

CONSTITUTION OF THE ORATORY SOCIETY

A Religious Society of the Old Catholic Apostolic Church



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1. FOUNDATION AND PATRONAGE

1.1 The Oratory Society is a religious Society founded by the late Bishop Pat Buckley in June 1986. The Oratory Society is a religious society of the Old Catholic Apostolic Church.

1.2 The Patriarch of the Old Catholic Apostolic Church shall be the earthly Patron of the Society, to whom the Society looks for spiritual oversight and communion.

1.3 The Constitution and Canons of the Oratory Society shall always be consonant with the Canons of the Old Catholic Apostolic Church.

2. NATURE AND PURPOSE

2.1 The Oratory Society is an inclusive Christian community rooted in the rich traditions of the Catholic Church while embracing a contemporary vision for today.

2.2 Comprising ordained pastors and laypeople, the Oratory Society is dedicated to upholding the sacraments and teachings passed down from the apostles. We govern ourselves while remaining in full spiritual communion with the broader Church.

2.3 We hold a deep reverence for the sacraments and celebrate the Eucharist in our welcoming chapels known as Oratories—spaces where Christian communities come together to hear the Word of God and to receive the sacred sacraments.

2.4 At the heart of the Oratory Society is an unwavering commitment to embracing all individuals. Everyone, irrespective of age, gender, background, or life story, is welcomed with open hearts.

3. SPIRITUAL ETHOS

3.1 The life of the Oratory Society is rooted in:

- the Gospel of Jesus Christ;
- a sacramental and eucharistic vision of Christian life;
- respect for conscience; and
- a commitment to inclusion, reconciliation, and peace.

3.2 The Oratory seeks to be a stable, sacramental, and inclusive expression of the Church, rooted in prayer and accountable in its life together.

3.3 We are a community gathered for prayer, sacramental life, and the proclamation of the Gospel, offering a home particularly to those who have felt marginalised or wounded by their church.

4. STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE

4.1 Episcopal Oversight

Overall pastoral oversight rests with the Bishop of the Oratory Society, who exercises authority in a spirit of service, collegiality, and consultation. The Bishop is accountable to the Patron and to the members of the Society.

4.2 Decision-Making

Decisions affecting the life of the Society should be made with appropriate consultation of clergy and lay members, proportionate to the matter at hand. Where possible, decisions shall be reached by consensus; where consensus cannot be achieved, the Bishop and a governing body shall decide.

4.3 Autonomy of Oratories

Each Oratory operates within the life of the wider Society and in communion with its Bishop, with freedom to develop its own particular character and ministries appropriate to its local context.

5. MEMBERSHIP

5.1 Categories Membership of the Oratory Society includes:

- Ordained ministers who serve the Society; and
- Lay members who participate in its worship and life.

5.2 Basis of Membership

Membership is based on shared commitment rather than uniformity of background, opinion, or experience. No one shall be excluded on grounds of gender, sexuality, marital status, disability, race, or previous church affiliation.

5.3 Admission:

A person may be received as a member if they:

- have worshipped with the Oratory regularly for a period of time;
- understand the ethos and the commitments;
- agree to safeguarding expectations and the Code of Conduct; and
- are willing to be accountable in the life of the community and declare so in a simple declaration of intent.

6. ORATORIES

6.1 Definition

Local communities of the Society shall be known as Oratories. An Oratory is a physical place where members gather regularly for:

- the celebration of the Eucharist;
- prayer and the Word of God; and
- fellowship and pastoral care.

6.2 Real-World Communities

Oratories are real-world communities. We serve in the places where people actually live, work, struggle, rejoice, and hope. Our ministers are present in real life and rooted in the lived experience of those they serve. Our focus is on authentic pastoral presence grounded in relationships.

6.3 Welcoming Spaces

Oratories are welcoming chapels where Christian communities come together to hear the Word of God and to receive the sacred sacraments. They are spaces marked by warmth, inclusion, and the recognition that everyone, irrespective of age, gender, background, or life story, is welcomed with open hearts.

7. MINISTRY

7.1 Purpose

Ministry within the Oratory Society exists for the building up of the community and the service of others.

7.2 Ecumenical and collaborative ministry

The ministry of the Oratory Society includes ecumenical participation and collaboration with other Christian communities, including occasions where we are invited to lead, preach, read, or assist in worship within other denominations, and where we welcome others to minister among us.

Such ministry is exercised in accordance with the safeguarding policies and standards of the Oratory Society and the Old Catholic Apostolic Church.

8. SAFEGUARDING AND CONDUCT

8.1 Commitment

The Oratory Society is committed to the safety, dignity, and well-being of all people. Appropriate safeguarding policies and a Code of Conduct shall be maintained and observed by all members and ministers.

8.2 Code of Conduct

All members and ministers are expected to:

- act with integrity, honesty, and respect;

- treat others with dignity and compassion;
- behave in ways consistent with the Gospel and the mission of the Oratory; and
- avoid conduct that could bring harm, distress, or disrepute to others or to the Society.

8.3 Respect and Inclusion

Members and ministers must:

- respect differences of background, belief, experience, and identity;
- refrain from discrimination, harassment, or abusive behaviour; and
- engage disagreement with charity and humility.

8.4 Boundaries and Power

Those in positions of leadership or ministry must be particularly mindful of boundaries and the responsible use of power, avoiding manipulation, coercion, or exploitation, and never using a pastoral or ministerial role for personal advantage.

8.5 Accountability

Members and ministers are accountable to one another and to the Bishop. Concerns about conduct should be raised in a timely, honest, and appropriate manner, with a preference for resolution that is restorative rather than punitive, wherever possible.

8.6 Breaches

Breaches of the Code of Conduct may result in pastoral conversation, formal review, suspension, or removal from roles of responsibility, as deemed appropriate by the Bishop.

9. PROPERTY AND FINANCE

9.1 Use of Resources

Any property or finances held by the Oratory Society are to be used solely in furtherance of its mission and ministry.

10. COMMUNICATIONS AND OUTREACH

10.1 Data Protection

The Society shall process personal data in accordance with applicable data protection legislation, holding only the minimum necessary data to enable the efficient running of the Society and communication with members. Such data shall never be used for any other purpose.

10.2 Confidentiality

Confidential information shared in pastoral, ministerial, or personal contexts must be treated with care and respect. Confidentiality should only be broken when there is a risk of serious harm, safeguarding obligations require it, or the law requires disclosure (See 10.4 & 10.4 below).

10.3 The Sacrament of Reconciliation (seal of confession)

What is disclosed in the Sacrament of Reconciliation is received under the seal of confession and must never be disclosed. This seal is absolute.

10.4 Clarifying the boundary

Members of the Society should make reasonable efforts to ensure that penitents understand when a conversation is ordinary pastoral care and when it is the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

10.5 Online Presence

We value the use of social media and online presence as tools for connection and communication, extending our welcome and ministry beyond the physical walls of our Oratories while maintaining appropriate boundaries and professionalism.

11. AMENDMENTS

11.1 This Constitution may be amended from time to time as the life of the Oratory Society develops.

11.2 Any amendment should reflect the spirit and purpose of the Society and be adopted through a consultative and prayerful process, with the approval of the Bishop and notification to the Patron. All amendments must be shown in the version control of this document.

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