

# ***ORDER OF CORPUS CHRISTI***

---

## **Foundation of the Order**

### **INTRODUCTION**

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.”  
(Hebrews 12:1-2a)

The spirit of the Order of Corpus Christi is to be found at the heart of the Gospel in the heart of the Church, the Body of Christ.

What is contained in this document is neither unique or peculiar to Corpus Christi. It is a simple outline for those who are committed to living out the call to be new persons and new communities in Christ, living and growing in union with Christ, and in communion with all whom Christ calls from all times, all places, all nations and races.

This outline should be understood in the context of the balance which exists between the external and the internal, the outward and the inward, the form and the substance. In our modern world the temptation is always with us to focus upon the external, and to turn outward actions and regulations into laws and prisons. When we yield to this temptation, the external becomes an end unto itself. What is meant, therefore, to be a gift or instrument of help can become an obstacle, a barrier, and a prison.

It is important, therefore to maintain the balance and understand the vision and intention of Corpus Christi by “looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.”

Corpus Christi calls us to a life of common prayer and contemplation which produces concrete action in the life of the Church and the world. At the heart of Corpus Christi we encounter the living Christ in Word and Sacrament in the community of the Church which nurtures us in the life of faith and in mission and ministry. Daily prayer, silence, and contemplation also inform the life of Corpus Christi. All these are not ends unto themselves. They are, rather, means of God’s grace through which the balance is maintained and life, growth, and development in the Christian life and mission are given.

The practices in which the members and communities of Corpus Christi engage are intended to express commonality of faith, worship and service. In the midst of diversity there is unity and commonality in Christ!

The common practices of Corpus Christi serve as a witness and a sign. They witness to our oneness in Christ, and they are a sign of our communion with others in Christ through one Baptism, one Bread, and the call to discipleship.

These common practices, and those God will make known to us in the days and years to come, are means through which the members and communities of Corpus Christi respond to God's call heard and seen so clearly in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist: "Be who you are—the Body of Christ!"

The members and communities of Corpus Christi endeavor to respond to this call within the United Church of Christ, which is part of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church. In so doing Corpus Christi prays that it may be leaven within the loaf.

## **THE FOUNDING OF THE ORDER**

The Order of Corpus Christi grew out the shared concerns and vision of a group of pastors who met in May of 1986 at Trinity United Church of Christ in East Petersburg, Pennsylvania. These pastors, participants in the Biblical, Theological, and Liturgical Group (the United Church of Christ Mercersburg Study Group), had gathered for the presentation of a paper by the Rev. Dr. John C. Shetler, Conference Minister Emeritus of the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ. The paper was entitled "*The Church: Evangelical, Reformed, and Catholic.*"

Discussion of the content of the paper led to a meeting that same month of several pastors and a lay person at St. John's United Church of Christ in Reading, Pennsylvania. A working document was presented, and the charter and by-laws of several religious orders were presented for information and study. The pattern for subsequent meetings was established by beginning with the Holy Eucharist followed by reports and study.

In September of 1986 Clergy gathered at Zion's Reformed United Church of Christ in Ephrata, Pennsylvania, for presentation and discussion of a working paper for the organization of the Order of Corpus Christi. At that meeting leaders of the Order were elected: Prior, Sub Prior, Scribe, and Steward. In 2003, in response to the growth of the Order, these offices were redefined as Abbot, Prior, Chancellor, and Provincial. In October of 1986 interested clergy again met at Zion's Church where a proposed charter was read. A decision was made to met every other month, with the executive committee (officers) meeting in the interim months.

The first retreat of the Order was held in September of 1987, and was open to all clergy, laity, and congregations who sought fellowship with those who faith is defined by the historic Creeds of the Church, who hold in their hearts the Church, catholic, apostolic, evangelical, and reformed, and who love the United Church of Christ. At that retreat, the Order of Corpus Christi became a reality.

From this modest beginning the Order has grown in number of members from various parts of the United States, and most recently Great Britain, who meet regularly in chapters, and live out the common disciplines and the Rule of the Order in the life, mission and ministry of the Church.

## HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

The Order of Corpus Christi came to life in a time of religious ferment not unlike the 1840s. George Richards, addressing the Alliance of Reformed Churches in 1941 stated:

“In the opinion of John Nevin and Philip Schaff the German Reformed Churches had forsaken their original denominational character, had come under the power of a spirit foreign to the Reformation symbols, and were subjected to the powers of Puritanism and Methodism.”

Nevin and Schaff believed that the Church needed to reclaim the piety and theology of the Reformation. The emphasis of the Church needed to be on the objective, sacramental, and liturgical over against the subjective revivalistic and rationalistic practices and teachings which were so appealing to the pioneer spirit and culture.

The remedy, Nevin and Schaff believed, was a restoration of the evangelical ideas of the Reformation. The Reformation must be regarded as incomplete, and to be complete, there must be a unity of what had become divided: the Catholic and Evangelical Churches. Each was suffering from one-sidedness and incompleteness. The Evangelical Churches emphasized the subjective and experiential to the neglect of the objective and sacramental. The Catholic Churches reversed the emphasis and ignored the personal elements and experiential in the practice of faith. Nevin and Schaff believed the source of the error was defective Christology or want of a proper concept of the Incarnation of God in humankind which reflects the organic union of the natural and supernatural in the ongoing life to the Church to the end of time.

The restoration of the Church was to be a new condition of the relationship of the believer to Christ, of faith to the Bible, of freedom to authority, of the individual to the Church as these were realized in the experience of the Reformers. There was to be an advance beyond the position of the original Reformers.

The thought of Nevin and Schaff was Christological, and from Christology all other articles of faith are discerned. In Christ God became human, sanctifying, revealing, and saving humanity. Christ, as glorified humanity, remains the only medium of gracious communication from God to humanity, and humanity's approach to God, and fellowship with God.

The Church is the organic continuation of the divine/human Christ in time, for the salvation of all people. The Holy Spirit is the bearer of Christ through the ages, and the agent enabling the helpless sinner to participate in Christ's grace.

The Sacraments are the symbols of the Church and the means of grace by which the people share the life of Christ. Through the Sacraments people are regenerated from their fallen nature to a new creation. The conversion of a person is a voluntary act in response to the authority of the Realm of God into which that person is brought by Baptism.

So saying, Nevin and Schaff believed the solution to the malaise within the Church was not a return to the past, but an advancement into a new order.

Nevin and Schaff believed the question of their time concerned the nature of the Church itself; its relation to the world and to the individual Christian. The ecumenical movement is one by which the members rest upon the Church. Christ lives in his people by the life which fills his body, the Church, and they are all necessarily one before they can be many.

In 1863, Philip Schaff left Mercersburg, Pennsylvania, and following the Civil War, John Nevin was called to the presidency of Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. The Mercersburg heritage was conserved theologically by Pastors and teachers in the Reformed Church in the United States until the Seminary moved to Lancaster with Franklin and Marshall College and again came under the influence of Nevin.

During the 1930s the issues raised by Nevin and Schaff again came to the foreground in the life of the Church. Within the circle of those churches involved in the 20th century ecumenical movement, the issues of Christ and the Church, Tradition and traditions, ministry and sacraments, ways of worship and the nature of Church unity were identified as issues to be addressed.

Today, as is evident in the documents *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* and *The COCU Consensus: A Church of Christ Uniting*, many Churches are still engaged in discussion about and in search of that ongoing process of advancement into the new order visualized by the Reformers and Nevin and Schaff. The Order of Corpus Christi is part of that engagement and search.

## **Rule of the Order**

### **THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS**

The Apostle Paul asked the members of the Church at Corinth, “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Corinthians 10.16-17).

We, the members of the Order of Corpus Christi, a people who share the Holy Eucharist, believe by such participation we are a part of the Body of Christ (Corpus Christi). “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:12-13).

Being of one Baptism, of water and the Spirit, into the Body of Christ, renewed and sustained in and through this one Body by the Holy Eucharist, we affirm our faith and commitment to the Church of Jesus Christ. We believe the Church to be the visible body of our Lord and Savior. With love for the United Church of Christ (a member of the visible body) and with our love for the Church catholic, we pledge ourselves to confess faithfully our belief and trust in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

This Gospel, confessed and attested to in the historic creeds, reclaimed in the basic insights of the Protestant Reformers, and lived through the witness and sacrifice of the saints, is our daily call and guide to be part of the visible Body of Christ. Through fellowship with other members of the body and by focusing upon the sacrificial suffering and death of Christ, made visible in the resurrection, we are made one in the Body of Christ.

That oneness has many expressions. We, holding to our baptism and the Holy Eucharist, in response to the Word, affirm our commitment to an evangelical, reformed, catholic, and apostolic Church. We are committed to seeking and being open to a true koinonia through the Order of Corpus Christi.

Our purpose is to remain faithful to that understanding of the Church catholic. Therefore, we commit ourselves to the concepts as set forth in *The COCU Consensus: In Quest Of A Church Uniting* as well as that set forth in the World Council of Churches document *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*.

We accept the polity and structure as set forth in the COCU documents i.e., synods, bishops, and other ecclesiastical offices and officers. We accept and are committed to the goal of COCU: The Church of Christ Uniting. With other members of the Body of Christ we accept the creeds, confessions, sacraments—infant baptism in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and we affirm the mystical presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist—the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and the polity structure as set forth in COCU.

We purpose to serve as a positive alternative to those expressions of faith which lead to unitarianism, sectarianism, humanism, and other distortions of true faith. We hold to a firm belief in the living presence of Christ, believing the Order of Corpus Christi to be a creation, not of persons, but an embodiment and a continual development of the new life Christ begins in our baptism. This life is nurtured and sustained through Word and Sacrament so that we might live this life to the glory of God through faithful proclamation of the Good News and the search for justice, mercy, and peace in the Church and the world.

We covenant together, clergy, laity, and congregations, as members of the Order of Corpus Christi, in the sure and certain hope that we shall indeed be one in Christ (Ephesians 2:11-18).

## **COMMON DISCIPLINE**

Therefore, we covenant together in a discipline which includes the following common practices:

1. Daily Office
2. Common Vestments
3. Common Eucharistic Prayers and Ceremonialism
4. At Least Monthly Celebration of the Holy Eucharist in the Local Parish
5. Use of a Common Escutcheon

6. Common Practice of Spiritual Reading
7. Participation in an Annual Retreat
8. Participation in the Annual Synod of the Order
9. Faithful Participation in the Life of our Judicatories
10. Engaging in Common Study.

## **COMMENTARY ON THE DISCIPLINE**

### **1. Daily Office**

Our daily prayer will be enriched through the use of a variety of forms such as The Order for Daily Prayer of the Order of Corpus Christi, the Daily Offices from the Presbyterian Book of Worship, the Liturgy of the Hours, the Taize Office, or others incorporating Morning and Evening Prayer.

Our commonality shall be experienced by requesting that each member include in daily prayer (no matter what Order is used) the following:

- Psalter
- Gloria Patri
- Confession of Sin
- Common Daily Lectionary
- Apostle's or Nicene Creed
- The Lord's Prayer
- Intercessions for Members of the Order, the United Church of Christ, the Church Catholic, and the Needs of the World.

### **2. Common Vestments for Clergy**

Proper clerical attire should be worn (clerical collars) at all times when discharging the duties, tasks, and functions of the ministerial office, and representing the Church in the midst of the world.

We encourage basic vestments for the liturgy of the Word to be alb, cincture, and stole; for the liturgy of the Altar, alb, stole, cincture, and chasuble, using the appropriate color for the particular time of the Church year.

### **3. Ceremonialism**

The Order is in the process of developing a common manual on liturgy and ceremonialism. For the present, we encourage use of the Sign of the Cross at baptisms, consecration of the elements, dedications, blessing, and benedictions, and at appropriate places during the liturgy such as the Affirmation of Baptism.

We also encourage reverencing of the Altar upon entering and departing the house of worship, and that the congregation stand for the reading of the Gospel.

#### **4. Weekly Eucharistic Celebrations**

The Holy Eucharist is a corporate celebration of reconciliation with our Triune God, which we joyfully eat together, with thanksgiving, meeting at the Table of our Savior. Partaking in Christ we eat the bread and drink the wine in accordance with Christ's appointment, we receive from the risen and living Lord the benefits of his death, resurrection, and ascension. We are refreshed and nourished for the service to which Christ has called us. More than just a memorial of Christ's birth, life and ministry, death and resurrection, this Sacrament is the experiencing of the mystical presence of Christ, of the incorporation into his body, and of the feeding by Christ in and through the elements of bread and wine.

Therefore, it is appropriate and necessary to celebrate the Holy Eucharist with weekly regularity in order to be sustained and nourished in the faith, and that weekly celebrations be understood as the normal pattern of worship for the Christian community of faith.

#### **5. Use of a Common Escutcheon**

The Escutcheon or Insignia of the Order is a shield divided by a cross into four quadrants. The upper right quadrant is the Bible, representing the Church evangelical. The upper left is the Seal of John Calvin, representing the Church reformed. The lower left is the keys of St. Peter crossed over the sword of St. Paul, representing the Church apostolic. The lower right is the Greek Patriarchal Cross in the Circle of Unity, representing the Church catholic. In the center on the junction of the arms of the cross is the chalice and host, representing the Holy Eucharist. At the top of the shield are the words, "Corpus Christi."

#### **6. Common Practice of Spiritual Reading**

The "embodiment and continual development of the new life Christ begins at our baptism" requires nurture through prayer, Word and Sacrament, life within the community of the Church, and a balance of contemplation and action. Members of the Order shall follow a discipline of reading classical and contemporary devotional literature, the lives of the Saints, and spiritual theology. This discipline is for the purpose of strengthening the growth of the inner life as we grow in an ever deepening encounter with Christ which leads to our union of life and love with him in service of our brothers and sisters.

#### **7&8. Annual Retreat and Synod**

Each year the members of the Order shall attend the Annual Retreat for the purpose of renewing and deepening our individual relationship with God, clarifying and discerning God's will and direction for the Order and its members, listening to God's leading both individually and corporately, and engaging the members of the Order to uphold one another's direction and discernment in prayer and support. The Retreat shall include The Daily Office, Daily Eucharist, the Liturgy of the Hours, the Great Silence, a central theme for prayerful reflection and consideration, and group sharing on the central theme.

The Synod of the Order shall be held at an appropriate time during the retreat to address the corporate business of the Order. Each member of the Order is required to attend the Retreat and Synod, unless circumstances, time, or distance prohibit. Members who are unable to attend are to notify the Abbot in writing regarding the particular circumstances which prohibit attendance.

The Retreat and Synod shall be held at a facility which is conducive to prayer and quiet communication with God. The facility, as well as the content and length of the Retreat and Synod shall be determined by the Abbot and the Consistory.

## **9. Participation in Life of Our Judicatories**

Members of the Order are encouraged to participate in life, mission and ministry of their respective Association and Conference by attending regular meetings, and serving on committees or other groups which further the work of the judicatories.

## **10. Common Study**

Members of the Order shall share in disciplined study of a least one document a year that will enhance spiritual growth, strengthen the common life in respect to the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, and address practical issues and skills which benefit daily Christian living. At each Annual Synod, the Consistory will present recommendations for study documents which will be offered to assembled body for discussion and decision. Discussion and reflection on the chosen document should be part of every Consistory and Chapter meeting, as well as the Annual Retreat. The Consistory will be responsible to secure adequate copies of the study documents and distribute it to the members.

## **MEMBERS OF CORPUS CHRISTI**

Membership is open to Ordained Clergy, Baptized and Confirmed Communicating Laity, and Congregations of the United Church of Christ. As a witness to the recent actions which have brought the United Church of Christ into full communion with other representatives of the Reformation Churches, members are also received from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Reformed Church in America, and the United Reformed Church in Great Britain. All members shall subscribe to the faith embodied in the Constitution and By-laws of the Order, having engaged in a period of formation prior to being received into membership.

## **SUPERIORS OF THE ORDER**

Abbot<sup>1</sup>  
Prior  
Chancellor  
Provincial  
Consistory<sup>2</sup>

---

---

<sup>1</sup> Elected by ecclesiastical ballot and serves for an undetermined number of years.

<sup>2</sup> Nine members, three elected each year for a term of three years. The Sub Prior, Scribe, Steward and Consistory members may be elected for one additional three-year term.

# ***ORDER OF CORPUS CHRISTI***

## **Spiritual Formation for Novices**

---

### **WELCOME**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We extend to you our prayers and our support as you embrace the principles and disciplines of the Order of Corpus Christi.

This introductory material has been prepared to assist you in your spiritual pilgrimage. You have stated that you aspire to grow spiritually and in the practice of the Christian, and that you see reflected in the discipline and prayer life of the Order a respectful and faithful model for spiritual growth and reflection.

This document and supporting documents have been prepared to enhance and guide the pilgrimage you have voluntarily undertaken. We offer you the basic information necessary to fulfill the vows you have taken as you begin the Formation Process and move toward becoming a full member of the Order.

May the blessing of God Almighty-Father, +Son, and Holy Spirit —be with you as you grow in grace and spiritual maturity.

### **ENTERING THE NOVITIATE**

To become a member of the Order of Corpus Christ, you must engage in a spiritual pilgrimage. That pilgrimage will require you to fulfill several specific tasks in which you will be guided and supported by all the members of the Order.

1. To begin your pilgrimage, contact the Abbot to request information regarding the Order and the Formation Process, asking

“...to be taught how to follow Christ in a life of prayer and service,”  
and  
“...to be taught the rule and spirit of the Order of Corpus Christi,  
the observance of Christ’s way, and of perfect love.”

The Abbot will bring that request to the Consistory, and subsequently forward it to the Novice Master of the Chapter nearest to you.<sup>3</sup>

2. You will be assigned a spiritual advisor who will provide encouragement, support, guidance as you proceed through the Formation Process. You will also be

---

<sup>3</sup> If there is no Chapter within your geographical area, alternative arrangements will be provided.

provided with all relevant documents of the Order to assist you in the Formation Process.

- a. The Order for Daily Prayer: This is a brief order for your personal use as you pray and meditate upon the reality of the presence of God in your life.
  - b. The Daily Lectionary: This is a listing of Scripture readings, arranged in a two-year cycle, for each day of the year.
  - c. The Foundation Document: This document will acquaint you with the history of the Order, its theological foundations, and its common discipline.
  - d. The Constitution: This defines the organization and administrative structure of the Order, and describes how the Order functions decently and in order.
3. You will be required to maintain a journal of your spiritual pilgrimage as you pray, read and study Holy Scripture, and meditate upon what it means to be the Body of Christ.
4. Since incorporation into the Order necessitates a spiritual pilgrimage, you will be required to prepare a written testimony for presentation to the Consistory which addresses the following questions:
- a. Why are you requesting to be received into the Order of Corpus Christi?
  - b. How would you describe your understand of faith and Church at the beginning of your spiritual pilgrimage?
  - c. How would you describe your understanding of faith and the Church at this point in your spiritual pilgrimage?
  - d. Who are your companions on this pilgrimage?
  - e. What has the Daily Office, the Spiritual Readings, the worship of God, and the celebration of the Holy Eucharist provided on your pilgrimage?
  - f. What is your understanding of connectionalism, and of the three-fold pattern of ministry: bishop, presbyter, and deacon?
5. At the conclusion of the Formation Process, and with the approval of the Consistory, you will make profession of final vows to the Order. This normally takes place at the Annual Retreat and Synod during the final liturgy of Word and Sacrament.<sup>4</sup> You will be asked to respond to the following scrutiny:
- a. Do you believe in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be the Word of God, and to contain all things necessary to salvation?

---

<sup>4</sup> For some time and distance may be problematic. In such circumstances alternative arrangements will be made.

- b. Will you proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ in all your life and work?
- c. Do you confess your faith through the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds, and will you be faithful to these Creeds in your life of faith?
- d. Do you confess the Church, evangelical, reformed, catholic and apostolic, and will you remain within an unbroken relationship to this Church of the Apostles and strive for its unity?
- e. Do you promise to conform to the discipline of the Order, being faithful in daily prayer and the daily study of Holy Scripture?
- f. Will you do all this so that Christ may be given the glory?

As a novice you will be preparing to be a member of an assembly of God's people. Within the assembly you will discover persons who will encourage and assist you in your spiritual pilgrimage, and you will have opportunity to offer your support and encouragement to others through your prayers for the members and novices of the Order, for we are knit together in Jesus Christ.

**For Information Contact:**

**The Right Rev'd Richard Hammond Price, OCC  
Abbot  
[abbot@orderofcorpuschristi.org](mailto:abbot@orderofcorpuschristi.org)  
215.943.7110**