



EPISCOPAL
DIOCESE OF
NEW YORK

A GUIDE TO THE RECEPTION & OVERSIGHT OF THOSE CALLED TO THE LIFE OF A SOLITARY¹

Preface: The Solitary Life is an unusual and uncommon vocation in the life of prayer. It has connections, precedents and similarities to other vowed witnesses in Christian spirituality (e.g. - hermits, contemplatives, anchorites). The most common modern practice does not involve being a recluse.

Principles:

- ❖ The vows of a Solitary are received by the Diocesan Bishop, not in his or her person but in the “office” of the Diocesan Bishop itself.
- ❖ The Solitary will physically reside within the jurisdiction of the Diocesan Bishop who received the vows.
- ❖ Should the Solitary desire to move physically to another diocese, permission must be granted by both the sending Bishop and the receiving Diocesan Bishop in order for the Solitary’s vows to continue to be held by the Church.
- ❖ The Bishop can release a Solitary from his or her vows upon receiving a written request from the Solitary and an endorsing letter from the Solitary’s spiritual director that this decision has been reached after prayer and consultation.

Application Process & Discernment:

- **A WRITTEN STATEMENT** - should be submitted, outlining:
- a) a description of what the applicant believes the Solitary witness is...what it involves...and how it differs from other lay vocations,
 - b) how the applicant learned of this baptismal witness and how long s/he has considered applying for it (i.e. – why this ministry?, why now?),
 - c) a review of the applicant’s life, spiritual journey, ministry now & a copy of his/her Rule of Life,
 - d) a review of the applicant’s life in community, and
 - e) a description of the applicant’s work and income, with a signed statement that s/he is debt free and is registered with social security.

¹ From The Rt. Rev. Mark S. Sisk, Bishop of New York - For the Religious Life Committee – House of Bishops – Summer 2009

→ **CORROBORATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS** – Letters of reference and support should be submitted by A) the applicant’s parish priest, B) 1 layperson known to the applicant, C) 1 layperson familiar with the vocation, and D) a spiritual director.

→ **INTERVIEWS & EVALUATIONS** - 3 face-to-face interviews with persons selected by the Bishop will be required, with subsequent confidential reports to the Bishop.

→ **PSYCHIATRIC EVALUATION** - A psychiatric evaluation for suitability is required, after psychological testing has been completed. The cost of this evaluation is to be paid by the applicant.

→ **BACKGROUND CHECK** – A five-year background check is to be conducted.

→ **ANNUAL VOWS** - This vocation will be considered only after five (5) years of testing. After clearance from the initial screening and discernment stage, there will be five years of Annual Vows preceding a Life Profession.

→ **HABIT & TITLE** – The wearing of any distinctive habit – or the use of any title – is prohibited until after Life Profession. After Life Profession these customs must be limited to liturgical events and appropriate specific ecclesial occasions.

After Life Profession:

→ Each Solitary shall have his or her own **Advisory Board**, comprised of three persons, appointed by the Bishop. The Bishop will consult with the Solitary for suggestions of persons he or she would recommend to the Bishop for appointment. This Advisory Board shall meet with the Solitary (individually or together) a few times each year. However, at least once annually they will meet together, as a Board, with or without the Solitary. The Advisory Board will send an **annual letter** to the Bishop reporting on the Solitary’s ministry and welfare.

→ Each Solitary shall give written permission for the Bishop to be in contact with that Solitary’s **Spiritual Director**.

→ At the Bishop’s prerogative, the Solitary may be required to have a psychological evaluation.

→ Each Solitary shall annually submit a written **report** to the Bishop, outlining the past year’s work, describing plans for the next year, and generally updating the Bishop on this person’s witness in this particular vocation.

→ Each Solitary shall **meet** annually (during Advent) with the Bishop, or the Bishop’s representative, to review their annual report.

➔ Each Solitary shall sign a waiver stating that, while they have made Life Vows before the Bishop of _____, they do not constitute a legal or canonical entity of the Diocese of _____, do not officially represent the Bishop, and cannot claim official status in the Episcopal Church.
