



## The Rule

### PREAMBLE

Ordained to the Ministry of the Word and the sacraments in Christ's Church and called to such an office in Lutheran churches, and so committed to work toward the confessional and spiritual renewal of the Lutheran churches, we form together a ministerium to be known as the Society of the Holy Trinity. As members of this Society, we will:

Promote an ecclesial and pastoral piety shaped by the daily discipline of prayer and meditation on the Holy Scriptures (Chapter I).

Challenge and encourage one another to live in obedience to Jesus -- helping one another to be faithful to the promises spoken when we were ordained and seeking to live as examples to the faithful -- and to adorn with holy living the Ministry entrusted to us(Chapter II).

Gather regularly in retreat for hearing God's Word, celebrating the Lord's Supper, prayer, and theological reflection (Chapter III).

Engage in mutual pastoral visitation, in order to fulfill the commitments of the Society (Chapter IV).

Provide one another with the opportunity for individual and personal Confession and Absolution, so that we may enjoy the true "mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren" and, in turn, become faithful confessors for others (Chapter V).

Engage one another in disciplined reflection on the mysteries of the Faith, sharing our learning in the Scriptures, the Creeds and the Confessions, as well as Christian theology and literature -- desiring to glorify God with Our minds and to be more faithful and learned teachers of the Faith (Chapter VI).

Work together to shape a parish pastoral practice centered in the Word and the sacraments that is consistent with the catholic Faith as formulated in the canonical Scriptures and confessed in the ecumenical Creeds and the Lutheran Confessions (Chapter VII).

Serve the cause of Christian unity as confessing members of the western catholic Church, stopping at nothing, in so far as God and conscience allow. (cf. Augsburg Confession, Preface) (Chapter VIII).

The membership of the Society shall consist of ordained Lutheran ministers who have accepted this *Rule* and joined a specific Chapter. The work of the Society shall be under the pastoral direction of a Senior, who with a Bursar is elected by the entire Society. They shall be assisted by a Vicar, a Secretary, and an Editor appointed by the Senior. Each Chapter shall elect a Dean (Chapter IX).

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## **CHAPTER I. FORMATION IN DAILY PRAYER**

1. The Society will be bound together in common prayer. The daily prayer of the Church (the divine office or the liturgy of the hours) forms the personal discipline of the members because of its biblical content, Trinitarian and Christological orthodoxy, and roots in the catholic tradition.
  2. As pastors of the Church and leaders in prayer for the people of God, we pray the office as routinely as possible in some place of public access (e.g. in a church building or chapel) where others may join us. As often as possible, we provide for congregational celebrations of Matins, Vespers, and Compline.
  3. We will become acquainted with, and provide instruction in, the daily prayer offices, the course of psalmody, and the daily lectionaries as provided in the historic liturgy of the Church.
  4. The ideal use of the divine office is the full choral and corporate recitation. A private recitation of the office would include these elements:
    - Morning Prayer (*Matins*): Psalm 95, other Psalms, a reading from the daily lectionary, Song of Zechariah (*Benedictus*), the Prayer of the Day, other prayers, the Collect for Grace, and the Lord's Prayer.
    - Evening Prayer (*Vespers*): Psalm 141, other Psalms, a reading from the daily lectionary, Song of Mary (*Magnificat*), intercessory prayers, the collect for peace, and the Lord's Prayer.
    - Prayer at the Close of the Day (*Compline*): a prayer of confession, Psalm 4, 33, 34, 91, 134, or 136, a brief lesson, a bedtime prayer, and the Song of Simeon (*Nunc dimittis*).
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## CHAPTER II. A LIFE OF OBEDIENCE TO JESUS

We will challenge and encourage one another to live in obedience to Jesus, desiring to be examples to the faithful and to adorn with holy living the Ministry entrusted to us. Mindful of the admonition of Scripture, and the table of duties in the catechism, we will strive earnestly to:

1. Be prepared to confess Christ before the world and to give testimony to the hope that is in us. (cf. 1 Peter 3:15).
2. Lead a life worthy of the calling to which we have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (cf. Ephesians 4:1-3).
3. Do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God (cf. Micah 6:8).
4. Exercise authority wisely, not for personal whim or gain, but in praise of the Father who by the power at work in us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine (cf. Ephesians 3:20).
5. Live as a responsible citizen, pray for those in authority (cf. 1 Timothy 2:1-2).
6. Defend the poor, the weak, the orphaned, the fatherless, the widowed. (cf. James 1:27).
7. Be of a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith (cf. 1 Timothy 1:5).
8. Speak the truth in love (cf. Ephesians 4:15).
9. Live with one's conscience captive to the Word of God, praying for the courage to speak and act by such a conscience.
10. Be chaste and pure, faithful in marriage and celibate in singleness, according to the norm of Scripture and the tradition of the Church.
11. Be above reproach, of one spouse, temperate, sensible, dignified, hospitable, an apt teacher, no drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and no lover of money. (cf. 1 Timothy 3:2-3).
12. Manage our own household well -- caring, just, and loving to husband or wife; loving and respecting our children, teaching them to be obedient and respectful (cf. 1 Timothy 3:4).
13. Live simply and wisely as good stewards of personal resources and God's good earth.
14. Live in all things to yield the fruit of the Spirit: love, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-23).

Rejoicing in the fellowship of all the saints, we commend ourselves, one another and our whole life to Christ, our Lord.

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**CHAPTER III.  
GATHERING FOR RETREATS**

1. The Chapter Dean shall gather the chapter for retreat, ideally, no fewer than three times each year at a place suitable for prayer, worship, and study. Chapter retreats shall last no fewer than 24 hours. Leadership in prayer, worship, and study shall be exercised by the Dean or by one designated by the Dean. Continuity in leadership is desirable.
2. The Chapter in retreat shall pray together the daily prayer offices of the Church (Morning Prayer, Prayer at Midday, Evening Prayer, Prayer at the Close of the Day).
3. The Chapter in retreat may celebrate the Holy Eucharist.
4. The Chapter in retreat may gather for Corporate Confession and Absolution.
5. The Chapter Dean will ensure that there will be the preaching of the Word of God during the course of the retreat.
6. A place and opportunity for individual Confession and Absolution will be provided.
7. Designated times of silence will be kept for private prayer and study.
8. Bible study and theological and pastoral reflection may be provided, the Chapter members instructing and advising one another.
9. The Chapter in retreat shall eat meals in common.
10. Chapter members shall share equally in the costs and physical preparation of the retreats.
11. A Chapter meeting may be held during the course of the retreat in which matters of mutual concern, encouragement and discipline may be addressed.
12. The Senior of the ministerium shall gather the whole Society in retreat for no less than 48 hours once each year in a place suitable for prayer, worship, and study.

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**CHAPTER IV.  
MUTUAL PASTORAL VISITATION**

1. Once a year each Chapter shall welcome at retreat a member of the Society designated by the Senior in order that the work of the Chapter may be examined, and to provide continuity and communication among the Chapters.
2. Once a year each member of the Society shall welcome a visit from another member, designated by the chapter Dean or by the Senior, in order that pastors may be mutually encouraged and may examine their own ministries openly and honestly according to the commitments of the Society.

3. Each member shall be available to conduct one pastoral visit during the course of a year.
4. Once each year, during the Chapter retreat, members shall receive advice and training in the making of mutual pastoral visits.
5. Mutual pastoral visitation shall provide opportunity for members to pray together.
6. Mutual pastoral visitation shall provide opportunity for the local pastor to seek guidance in pariah ministry and in working toward the commitments of the Society.
7. Mutual pastoral visitation shall be marked by an open and honest examination of a member's work and life, excepting only those matters reserved for individual Confession and Absolution and those matters which the local pastor is bound to hold in confidence.
8. Mutual pastoral visitation within the chapter shall be scheduled by the Dean.
9. Members shall visit other members in cases of illness or other distress.
10. Mutual pastoral visitation among the chapters, and visitation to those who are geographically isolated from a chapter, shall be scheduled by the Senior.

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## **CHAPTER V. CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION**

Individual or personal confession of sins is to be kept and used by us for the sake of the absolution, which is the word of forgiveness spoken by a fellow pastor as from God himself. Therefore, members will:

1. Learn and adopt the understanding and practice of Confession and Absolution as described in the Augsburg Confession (Article XI, XII, XXV), and the Small Catechism.
2. Seek out a trustworthy pastor who will be willing to serve as a confessor and who will be able to be available for one's individual confession regularly and frequently.
3. Prepare to make individual confession by examining one's personal life and relationship with God and others in the light of the Ten Commandments. Also helpful are the penitential Psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143) and the Prayer of Manasseh in the Apocrypha.
4. In preparation for hearing the confession of others, make regular and frequent use of Confession and Absolution, keep confidences, so as to be worthy of the trust of others, read and reflect on the Holy Scriptures so as to provide a reservoir of passages with which to comfort consciences and strengthen the faith of penitents (see FC, SD XI.28-32).
5. Both as penitent and confessor, refrain from extraneous conversation so that attention is centered on the penitent's confession of sins, the Absolution or forgiveness of sins, and the confessor's use of Scripture passages which comfort

- the conscience and encourage faith in the Word of God which absolves; refrain from challenging or evaluating the confession; use the order of Confession and Absolution of the Small Catechism or that of the service books of the Church.
6. As absolved penitents, expect to be held accountable by the confessor for reconciliation with those whom we have offended and restoration of what we have taken or broken.
  7. Confession and Absolution is a sacramental rite of the Church (AP XII.4) and therefore is normally conducted in church buildings where provision can be made for privacy and confidentiality.

Since Confession and Absolution has fallen into disuse among many of us, its restoration demands utmost care and concern for both penitent and confessor. Introduction to and initial use of Confession and Absolution may call for simply following the order of Confession and Absolution lest the penitent worry about a full enumeration of sins or the confessor about comforting and encouraging with passages of Scripture.

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## **CHAPTER VI. LEARNING AND TEACHING SOUND DOCTRINE IN THE CHURCH**

1. In addition to the use of Scripture, Creed and Confession in our life of prayer, we will daily devote ourselves to systematic study of the same.
  2. We will seek to gather with fellow pastors both within and outside of our Society, both within and without the Lutheran confessional family, to encourage their study, teach them what we have learned and be taught by their learning.
  3. In this study and reflection we will make use of the Councils, Fathers and Doctors of the Church, and the Sixteenth Century Reformers and their Confessions.
  4. Recognizing the ecumenical dimension of the Church's life and theology, we will be open to contemporary voices that seek to express the Church's orthodox, catholic, and apostolic tradition.
  5. In our gatherings for retreat, we will be prepared both to participate in and to lead discussions upon the mysteries of the Faith.
  6. Since the great biblical, creedal and confessional witness is a treasure belonging to the whole Church and not just her ministers, we will make use of that same tradition in our parish teaching both in primary and ongoing catechesis and in the norming of our preaching and other pastoral practice.
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## **CHAPTER VII. PARISH PRACTICE**

In the parishes we serve we will shape our exercise of the ministry by catholic and confessional standards. Specifically we will:

1. Preach the Word of God, rightly distinguishing Law and Gospel, and minister the Sacrament of the Altar on Sundays and other holy days whenever there are those who gather to hear and to receive.
2. Baptize with water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and in no other name and with no other words.
3. Preside at the Holy Communion using bread and wine, leading the faithful in worship according to the orders and texts of the Church, as provided in her historic liturgy.
4. Offer regular opportunities for individual and personal Confession and Absolution to the faithful with instruction in the use of this means of grace.
5. Pray the daily office and provide instruction and opportunity for the faithful to pray the daily prayer of the Church.
6. Use church music and hymnody that expresses orthodox Trinitarian worship, fosters congregational participation in liturgical celebration, and does not neglect the heritage of Lutheran chant and chorale.
7. Provide sound catechesis for all candidates for baptism and confirmation, and their sponsors, guided by the catechisms of the Church catholic and especially Luther's Small and Large Catechism.
8. Provide regular instruction in Scripture, doctrine, prayer, liturgy, and morals for adult Christians, that the faithful may be prepared to account for the hope that is in them, and may grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ.
9. Engage in regular visitation of parishioners in order to provide the Word and the sacraments to the troubled, the sick, the dying, and to those who need counsel, admonishment or discipline.

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## **CHAPTER VIII. ECUMENICAL COMMITMENTS**

1. This Society, from its beginning, is committed to Lutheran unity. Our membership is drawn from any and all Lutheran church bodies, particularly in the United States and Canada.
2. We are aware that Western Christianity as a whole is in a crisis of faith and that there are movements and orders in other ecclesial traditions organized for the confessional and spiritual renewal of their churches (i.e. the churches of the

- Reformation as well as the church of Rome). We will make contact with these movements and orders and invite them to chapter retreats and special meetings.
3. At the same time, the Lutheran ecumenical vocation is the unfinished business of the sixteenth century Reformation. Together with our forebears at Augsburg in 1530, we long for that reunion of Christians in which the Gospel might have free course and for that unity for which Jesus prayed. (cf. John 17).
  4. Therefore, this ministerium is dedicated to the Lutheran vocation of reform of the Church and the Lutheran ecumenical destiny of reconciliation with the bishop and church of Rome.
  5. We support the pursuit of conversations with the Eastern Orthodox churches.
  6. Prayers for Christian unity shall be a regular part of Society and Chapter retreats.
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## **CHAPTER IX. MEMBERSHIP, LEADERSHIP, ORGANIZATION**

1. Members are those who subscribe to this Rule and strive faithfully to keep it. Members are organized in regional or local Chapters.
2. Neglect of the Rule will constitute resignation of membership in the Society.
3. Members will support the work of the Society with annual dues to be determined at the annual retreat.
4. Members shall be alert to potential members and encourage their subscription to the rule.
5. The Senior of the Society shall be elected at the general retreat by a pure ecclesiastical ballot for a term of three years. Each ballot shall be preceded by Scripture reading, a hymn and prayer for the Holy Spirit.
6. The Senior shall convene the Society once each year; schedule visitation to chapters; communicate to the membership through a newsletter, appoint a Vicar, Secretary, and Editor for terms of three years; authorize expenditures; provide for an annual independent audit of the Society's financial records.
7. The Senior shall by life and teaching give pastoral direction to the Society. The Senior shall represent the Society in its ecumenical and public affairs.
8. Should the Senior be unable to complete the term through resignation or incapacity, a new Senior shall be elected for a three year term at the next general retreat.
9. The Dean of the Chapter shall be elected by a pure ecclesiastical ballot for a term of three years. Each ballot shall be preceded by Scripture reading, a hymn and prayer for the Holy Spirit.
10. The Dean shall convene the Chapter according to the Rule, schedule mutual pastoral visitation, and be responsible for the discipline of the Chapter.
11. The Dean shall by life and teaching give pastoral direction to the Chapter.

12. Should the Dean be unable to complete the term through resignation or incapacity, a new Dean shall be elected for a three year term at the next chapter retreat. In this case, the Senior shall appoint an interim Dean.
13. The Vicar of the Society shall assist the Senior as mutually agreed and shall assume the duties of the Senior in case of incapacity or resignation until the next general retreat.
14. The Secretary of the Society shall receive applications for membership; record and deposit dues and contributions, assist the senior in communication; report annually to the Society.
15. The Editor shall publish the regular newsletter of the Society.
16. The Bursar shall be elected to a three year term by nomination and majority vote of the Society. The Bursar shall disperse funds as directed by the Senior, keep records thereof, and report annually to the Society.

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***AD GLORIAM DEI***  
***SEPTEMBER 1997***

ADOPTED AT THE FIRST GENERAL RETREAT OF THE SOCIETY OF THE HOLY TRINITY  
LOYOLA HOUSE, MORRISTOWN, NEW JERSEY  
SEPTEMBER 23, 1997