

“Way of the Culdee”—draft amplified Rule of Life for Culdees of the Columba Center

This draft Rule is an amplification of aspect #2 of the Commentary on the “Way of Columba”, that there may be “those who feel drawn to make formal vows to the Way, living it with an advanced degree of observance. Such folk are to be supported and offered the careful discernment of the leadership and Companions, consulting the local Bishop and other church authorities when appropriate.” (Commentary p.4)

Within the history of Celtic monasticism, a renewal movement began in the 8th Century which sought to return to the rigor and passion of the early age of the Celtic Church, the “age of saints” of the 4th-6th Centuries. Including within it the monastery of Tallagh and its great abbot Maelruain, adherents of the movement called themselves “Celi De”, “clients of God” or “friends of God”, later rendered as “Culdees”. Sometimes living as solitaries alone or appended onto residential communities, sometimes on constant pilgrimage as “gyrovagus”, sometimes comprising whole communities, the Culdees were living examples of a fervent and intentional life consecrated to Christ, and by example were a force for renewal within the whole Celtic Church.

The modern vocation of Culdee is meant to be just such a presence within The Columba Center, parish life, and the larger church. Drawing on the Celtic monastic heritage, those who (after careful discernment and a probationary period) vow themselves as Culdees will live an amplification and intensification of the “Way of Columba”. Accountable to both the Abba of the Columba Center as well as to the local bishop or bishop’s delegate, the Culdee will make of their own lives the “peregrinatio Cristi”, the “pilgrimage of Christ”, and will serve as witness and leaven for the larger Church.

The following amplification assumes that the Culdee will continue to observe all of the other demands of the “Way of Columba” and its Commentary:

1) Commitment to Christ:

The Culdee will seek to immerse her/himself in the mystery of Christ through...

- a. Word: the Culdee will engage in ongoing study of the four canonical Gospels, alone, with a tutor, in a small-group setting, or in a formal class. The goal of this is not intellectual knowledge so much as the nurture of a warm and living love of Christ and a further exploration of the mystery of Christ as presented in Scripture. Study of the whole Bible, as well as of

the early Church Fathers and Mothers, is also highly encouraged.

- b. Sacrament: the Culdee will affiliate with a parish community in which the celebration of the Eucharist occupies a central place. The Culdee will attend Eucharist and communicate on the Sundays of the year as well as on all major feasts when possible.
- c. Service: the Culdee will make time for some form of “hands-on” ministry to the poor and needy. At The Columba Center’s site of SS. Peter and Paul, Brigid’s Table meal program, Rahab’s Sisters ministry to persons in prostitution, and other present and future servant ministries provide excellent opportunities for this. The Culdee is to be open to other opportunities, especially if he/she lives near and worships at a place other than SS. Peter and Paul.

2) Common Life

The Culdee will seek or create, whenever possible, a “muintir” or small-group setting where a real shared life in Christ may be lived. Such small group communities may change or come and go as time goes on.

The life of the Culdee is not meant to be restricted to one specific state of life. The Culdee may discern that she/he is called upon to live as a solitary, or as a member of a family, or in intentional community with others called to the same way of life. In any case, the Culdee is to strive to form authentic Christian community with those whom she/he is called to live, a life based on prayer, hospitality, service, and love in charity. A first step in living Common Life is naming and declaring blessed those communities of which the Culdee is already part, whether familial, professional, or intentional, and infusing their life together with Celtic Christian values.

3) A life of prayer

- a. The Culdee will pray a full Daily Office. The Daily Office of the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer is recommended as it makes use of the whole Psalter (a central feature of Celtic Christian devotion) and includes a lectionary or schedule for course reading of the Bible. Other forms of Daily Office such as Celebrating Common Prayer, Celtic Prayers From Iona, A Northumbrian Daily Office or other Celtic forms, resources from Lutheran, Roman Catholic, ecumenical communities such as that of Taize, or other sources could also be used. The Abba or Prior could assist the Culdee in choosing a form of Office. The exact form is not of primary importance. It is

simply important to have an Office, a regular daily rhythm of praise of God, listening to God, and praying to God in Christ, firmly rooted in the Scriptures. Daily Morning and Evening Prayer are the standard required of a serious daily Office. Midday Prayer and Night Prayer are also encouraged. It is highly recommended that the Culdee pause for intentional prayer at or near noon so as to join in spirit with the Office offered by the Companions of Columba at SS. Peter and Paul. Prayer upon retiring may take the form of a formal Compline or night prayer drawn from the BCP or other sources, or may take the form of an Ignatian “examination of conscience”. It is highly recommended that the Daily Office be enriched by Canticles, Collects, and other prayers drawn from Celtic sources. The Abba and Prior can suggest or make available resources for these. One of the Daily Offices should always include the prayer “Kindle in our hearts, O God...” attributed to St. Columba. The Cantic “Columba’s Rock” is highly recommended for use on Thursdays.

- b. The Culdee shall also devote one hour daily to private prayer. This may be done in one sitting, or broken into two half-hour periods, or further broken throughout the day as circumstances demand. The form of prayer pursued during this time would be left to the discretion of the Culdee, drawing freely from the riches of Christian tradition when helpful. The Holy Spirit can be trusted to guide the Culdee in how to pray aright, and it is assumed that the “anamchara” or soul-friend of the Culdee, as well as the Abba, will be of help in exploring the rich heritage of Christian spirituality.
- c. The Culdee shall practice intercessory prayer as an essential part of her/his vocation, and shall pray for those in need. The Culdee shall pray for the Columba Center, the parish, the diocesan Bishop, for world peace and repentance from the ways of violence and power, and for the poor and the oppressed.
- d. The Culdee shall participate actively in the worship life of the Church, paying special attention to the celebration of the Eucharist. The Culdee is encouraged to take active roles in the liturgy at the discretion of the priest or pastor.
- e. The Culdee shall practice Reconciliation and seek to live a reconciled life, accepting the free gift of the mercy of God and living at shalom with others. The Culdee is encouraged to make confession at least once a year to a member of the clergy. If one is not available or if the practice of oral confession presents too many stumbling blocks, the Culdee is encouraged to celebrate reconciliation regularly with an

anamchara or another trusted Christian. Remember that the form for Reconciliation in the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer provides for a “Declaration of Forgiveness” to be offered by a layperson.

The Culdee shall seek to be a reconciling presence in the world, courageously witnessing to the Prince of Peace at all times.

- f. The Culdee shall maintain a practice of “spiritual reading”, always “keeping a book going” which is chosen for its capacity to feed the spirit and support the Christian journey of the Culdee. Special attention should be given to the Sayings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers as well as early Celtic monastic sources.
- g. The Culdee shall observe the feasts of St. Brigid (February 1), St. Patrick (March 17), and St. Columba (June 9) with special joy, attending Eucharist or otherwise celebrating the feasts with intentional prayer and festivity. Observance of other Celtic feast days is highly encouraged. Thursdays are always Columba’s Day in accord with Celtic monastic practice, unless superceded by other feasts. The day’s Office is appropriately supplemented with the canticle “Columba’s Rock” or material from Columba’s “Altus Prosator”, and the Collect from St. Columba’s Day may appropriately be used. Thursdays are also especially appropriate days to pray the Office with others or to attend the Eucharist .
- h. The Culdee shall observe a monthly “desert day” in which she/he will withdraw from all normal work, ministry, or other activities insofar as is possible. This day may be spent at home, if the atmosphere allows for such disengagement, or may be spent at another location. The day shall be spent in silence and solitude insofar as is possible, and only the Scriptures shall be used as reading matter.
- i. The ancient Celtic Church observed three Lents, and St. Benedict as well described the life of the monastic as “a continuous Lent” (RB 49: 1). Although literal imitation of the early Fathers and Mothers is probably not advisable, the Culdee shall honor the spirit of the penitential heritage of the Celtic Church, by which each was called to continual conversion of life, by honoring the tradition of fasting. These are some ways to do so:
 1. The Culdee is invited to observe a Western church-fast (one full meal without excess, two further servings which together do not comprise one full meal) on two select weekdays, excluding Sunday, during the after-Pentecost season until 1 Advent,

and from Epiphany to Ash Wednesday. Wednesdays and Fridays are traditional days on which to do so, but other days may be chosen as circumstances dictate.

2. The Culdee may observe the same church-fast on all the weekdays of Lent and Advent, excluding Saturdays and Sundays.
 3. Fasting is forbidden on Sundays, during all the days of Eastertide and Christmastide, on all feast of the Lord and other major feasts, and on the feasts of SS. Brigid, Patrick, or Columba.
 4. There are many reasons in Christian tradition for fasting. One honored reason is fasting in solidarity with those who suffer hunger or injustice. Such fasting may be undertaken with a larger call to fast in regard to a particular cause or event. Another form of fasting in solidarity is to do so in union with sisters and brothers of other faiths. The Culdee may consider fasting in solidarity on the Jewish Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) or during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, during which nothing is taken by mouth from sunup to sundown. In each case inter-religious reconciliation through personal discipline is being expressed.
 5. Any fasting in excess of this is only to be undertaken in consultation with the Abba and the anamchara of the Culdee, and for a proscribed length of time. It is to be remembered that fasting is a tool and aid, never a goal, and is to be mitigated or discontinued whenever it seems to threaten physical, mental, or spiritual health.
- j. The Culdee shall make an annual retreat of at least five days insofar as is possible. This retreat may be directed or simply a time spent in silence and recollection. If need be, the Culdee may make this retreat while living at home or working, in a manner similar to the conduct of the “19th Annotation” of the Ignatian Exercises.

4) Soul-friendship

The Culdee shall have an “anamchara” or spiritual friend, and shall cultivate this friendship regularly. The tradition of “spiritual director” nurtured in the Western church may be one way to fulfill this ministry. But the gift and ministry of anamchara is the older tradition in the Celtic lands, and may prove to be more accessible as it is non-professionalized.

The Culdee shall be open to being an “amamchara” to others, and shall engage in such relationships with a full heart but with discretion, consulting the Abba or her/his own anamchara if any issues or concerns arise.

5) Accountability

- a. The life that the Culdee undertakes is a serious one, and the witness to the larger Church and world is a calling, a grace, and a responsibility. Hence the Culdee is a person in a stance of listening to the promptings of the Spirit in private discernment, in the counsel of their anamchara, the role of the Abba, the authority of the local Bishop and other church officers, and the life of the larger Church.
- b. The Culdee is to remain aware that all things spring forth from God and are to be given back to God joyfully. The Culdee shall embrace the tithe as the minimum standard of Christian giving, and shall tithe to the local congregation where the Culdee has taken spiritual root. A donation to the life and ministry of the Columba Center shall also be given. The Culdee shall make an annual financial accounting of her/his affairs to the Abba or Prior, who shall hold the information in confidence.
- c. The Culdee is not vowed to celibacy by her/his profession, and is free to be open to the relationships placed in her/his life. The Culdee is to observe Christian chastity according to her/his state of life, remaining aware of the many temptations to exploitation in our time and culture. The Culdee is free to marry, informing both the Abba and the Bishop beforehand. If the Culdee intends to embrace lifelong celibacy, she/he may do so and vow to do so, but only after careful discernment and consultation with the Abba and Bishop.
- d. The Culdee is to make quarterly visits to the Abba or Prior in order to make account of her/his observance of the rule in general, and is to write an annual letter to the Bishop in the spirit of “manifestation of conscience”, telling the Bishop of the joys, sorrows, and challenges of the life undertaken.
- e. In case of conflict regarding the interpretation and living of the Rule, the Culdee shall work together with the Abba and Prior as well as the other Culdees, consulting at need the Bishop and work with him/her or a person that the Bishop appoints.

6) Service and witness for justice

The Culdee shall regard deep awareness of the real-life sorrows, joys, and struggles of the world as intrinsic to her/his calling. The Culdee shall pray for a more just world, seek to raise her/his consciousness of the struggle of the poor, the marginalized, and the oppressed, and seek ways in which she/he may actively work on behalf of justice. Christ may be encountered on a picket line or in a congressman's office as readily as he may be in prayer.

7) Learning and study

- a. The Culdee shall value learning, and shall engage in ongoing Biblical study as well as the study of the history of religious life, the Celtic Church, and other related areas, with the help and consultation of the Abba.
- b. The Culdee shall be open to further theological education, in the forms of formal divinity studies, EFM, other approved programs, or individual reading and study.
- c. The Culdee shall also value ongoing learning and formation in other fields, remembering the love for and valuing of the life of the mind that was the hallmark of the Celtic saints and monastics. Ongoing educational goals shall be part of the accountability rendered quarterly and annually by the Culdee.

8) Pilgrim identity

- a) The Culdee shall actively seek at least one opportunity in her/his lifetime to go on pilgrimage to the British Isles, visiting prayerful holy sites such as Iona, Lindisfarne, Kildare, Glendalough, and others.
- b) The Culdee shall remember that he/she is a pilgrim on earth, and will seek ways to "tread lightly", remembering that the true home of the Christian is in Christ.
- c) The Culdee shall observe simplicity in her/his use of the world's good, remembering that the life of a religious is meant to mirror the truth that true happiness is found in Christ, as well as the fact that most of the world lives in hunger and want in order that the privileged may live in luxury. Excessive accumulation or consumption is antithetical to the life and witness of the Culdee.
- d) The Culdee shall write a will disposing all of her/his earthly possessions, remembering the local congregation and The Columba Center in the bequest.