

The Rivendell Community Rule and Constitution

The Companions' Rule of the Rivendell Community

The Constitution

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THE RIVENDELL COMMUNITY COMPANIONS' RULE

In grateful response to the overwhelming love of God, we desire to give ourselves wholly, unreservedly, and continually to the One who gives himself to us. We seek to be conformed to God's will, to share in Christ's cross and resurrection, and to cooperate faithfully with the gifts of grace. Helpless as we are in ourselves, we pray and trust that God who has given us these desires will also bring them to fruition. By his own invitation, we set our hearts and wills on God, joyfully declaring that nothing else and nothing less will content us. And trusting that nothing else will content God either, we cast ourselves into his arms.

We intend full and unqualified consent to God's invitations, in general and in particular. Our longing is that our whole lives may pronounce a "yes" to God's purposes for us and the world. Our intention is to en flesh our response to the commandments to love God with our whole heart and mind and soul and strength, and our neighbors as ourselves, by adopting these means and goals in common.

This common Rule is intended to deepen community, provide a container for common life, and assist in mutual accountability. We understand it as a framework for freedom, the freedom to become increasingly who God calls us to be. Though we recognize that we will constantly fall short of these intentions, we commit ourselves to persevere in hope, trust, and dependence on God's grace.

WORSHIP AND PRAYER

We will participate fully in the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church as provided for in the Book of Common Prayer.

EUCHARIST

We will participate in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist on Sundays (and on major feasts and other days as our circumstances permit).

We intend to celebrate the Eucharist continually in our lives as well as in the liturgy, to offer ourselves in all that we do or suffer to God, with the intention that our offering be taken, consecrated and united to Christ's sacrifice, broken and given. As members of a royal priesthood, we will also present to God the joys and sorrows of the world. Our intention is to give thanks to God in all things.

THE DAILY OFFICE

We will pray the morning and evening offices daily. (The office for noonday and/or compline may be added, regularly or occasionally.)

We intend to participate in the Church's continual offering of praise, thanksgiving and intercession, and, by structuring our lives around the daily office, affirm that all our lives belong to God.

We intend to pray the office and read the appointed readings with as full a degree of attention and presence as possible.

THE LITURGICAL YEAR

We intend to immerse ourselves in the rhythms of sacred time, including observance of the various seasons, feasts and fasts appointed.

We will observe the days of special devotion by some special act(s) of discipline and self-denial.

SILENCE

We will devote time to silent prayer daily.

Our basic intention is to be lovingly attentive and available to God, whatever forms our silent prayer may take.

We seek the gift of inner silence that will dispose us to receptivity and obedience to God's purposes through the rest of the day.

COMMUNITY

We recognize and embrace our interdependence within the Communion of Saints, and joyfully accept the privileges and burdens of community life. We consent to bear one another's burdens freely, in whatever ways are given us, visible and invisible, known and unknown.

We commit ourselves to love one another, and others whom God gives us to love, as we love ourselves; that is, to desire, serve and work for the fulfillment of God's purposes in the other. We agree to give and receive encouragement, challenge, comfort, correction, guidance, and provocation to holiness.

INTERCESSION: We will pray daily for one another, and for others who become part of our "extended family."

CONVERSATION: We will meet regularly for the purposes of mutual support and accountability.

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION: We will each have a spiritual director.

CONFESSION: We will make sacramental confession at least twice a year.

In all of these relationships, we commit ourselves to as much transparency, integrity and undefendedness as we are currently capable of sustaining, and intend by God's grace to deepen these qualities.

CONSTITUTION OF THE RIVENDELL COMMUNITY

1. NAME AND PURPOSE

i. The Rivendell Community is a Christian Community of the Episcopal Church. In obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ's commands, we seek to love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves, particularly through the Community's vocation of contemplation and hospitality.

ii. Like its literary namesake, Rivendell intends to provide places of sanctuary, sustenance, consolation and healing, challenge and guidance for those who travel the Way, and "homely houses" where the stories, songs, and customs of our true Home are remembered, cherished and lived with beauty, intensity and joy. Having renounced the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God, we intend to stand against them by practicing a way of life grounded in and reaching out toward the Reign of God, without using the weapons of domination; and by seeking strength and grace, both for ourselves and for others with different vocations, in our ministries in the world. The Community's work includes hospitality, both physical and spiritual, for those whom God gives us to love and care for, as well as the constant offering of prayer and worship on behalf of the Church and the world. It seeks to nourish both members and guests with the riches of the Episcopal tradition, and, in particular, to embody the contemplative aspect of the life of faith and support those drawn to it. The Community desires to glorify God and serve the beloved people of God through lives of continuing conversion, increasingly open to the transformative power of God and available for the work of God in the world.

iii. The organization is organized exclusively for charitable, religious, educational, and/or scientific purposes under section 501(c)3 of the Internal Revenue Code.

2. ADHERENCE TO THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

The Rivendell Community adheres to the faith of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, and is loyal to the doctrine, discipline and worship of Christ as the Episcopal Church has received them.

3. MEMBERS

i. Full members of the Community are called Companions (those who break bread, and share the journey, together) because they have committed themselves to the Companions' Rule. Companions may be women or men, single or married, lay or ordained. Some Companions may choose to live in residential community, while others live with their families or alone.

ii. Postulants are persons who wish to explore the Community's pattern of life by participating in it and keeping some or all of the provisions of the Rule, without formal commitment. With the consent of any Chapter meeting, Postulants may be invited to participate in Chapter. A Companion will be assigned to serve as a mentor or Formation Director, offering guidance and

instruction in the spirit and specific disciplines of the Rule. This initial period of exploration normally lasts approximately six months, and may be extended for up to two years.

iii. Novices: Following such exploration, with the recommendation of his or her mentor and/or Formation Director and the consent of the Chapter, given after opportunity for discussion at a Chapter meeting of the present Companions only, a Postulant may be presented for acceptance as a Novice. Before advancement to the Novitiate, the Postulant will attend at least one General Chapter or other gathering of the whole Community, complete the Postulancy program, and be approved for acceptance by a vote of Professed Companions. In circumstances where the decision is for postponement or denial of acceptance as a Novice, the Guardian or Formation Director will provide a written response to the candidate, including both reasons for the decision and guidance for future direction. Following acceptance, the new Novice makes a preliminary commitment to embrace the Rule and accept some responsibilities for the life and ministry of the Community. The small Companions' Cross is presented at the time of this first formal commitment. During this time, the Community will be responsible for providing education and formation, and the new Novice will seek to observe the Rule fully, and to discern, with the help of the Community and his or her director, whether it is congruent with the way to which the person is called.

iv. Following this period, which normally lasts two years and may be extended by request of either the Novice or the Community, the Novice may be approved, by vote of the Professed Companions, to make profession of vows as a Companion of this Community. Before such approval, the Novice must have completed the Novitiate program and be recommended by the Formation Director, the Guardian, and the Chapter. Chapter recommendation is given after opportunity for discussion at a Chapter meeting of the present Companions only. In circumstances where the decision is for postponement or denial of acceptance for profession, the Guardian or Formation Director will provide a written response to the candidate, including both reasons for the decision and guidance for future direction. Upon acceptance, the Companion makes vows, in a form adopted by the Community, to embrace the Rule and abide by this Constitution for a period of a year, or until the next occasion for annual renewal of vows. Companions make or renew their vows annually. After living the Rule faithfully, and having annually renewed their vows for a minimum of four years, with the consent of the Guardian and their Chapter, they may make profession of final vows, for the remainder of their lives; or they may continue to renew their vows annually.

v. Ecumenical Companions are Companions who belong to other branches of the Church than the Episcopal Church. They observe the Rule fully with whatever accommodations may be appropriate to their tradition. (They may, for example, pray the Daily Office using their tradition's liturgical forms, when not praying it corporately with others in the Community.) Ecumenical Companions vote in Chapter and exercise all other privileges and responsibilities of membership, except when this would be inappropriate for reasons of conscience, the polity of either branch of the Church, or other considerations. It is understood that Article 2 applies to the Community as a whole, and in no way abrogates or impairs individual Ecumenical Companions' loyalty to the branch or expression of the Church to which they belong.

vi. The Companions' Cross: The Companions' Cross is worn by all Companions. Upon ceasing commitment to the Rule or the Community, the member will return the cross to the Community.

vii. Definitions:

a. The "Community" is generally considered to include all those who participate in the life of the Rivendell Community in any way, regularly or occasionally, with or without formal commitment. However, in this Constitution the "Community" refers specifically to Companions (3.i), Novices (3.iii) and Postulants (3.ii) of all Chapters.

b. "Companions" refers to Professed Companions (3.1).

c. "Members" include all Companions and Novices.

viii. Associates

a. In addition to Companions who are committed to the full Rule, this Community may have Associates. With Community support and guidance, they develop and keep a rule of life, modeled after the Companions' Rule, with modifications appropriate to their particular situation and vocation. Associates participate in and support the life and work of the Community as their circumstances permit.

b. Means of welcoming, incorporating, and supporting Associates, including expectations and procedures for aspirancy, discernment, formation, commitment, and participation in the Community's life, will be developed as needed and approved by the Guardian and the Community. One or more persons may be appointed by the Guardian as Associates' Adviser, and will maintain regular contact with Associates.

c. Upon making a formal commitment to a rule of life approved by the Guardian, and being received as an Associate of the Rivendell Community, the Associate may receive the Community's Associates' Cross, and may wear it as a symbol of this commitment. Associates' commitments are renewable annually. Should association with the Community cease, the Associate will return the Cross to the Community.

d. In the case of Associates who live in the vicinity of an existing Chapter, the Chapter invites such Associates to participate in their life and work in whatever ways are appropriate. Likewise, the Community may invite Associates to attend General Chapter or other gatherings.

4. THE DAILY OFFICE

Companions regularly pray the Daily Office using *The Book of Common Prayer*, *The Prayer Book Office*, or other forms authorized by the Episcopal Church or adapted for Community use and approved by the Guardian. Other forms of the Office may be used on occasion.

5. CHAPTERS OF THE RIVENDELL COMMUNITY

- i. The Rivendell Community may include more than one Chapter, each with two or more full Members. A new Chapter is formed with the consent of the Community.
- ii. Each Chapter may adapt customary so as to embody the Rule in ways appropriate to the local setting and circumstances. This will normally include provisions for corporate offering of the Daily Office in such a way that all may participate, regular occasions for hospitality and conversation, and Chapter meetings.

6. HOUSES OF THE RIVENDELL COMMUNITY

- i. Each Chapter may have a house to be used for its life and ministry of hospitality and prayer. Houses may be rented or owned by the Chapter or the Community, by a parish or diocese, or privately, or may be provided in some other suitable manner. The Chapter may select a name for its house which reflects in some way the Community's dual vocation of contemplation and hospitality. Each house will include a chapel, where if possible a celebration of the Eucharist will be offered at least weekly, and the Sacrament reserved, and where some or all of the Daily Office is prayed. In each house, members of the Community will seek to foster an atmosphere of quiet presence to God, including regular times of silence. Each House and its life and worship will be as open, available, and welcoming as possible. All members of the Community are expected to reflect, in the welcome and courtesy offered to one another and to guests alike, the welcome and courtesy we receive from our Lord Jesus Christ.
- ii. When feasible, a House will be occupied and served by a residential community. Companions who live in a Community House are expected to order their life so as both to provide for silence, prayer, domestic duties, rest, solitude, and community time, and to exercise the privilege of sharing what they have freely, and extending generous hospitality to others, both outwardly and inwardly.
- iii. When space and circumstances permit, others involved with the life and ministry of the Community may be invited to live in residence for a specified period of time, mutually agreed upon by the Chapter and the resident.

7. ASSOCIATION WITH THE DIOCESE AND LOCAL PARISHES

Each Chapter participates in and supports the life of the Diocese, and the local parish(es) to which Members belong, through prayer and through ministries congruent with the nature and vocation of the Rivendell Community. Chapters may have formal or informal associations with particular parishes; however, as Chapters of a Christian Community, they are not subsidiary diocesan or parish organizations.

8. CHAPTER MEETINGS

- i. Though regular Chapter meetings normally focus on conversation on some aspect of the spiritual life, mutual support and accountability, at least once a month opportunity will be

provided for dealing with whatever business may be required. Chapter may deal with such matters at other times, as needed, taking care not to neglect its other purposes.

ii. When decisions are required, opportunity shall be provided for all members, whether Companions, Novices, or Postulants, to be heard, remembering that the Holy Spirit indwells each member individually and all corporately. Decisions will usually be made by consensus, but when a vote is needed because of legal, ecclesiastical, or other requirements, for the sake of clarity, or when an unresolved difference of opinion exists, all Members shall have voice but only Companions shall have vote. The Guardian may vote in any Chapter. Any Member may request that a vote be taken. An affirmative vote of a majority of all Companions shall be necessary for passage, unless otherwise indicated in this Constitution.

iii. Chapter may recommend Postulants for advancement to the Novitiate, and Novices for Profession, in accordance with this Constitution, elect or appoint Companions to fulfill particular offices, approve expenditure of Chapter's funds, accept and dispose of other possessions, plan and organize ministry congruent with the Community's purpose, offer counsel to the Companion in Charge, and perform other functions mentioned in this Constitution or otherwise needed. Gifts designated for specific purposes and valued at over \$200 will be accepted only with consent of the Chapter.

9. GENERAL CHAPTER

i. A General Chapter will be held annually, meeting at a time and place announced at least one month in advance. Members and Postulants are expected to attend; all Members of the Community, whether Novices or Companions, may participate and have voice. All Companions are eligible to vote. At the Guardian's discretion and with advance notice, votes by proxy, by mail, or by some other means may be accepted. Special meetings may be called by the Guardian or by the Companions in Charge of two Chapters.

ii. General Chapter may hold and disburse funds, for the assistance of local Chapters and the ministry of the Community.

iii. Should some action of General Chapter be required between meetings, a vote may be taken by mail, electronically, or by some other appropriate means, with the approval of the Guardian and a majority of the Companions in Charge.

10. OFFICES

i. Episcopal Visitor: An Episcopal Visitor shall be elected in General Chapter.

ii. Guardian. Companions shall elect a Guardian in General Chapter, to serve the whole Community for a term of three years. Should a General Chapter so decide, co-Guardians may be elected to share responsibility for this office. The Guardian is elected from among the fully professed Companions. The Guardian may be reelected for additional terms of three years. The Guardian's duties are to preserve and interpret the spirit of the Community as expressed

in its Rule and Constitution, to encourage care and faithfulness in its practices, to protect the bond of mutual charity within the Community, and to be solicitous of the individual needs and common good of all its members. When appropriate, the Guardian may make whatever accommodations, dispensations, or modifications to the Community's pattern of life and practice, or temporarily suspend or modify provisions of the Constitution. The Guardian presides at General Chapter, and fulfills the other duties and responsibilities mentioned in this Constitution. The Guardian may appoint a Council of Advice, the members of which serve at the Guardian's pleasure, offer counsel and advice, and may be delegated to exercise some aspect of the Guardian's duties for a period of time. The Guardian may also be designated as President of the Community when required for legal or business purposes; or another Companion may be elected to serve in this capacity.

iii. Companion in Charge: Each Chapter will have a Companion in Charge, appointed by the Guardian with the advice and consent of the Chapter, for a term of one year. The Companion in Charge may be re-appointed for additional one-year terms. He or she is responsible for ordering and arranging for the life of the Community, and presides at Chapter, or asks another member to do so. The Companion in Charge also encourages care in maintaining the particulars and the spirit of the Rule. When required for business or legal purposes, the Companion in Charge is designated as president of the Chapter. Where there is a House with residential members, the Companion in Charge, if resident, also assigns household duties and other responsibilities, and maintains and when appropriate modifies the schedule and customs of the House. Should any Chapter which includes a residential community have a non-residential Companion in Charge, the Guardian will appoint a residential member to fulfill these responsibilities, with the advice and consent of the residential community members.

iv. Secretary and Treasurer: A Secretary and a Treasurer (or a Secretary/Treasurer) shall be elected by Chapter for a one-year term, and may be reelected for additional terms of one year. The Secretary will be designated as secretary for legal or business purposes. The Secretary may be assigned duties such as correspondence and other communications, maintaining records, and attending to business matters. In the event of the death or incapacity of the Guardian, the Secretary will fulfill the Guardian's office temporarily, and if necessary call for a new election. The Treasurer shall make regular reports to the Community of the financial status, income and expenditures, of the Community.

v. Other offices and services (such as responsibility for liturgical planning) will normally be performed in rotation by those members willing and able to do them. Each House or Chapter may designate these functions according to its needs.

vi. Although preserving faithfulness to the Rule, mutual charity, and loving solicitude for all members, is the particular charge of the Guardian and the Companion in Charge, it is the responsibility of all members. Working for the fulfillment of God's purposes in one another, and giving and receiving encouragement, challenge, comfort, correction, guidance and provocation to holiness are explicitly privileges and obligations of the Rule.

11. OUR WAY OF LIVING THE GOSPEL

i. Our way of life includes both particular patterns of prayer, worship, and community life, and an inclination of our hearts and lives toward embracing the fullness of the Gospel in its radical implications for ourselves, the Church and the world. Underlying the specific disciplines of prayer and worship, and of community life, of the Companions Rule is the desire and intention to give ourselves wholly, unreservedly, and continually to God. In accordance with common Christian tradition, members of the Rivendell Community seek to respond to Jesus' invitations to poverty, chastity and obedience in ways consistent with their life circumstances and vocation, seeing them as ways of joy and freedom. While these ways will vary from person to person, our intention and hope is that our response to these invitations will be intensified and deepened as an expression and result of constant, continuing conversion.

ii. Poverty is embraced in entire dependence on God and God's grace, setting our hearts and wills on God and joyfully declaring that nothing else and nothing less will content us. We express poverty in seeking to live in holy simplicity, both for the sake of uncluttered lives available to God's purposes and in order to share what we have with those in need and to use our resources for the ministry of Christ. This spirit of simplicity will also be reflected in the furnishings and other possessions of Houses of this Community.

iii. Chastity is embraced in the recognition that we belong wholly, unreservedly, and continually to God, and the ordering of all human relationships around the love of God, desiring, serving, and working for the fulfillment of God's purposes in others. We express chastity in seeking generous, loving relationships, free of the demands of self-serving, and subordinated to the claims of Christ. Both loving fidelity within marriage and celibacy are congruent with chastity.

iv. Obedience is embraced in whole-hearted acceptance of God's purposes, responsive listening for God's guidance, and faithful intention to do God's will in all things, seeking to be conformed to God's will, and longing that our whole lives may pronounce a "yes" to God's purposes for us and the world. We express obedience in adherence to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in accordance with our Rule and Constitution.

v. Profession of vows in this Community commits us to poverty, chastity, and obedience as expressed in this section, and in accordance with the particular circumstances of each Companion.

12. RESIDENTIAL COMPANIONS

i. For some Companions whose circumstances permit, the vows are expressed in a life of celibacy in residential community. Before being accepted for residence, they must obtain the consent of the Guardian and all members of the House in which they are to be resident. For these Residential Companions, the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience take particular forms:

a. They will live in community and hold possessions in common, not as private property. They will seek in attitude and in practice to reckon nothing as exclusively their own, but to share freely with the Community and the needy. The vow of poverty also commits these Companions to a modest, simple and sacrificial manner of living, avoiding unnecessary accumulation of material goods, in order to live more fully in loving fidelity to Christ who for our sakes became poor, to share with others deprived of basic necessities, and to depend on God's care in all our needs.

b. These Residential Companions normally contribute whatever income they may receive to the Rivendell Community. Such income is contributed freely as a gift; the member relinquishes any present or future claim on it. When circumstances warrant, a portion may be set aside in a personal account for the needs of a Companion's dependents; in this case, these funds are not given to the Community.

c. A Residential Companion may place assets in a separate account or trust, to be used for the benefit of family or to fulfill other prior obligations. The Companion may also choose to place assets in the common fund, in which case those assets are contributed freely as a gift to the Rivendell Community; the member relinquishes any present or future claim on them.

ii. These Companions commit themselves to celibacy, setting aside the option of marriage and devoting their capacity for spousal intimacy to Christ alone. They choose this as a particular expression of the Community's vocation of prayer and hospitality, with the intention of belonging wholly to God and enhancing their capacity for generous, loving relationships with others. A manifestation of vowed celibacy should be increasing freedom for expansiveness of spirit, capacious compassion, and tenderness of heart.

iii. Within the vow of obedience, Companions commit themselves without reservation to loving obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ in everything, according to their conscience informed by Scripture, prayer, and the teachings of the Church. They seek to live in fidelity to their baptismal vows, ordination vows if applicable, and the Rule and Constitution of this Community, to live in and to be amenable to spiritual counsel and the deliberations and decisions of the Community and Chapter. The small daily obediences appropriate to common life, based in willingness to set aside our own will and preferences, including loving mutual regard and subjection, and specifically obedience to those exercising office, also express the vow of obedience in residential community. They commit themselves to love one another in tenderness and mutual courtesy, to forgive and accept forgiveness at once when any offense occurs, to bear patiently with one another's idiosyncrasies and faults, and never to lose heart about themselves or one another, but to persevere in charity, and in hope, trust, and dependence on God's grace.¹

v. In the case of married persons, both of whom desire to live in residential community "chastity" is understood as interpreted in Article 11.iii, rather than Article 12.ii, and does not

imply celibacy. All other provisions of this Article pertain.

vi. Nothing in this article should be taken to imply that this form of life is either preferable or normative for this Community; it is simply one expression among others of the basic pattern of life shared by all Companions.

vii. Other members of the Community, and others who do not make these commitments, may also live in a Community House either temporarily or for an extended period, with the consent of all residential Companions of the particular House. In this case, the Residential Members and the other prospective residents mutually agree upon terms and expectations (including financial support and responsibilities), and a written record of these agreements, signed by all parties (or, in the case of minors, by parents or guardians), is retained by the Companion in Charge and the Guardian.

13. RELEASE AND REMOVAL

i. A Companion may be temporarily released from some or all of the privileges and obligations of the Rule for a specified period of time, and under conditions mutually agreed upon by the member and the Chapter.

ii. A Companion who wishes to be released from the commitment to the Rule, or who is unsure of whether to continue, will normally make these concerns known to the Chapter and the Guardian, so the Community can assist with the process of discernment in whatever ways may be appropriate. On mutual agreement, the Companion may be released from the privileges and obligations of the Rule, though not, of course, from those of mutual love. Such a person may continue to participate freely in the life and worship of the Community as fully as desired. Should a former Companion later wish to return to full membership, he or she will normally proceed as though entering for the first time, unless the Community makes other arrangements.

iii. Should a Companion discontinue participation in Chapter without making such a request for a period of two months or more without excuse, and efforts have been made to welcome the member and explore whatever needs or concerns may be involved, Chapter may remove him or her from membership. Such a removal requires the vote of a two-thirds majority of Chapter and the consent of the Guardian. A person removed from membership may be readmitted only with the approval of a two-thirds majority of the Chapter and consent of the Guardian.

14. DISSOLUTION OF THE COMMUNITY

i. Should any Chapter or House of this Community be dissolved, any property held will revert to the General Chapter of the Rivendell Community. In the case of dissolution of the Community as a whole, the property will be distributed to one or more 501(c)3 organizations, as agreed upon by the Members.

ii. Upon the dissolution of the organization, assets shall be distributed for one or more exempt

purposes within the meaning of section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, or corresponding section of any future federal tax code, or shall be distributed to the federal government, or to a state or local government, for a public purpose.

15. AMENDMENT

i. This Constitution may be amended by a two-thirds majority of all who are Professed Members of the Community at the time the amendment is considered. A proposed amendment must also be approved by a majority in each House or Chapter.

ii. Exception for amendments of article 12: Amendments to articles which apply to Residential Members may be initiated only by such a member, and require the affirmative vote of two thirds of those to whom they apply.

Memphis, Tennessee

The Third Sunday of Easter, May 7, 2000

Amended July 22, 2005

Amended October 4, 2014

Amended July 14, 2015
