



# THE COMMUNITY OF THE INCARNATION

## The New Monastic Community of the Center for Spiritual Imagination

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The Community of the Incarnation is a new monastic community which embodies and teaches engaged contemplative spirituality in response to what Father Bede Griffiths called “the universal call to contemplation.” We follow a Rule of Life that includes three vows: a commitment to a new monastic rhythm of life, a commitment to ongoing conversion of life, and a commitment to live our spirituality in the context of “hearing and responding to the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth.”

Our community is dispersed, with members from many different locations and time zones. We gather primarily online and also meet in person at retreats. We welcome members of any age, race, gender identity, sexual orientation, and spiritual background. Our Rule of Life is based on the Christian contemplative and monastic traditions. It is helpful for members interested in joining our community to have some familiarity and appreciation for these traditions, as well as an open mind to contemporary interpretations. We do not ask our members to affirm any particular creed, but rather to commit to a particular Rule of Life (see page 10) and to a particular group of people (the Community of the Incarnation).

The process for becoming a member of the Community of the Incarnation involves a year of discernment followed by three years of formation before taking final vows.

# CANDIDACY

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The first step of discernment is called **candidacy**. Candidates fill out a simple application declaring their interest in joining our community. After they submit their application, they spend at least four months:

- Completing our course on the Incarnation Method of Prayer
- Practicing our prayer methods
- Attending our weekly Tuesday night online meditation or one of our in person meditations
- Attending two or more of our other public events
- Exploring aspects of our Rule of Life on their own

During this time, candidates will discern if our prayer method, teachings, and other practices resonate with their sense of call to a committed spiritual life of engaged contemplative prayer. If candidates find that they want to experience these practices in the context of community, they are invited to apply to become either a companion member or a vowed member.

We can accept any number of people into companion membership, but we are only able to accept a maximum of 12 people per year into the vowed way.



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# COMPANION WAY vs VOWED WAY



| COMPANION MEMBERS  | VOWED MEMBERS  |
|--|--|
| <p>Must complete Candidacy Program</p>   | <p>Must complete Candidacy and Postulancy Program, followed by three years of formation in the Novitiate</p>   |
| <p>Engage in self-guided study on readings of contemplation and justice. Monthly gatherings with other Companion Members to share and practice together</p>  | <p>3 years of formation, which includes weekly groups and monthly 3 hour Saturday intensives</p>   |
| <p>Engage with our Rule of Life on your own terms, adapting it to your life circumstances</p>  | <p>Commit seasonally to our Rule of Life for three years, gradually incorporating it into your life. After formation is complete, invitation to take a lifelong vow of commitment. (This includes committing to two daily periods of contemplative prayer, daily lectio divina, praying the daily office, and practicing nightly Examen, etc.)</p> |
| <p>Participate in our public programs when possible, including regular attendance at meditations</p>   | <p>Participate in our public programs when possible, including regular attendance at meditations. Our vowed members are trained to become facilitators and leaders of our public programs.</p>   |
| <p>Applications are open to all who have completed candidacy and have demonstrated that they are people of goodwill who resonate with our way of life. We can accept any number of people into Companion Membership.</p> | <p>Applications are open to all who have completed candidacy and have demonstrated that they are people of goodwill who resonate with our way of life. We can only accept 12 people per year into the formation program for the Vowed Way.</p>   |



# POSTULANCY

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Those who have completed the candidacy program and are interested in the vowed way are welcome to apply for **postulancy**. Applications open on March 1 and close on April 1. The application to postulancy includes:

- Letter detailing why you feel called to this particular community and way of life
- Written reflection on your experience with the Incarnation Method of Prayer and the other events you have attended with us
- Written version of your spiritual autobiography
- Interview with a community member and one of our co-founders

Upon completion of these steps and approval from the community, the candidate becomes a postulant.

## **Postulants commit to:**

- Attendance and participation at our May Saturday intensive
- Six weekly small group meetings with other postulants
- Continued daily engagement with our prayer practices

Postulancy lasts for six weeks, and no more than two absences from weekly small groups is permitted.

During this time, postulants will have an opportunity to spend time with vowed members of the Community of the Incarnation as well as other postulants. This is a time to discern whether you are ready to commit to this particular group of people at this particular time. You will also spend some time exploring aspects of our Rule of Life, trying on different practices and seeing how they resonate with you. At the end of this period, we will mutually discern if you are called to be with this Community and are ready to commit to a deepening study of our Rule of Life and charisms. If so, you will be invited to apply to the novitiate.

# THE NOVITIATE

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Those who have completed the postulancy phase may apply to the **novitiate**. The application to the novitiate includes:

- Letter reflecting on the postulancy and why you continue to feel called to this particular community
- Written reflection on our Rule of Life and why you feel called to integrate it into your life in the context of community
- Commitment to our novitiate attendance policy

The novitiate formation is a three year process that emphasizes deep practice and a solid theological foundation. Novices will develop an overall understanding of the spiritual journey, especially the dry seasons of prayer life, the need for spiritual friendship, and the importance of an honest and heartfelt community of accountability and mutual support. We also emphasize the integration of contemplation with action and justice making, and a cultivation of aliveness, celebration, and joy as promises of spiritual life.

## THE RHYTHM OF THE NOVITIATE

### **In Person Retreats**

- One weekend retreat with your cohort
- One retreat with the whole community at the end of each year
- Immersive, guided contemplative practice

### **Weekly Online Small Groups**

- September to June with breaks for Christmas/New Year's, Holy Week/Easter, and all Federal Holidays
- Take place during the same time slot as your postulancy meetings

### **Monthly Online Community Intensives**

- One Saturday a month, November to May, 9am to 12:30pm ET
- Includes guest speakers who are expert practitioners and teachers of engaged contemplative spirituality
- Time to engage with the Community at large
- Discussion groups with monthly readings
- Meetings with mentor teams and accountability partners

## **YEAR ONE: THE BENEDICTINE CHARISM**

The first year of the novitiate engages with the Benedictine charism, with a focus on community life and sanctifying the hours of the day. In this year, novices will:

- Practice daily our community's methods of Lectio Divina, Examen, and Daily Office
- Read and study the Rule of St. Benedict
- Practice two periods of contemplative prayer, using the Incarnation Method of Prayer for at least one session
- Guided study of classical and contemporary writings on the themes of Benedictine Spirituality
- Practice the 12 Steps through the lens of Benedictine principles

Cohort will take an immersive weekend retreat in the fall of Year One with a partner Benedictine monastery.

## **YEAR TWO: THE CARMELITE CHARISM**

In the second year, we engage with the teachings of Carmelite spirituality, entering the desert of our hearts through practices of silence and friendship with God. We add the following practices to those we developed in year one:

- Practice a form of daily remembrance of God as advocated by Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection
- Dedicate one day a month as a “desert day” dedicated to rest, reflection and contemplative prayer

- Practice of the 12 Steps through the lens of Carmelite spirituality
- Guided study of the writings of St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross, alongside contemporary interpretations
- Engage a spiritual director and therapeutic healing modality from outside the community

Cohort will take an immersive weekend retreat in the winter of Year Two in the desert.

## YEAR THREE: THE FRANCISCAN CHARISM

In the final year of formation, our novices begin discernment for how they are called both as individuals and as a community to respond to “the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth.” In this year, we will:

- Study the writings of St. Francis of Assisi alongside contemporary interpretations
- Engage with concepts of liberation theology, ecospirituality and the integration of contemplation and justice
- Begin taking on leadership roles within the community
- Practice works of mercy
- Advocate for changes to structural injustice
- Guided training in movement ecology and community organizing

The cohort will spend days in retreat together leading up to the Community Retreat and Vow Ceremony.

## CONSIDERATIONS

### Time Commitment

Overall, the time commitment in the novitiate is relatively light. One hour a week is dedicated to a weekly small group, which meets mid-September through June with no meetings during holiday seasons. There are six Saturday intensives over the course of the year which meet for three and a half hours each. Finally, we have two in person retreats for each year of the novitiate, which typically take place from a Friday to a Monday, except in the Franciscan Year, which includes a single weeklong retreat in June.

Typically the monthly reading assignments are no more than two or three chapters of material with some reflection questions.

Our attendance policy reflects the fact that this formation process is not a class where one can “make up” lost time by doing extra credit. **Our weekly small groups, monthly intensives, and retreats are not primarily a means to educate you, but rather a way of forming a community.** As such, novices are expected to miss no more than five small group sessions over the course of a year, and no more than two Saturday intensives. Of course, unavoidable life circumstances happen, but we ask postulants to discern before applying to the novitiate whether this formation process is possible for them considering their other commitments in life. Those who have completed postulancy can “defer” their entrance to the novitiate, joining another year’s cohort at a later time.

Retreats are mandatory. We have found it essential for our community members to spend time with one another in these immersive spaces, and you will not want to miss the deep bonding and friendship that occurs.

If you must miss time, we ask that you inform the cohort as soon as possible. We work hard to accommodate various life circumstances and to support each other during times where regular attendance is not possible. Again, our goal is always relational community.

## **Cost**

It is a tradition of the Community of the Incarnation that all of our programs are offered by donation only. The suggested donation for the Novitiate program is \$100 a month (or \$1,200 a year). This donation should not be thought of as paying for our program, but rather as a contribution to our mutual aid so that no one will be denied admission because of inability to pay. Through donations from our community members and grants, we are able to offer four years of formation—including the cost of travel to and from retreats — to anyone regardless of their economic position.

This practice of mutual aid has strengthened community bonds and made us less reliant on outside funding. It is also emblematic of our community's rejection of the "spiritual marketplace" where you can only have as much enlightenment as you can afford. We believe that the gift of contemplation and our community's spiritual practices should be accessible regardless of one's financial situation.

# RULE OF LIFE:

## Community of the incarnation

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*Members of the community will commit to the following 3 vows, prayer disciplines and ways of being and living:*

### **I commit to a new monastic rhythm of life:**

- Meditate daily on scripture and the writings of our tradition's spiritual masters.
- Pray the Daily Office (morning prayer and evening prayer or compline).
- Daily participate in or celebrate the Eucharist when possible.
- Daily hold two 30 minute periods of contemplative prayer when possible. As St. Teresa of Avila says, "contemplative prayer is nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends", where we take time every day "to be alone with the One who we know loves us."
- Practice a form of remembrance of God when possible during the day (Jesus Prayer, Christian Mindfulness or Recollection advocated by Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection).
- End my day with a Nightly Examen.
- Designate one day a month as a "desert day" dedicated to rest, reflection and contemplative prayer.
- Have a week-long retreat each year.

### **I commit to an "ongoing conversion of life:"**

- Live in obedience and trust knowing that obedience means to listen and that it requires proper discernment to be done in the context of my community and its rule of life.
- Study classical and contemporary writings on spiritual growth.
- Commit to a vision of reciprocity and justice that goes beyond my personal change and encompasses the need for social, structural and ecological healing and transformation.
- Adopt the 12-steps as a method of conversion of life, specifically by working the steps in a small group.

- Meet with a spiritual director on monthly basis.
- Engage with a therapeutic healing modality (like psychotherapy or co-counseling) to ensure holistic growth and prevent spiritual bypass.
- Annually during Lent conduct a comprehensive examination of my life (including my choices, attachments, places of growth), receive feedback from fellow community members and trusted friends, and develop a personalized list of commitments as part of our rule of life.

**I commit to live my spirituality in the context of “hearing and responding to the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth”:**

- Commit to teaching contemplative prayer as a way of addressing spiritual impoverishment in church, culture, and society.
- Practice works of mercy: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, visiting the sick and the imprisoned, sheltering the homeless, giving alms to the poor, burying the dead, and caring for creation, knowing that “what we do to the least of our brothers and sisters, we do to God.”
- Strive to move beyond charity into justice by advocating for change in the structures that produce social and environmental injustice, and by modeling an ethic of God’s Kingdom.