



The Priory

The **base ecclesial communities** are different in form to that of the intentional communities.

They are less structured and in some ways function more like what we popularly understand by small fellowship groups. But they are different from fellowship groups in that they have a much greater emphasis on solidarity and common ministry. While the base ecclesial communities are usually associated with the emergence of the church of the poor in Latin America, they have, in fact, sprung up all over the world.

The base ecclesial communities are more practically described as consisting of ten to thirty persons who share a common faith in the God of Jesus, who relate deeply to one another in the form of spiritual and practical care and who seek together to minister to their neighbourhood. They are more theoretically described as a new and original way of being church which is gathered around word and sacrament and which focuses on the ministries of lay people. Such communities utilize participatory processes, and decisions for their life and ministry are made by the people themselves.

For many members in base ecclesial communities in the church catholic involvement in these communities is based on a dual experience: on the one hand, they still relate to the church as an institutional, sacramental and priestly reality; on the other hand, they experience church as people in solidarity with each other and in their particular neighbourhoods.

By contrast, where the more evangelical are involved in intentional communities, base ecclesial communities or house churches, these tend to be their sole and distinct way of being church.

There are undoubtedly multiple reasons for this difference. One is that the Church catholic has traditionally been structured on diversity while retaining and sacramental centre. The more evangelical on the other hand, base church on a uniform reality and consequently have adopted the splinter principle.

Our experience is not to desire to further the scars of further possible or perceived splintering. Here, the model of a Base Ecclesial Community and the experience of monastery have found a synthesis for us.

Apart from our Abbey on the Bellarine Peninsula in Victoria we have several who have asked to be Solitaries with us. We also support the growth of a priory in localities where people feel they can come together.

A Priory is for us a **basic Christian community** brought together with a prior/prioress that uses aspects of monastic spirituality to foster a godly everyday ordinary life with a care for others.

Priory is a term from the monastic tradition. It denotes a smaller community of monastics that are attached to a larger monastic community. Basic Christian Community is a term of the Latin America but more directly has its roots in the early Christian community as described above.

The general characteristics of a Priory are:

Instead of being built primarily around Bible study or the examination of a specific topic, the Priory meets around a shared meal and prayer generally using the Daily Office.

The Priory is designed to foster friendship - a bond on non-intrusive but tangible care between friends with the assumption that in discipleship more is caught than is taught.

The Priory generally meets at least once a month. This is to give enough time for the companions to grow in friendship but allow freedom in one's life for all the many varied other commitments in each one's life and especially for friendship with other people, care of family, sport, gardening, commitment to the community in general, etc..

Each member makes a non-threatening covenant with other companions to attend the meetings of the group and fulfill any other commitments the groups agree to. This covenant is central to the aim of the Priory and will foster and strengthen the bonds of friendship and ignite a cord of collective discipleship.

The Priory intentionally encourages each of the members to commit to and live out the Rule of Life which is based on the Celtic Saint - Columba of Iona - and his rule.

The Priory prays the Office when together, and each member is encouraged to pray it at home. If possible the Priory shares in the Eucharist.

Each Priory is led by a person who will not only serve as organizer and facilitator for priory meetings, but will act as a kind of '*anam-cara*' – soul friend seeking to encourage and strengthen each companion in their pilgrimage and help the group grow together into deeper bonds of a true and life-long friendship. The group leader is called and installed as Prior/Prioress.

Each Priory will do gently reach out together through genuine care and in a spirit of true hospitality and to serve the surrounding community in whatever ways build up the lives of others in their circle of life or the broader community in which they live...

Ways to position yourself within our network

When you become part of the Patmos Companions – the Order of St Columba, there are some areas which may relate to you:

You are able:

- 1 Stay in Your Own Home
- 2 Remain in Your Own Denomination
- 3 Discern and Shape your own way of service (with help)
- 4 Choose your Own Level of Commitment

and you do all this in a supportive environment, with spiritual friends and advisors of your own choosing.

As you may see, the Order of St Columba is an association for men, women and couples who desire to pursue their vocations as individuals in companionship rather than in a more traditional religious community.

Members live at home and might worship in the denominations of their choice. Unlike the more traditional religious communities our Community does not require all members to undertake the greatest

level of commitment. Each member selects the appropriate 'entry-point' for them. It is more likely however that one's desire for disciplined commitment will grow, rather than diminish, and we are all encouraged to deepen our level of service and attachment.

Alternatively a member may choose to be totally dedicated for a particular length of time. The idea is to give oneself a solid grounding in spiritual life and practice, in a concentrated way, before moving 'out' or 'back' into more apparently 'normal' society, so as to practice the life of dedicated service. To become a kind of hidden servant of those one meets following the ancient wisdom "After enlightenment, the marketplace".

If you feel that God may be calling you to some form of pilgrimage in this network of Companions you may wish:

- to consult wise spiritual friends, or
- you may wish to contact us,
- you may wish to begin by taking part in the e-mail group, or
- to email either the Abbot or one of our Priors who may live in close proximity to you.

You are encouraged to look for:

- a spiritual friend - or soul friend - with whom you can speak about every aspect of your life - not just those parts of it that you are used to thinking of as 'spiritual'.
- You will also need an ongoing Spiritual Director from your own tradition (or from the Community, if you are exploring life in a particularly Celtic way already)

COMPANIONS OF THE COMMUNITY:

Professed Companions of the Order of St Columba are Christians are closely connected to the Community. Companions usually engage in a servant or contemplative ministry of their own and participate in community activities, including offering guidance to other members. We are also exploring the creative overlap with other like-minded communities which so far has been of dynamic emotional support to us. Exploring and giving thanks!

Professed Members are Servants of the Community. Professed Members may also guide others, in lieu of independent Spiritual Advisors and Mentors. Servants are seriously engaged with their vocation within the Community context. Like Companions they follow a "Rule of Life" and are guided by a Spiritual Director. They may call on the Community for assistance with their personal ministries, provide guidance for friends and Companions, and are also expected to take part in major decisions which are likely to affect all members of the Community.

Companions-in-Association (Associates) like Novices; and like non-professed Oblates. I really dislike fancy names, but what can one do?) Some people need the personal affirmation of a descriptive title, most of us like to be reminded that we are part of a spiritual family and these forms of security are encouraged. We must, however, be mindful of what I have said in our Rule of Life with warning against being pleased with the titles and yet not fully dedicated to the way of life. That's why there is such potential for a long period of companionship before final commitment. In the end, what each individual may choose to be called - 'Sister', 'Brother', 'Dom', 'Mother', or the like, is really dependent on the denomination of the member, and on what feels most comfortable personally.

Membership of Patmos Companions – the Order of St Columba is not exclusive. That is, it is possible for an entire community or monastery to become part of the Community, whether for the purpose of sharing in the teaching or healing ministries offered, or in offering the service of their own particular charism or

insight. What is more, any member may be (and often is) a member of another order or society. For example, one may be associated with one of the Benedictine Orders, Franciscan, Salvation Army Ranks etc, and still be entitled to full professed membership of Patmos Companions – the Order of St Columba. Indeed, you will be very readily accepted among us in such a case.

Where to begin:

- Pray.
- Think it over. Make lists, pro and anti, ask yourself what is attracting you, and what that implies about your own vocation.
- Find someone you trust, and ask them if they're willing to walk the Christian walk with you. Be sure that this is a wise and straightforward person, as well as being someone you like to be with.
- Ask God to send you the right *Anam Cara* Spiritual Director for you. Then start looking, and asking and researching right now. "When the pupil is ready the teacher appears."
- It is probably a good idea to have access to a wise counsellor anyway. Especially if this person is sympathetic to the fundamental notion of a consecrated or dedicated way of life...
- See what happens...!!

Feast of St Brigid, 2011