

ST. BEDE ABBEY NOVITIATE POLICY

Section One: The Nature, Purpose and Length of the Novitiate

A) Nature of the Novitiate: “The novitiate, by which life in the institute begins,” (*Code of Canon Law* 646; hereafter *CIC*) is a time of initiation and discernment. The novice is initiated into the basic meaning and requirements of Benedictine life at St. Bede Abbey. Through a growing knowledge of God, of himself and of the religious life at St. Bede he seeks to discern whether God is calling him to this community. The monastic community, through prayer and experience of the novice’s way of life, seeks to discern whether he demonstrates a right intention and the ability to live monastic life at St. Bede in a way that contributes to his growth, enriches the community and serves the Church.

- B) Major Novitiate Goals: In particular, the purpose of the novitiate is to enable the novice:
- a) to develop those human and Christian attitudes and practices which will help him to grow in virtue and enable him to embrace our way of life fruitfully;
 - b) to study the monastic tradition of spirituality from its beginnings;
 - c) to learn from daily living about our community’s character and spirit, history and life, identity and mission;
 - d) to begin to discern possible ways of future service in the community and the demands that life and work in the community will make on him.

C) Length of Novitiate: The length of the novitiate is to be twelve months. “Absence from the monastery that lasts more than three months, continuous or interrupted, renders the novitiate invalid. An absence of more than fifteen days must be made up. The abbot may allow first profession to be anticipated, but not by more than fifteen days” (*The Constitutions and the Directory of the American-Cassinese Congregation* C 42). “If doubt exists concerning the novice’s suitability for profession, the period of probation may be prolonged by the abbot, after consultation with the council of seniors, but not for longer than six months. Otherwise the novice is to be dismissed” (*The Constitutions and the Directory of the American-Cassinese Congregation* C 43.3). “A novice may freely leave the monastery at any time; he may also be dismissed by the abbot” (*The Constitutions and the Directory of the American-Cassinese Congregation* C 41).

Section Two: Role of the Abbot and Community in Novitiate Formation

A) The abbot: As spiritual father of the monastery the abbot has the responsibility of seeing that the novitiate formation program is in accord with the law of the church and of our congregation and that it addresses the specific needs of the novice. The abbot appoints the novice master (*The Constitutions and the Directory of the American-Cassinese Congregation* C 39.1), may take part in the novitiate instructional program, meets monthly with the novice to discuss his experiences and progress, and may, with the chapter’s consent, admit to first profession of vows.

B) The community: All the members of the community are to be conscious of their responsibility in the formation of the novices, particularly by their prayer for them and for the novice master and by their good example. They are to cooperate with the novice master and the program of novitiate formation. Likewise, they are to respect the established nature and measure of contact with the novices (cf. *The Constitutions and the Directory of the American-Cassinese Congregation* C 56). They should be informed about the novitiate policy and the specific program for each group of novices. If they have any concerns about the novitiate program or about a novice, they are to bring them to the attention of the novice master.

Section Three: The Novice Master

A) General responsibilities: “The novice master is to have full responsibility for the administration of the novitiate and the program of formation, always under the abbot’s direction” (*The Constitutions and the Directory of the*

American-Cassinese Congregation C 39.2). Therefore, the novice master, who may be assisted by others, is responsible for the discipline, organization, direction and didactic aspects of the formation program and is to see that the purposes of the novitiate are fulfilled. “Since it is the responsibility of the master of novices to provide for the monastic formation of the novices and to assist them in the discernment of their vocation, he must be free enough from other responsibilities to serve in this position” (*The Constitutions and the Directory of the American-Cassinese Congregation D 39.1*). He is to keep in mind that all aspects of novitiate life, including informational ones, are directed primarily toward the personal growth of the novice. Through the novitiate program he should foster an environment which is conducive to the reflective approach of life that will assist the novice in his attempt to listen to God and to reflect on his calling and his experience in the community. He is to take care that the community’s novitiate policy is prudently applied to the specific circumstances of each novitiate group.

B) Consultation: The novice master is to follow a schedule of consultation:

- a) each month he will talk to the abbot about the progress of the novice;
- b) at the end of the first, third and eighth month of the novitiate he will talk with the novitiate teachers and anyone who has regular contact with the novice to seek their assessment of the novice’s progress;
- c) at the end of the fifth and tenth month he will arrange a meeting with the novitiate teachers, with those who are in regular contact with the novice, and with the abbot, so that the abbot will have full information on the status of the novice.

C) Reports: The novice master is to make the following reports:

- a) during the first month of the novitiate he will give a brief oral report to the community about the daily and class schedule of the novice; the class schedule will then be posted and kept on the novitiate bulletin board;
- b) at the end of the sixth and eleventh month he will give a report to the monastic chapter about the novice; this report will include a description of the novice’s strengths and weaknesses, his growth and any significant areas of concern. Copies of these reports are to be placed in the novice’s file.

D) Calendar: At the beginning of the novitiate the novice master will draw up a calendar indicating the dates for the consultations and reports outlined above and will give a copy of it to those involved in the consultations and reports, including the novice himself.

Section Four: The Novice and the Novitiate Program

A) Major Components of the Novitiate Program: In pursuit of the novitiate’s goals, the novice is to take an active part in and contribute to the novitiate program of formation. This program has the following major components:

1) Program for Human Spiritual Growth: Major ways in which this growth is to be fostered and assessed are:

- a) regular and frequent private conferences with the novice master, in which the issue of human maturity is related to spiritual growth in the context of the novice’s daily life, and in which the novice is encouraged to share his experiences of novitiate prayer, work and community living;
- b) attention to the way the novice handles personal relationships, social interaction with the community, study, personal and liturgical prayer, and work;
- c) assistance to the novice, through study and discussion, in clarifying his motivation;
- d) a monthly day of recollection that will include a conference with the novice master or abbot.

2) Program of Studies: Since the novices are to receive thorough formation in the elements of the monastic life, and their entire formation is to be animated by the Scriptures and the liturgical life of the church (cf. *The Constitutions and the Directory of the American-Cassinese Congregation C 40*), the novitiate study program, adapted to

the needs of the particular novice, is to include instruction concerning: monastic history and spirituality, the *Rule* of St. Benedict, the proper law of our congregation, the traditions and works of our monastery, an introduction to Scripture (especially the Psalms), to liturgy and to spirituality, and the meaning and obligations of monastic profession. These studies are to be complemented by reading in common from the Bible, ancient monastic authors and other appropriate literature.

3) Work program: In keeping with the *Rule* of St. Benedict, the novice is to spend several hours a day in work. The work program should aim to bring together the abilities of the novice and the needs of the community so that the novice may make a real contribution to the community by his work. The work is to be such that it will not distract the attention of the novice from the goals of the novitiate. The novice may work with a variety of community members, but at least on occasion the novice master should work with the novice. "No one except the abbot and master of novices and those specifically designated by them may impose tasks on the novice" (*The Constitutions and the Directory of the American-Cassinense Congregation* D 39.2).

B) Schedule of the Day: The daily schedule for the novitiate, arranged by the novice master, is to be integrated into that of the community. While including time for classes and work, the schedule should respect the novice's need for privacy, *lectio*, personal prayer and leisure, and should contribute to a reflective atmosphere.

C) Community and Novitiate Observances: Initiation into the community's way of celebrating the liturgy and into its other customs, usages and etiquette, begun in the postulancy, should be continued as needed in the novitiate. The novice master is to make clear to the novice what is expected of him at this stage in his formation in the matter of observances. In general the novice is to follow the regulations laid down for all community members, with the following special provisions for the novitiate:

- a) Clothing: The novice does not wear religious garb but clean lay clothes. At liturgical functions (except Midday prayer) and in class, dress slacks and a good shirt or sweater are to be worn. A tie and sport coat are to be worn on Sundays and other major celebrations, e.g., Christmas.
- b) Supplies: Necessary supplies not available in the community store (*spelunca*) are to be requested from the novice master.
- c) Money and gifts: Money deposited by the novice at the beginning of the novitiate and monetary gifts received in its course are kept for the novice by the novice master. Permission to keep other gifts is to be sought from the novice master.
- d) Smoking: The novice is not to smoke.
- e) Recreation: Novices usually recreate with the monastic community. Depending on circumstances, the novice master may at times make other provisions.
- f) Visits: The immediate family of the novice may visit him once or twice in the year. Other visits are to take place only with the novice master's permission.
- g) Mail: Incoming mail is distributed by the novice master; outgoing mail is given to him sealed.
- h) Phone calls: Generally the novice is not to make or receive phone calls without permission of the novice master. The novice should inform family and friends of this policy.
- i) Radio, CD player, television, and desktop computer/laptop: The novice is not to have a radio, CD player, or television in his room. A CD player for common use and appropriate tapes are available for occasional use in the recreation areas of the monastery. Generally the novice will not watch television unless he has the permission of the novice master. The possession and use of a desktop computer or laptop belonging to the novice before entrance into the novitiate will be determined on case by case basis. Generally speaking the novice will not be allowed the use of a computer in the monastery computer lab.
- j) Absence from the property: Permission must be obtained from the novice master for leaving the St. Bede grounds.
- k) Service at the Liturgy and Table: When the novice master considers him to be sufficiently prepared, the novice will begin to serve at Mass and read at Office, as well as serve and read at table.
- l) Community and chapter meetings: Unless the abbot decides otherwise in a particular case, the novice is to attend community workshops and meetings. He will attend chapter meetings only when

the abbot requests his attendance. The abbot will inform the novice master to what extent the contents of a chapter meeting are to be made known to the novice.

m) Confessors: The abbot will recommend certain priest-monks from among whom the novice may choose a regular confessor. If the novice wishes someone else as a regular confessor, he should consult the novice master.

Section Five: Transition to the Juniorate

A) Self-Evaluation by the novice: In the last quarter of the novitiate year the novice, under the direction of the novice master, will engage in a special process of self-evaluation. This may include consideration of possible future work and ministry in the community. At the conclusion of the evaluation the novice may apply in writing to the abbot for admission to temporary vows for two years.

B) Evaluation by the abbot and chapter: In the eleventh month of the novitiate the novice master will make a report to the chapter on the novice's readiness for profession. "The abbot, with the consent of the monastic chapter, may admit a novice who has completed the novitiate to first profession. If a novice is judged suitable by the monastic chapter and the abbot, he is admitted to first profession in accordance with the proper law of the Congregation" (*The Constitutions and the Directory of the American-Cassinense Congregation* C 43.2). "If doubt exists concerning the novice's suitability for profession, the period of probation may be prolonged by the abbot, after consultation with the council of seniors, but not for longer than six months. Otherwise the novice is to be dismissed" (*The Constitutions and the Directory of the American-Cassinense Congregation* C 43.3).

C) Date and planning of profession: The day and hour of the profession is established by the abbot. The novice master, in consultation with the choir master and liturgy committee, is to coordinate the arrangements for first profession, which is to be a modest celebration with attendance limited to the monastic community, immediate family and close friends.

D) Cessation of Administration of Temporal Goods: "Before his temporary profession a novice is to sign a document, valid in civil law, ceding the administration of his temporal goods to whomever he chooses and making disposition of their use and revenues (*CIC* 668.1). "He is likewise to make provision for the disposition of any income that may accrue to by way of pensions, subsidy, or insurance in any way whatever" (cf. *CIC* 668.3) (*The Constitutions and the Directory of the American-Cassinense Congregation* D 54.1).

E) Retreat: Prior to profession the novice is to make a five-day retreat, which will be arranged by the novice master.

F) Communication with the Junior Master: After the novice has been accepted for profession, the novice master will give his file to the junior master. The novice master will also discuss with the junior master the future junior's particular needs and how these may be addressed in the juniorate program.