



Commentary & Reflections

From the Abbot General
Grey Robe Monks of St. Benedict



Since the establishment of the Grey Robe Monks of St. Benedict in 2002, the Holy Spirit has been moving with great power in our order. The Grey Robes has grown from the original eight members in the Charter Community of Luz de Cristo, to 160 in Arizona, California, Colorado, Georgia, Florida, New York, Kansas, Oregon and Cameroon, Africa. We are comprised of ordained and lay professed members from every denomination. The Lord, and St. Benedict, has blessed us abundantly. And, with new blessings come new challenges.

The diversity we share in size, scope and distance requires us to communicate more often, and clearly, to ensure we are together as an order. While each of the communities is self-directed in most things, they are also part of a larger group that relies on a consistent message to validate our common purpose. With this in mind, I am beginning the process of periodic reflections and commentary. They will provide general comment on the questions and concerns raised by community members and/or reflection on the Rule. Thus, I will dedicate this first commentary on some general questions that have surfaced in the past few months.

Q: Why do we use the term vow rather than commitment?

A: The term vow comes from the earliest traditions in monasticism. Vows express our deepest allegiance to the Order and Rule. Consequently, they should not be taken lightly. Commitment is a more modern term and gives the appearance of being less binding than vows. From a contemporary point of view, it has become common place to shrug off commitments.

The Vow of Obedience in the Grey Robes means obedience to God, the superiors of the order and to the needs of our sister and brother Benedictines.

The Vow of Poverty comes from Benedict himself. Poverty also transcends the modern understanding of the term. For Benedictines it is not just living simply but detachment from things we desire, both internally and externally. Poverty in monasticism is the work of ridding oneself from harmful and binding attitudes, actions and material things. Poverty is the toil of becoming completely “unselfish” in thought, word, deed and possessions.

Q: Why do we use a Rule?

Benedictine Spirituality is tough stuff, and the Rule helps us stay focused and on track. The word Rule is derived from a Latin term meaning trellis. St. Benedict saw the wisdom in this term as he developed the Rule. Each member grows in their own way, but within the confines of the trellis, much like a climbing rose bush. If it stays connected to the trellis it adds to the beauty of the whole piece. If it branches out on its own, it becomes a distraction and needs to be pruned to return its growth and beauty to the whole.

Q: When is it appropriate to wear the habit?

Professed members and novices may wear the habit anytime. The Charter and Rule outlines the specific times and events where the habit must be worn by the community. The community superior may also add to those times whenever it is deemed appropriate. Currently, some communities wear the habit when they are engaged in community service with the homeless or some other social justice ministry.

For the ordained members of the order, the habit should never be substituted for liturgical vestments while presiding, or concelebrating, at the Eucharist or other liturgical celebrations.