

THE FOUNDING DOCUMENT



The Ecumenical Order of Charity

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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. (*1 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. 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 everything 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 provides 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." – Iraneaus.

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
- To pray for all

- Matthew 23:4; Isaiah. 61:1

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 helps 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 deprive 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 Itkin

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, 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, 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 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 Charist 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 may be suspended from the cord on the left side, opposite the knots. Companions who have professed Life Vows may suspend a crucifix or plain cross from the cord on the left side, opposite the knots. Companions who have professed Life Vows wear a simple black ring on the ring finger of the right hand, bearing the motto of the Order on the outer band, in a language meaningful to the individual Companion.

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.

VIII. 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 reevaluation 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.

The Vow of Simplicity of Life

*“Happy-fortunate-blessed are those who are poor in spirit, 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

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

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

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

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 the Foundation Program. The Director of the Foundation Program 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 Director of the Foundation Program asks the individual to submit a formal application for admission to the Foundation Program. After the application is received, but before the interviews, the applicant completes a psychological screening, which is paid for by the applicant. After reviewing the screening results, if it seems reasonable to the Director of the Foundation Program to proceed, the applicant is interviewed. In keeping with Charitist 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 the Foundation Program 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 Director of the Foundation Program invites the candidate to enter the Foundation 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 Foundation Program, as determined by the Servant Leader and Director of the Foundation Program.

II. Annual Vows

The first profession of vows is made at the end of the Foundation Program. There is no vote for First Vows. That decision is discerned between the Director of the Foundation Program and the novice, in consultation with the Servant Leader. 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 vows is made annually at General Assembly. 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 Servant Leader who will present the request to all Companions. The Companions will vote to decide if the Companion may take Life Vows. A simple majority of the Companions 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, 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 (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 and the Director of the Foundation Program.

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 and the Director of the Foundation Program. For those Companions who left after life profession, a full three years of Annual Vows shall be repeated, beginning with the next General Assembly.

Leave of Absence

1. A Companion under vows, either annual or Life, may, at the discretion of the Servant Leader, be granted a Leave of Absence not to exceed one year, with one possible additional year extension, also at the discretion of the Servant Leader.
2. During the Leave of Absence, the Companion remains subject to the authority of the Servant Leader but is dispensed from vows, he/she loses his/her voice and vote and should not wear the habit or medallion of the Order.
3. During the Leave of Absence, the Companion may apply to return at any time through the Servant Leader.
4. Upon completion of the specified period of Leave of Absence, the Companion either returns to the Community or asks the Servant Leader for a request for dismissal.
5. The process of returning to the community from a Leave of Absence shall be determined by the Servant Leader and the Companion, and shall include a period of discernment.
6. The Servant Leader may involve other Companions in any of these discernments, as he/she deems appropriate.

Limited Ability to Participate in the Life of the Community

1. Members who become unable to participate substantially, if at all, without grave difficulty in the common life of the community due to physical or mental challenges shall remain full members of the community in order that they might remain lovingly and meaningfully a part of the community for the rest of their natural lives.
2. These members may vote in elections or any other decisions as their physical and/or mental health permits.

Annual Vows Renewal Statement

The failure of a Companion in Annual Vows to renew his or her vows will be considered as a request for withdrawal from the Ecumenical Order of Charity.

Membership in Another Community

A person shall have been invalidly accepted, and will be subject to immediate dismissal if:

1. Any information provided in the application or interview shall be shown to be false or intended to mislead
2. The individual has concealed previous or current association with any other order, community, or institute.

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. CSC begins upon acceptance as a postulant. 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 OC at the end of his/her name. A novice has the right to use nOC 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. 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 encouraged to attend General Assembly annually. However, attendance at General Assembly is mandatory every three years, 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 under-gird 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 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:

1. To elect the Servant Leader at term's end
2. For the Servant Leader to receive a Companion's Life Vows
3. To conduct official business of the Order
4. To make changes in The Founding Document as necessary
5. To review and act on agenda topics submitted by the professed Companions
6. 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.

Annual attendance at General Assembly is strongly encouraged. However, attendance at General Assembly at least every three years is mandatory for Companions, unless expressly excused by the Servant Leader.

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 a Life Professed member of the community. The Servant Leader is elected every four years by the General Assembly of professed members. 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 one 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. The Treasurer

Companions share co-responsibility for the welfare and support of the Order of Charity by supplying their monthly Community Support Contribution, known as the CSC. The CSCs are forwarded to the Order's Treasurer, who maintains the financial records of the Community. The Treasurer pays all

corporate expenses on behalf of the Order, and provides annual reports regarding Community financial health and obligations at General Assembly.

The Treasurer is a Life Professed member of the community The Treasurer is elected every year at General Assembly by professed members, and serves with no limit in terms of succession.

XVI. The Secretary

At General Assembly, the Order holds its annual Corporation business meeting. The Secretary guides the Annual Meeting according to Roberts' Rules of Order to ensure that Order business is conducted appropriately and responsibly. The Secretary keeps the Minutes of the meeting, maintaining them in archives for reference.

The Secretary is a Life Professed member of the community. The Secretary is elected every year at General Assembly by professed members, and serves with no limit of terms in succession.

XVII. Offices as Appointed

The offices of Director of Communications and Director of the Foundation Program are appointed by the Servant Leader, to serve at the discretion of the Community.

The Director of Communications composes, edits and publishes written works as needed by the Community, such as various ceremonies, newsletters, prayer services and liturgies. This office is also responsible for guiding renewal of the book of Hours and the Founding Document, as needed.

The Director of Communications serves term length as decided by the Servant Leader.

The Director of the Foundation Program serves as the primary contact person for potential vocations to the Order of Charity. The director engages inquiries through snail mail, e-mail and phone calls. When possible, the director meets face to face with the inquirer to help better discern the person's call to the Ecumenical Order of Charity. When deemed ready, the director provides the inquirer with the application to the Foundation Program, and arranges interviews with Companions as part of the discernment process.

In conjunction with the Servant Leader, when the inquirer is received into Foundation Program, the Director of the Foundation Program shepherds the progress of the postulant and novice until first vows.

The Director of the Foundation Program serves term length as decided by the Servant Leader.

XVIII. 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.

XIX. Sexual Abuse and Misconduct Policy

All Companions shall read the Sexual Abuse and Misconduct Policy which can be found on The Cloister page of the EOC website. Each Companion shall sign the Attestation and Agreement Statement, which is the last page of the policy. The signed statement will become a part of each Companion's file.

XX. 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!

Bro. Guadalupe Maria Hardin, OC

In promulgation of the 2018 Revisions

CORPORATION BY-LAWS OF THE ECUMENICAL ORDER OF CHARITY, INC.

Article I: Name

The name of this corporation is The Ecumenical Order of Charity, Inc., hereinafter referred to as “The Order”.

Article II: Purposes

The purposes of this corporation are:

1. To form a non-profit legal entity which represents the Ecumenical Order of Charity, an independent, non-canonical and self-governing Christian ecumenical religious Order of men and women, founded on May 14, 1989 in Vancouver, Washington, whose life is determined by The Founding Document.
2. To initiate, maintain and conduct any and all such activities as are appropriate and lawful for the conduct of a religious Order and in keeping with the way of life set forth in The Founding Document of this Order.
3. To oversee by audit the funds of the Order as administered by the incumbent Servant Leader of the Order.

Article III: Membership

Membership in this corporation shall consist of all such persons (hereinafter referred to as “Companions”) who have been officially admitted to and have professed vows in this Order according to the rules set forth in The Founding Document. All Companions shall be entitled to vote in the regular or special meetings of this corporation.

Article IV: Corporation Meetings

Powers

The corporation meetings shall be the governing body in business and fiscal affairs of the Order.

Annual Meeting

Fiscal Year: The fiscal year for the Order shall coincide with the calendar year.

Date of the Annual Meeting: The annual meeting of the corporation shall be held during General Assembly.

Presiding Officer: The presiding officer at the annual meeting shall be the president of the corporation. In his/her absence, the treasurer of the corporation shall preside. In the absence of both the president and the treasurer of the corporation, the secretary of the corporation shall preside.

Quorum: The presence at an annual meeting of not less than two (2) persons qualified to vote thereat as provided in Article III of these by-laws shall be necessary to constitute a quorum.

Voting: The action of the meeting upon any matter or question shall be decided by a majority of the Companions present and voting thereon unless otherwise specified in these by-laws, a quorum being present. Proxies shall not be allowed. All voting shall be by open ballot.

Agenda: The annual meeting shall receive reports of funds received and disbursed during the preceding fiscal year.

Special Meetings

Call for Special Meetings: A special meeting of the corporation may be initiated by any two officers on their own motion. Such a special meeting shall be called by the president.

Agenda: The call for such special meetings shall specify the business to be transacted thereat, and only such business shall be acted upon. Subject to such limitation, the call for such meetings shall be published and such meeting shall be conducted as to quorum, majority rule, voting and powers as provided in Article IV.

Article V. Officers

Officers and the Election Thereof

President: The Servant Leader shall be *ex officio* the president of the corporation.

Other officers: The other officers of the corporation shall be a treasurer and a secretary. Only a life professed Companion may serve as an officer of the corporation. The president of the corporation shall nominate Companions for the offices of treasurer and secretary. Such nominations shall be voted on at the annual meeting of the corporation. A simple majority of the Companions present and voting shall be required to elect the nominated candidates. Should a candidate for either office nominated by the president of the corporation fail to receive a majority of the votes, the Companions may then nominate candidate(s) for the office. A simple majority of the Companions present and voting shall be required to elect a candidate nominated by the Companions.

Term of Office: The term of office for the treasurer and the secretary shall be for one (1) year. A vacancy in one or both of these positions occurring by death, resignation or other than by expiration of term or removal from office shall be filled by interim appointment by action of the president until the next annual meeting of the corporation.

Removal of Officers: An elected officer may be removed from office for cause by a majority vote at an annual or special meeting of the corporation which meeting shall thereupon elect a successor for the unexpired term. In no way does this give authority for the removal of the Servant Leader before the expiration of his/her elected term.

Duties of the Officers: The duties of the officers of the corporation shall be those commonly pertaining to such offices, in strict conjunction with The Founding Document. The duties pertain only to the functioning of the corporation and not to the specific individual ministries, missions and apostolates of the Order; nor to the functioning of the Headquarters of the Order.

Article VI: Property

As directed in The Founding Document, the Order may own no real estate but may hold personal property in trust for the Order, e.g., the library, goods, files, etc., as requested by professed Companions. The treasurer may hold and handle money for the use of the Order. This fund will be administered by the incumbent Servant Leader.

Article VII: Amendment

These by-laws may be altered, amended or new by-laws adopted by a two-thirds vote at any annual meeting.

Article VIII: The Founding Document

The Founding Document is always the chief document of governance and always guides the decisions made by this corporation. No decisions or policies may be made by this body which are in direct or indirect conflict with the Principles, Vows or Precepts as set forth in The Founding Document. All Companions are bound by their vow of obedience to uphold The Founding Document.

Article IX: Adoption of Initial By-Laws

The initial by-laws of the corporation shall be adopted by a majority vote of the officers of the corporation at a meeting specifically called for that purpose. Any one or more of the officers may participate in the meeting by means of a telephone conference call or similar communications equipment allowing all persons participating in the meeting to hear each other at the same time. Participation by such means shall constitute presence in person at the meeting.

The foregoing by-laws were approved and adopted by a majority vote of the officers of The Ecumenical Order of Charity, Inc. on October 19, 1999 at a meeting duly called for that purpose at which all officers were present, the vote being 3 (three) in favor and 0 (none) opposed.

Bro. Dale Robert Schell, OC

Bro. Dale Robert Schell, OC
Director General/President

Bro. John Bowdle, OC

Bro. John Bowdle, OC
Secretary