we commit ourselves to finding ways of resolving human conflict by trust, cooperation and understanding, rather than by outright force and rejection. We turn our energies to ending fear, aggression, violence, coercion, exploitation and injustice. By this vow we practice the disciplines of forgiveness and empathy. We renounce any recourse to violence and unlawful force. We reject war and look for its elimination; we abhor nuclear armament. We join the struggle with all peoples for liberation, peace, human dignity, rights and integrity. (2 Cor. 10:4)

The vow of Non Violence does not mean impassivity to hurtful events. The grace of this vow compels us to nurture reconciliation, and foster the ways of peace, wherever we find ourselves. (Rom. 12:21)

Its very nature reminds us of our responsibility to the whole of God's creation. We commit ourselves to searching for ways to protect the environment and all sentient beings that share the planet with us, over whom we have been placed as stewards.

By this vow, Companions must be ready, on-call at all times, for the defense of justice with the non-violent arms of love. We must challenge the sources of violence, war, oppression and persecution. We must hold back the forces of darkness, and transmute them into Light. (Bishop Itkin)

*...they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.
(Isaiah 2:4)*

V. THE VOW OF UNIVERSAL CITIZENSHIP

*Happy-fortunate-blessed are those who mourn, they shall be comforted.
Happy-fortunate-blessed are those who are persecuted for the cause of justice,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Happy-fortunate-blessed are you, when people insult you and persecute you and speak
all kinds of evil against you because you are my followers. Be glad and joyful,
for a great reward is kept for you in God.
-Matthew 5:4; 10-12a-*

We are children of the same Maker and thus, members of the household of God. We are the body of Christ, and stand in solidarity with every family and neighborhood; every land and nation; with every culture and race throughout the world. We yearn to restore the flow of grace to a broken humanity and a violated creation.

We proclaim the value and equality of every person, and renounce the nationalism, racism, sexism, colonialism and discrimination nurtured by fear and ignorance. This vow invites us to value the beliefs, history and cultures of all peoples, celebrating our commonalities and appreciating our differences.

We look for any opportunity, however small, to stand in friendship with someone confronted by

disrespect or hate because they were perceived unworthy. We commit ourselves to constant self evaluation, that we not violate this vow by allowing previous attitudes of distrust to resurface and control our actions. By this vow we unite ourselves with creation and all Humanity.

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but all citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus as the chief cornerstone.

(Ephesians 2:19-20)

The Precepts

I. The Foundation Program

So give up all evil and deceit, hypocrisy, envy and every kind of gossip. Like newborn children, seek eagerly for the pure milk of the Word that will help you grow and reach wholeness.

(1 Peter 2:1-2)

A person who wishes to enter the Order contacts the Director of Vocations. The Director of Vocations explores the call to Companion status with the individual and then contacts the Servant Leader who aids in discernment for the next step. If agreeable, the Vocation Director asks the individual to submit a formal application for admission to the Foundation Program. In keeping with Charistist custom, three professed Companions may be invited to conduct telephone interviews with the applicant. Upon completion of the interviews, the Companions share their observations and discuss their recommendations concerning admission with the Director of Vocations and the Servant Leader. If still agreeable, a background check is performed, paid for by the applicant. Upon receipt of a satisfactory background check, the Vocation Director invites the candidate to enter the Formation Program. Based on the candidate's previous experience with religious life, the candidate may be admitted to either the postulancy or novitiate stage of the Formation Program, as determined by the Servant Leader and Director of Vocations.

II. Annual Vows

The first profession of vows is made at the end of the Foundation Program. The vows are renewed annually for three years, after which time the Companion will decide either to take life vows or to continue indefinitely with annual vows. The renewal of annual vows is made on the anniversary of the first profession of vows. All renewals must have the approval of the Servant Leader.

III. Life Vows

To be permitted to profess life vows, the Companion must make written application to the Director General who will present the request to all the Companions present. The Companions will vote to decide if the Companion may take life vows. A simple majority of the Companions present and voting is required to approve the Companion's request to profess life vows. The Servant Leader may, at his/her discretion, waive either the three year waiting period-for final vows or override the decision of the Companions.

IV. Regarding Dismissal and Resignation and Readmission

After this, many disciples withdrew and no longer walked with him. Jesus asked the Twelve, "Will you also go away?"
(John 6:66-67)

A Companion who demonstrates a consistent, fundamental unsuitability to live the religious life, as evidenced by persistent disobedience, refusal to accept the obligations of the Order as embodied in The Founding Document, or who has been the culpable cause of imminent and very grave or exterior scandal or harm to the community, may be dismissed from the Order. In this case, the Servant Leader will call an Advisory Council of three Companions and the Servant Leader, and the accused Companion. This Advisory Council will meet (either by phone or in person) within fourteen days-of being assembled and will decide if the person accused may continue as a Companion in the Order. After the decision is reached, the Advisory Council is disbanded.

Recognizing that an individual may be called by the Spirit to journey with the Order for only a limited time, a Companion may resign from the Order at any time by notifying the Servant Leader in writing of his/her intention. A Companion considering resignation is encouraged to enter into a discernment with the Servant Leader or designee prior to making a final decision. If after serious reflection and consultation with the Servant Leader the discernment has led to the decision to resign from the Order, the Servant Leader will formally release the Companion from his/her vows and from Companion status. Once a person is released from vows and Companion status, the medallion is to be returned to the Headquarters as it is the property of the Order.

There are Companions who, following the prompting of the Spirit, may ask to return to the Order of Charity, to share again in the Journey.

If the Companion left during postulancy, s/he will repeat the full year of postulancy, beginning with the next General Assembly. Foundation studies may be repeated, or picked up where left off, as determined by the Servant Leader, Director of Formation and Mentor. For those who left while a novice, a full year of novitiate is repeated, beginning with the next General Assembly. Foundation studies may be repeated or picked up where left off, as determined by the Servant Leader, Director of Formation and Mentor.

For those Companions who left after life profession, a full three years of annual vows shall be repeated, beginning with the next General Assembly.

V. Regarding Self Sufficiency and Community Support

Use your money according to the commandments of the Most High, and you will find them more valuable than gold.

(Sirach 9:11)

Each Companion is responsible for earning his/her own livelihood in a manner which entails no evil consequence. Each is responsible for his/her own finances and to contribute to the support of the Headquarters and of the House where s/he lives.

In order to manage the financial affairs of the Order, the Community has established a three tier monthly Community Support Contribution (CSC). Each Companion is expected to contribute regularly to the CSC in accordance with the guidelines established. Provisions shall be made for those Companions whose financial situation does not allow them to contribute within the three tier levels established. A Companion may request special arrangements by contacting the

Treasurer

directly. All arrangements regarding the CSC are approved by the Treasurer, after consultation with the Servant Leader.

VI. Titles

And stretching out his hand toward his disciples he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers and my sisters! For whoever does the will of God the creator is my brother and sister and mother."

(Matthew 12: 48-50)

Religious titles are not to be considered as marks of superiority, nor as barriers between laity and religious. They are instead a sign of Companionship to one another in the Order, and our solidarity with creation. They represent our special vocation and our commitment to our vows. They serve to remind the Companions that by the vows we profess, we are kin to every living being.

All Companions and novices of the Order are to be addressed as Brother or Sister. This is an integral part of the religious name. A Companion may also take a name in religion, if desired. This name in religion is proclaimed to the community during the Ceremony for the Clothing of a Novice.

After the profession of first vows, a Companion has the right to use the initials O.C. at the end of his/her name. Clergy may use the title appropriate for their denomination when conducting church business which requires a member of the clergy. Otherwise, the title Brother or Sister is to be used.

VII. Houses

*...but as for me and my household, we will serve God.
(Joshua 24:15)*

Our Order is in fact an extended community, a monastery without walls. We live a new pattern of consecrated life, in free-form contemporary units and in a community which transcends physical distance.

We live in a rapidly changing and diverse world. The Companions seek to make a home therein and, consequently, there are as many different living arrangements as there are Companions. Because we interpret our vows in ways more conducive to religious living in the work-a-day world, the Companions' expression of individual lifestyle and ministry is not hampered. Each Companion is responsible to live in a manner which reflects the philosophy of our Order as outlined in The Founding Document. Each House is free to implement an internal structure conducive to the well-being and spiritual growth of each Companion living there.

Our Houses are to be given a religious name. In addition, each House, mission and ministry of our Order will be identified by a conspicuous sign which indicates it to be a House and/or apostolate of the Ecumenical Order of Charity.

The Headquarters of the Order are determined by the incumbent Servant Leader.

VIII. Retreats, Spiritual Direction and Involvement in a Faith community

*And from time to time he would withdraw to lonely places for prayer.
(Luke 5:16)*

In order to reaffirm our commitment to the religious life, all Companions of the Order are encouraged to make a two day retreat annually. This retreat should be made away from the daily life setting so that distractions may be kept to a minimum.

During this time of exterior and interior silence, the Companion takes the opportunity to grow in the spiritual life. While on retreat, it is advised that The Founding Document be reviewed so that the Companion can reflect on its meaning in his/her own life. It is also recommended that a private reaffirmation of vows be made.

In order to deepen the Companion’s interior life and expand the Companion’s awareness of connection with the presence of the Indwelling Spirit, each Companion is expected to be part of a local spiritual community that is appropriate to the Companion’s denomination or interest. As part of the Companion’s continued spiritual growth, each Companion is encouraged to participate in regular spiritual direction. The continued spiritual growth of each Companion contributes to the spiritual growth of the entire Community, strengthening us for our work for the sake of the kingdom.

The entire Community meets annually for General Assembly. This is a time when Companions meet for community, recollection, and spiritual renewal as well as for making decisions that affect the Order’s corporate life. All Companions are expected to attend General Assembly regularly unless excused by the Servant Leader for valid reasons.

IX. The Calendar of Celebrations

*At your festivals, solemnities, or new-moon feasts, you will sound the trumpet at the time of your holocausts and your communion sacrifices, and they will call you to the remembrance of your God.
(Numbers 10:10)*

Since the Companions come from a variety of religious and cultural traditions, an all-inclusive calendar of feasts would be cumbersome to the Order as a whole. Therefore, the observance of special feast days is left up to the individual Companions and Houses. However, to show the unity of our celebration as a community, the following holidays are to be observed by all Companions of the Order:

January 18	Start of the Week of Christian Unity
April 22	World Environment Day
May 7	World Day of Prayer
May 14	Founding of Our Order
June 29	Human Rights Day
August 6	World Peace Day
October 4	Animal Rights Day
December 25	Christmas
Variable	Easter
Variable	Pentecost

The holidays should be observed by all with special activities such as private and common prayers, special meals and gatherings. Additional holidays may be added as agreed upon by the Community.

X. Regarding Corporate Status and Ownership

*Jesus said, “foxes have lairs and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Humanity has nowhere to lay his head.....Follow me.”
(Luke 9:58-59a)*

The Order will own no real estate. No Companion or group of Companions, including the General Assembly, may enter into a transaction which binds another Companion or the Order as a whole. Nothing in this document prevents a Companion from owning personal and/or real property.

The Ecumenical Order of Charity is a non-profit corporation, incorporated in the State of Arizona.

This corporation covers the Headquarters and all the individual Companions. Each mission or ministry is to be incorporated as an entity separate from the Order. Individual ministries and Houses are independent and have no direct affiliation with the Order or the Board of Directors of the corporation.

XI. The Structure of the Order of Charity

If we live by the truth and in love, we shall grow in all ways into Christ, who is the head by whom the whole body is fitted and joined together, every joint adding its own strength for each separate part to work according to its function. So the body grows until it has built itself up in love.
(Ephesians 4:15-16)

Our Order is dedicated to the spiritual growth of all creation and acknowledges the inherent value of all persons. We celebrate the special individual contribution each Companion makes to the Order and, therefore, we follow a collegial system of government.

Recognizing the need for structure, The Founding Document has been established to guide the spiritual affairs of the Order. Each Companion, with The Founding Document as the guide, is responsible for his/her own actions.

XII. Regarding the Founding Document

You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart, soul and mind; this is the first and greatest commandment. But there is another, just as great: you shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole Law and the Prophets are founded on these two commandments.
(Matt 22:37-40)

The Founding Document is the Rule of Life of the Ecumenical Order of Charity, having been composed after reflection on the rules of life of ancient religious orders and, under the guidance of the Spirit, adapting those reflections to the Charitist way of life.

It is not a set of by-laws for a religious organization, but the means of creating a nurturing environment for a living, thriving organism. Its Principles inspire, its Vows bind and compel, and its Precepts structure our life in common. It is designed to allow each Companion to follow the promptings of the Holy in their particular journey, and undergird us into a viable, connected community. It is a living document, reviewed and edited in the light of experience and prayer.

Suggestions for modification to the Founding Document are formally presented and discussed at General Assembly. After serious reflection, these changes are voted on by professed Companions. If agreed, The Founding Document is updated accordingly, and published to the community before the next General Assembly.

XIII. Regarding General Assembly

At your festivals, solemnities, or new-moon feasts, you will sound the trumpet at the time of your holocausts and your communion sacrifices, and they will call you to the remembrance of your God.
(Numbers 10:10)

The General Assembly is our chief government and it guides the temporal affairs of the Order. It

consists of all professed Companions (each of whom has equal voice), and is called and chaired by the Servant Leader, and meets every year. To call the General Assembly into session, the Servant Leader will choose a location which is the most convenient for the majority of Companions to attend without undue hardship. The Servant Leader will solicit topics for discussion ninety days prior to the meeting and will communicate the agenda topics thirty days prior to the meeting.

The

Servant Leader will publish the decisions of the General Assembly thirty days after adjournment. This time is observed in a simple monastic style, with praying of the Hours and Eucharist in common, as well as meals, conferences and recreational outings. General Assembly thus nurtures the bonds of community.

The duties and responsibilities of the General Assembly are as follows:

- To elect the Servant Leader at term's end
- To conduct official business of the Order
- To make changes in The Founding Document as necessary
- To review and act on agenda topics submitted by the professed Companions
- To protect the charism and heritage of the Order
-

We believe that God's Holy Spirit is present wherever two or more are gathered in Christ's name.

We make our decisions based on the movement of God's spirit in our lives. All decisions are made by majority vote of the Companions present and voting. This process recognizes the Spirit's manifestation of the Divine Will through the unique ideas, feelings, perspectives and contributions of each Companion, while freeing the Community for action as needed.

We unite ourselves by our common concerns and commitments and we act collegially in our community decisions. Harmony will exist in our Order when each Companion takes an active interest in the well-being of all.

XIV. The Servant Leader

You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great persons exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you; whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be the slave of all.

For the Son of Humanity came not to be served, but to serve...

(Mark 10: 42-45)

As every community has a leader, our Order designates the Servant Leader as the director of our religious community. We view this position not as the head of a body, but rather as the center of a

circle. The Servant Leader is a person who has an openness to be energized by the mission of the Order and is inspired by the Spirit to meet the needs of the Companions. His/her major task is to maintain the cohesiveness of the Order. The Servant Leader has the prophetic function of challenging the Companions to a deeper living out of their religious commitments. The duties of the office are derived from The Founding Document, the authority from the Companions, and the

respect from his/her own life based on the vows. His/her guidance of the Order comes from a shared common understanding of The Founding Document and not from personal, autocratic whim.

The Servant Leader is elected every four years by the General Assembly. The Servant Leader may serve no more than two consecutive terms, but may be re-elected to office, having been out of office for a minimum of one full term. S/he conducts all official business which affects the Order as a whole. S/he handles correspondence, vows, maintains the archives and the chronological account of the history of the Order, calls and chairs the General Assembly, receives the profession of vows of each Companion, and fulfills other duties as outlined in The Founding Document. S/he may act on behalf of all Companions in internal affairs as requested.

Upon vacancy of the office of the Servant Leader for whatever reason (other than the expiration of a term of office), the senior-most Companion in vows in our Order will become the acting Servant Leader. S/he will call a General Assembly (by mail if necessary) within the next thirty days so that a new Servant Leader can be elected. If the new Servant Leader is elected to fill an unexpired term of greater than two years, that term shall be considered as of the two consecutive terms to which a Servant Leader may be elected. If the new Servant Leader is elected to fill an unexpired term of less than two years, that term shall not be considered as one of the two consecutive terms to which a Servant Leader may be elected. All professed Companions must be given the opportunity to vote for the new Servant Leader.

In the Order of Charity, there are no “superiors” or “inferiors”, but only friends.

XV. Associate Companions

*For whoever is not against us is for us.
(Mark 9:40)*

An individual who supports The Founding Document of our Order and wishes to participate in the daily life of the Order without taking vows may become an Associate Companion. The Director of the Associate Program, in consultation with the Servant Leader, determines who will be admitted to the Associate Program.

The Associate Companion may share in the life of the Order, although s/he may not wear the habit, habit medallion, Companion lapel pin, or use the title Brother or Sister. Associates receive a Charitist Associate lapel pin, to be worn whenever the Associate deems appropriate. Associates may also be invited by the Servant Leader to the General Assembly as non-decision making guests.

The acceptance of an Associate Companion is formalized by the Service of Acceptance. An updated list of Associates shall be kept by the Director of the Associate Program and shall be sent to the Headquarters annually, where a record will be kept.

Associate status may be terminated at any time by the individual Associate or by the decision of the Servant Leader in consultation with the Director of the Associate Program.

XVI. The Exhortation

Brother and Sister Charitists,

Herein is the key with which you will unlock the doors to many hearts. Use it well and cherish it always.

Guard your practice of the principles of The Founding Document and follow its precepts faithfully. With its assistance you will find spiritual renewal, consecration and transformation.

Let this Founding Document be our unity in our diversity.

Remember, everything fulfills its own destiny in its own time. Do not allow our Founding Document to turn to stone. Keep it always alive, for it is meant to assist with developing a fuller life. This is a living document. As your spiritual life deepens, so should your understanding and living of The Founding Document.

May peace, love and wisdom abide with us always!

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