



o prayer and service.

Diocese of Derby

**Those committing to the Religious life take vows and make promises to God. Such vows can take different forms and are the mark of monks and nuns, friars and sisters.**

**The vows differ by community, but all include:**

- **Living a simple life and sharing possessions (poverty)**
- **Refraining from sexual or exclusive relationships (chastity)**
- **Setting aside the freedom to do as we please and instead committing to listening to others (obedience).**

**All these vows involve deep and positive values of attending to God and living together. The Religious life is demanding yet joyful, a way to find God and**



## **History**

**God has called many people through centuries to live this life. Among Anglicans though there were no nuns and monks until the mid-19th century. Then the revival of Religious communities was embraced by the Victorians as a way of mission and service.**

**Of the many communities founded, some pioneered nursing or education for the poor, or reached out to wayfarers. Others concentrated on evangelistic work both in Britain and overseas. All led a dedicated life of prayer alongside their ministries, and some developed into places devoted to prayer alone.**

## **Community life**

**Most communities are women only or men only; some are of both. Some wear distinctive clothes (a 'habit'), others do not. Some are engaged in the world, others are more oriented to prayer. Members of communities can be lay or ordained.**

**Community life – like family life - is not always easy, but the practice of loving forgiveness builds bonds that go beyond difference. This is a witness to a fragmented and divided society.**

## **Joining a religious community**

**The best way forward for anyone interested in the life is to visit different communities and experience the way of life as a visitor first. Many communities provide opportunities for people to live alongside them for longer periods of time.**

**Participants commit to helping with the work of the monastery or community - and there is no obligation to join the community afterwards unless the person wishes to explore further.**

**If you'd like to find out more please visit the [Anglican Religious Communities Website](#).**

**For an initial conversation about life in a religious community, contact [info@arcie.org.uk](mailto:info@arcie.org.uk).**

## Active Communities

**Active communities have active ministries in society: in education, health and social care, evangelism and parish work. What makes their ministry different is the way it is anchored in a life lived together.**

**The support of sisters and brothers acts as an encouragement and a witness. Caring for the poor and reaching out to the vulnerable are central to the witness of religious communities.**

### **Communities for both women and men living in one community**

Society of the Sacred Mission

### **Communities of women**

All Saints Sisters of the Poor

Community of the Holy Name

Community of St John the Divine

Community of St Mary the Virgin

Community of the Sisters of the Church

Order of the Holy Paraclete

Sisters of Jesus Way

Society of the Sisters of Bethany

### **Communities of men**

Community of the Resurrection

Society of St Francis

Oratory of the Good Shepherd

### **Acknowledged communities (for men and women, married or single)**

Church Army

Church Mission Society

Community of Hopeweavers

Community of St Anselm

Company of Mission Priests

Contemplative Fire

Order of Anglican Cistercians

The Order of Mission

The Sisters of Jesus

Third Order of the Society of St Francis

For new monastic communities (for women and men, married or single)

For single consecrated life (for men or women living alone with a variety of ministries)

A fuller list of communities worldwide may be found in the Anglican Religious Life Year Book

### Contemplative communities

**Contemplative communities revolve around set times of prayer and worship. Much time is given over to seeking God in private prayer and silence. The community's home, which may be called a monastery, priory or convent, is a place of God.**

**Some members will leave the monastery at times to preach and minister, but such outside commitments are secondary to the life of prayer.**

**Some communities confine their work to the home and its grounds, maintaining what is called 'enclosure'. This helps keep distractions from prayer to a minimum.**

### **Communities for both women and men living in one community**

Order of St Benedict

### **Communities for women**

Community of the Holy Cross

Community of St Clare

Community of the Sisters of the Love of God

Order of St Benedict

Society of the Precious Blood

Society of the Sacred Cross

### **Communities for men**

Alton Abbey

**Community of the Servants of the Will of God [no website – see *Year Book*]**

A fuller list of communities worldwide may be found in the [Anglican Religious Life Year Book](#)

### New Monasticism

New Monasticism traces its history back to the activities of the Confessional Church during the Second World War. In resistance to Nazi oppression, German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer advocated a complete lack of compromise in a life lived in accordance with the Sermon on the Mount in the discipleship of Christ.

Since then, there has been a revival in the place of Christian groups living out a sense of community, loving service, and rhythm of life. New Monasticism was recently named as a fresh expression of church, for which a number of diocesan-funded initiatives have grown up.

A prominent example is St Anselm, a residential community based in Lambeth Palace, which has given young adults selected from around the world the opportunity to live a life of prayer, community and loving service for up to a year.

This model is now being expanded to Leicester Cathedral and Sheffield Cathedral, with others also considering it.

[Discover more on new monastic communities \(for women and men, married or single\)](#)

### Benedictines

St Benedict (c, 480-543) is often called the Founder of Western Christian monasticism because he wrote *The Rule of St Benedict*, which has been widely adopted by communities for many centuries.

It was so widely adopted as a consequence of its balance and sensitive understanding of the stresses that occur in community life.

It has also proved adaptable for use by both communities that follow a life of prayer in one place and also by those with more active ministries. The Benedictine spirit is also influential on some new monastic communities.

For all Benedictines, praying the Office, the schedule of prayer times during each day, is foundational for a Christ-centred life. This emphasis on prayer is in balance with the hours of work, whether in ministries in the outside world or whether in activities within the monastic house.

The Rule also gives emphasis to each person's 'conversion of life'. Humility and obedience mark the Benedictine spirit as exemplified in the Rule. The vows that monastic Benedictines traditionally take therefore are: Stability, conversion of life and obedience.

Benedictines can be found today living a variety of forms of Religious life and there are a number of communities among Anglicans.

### **Communities for both women and men living in one community**

[Order of St Benedict](#)

### **Communities for women**

[Community of the Holy Cross](#)

[Order of St Benedict](#)

### **Communities for men**

[Alton Abbey](#)

Some communities in the UK who are active in outside ministries and who are inspired by the Benedictine Rule.

### **Communities for women**

Order of the Holy Paraclete

### **Communities for men**

Community of the Resurrection

A fuller list of communities worldwide may be found in the Anglican Religious Life Year Book

### Franciscans

St Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) is one of the most well-known of saints, particularly because of his association with the love of animals and the natural world. But he was much more than the sentimental figure sometimes represented in popular culture.

He turned his back on a comfortable life to live simply, on the move from place to place, preaching the Gospel and serving the poorest wherever he found them. This idea of a Religious, as someone not tied to a monastery or specific place, was a radical idea in his day.

Francis and his followers were not monks but friars, although they took vows as their monastic brothers did. Francis was not only a tireless advocate for the poor but a man dedicated to peace and reconciliation.

Poverty, peace and a love of the natural world were the marks of St Francis's life.

St Clare (1193-1253) was one of those captivated by Francis's preaching and message. At 18, she left behind her parent's comfortable home, gave away her possessions and began to live a life of poverty, chastity and obedience. She and the sisters who gathered around her became the first 'Poor Clares', committed to a life of prayer.

Francis wrote a Rule of Life for his brothers in 1209, which was superseded in 1223 by a fuller Rule that shapes the lives of Franciscan sisters and brothers to the present day.

- In the UK, the Society of St Francis encompasses friars and sisters dedicated to a variety of ministries
- The tradition of St Clare is found in the community at Freeland, near Oxford:
- Francis also encouraged lay people, married or single, to adopt Franciscan values whilst living in their own homes. Such followers created the tertiary movement or Third Order of Franciscans.

### Religious Life Glossary

#### **Acknowledged community**

Communities that allow for married members and where there are 'seasonal vows and promises' may apply to the Advisory Council to be 'acknowledged' communities.

This acknowledgement follows a process of discernment. This distinguishes them from communities that require a vow of celibacy and usually an eventual life commitment, which are 'recognised' communities of the Church.

#### **'Active' communities**

**These are communities that have ministries and outreach in society as a whole, as distinct from those who live a more prayer-focussed life in a monastery or convent.**

**Members of 'active' communities also have a rhythm and schedule of prayer in their lives and so some prefer the term 'mixed' life to 'active'.**

### **Advisory Council**

**A body set up by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York to be a source of advice and voluntary oversight of the Religious communities of the Church of England.**

**The Archbishops appoint four bishops to the Council, one of whom serves as chair, and the recognised communities elect other members. The Council may also co-opt a few further members who have particular skills or knowledge to be of assistance.**

**The ecumenical dimension of Religious life is usually represented by a Religious from the Roman Catholic Church also being a member. The Council publishes a Handbook of guidance for communities.**

### **Alongsider**

**A person who is accepted by a community to live 'alongside' its members for a specified period and who then participate in the life and work of the community.**

**This may or may not lead to the 'alongsider' seeking entry to the community's noviciate.**

### **Aspirant**

**A person who hopes to become a Religious and has been in touch with a particular community, but has not yet begun to live with them.**

### **Celibacy**

**The commitment to remain unmarried and to refrain from sexual relationships. It is part of the vow of chastity traditionally taken by Religious.**

**Chastity is a commitment to sexual integrity, a term applicable to fidelity in marriage as well as to celibacy in Religious Life.**

### **Chapter**

**The council or meeting of Religious to deliberate and make decisions about the community. In some orders, this may consist of all the professed members of the community; in others, the Chapter is a group of members elected by the community as a whole to be their representatives.**

### **Clothing**

**The ceremony in which a postulant of a community formally becomes a novice, and begins the period of formation in the mind, work and spirit of the community.**

**It follows the initial stage of being a postulant when the prospective member first lives alongside the community.**

**The clothing or novicing ceremony is characterised by the Religious 'receiving' the habit, or common attire, of the community.**

## **Contemplative**

**A Religious whose life is concentrated on prayer inside the monastery or convent rather than on social work or ministry outside the house.**

**Some communities were founded with the specific intention of leading a contemplative lifestyle together. Others may have a single member or small group living such a vocation within a larger community oriented to outside work.**

## **Enclosed**

**This term is applied to Religious who stay within a particular convent or monastery - the 'enclosure' - to pursue more effectively a life of prayer. They would usually only leave the enclosure for medical treatment or other exceptional reasons.**

**This rule is intended to help the enclosed Religious be more easily protected from the distractions and attentions of the outside world.**

## **Eremitic**

**The eremitic Religious is one who lives the life of a hermit, that is, largely on his or her own. Hermits usually live singly, but may live in an eremitic community, where they meet together for prayer on some occasions during each day.**

## **Evangelical Counsels**

**A collective name for the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.**

## **Habit**

**The distinctive clothing of a community. In some communities, the habit is worn at all times, in others only at certain times or for certain activities. In some communities, the habit is rarely worn, except perhaps for formal occasions.**

## **Novice**

**A member of a community who is in the formation stage of the Religious Life, when she or he learns the mind, work and spirit of the particular community whilst living among its members.**

## **Oblate**

**Someone associated closely with a community, but who will be living a modified form of the Rule, which allows him or her to live outside the Religious house.**

**Oblates are so-called because they make an oblation (or offering) of obedience to the community instead of taking the profession vows.**

**In some communities, oblates remain celibate, in others they are allowed to be married.**

**A few oblates live within a community house and then they are usually termed intern(al) oblates. The term oblate is more usually associated with**



**Benedictine communities.**

### **Office/Daily Office/Divine Office**

The round of liturgical services of prayer and worship, which mark the rhythm of the daily routine in Religious Life. Religious communities may use the services laid down by the Church or may have their own particular Office book.

The Offices may be called Morning, Midday, Evening and Night Prayer, or may be referred to by traditional names, such as Mattins, Lauds, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers and Compline.

### **Postulant**

Someone who is in the first stage of living the Religious life. The postulancy usually begins when the aspirant begins to live in community and ends when he or she becomes a novice and ‘receives the habit’.

Postulants sometimes wear a distinctive dress or else may wear secular clothes. In some communities, this phase of joining a community is covered by living as an ‘alongsider’ for a specific period.

### **Profession**

The ceremony at which a Religious makes promises (or vows) to live the Religious Life with integrity and fidelity to the Rule. The profession of these vows may be for a limited period or for life.

The usual pattern is to make a ‘first’ or simple profession in which the vows are made to the community. After three or more years a Life Profession may be made, which is to the Church and so the vows are usually received by a bishop.

In the Anglican Communion, Life Professed Religious can usually be secularized only by the Archbishop or Presiding Bishop of a Province.

### **Recognised community**

Communities that require a vow of celibacy and usually an eventual life commitment are ‘recognised communities’ of the Church. Any new community with these requirements undergoes a period of discernment under the guidance of the Advisory Council.

This ‘recognised’ status is distinct from ‘acknowledged communities’, who do not usually require celibacy and whose vows may be ‘seasonal’.

### **Religious (as in ‘a Religious’)**

The general term for a person living the Religious life.

### **Rule**

The written text containing the principles and values by which the members of a community try to live.

The Rule is not simply a set of regulations, although it may contain such, but is an attempt to capture the spirit and charism of a community in written form. Some communities follow traditional Rules, such as those of St Benedict or St Augustine, others have written their own.

## **Tertiary/Third Order**

**This term is usually associated with Franciscan communities, but is used by others too. A Third Order is made up of tertiaries, people who take vows, but modified so that they are able to live in their own homes and have their own jobs. They may also marry and have children.**

**They have a Rule of Life and are linked to other tertiaries through regular meetings. In the Franciscan family, the Third Order complements both the First Order of celibate friars and sisters and the Second Order of contemplative Religious.**

## **Vows**

**The promises made by a Religious at profession. In recognised communities, they may be poverty, chastity and obedience, known as the Evangelical Counsels.**

**In some recognised communities, they are obedience, stability and conversion of life (the Benedictine form).**

**In some new or acknowledged communities, 'seasonal vows' or promises are taken, which vary from community to community.**

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