



# The Society of the Holy Trinity

*A collaboration of Anglican New Monastic Communities*

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## 1. Name

The Society of the Holy Trinity ("SoHT").

## 2. Objects and Purpose

SoHT is an Anglican order and movement of new monastic communities in urban areas that are intensifying people's discipleship in the service and the mission of the Church in the context of the Kingdom of God.

## 3. Membership

### 3.1. Constituent Communities

3.1.1 SoHT is constituted (comes into existence) when there are 3 constituent communities.

3.1.2 Constituent communities are expected to:

- Abide by the Constitution
- Adopt the Rhythm of Life ("ROL") of SoHT
- Pray regularly for SoHT and its constituent communities
- Offer where possible practical support to constituent communities to encourage one another
- Commit to participate in 6-monthly meetings of the Chapter.

3.1.3 New constituent communities will need to have at least 3 professed members (see 3.2.5) and at least 3 more professed and/or participant members (see 3.2.4) to be recognised as a constituent community, and be committed to owning the SoHT Rhythm of Life ("ROL") and its Constitution. It is expected that a new community will discern and prepare for around a year before making their first profession to the Seasonal Vows, and where necessary this should also allow for others to make promises consistent with the different spaces of belonging (see 3.2).

3.1.4 New constituent communities are often birthed by a founder, who may be lay or ordained, and begin as either a local initiative or as an intention of a particular parish, deanery or diocese. In such situations these 'Pioneers' will need to be formally recognised and included in the SoHT (see 3.2.1).

To become recognised, a Pioneer must have:

- Actively begun the process of building a new monastic community, beginning with an invitation to seek new participants to join in.
- Evidence that they have made connections with the local Anglican context and leadership which may include Parish Priest, Archdeacon, Bishop, Diocesan Missioner or Fresh Expressions Enabler.
- a distinctive Anglican element to the identity of the emerging community and in the case of the start of an ecumenical community, this must have begun to seek a connection to the local parish/deanery/diocese.
- Formally met a member of the Chapter and ideally been in communication with the elected Guardian of the SoHT.

The status of a recognised pioneer must be discussed and confirmed by the Chapter.

3.1.5 In time, each constituent community may form a local constitution which is consistent with this Constitution. This local constitution may be used to bring clarity to contextually determined governance issues. All local constitutions must be submitted to the Chapter for approval.

3.1.6 The Chapter of SoHT shall consist of the elected Prior (see 4.2.1) and one elected professed member from each constituent community and any recognised Pioneers setting up new communities.

3.1.7. Every 2 years, there should be a gathering of SoHT open to all those involved in the various constituent communities or Pioneers.

## 3.2 Individuals

In each community it is envisaged that there will be different spaces of belonging in each constituent community. These spaces are to be kept fluid and responsive to the needs of the individual members in conversation with the constituent community Council.

### 3.2.1 Pioneers

As stated earlier, this is the category for those seeking to found new constituent communities in a new context who are either lay or ordained leaders (see 3.1.4).

### 3.2.2 Associates

Those who are wanting to support SoHT but live too far away to fully participate in a community, or who have formally begun training for ministry in the Church and are unable to participate locally at the moment. Such Associates will have a formal relationship with a particular constituent community.

### 3.2.3 Companions

Those who do not identify themselves as being Christian or who have not yet committed to follow the way of Jesus, and who may have not experienced any form of Christian initiation. In the Anglican tradition, Christian initiation includes baptism and confirmation. In this space those involved are committing to explore the Christian faith by engaging and entering dialogue with the community and attending dialogue and other opportunities. When ready, Companions will be invited to explore making a commitment to being a follower of Jesus through baptism and/or confirmation (if within the Anglican tradition or equivalent if in an ecumenical community), and then will be invited to become a Participant of the community.

### 3.2.4 Participants

Those who would describe themselves as Christian and followers of the Christian faith. This space is for those who have been initiated into the Christian faith but are not yet ready to make commitments to the Seasonal Vows, but ready to commit to regularly attend worship, mission and community life and activities of the community. New Participants will undergo a period of discernment, guided by their constituent community, but not normally shorter than 6 months and normally a year before making Seasonal Vows.

Participants are expected to make a yearly commitment at the Annual Commitment Service (see 3.3.2).

Participants are encouraged not to remain in this space for more than 1 or 2 years, as it is also a space to discern whether they feel called to a New Monastic form of Christian discipleship.

### 3.2.5 Professed

Those who are Christian and are committing to the ROL and make Seasonal Vows for the next year (see 3.3.1).

### 3.2.6 Registration

Each constituent community will keep a register of members, which will also be kept by the Chapter.

## 3.3 Seasonal Vows & Promises

In accordance with the published guidance compiled for the Advisory Council for Religious Communities of the Church of England (“Advisory Council”), the meaning of Seasonal Vows and Promises is important.

### 3.3.1 Seasonal Vows

These are important commitments made to God by individuals and communities before a Bishop or a Bishop’s representative and should not be made lightly or without due discernment. Seasonal vows are made for a set period of time, usually for a year but could be up to 3 years depending on the practice of the particular constituent community, which will reflect a commitment to the disciplines and charisms of the SoHT, (see the ROL). Seasonal Vows are made by those wishing to be Professed

(see 3.2.5). Seasonal Vows are made in an Annual Commitment Service, again, depending on the practice of the constituent community.

### 3.3.2 Promises

These are more general commitments made by Associates (see 3.2.2), Companions (see 3.3.3) and Participants (see 3.3.4). These are expected to be included into the Annual Commitment Service, depending on the practice of the constituent community.

Those wishing to become Companions can make such commitments before representatives of their constituent community outside of the regular Annual Commitment Service.

### 3.3.3 Renewal of Seasonal Vows and Promises

It is expected that each member of a constituent community will renew their Seasonal Vows/Promises annually and have a time to consider this before renewal. However, the Prior from time to time may need to encourage further discernment in a member regarding their spirit of engagement with the ROL. In exceptional circumstances, in consultation with, and in the presence of, the Episcopal Visitor, or someone the Episcopal Visitor has appointed in their stead, the Prior, as representative of the constituent community, may refuse to allow a member to renew their vows for a time, or permanently.

## 4. Leadership

### 4.1 Leadership of the Chapter

The Chapter consist of all Priors and one elected member (see 4.1.3) from each constituent community and any recognised Pioneers setting up new communities. The Chapter should meet no less than twice a year.

#### 4.1.1 Guardian

The Guardian is elected from the Priors of the chapter. The Guardian will be elected for a term of at least 3 years, which can be extended but will need re-election of the Chapter.

The role is to act as custodian of the ROL and Constitution, and to assist in the strategic support, encouragement, development and growth of constituent communities, and the planting and developing of new ones through the support of Pioneers. The Guardian will act as a representative to the wider church, and will be an important voice of wisdom and encouragement, who, with the Episcopal Visitor, provides oversight for SoHT.

The role will be held in keeping as that specified for the Leader of Acknowledged Religious Communities in 'A Handbook of the Religious Life' (latest edition) ("the Handbook")

#### 4.1.2 Secretary

The Secretary will be elected or co-opted by the Chapter to assist in the communication and administration of SoHT. This role will include the formulation of agendas, minutes and reports. The Secretary will work closely with the Guardian in the planning and administration of Chapter meetings and associated accommodation issues when required. It is proposed that the role holder commit to a term of 3 years to be reviewed and possibly extended at the end of this term of office.

#### 4.1.3 Elected members

The elected member from each constituent community must be a professed member of their local Community Council (see 4.2). This election is for a period of 3 years. In the event that an elected member has to step down from this role, there will need to be a local election where a replacement will be sought to ideally serve a full term of 3 years.

### 4.2 Leadership of Constituent Communities

Each constituent community will have its own the 'Community Council'. These will differ in form and legality depending on the nature of particular local expression of the community. For example, if it were a Bishops Mission Order a community would have differing legal governance systems to one which was part of a Parish

Church. These 'Community Councils' are the decision-making body of each constituent community, made up of Professed and Participant members. Community Councils should meet no less than twice a year.

The titles given to roles of responsibility are based on the advice of the Advisory Council in the 'Sharing the Spirit' document, but local variations may be used colloquially if there is significant pastoral need. In the interest of uniformity and shared life, the following titles are to be adopted officially. It is envisaged that all three leading roles will be elected positions once constituent communities have been formed and will be known as the 'Standing Council'.

#### 4.2.1 Prior

A Prior is elected from the Professed members of each constituent Community Councils for a period of 3 years. The Prior acts as the Chair of the Standing Council (see 4.3). In situations when the community is in formation and not yet able to vote/appoint leaders, the Prior may choose to appoint the sub-Prior as locally determined.

#### 4.2.2 Sub-Prior

The Sub-Prior/s is/are the Prior's deputy/ies and responsible for overseeing the constituent community when the Prior is absent. The Sub-Prior/s is/are part of the Standing Council and leading group and plays an important part of overseeing the welfare of the constituent community in its worship, mission and community life, and particularly for those in the different spaces of belonging, who have made various commitments and promises for the year ahead. It is expected that the Sub-Prior be a professed member of the community or a Pioneer.

#### 4.2.3 Dean

The Dean is elected by the constituent Community Council and is also a member of the Standing Council. They are largely responsible for sustaining the governance of the Community Council and acts as the Chair of the constituent Community Council, ensuring administration of meetings, agendas, and meetings. Regarding constituent Community Council's the Dean is tasked to:

- Plan and ensure that constituent Community Councils happen with reliability, ensuring that the agenda includes elements from Professed members, and Participant members.
- Ensuring that accurate minutes and action points are completed.
- Assist in the organisational development of the constituent community, and its participation in the Parish/Deanery/Diocese as appropriate.
- Together with the Sub-Prior, assisting the Prior in maintaining, developing and administrating of appropriate means of religious discipline to enable and encourage members' adherence to the ROL.

### 4.3 Local Standing Council

#### 4.3.1 Function

The Standing Council is responsible for governance of the constituent community and ensuring good order and compatibility with the Constitution. It will oversee the drawing up of any local constitution and ensure the four SoHT policies around healthy communities are followed (see appendices). The Standing Council also has collective responsibility to manage any breakdown in community life, and in particular the Code of Conduct (appendix 3) and the Discipline Policy (appendix 4).

#### 4.3.2 Membership

The usual ordering of the Standing Council will be the elected Prior, Sub-Prior/s and Dean (and Safeguarding Representative if explicable). This group will also be expanded in situations of challenging decision-making and may include the Episcopal Visitor, Local Archdeacon and, if the Standing Council does not include a clergy person licensed to the Parish, the Incumbent or Priest in Charge. The Discipline Policy also includes the appointment of an External Person by the Prior/Sub-Prior/Dean and approved by the local Archdeacon (see appendix 4).

#### 4.3.3 In situation of vacancies

In situations where one of the elected roles of Prior, Sub-Prior or Dean is unfilled where there is a residential community in existence or coming into existence, then an additional person will be appointed to the Standing Council on a temporary basis until the elected position is filled. This temporary position is to be appointed by the existing Standing Council in consultation with the Guardian and, if necessary, the Episcopal Visitor.

#### 4.3.4 The House Council

In situations where two or more of the Standing Council are living in the same community residential setting, then the formation of a House Council will be required to be responsible for instigating and sustaining healthy community as specified in the Code of Conduct (appendix 3) and the Discipline Policy (appendix 4) and any other requirements of the local constitution for that residential setting. (Note: this will not affect the functions of the Standing Council in its responsibilities outside of the particular residential setting).

##### 4.3.4.1 Membership

Members of the House Council will be appointed by the Standing Council as agreed with the local Archdeacon, the Guardian and the Episcopal Visitor and should include:

- The Incumbent of the Parish irrespective of whether they have been elected to the Standing Council and irrespective of whether they are part of the constituent community.
- All members of the Standing Council who are not resident in the particular setting.
- Up to three additional members who are not members of the constituent community but may be external members of SoHT, officers of the Parish, other appropriate clergy or other competent professionals such as a social worker or therapist. All nominees will be subject to the confidence and approval of the local Archdeacon, the Guardian and the Episcopal Visitor and membership of the Standing Council.

The House Council will meet regularly with the resident members in order to build up good relationships.

#### 4.4 Appointment of other roles and ‘officers’

Job/role descriptions will be drawn up as need arises, agreed by the constituent Community Council for both role description and appointment and any reviews. These may include cellarer, refectarian, cantor, treasurer, residential companion and residential participant.

## 5. Appointment of an Episcopal Visitor

### 5.1 Starting out

An important aspect of the governance of SoHT is to draw on the support and wisdom of an Episcopal Visitor to help grow, develop and sustain the vision and charisms of SoHT. The role of the Episcopal Visitor for Acknowledged Religious Communities is explained fully in the Handbook, which will be used as the authoritative text for this role as defined by the Advisory Council.

### 5.2 Process of Election

A Bishop of the Church of England shall be elected by the Chapter. At the point of an Episcopal Visitor stepping down, members of the Chapter can nominate their replacement. A vote shall be cast and the Guardian will make a formal request to the chosen Bishop. That Bishop will need to show themselves sufficiently supportive of the charisms and Rhythm of Life of SoHT. The role is held for a period of 5 years, renewable by re-election by the Chapter.

### 5.3 Responsibilities of the Episcopal Visitor

SoHT will utilise the Handbook to define the extent and purposes of the role. It is further noted that the role will not interfere or diminish the accountability of the constituent community to the local Diocesan or Suffragan Bishop in accordance with the governance of the Church of England.

It is recommended that the Episcopal Visitor visit or have connection with every local community every 2 to 3 years. The Episcopal Visitor can, in addition, also carry out a visit to the Chapter and constituent communities at any time on the visitor’s own initiative.

## **6. Movement of people between constituent communities**

### **6.1 Movement of the members between constituent communities.**

If members are (due to relocation), seeking to transfer between constituent communities, the Prior of the receiving constituent community will enter into a period of discernment with that person before they may make Seasonal Vows/Promises in the new community. The Prior may also consult the Episcopal Visitor concerning this.

### **6.2 Membership to another constituent community**

This will be made by taking Seasonal Vows/Promises at Annual Commitment Service before a Bishop or a Bishop's representative.

## **7. Symbols: contextually and locally determined**

### **7.1 Symbols used by constituent communities**

Given that each constituent community will have a different context, it is envisaged that each will have different symbols reflecting their different names and stories. There is no plan for having a dedicated symbol for SoHT.

### **7.2 Use of the suffix SoHT**

'SoHT' may be used as a suffix where it is contextually appropriate.

Only Professed members (see 3.2.5) can use 'SoHT' as a suffix.

## **8. Termination of membership**

SoHT will follow the wisdom and guidance of the Handbook regarding ending the participation of a constituent community. Individual membership of SoHT is contingent on participation as a Pioneer or as a member of one of the constituent communities.

### **8.1 Termination of an individual's membership**

A Prior, in conversation with the rest of the Standing Council (see 4.2), the Chapter (see 4.1) and the Episcopal Visitor, has the authority to terminate membership of individuals. This can only happen after due process, set out in the Code of Conduct and the Discipline Policy (see appendix 3 and 4).

### **8.2 Termination of a constituent community's membership**

The Guardian, in conversation with the rest of the Chapter (see 4.1) and the Episcopal Visitor, has the authority to terminate membership of constituent communities. This can only happen after due process.

### **8.3 Making good endings**

Attention will be paid to making good endings, either to celebrate the ending of times of commitment, or where people have decided to move on. Doing this well is crucial to the health of all forms of Christian community.

## **9. Dealing with Complaints and Conflict**

Conflict is an inevitable occurrence in all forms of Christian Community, and handling conflict well is important. SoHT will take all conflict seriously, both in constituent communities and SoHT more widely and will use the guidance of the Handbook to assist in this endeavour. Where there is a significant breakdown of relationship, the Episcopal Visitor and Guardian are to be involved in facilitating conflict resolution, restitution and healing.

### **9.1 Code of Conduct**

There is a SoHT Code of Conduct. Please refer to appendix 3.

### **9.2 Discipline Policy**

There is a SoHT Discipline Policy. Please refer to appendix 4.



## **10. Meetings of the SoHT**

### **10.1 Constituent Community Councils**

The Prior or Dean shall have power to convene the meetings. Decisions should be made by the constituent Community Council by a simple majority (over half of votes cast) of voting members except in a dispute, where the Prior may make the final decision. Decisions should be recorded. In elections, constituent Community Council meetings should be quorate (no less than 2/3 of those who are Professed or Participant members.) Such meetings should ensure that a notice period of at least one week is made and communicated before a constituent Community Council is held. In the event of the need for an urgent 'Extra-Ordinary Community Council meeting', this will require the consent of no less than 2/3 members to meet urgently, ideally confirmed by email communications.

### **10.2 Chapter**

The elected Guardian, Chair of the Chapter, shall have power to convene the meetings. It is expedient for the meetings to take place at a mutually convenient place, that evening meetings shall last no longer than 3 hours, and that there should be one overnight meeting per year. The Guardian may extend the meeting time in extraordinary circumstances by agreement of the majority of Chapter present. Meetings shall take place in an environment of prayer. Decisions will be made by the Chapter by a simple majority (over half of votes cast) except in a dispute, where the Guardian will make the final decision. Decisions should be recorded. In elections, Chapter meetings should be quorate (no less than 2/3 of its elected members.)

It is anticipated that the Episcopal Visitor will attend an element of the overnight meeting once a year.

## **11. Safeguarding**

Each constituent community must accept, comply and abide by the various House of Bishops' safeguarding policies and practice guidance for safeguarding children, young people and adults in the Church of England.

### **11.1 Safeguarding Responsibility**

Each constituent community must appoint a designated Safeguarding Person. The Prior of each community has overall responsibility for ensuring compliance with safeguarding policies and good practice. The Guardian and Secretary hold overall safeguarding responsibility across SoHT.

## **12. Property and Finance**

It is vital that in each constituent community, there is full transparency and accountability regarding financial management fully integrated into the context of the constituent community. For example, if the constituent community is parish based, the community and its financial processes must be fully compliant with the agreed local financial procedures policy of the PCC. Constituent communities should seek advice on possessing property or finances in their own right from the Chapter before such acquisitions are made.

## **13. Changes to Constitution & Rhythm of Life**

### **13.1 Starting Out**

When starting out on discernment as a potential constituent community of SoHT it is important to pray through and, in dialogue, reflect upon the ROL and Constitution of SoHT as a community.

#### **13.1.1 Starting with the Rhythm of Life**

A ROL is a living document and is the centre of our shared life together. It is vital that this sits firmly at the heart of our unity as constituent communities of SoHT. It is, therefore, a requirement that the ROL is lived out, in its current form, for a year by any potential constituent community before careful and prayerful discernment of any changes through the mechanisms of the Chapter, seeking to be both 'bottom up' and 'top down' (see 13.2.1). The spirit of the ROL is held by the Guardian (see 4.1.1). Potential constituent communities are encouraged to invite the Guardian to engage in at least one meeting of their discussions on it.

#### **13.1.2 Starting with the Constitution**

The constitution is also a living document and will require more regular amendments. It is suggested that any new constituent community abides by it for a year. Emerging constituent communities are

encouraged to invite either the Guardian or the Secretary (see 4.1.2) to engage in at least one meeting of their discussion on it.

## 13.2 Process of Changes

### 13.2.1 Changes to the Rhythm of Life

As the ROL is a living document whilst also being the symbol of our unity it is important that we continually reflect on it. It will be reviewed every two years as a means by which we remain committed to the charisms contained within them and ensuring we are faithful to God's call upon our shared life together. This review will begin with a questionnaire to be compiled by each constituent community to reflect a full review of the ROL as it is expressed. A compilation of these findings and recommendations will be sent to the Chapter in advance of an overnight meeting to help prayerful reflection. All changes to the ROL will require at least a 2/3 majority to be approved, and an agreed time for prayerful discernment if unity cannot be established regarding these changes. Changes to the ROL can be instigated through a constituent Community Council (bottom up process) or by the Chapter (in a top down process) after careful consultation. The Chapter will be responsible for setting the time line regarding reviews of the ROL. If at any stage a consensus around process or decision making cannot be agreed, the advice of the Episcopal Visitor will be sought. Revised ROL needs to be sent in full to the Secretary of the Advisory Council.

### 13.2.2 Changes to the Constitution

Formal reviews for the Constitution will be agenda'd as deemed necessary by the Guardian in consultation with Chapter members. All changes to the constitution will need to be voted on requiring at least a 2/3 majority to be approved, and again requiring sufficient time for prayerful discernment. On occasions it may be necessary to seek the wisdom of the Episcopal Visitor where there are contentious issues, or a common way forward cannot be agreed.

The Advisory Council must be notified before any proposed changes are made to the constitution that relate to The Religious Communities Regulations (2020). Revised constitution documents must be sent in full to the Secretary of the Advisory Council.

## 14. Dissolving the Society of the Holy Trinity

If in the future there are not at least two constituent communities, or when there are two constituent communities without any possibility of birthing new communities, the Chapter, in dialogue with the Advisory Council, should have the right to decide whether SoHT should be dissolved. SoHT should not exist if there is insufficient life and vision to warrant its continued existence.

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## ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS

1. Rhythm of Life of the SoHT
2. Appendix 1 – Preparing for forms of Residential Community
3. Appendix 2 – Discernment Standards & Processes for Appointment of Participants to Residential Communities
4. Appendix 3 – Maintaining harmonious relationships in Community: Code of Conduct
5. Appendix 4 – Maintaining harmonious relationships in Community: Dealing with conflict and breakdown in community life – Discipline Policy.