Constitution of the Williamite Order

I. Prologue

The Ordo Eremitarum Sancti Guillelmi – OESG, or the Williamite Order, is a monastic order rooted in the Old Catholic faith, established under the authority of the Nordic Catholic Church, and guided by the spirit of the Rule of Saint Augustine and Saint William of Malavalle. Its vocation is that its members, united in one heart and one soul, may seek God (Reg. Aug. I,1; Acts 4:32) through a life of prayer and contemplation, lived in the communion of fraternal charity (Ps 133:1), in the silence of the heart and the presence of God (Ps 37:7). Thus, the Order is called to be a spiritual servant of the Church, through prayer, inner silence, study, contemplation, and pastoral ministry (Reg. Aug. I,7).

II. Membership in the Order

Only full members of the Union of Scranton's churches may be admitted to the Order (1Cor 1:10). Should a member cease to belong to the Church, their membership in the Order is likewise automatically terminated.

III. Formation and Profession

The initial stage of entrance into the Order is the one-year novitiate. Admission to the novitiate and subsequent admittance to profession is decided by the local Chapter of the Convent. At the conclusion of the novitiate, the candidate makes a profession of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience (*tria vota religiosa*). This act constitutes a lifelong commitment to follow Christ more intimately. The traditional Augustinian black habit and cowl, symbolizing interior withdrawal, together with the long black leather cincture, representing the divine presence (Reg. Aug. IV,24), are donned by the brethren at the time of profession. In this Order, no temporary vows are made, nor is there any renewal of vows (Mt 5:37).

IV. The Spiritual and Pastoral Life of the Order

The members of the Order dedicate their lives to contemplation, meditation and prayer (*devotio interior*), as well as to pastoral ministry in service of the Church. This pastoral mission includes, in particular: offering spiritual lectures and organizing retreats and recollection, and engaging in apostolic ministry through spiritual accompaniment. "Do not go outward; return within yourself. Truth dwells in the inner man." („Noli foras ire, in te ipsum redi; in interiore homine habitat veritas." – Saint Augustine, *De vera religione*, XXXIX, 72)

V. The Structure of the Order

The basic organizational unit of the Order is the Convent, which refers both to a physical building and, in the absence of a monastery, to the local community of brethren living in geographical proximity. Wherever possible, the brethren are to live together in a monastic house. If this is not feasible, they are to dwell according to their means, yet strive to gather regularly for communal prayer, to cultivate the virtues of fraternity, and to continue their spiritual and monastic formation (Reg. Aug. I,9). A Convent whose professed members so desire may establish a new Convent by a formal resolution of its Chapter. At the inaugural Chapter of the new Convent, the brethren are to submit a written petition to the Bishop requesting the appointment of a superior.[1] Should the former Convent grant its consent for the foundation of a new Convent, from the moment of that decision the new Convent is to be regarded as autonomous, and the former Convent shall have no jurisdiction or interference in its internal affairs. There is no numerical requirement for the establishment of a new Convent (Mt 18:20), yet such a

[1] When the Order of Hermits of Saint Augustine (Ordo Fratrum Eremitarum Sancti Augustini) was organized, this was the prevailing practice. On April 9, 1256, Pope Alexander IV founded the Order and appointed its prior to lead it. Source: Melville, Gert. *The World of Medieval Monasticism.* Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2016., p. 261.

foundation must be justified by geographical location and the physical proximity of the brethren. A new Convent may not be established merely due to differing opinions, personal preferences, or party spirit (1Cor 1:10). Every division must be avoided in the spirit of obedience and unity. Where possible, male and female convents are to function separately. Autonomous local Convents belonging to the Order shall cooperate fraternally, offering mutual support without any claim to privilege or precedence (Reg. Aug. VI,41). The priors shall gather at least once a year to deliberate and to coordinate the work of their convents (Reg. Aug. V,31), so that they may serve the Church in unity (*Consilium Priorum*). "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant" (Mk 10:44).

VI. Chapter Assembly and Governance of the Order

The governing body of each Convent is the Chapter, of which all brethren belonging to the Convent are members; however, only the professed brethren possess the right to vote. Religious brethren may exercise their voting rights only within their own Convent; in other Convents, they may not vote and may only speak at a Chapter assembly if invited by the prior of that convent. Novices have the right to participate in deliberations, but only within their own Convent. The Chapter must be convened at least once a year in every Convent. In consideration of the possible geographic dispersion of members, the Chapter may be held in any suitable electronic form, at the discretion of the prior. All decisions of the Chapter are to be made in fraternal unity by simple majority (Acts 1:15–26). In the case of a tie, the vote of the prior, as the superior of the Convent, shall be decisive. All decisions of the Chapter must be recorded and preserved in writing in the Book of Chapter Decrees (*Liber Decretorum Capituli*), into which the Bishop of the Church shall at all times have the right of inspection. Within the Order, any professed religious may request access to the archives and Chapter decrees of any Convent, and such access must always be granted to the requesting brother.

VII. The Prior

The head of a local Convent is the *Prior Conventualis*, who is appointed by the Bishop of the Church. The prior does not hold highpriest rank, but serves solely as the superior of the community. His responsibilities include the governance of the Convent, the spiritual care, instruction, and development of the brethren, serving as a model of religious life, convening and presiding over the Chapter assemblies, receiving the profession of vows, exercising fraternal discipline in accordance with the spirit of the Rule of Saint Augustine, and representing the Convent before the Bishop, the Church, and third parties (Reg. Aug. VII,46). Should the prior become unsuitable or unworthy to fulfill his office, the Chapter shall notify the Bishop of the Church by formal resolution. Only the Bishop may relieve the prior of his office and appoint a new superior. The brethren shall care for the relieved prior with charity and compassion (Ps 25:8), and no penalty shall be imposed beyond his removal from office (Mt 9:13; Reg. Aug. VI,42). The priors of autonomous Convents are obliged to cooperate in the closest bond of fraternal charity, that the Order may flourish in the contemplative life and the Convents may jointly serve the Church with efficacy. The Order shall not have, nor shall it ever establish, a general superior or a general chapter.[2]

VIII. Obedience to the Church

All members of the Order owe obedience to the Prior of their respective convent and to the Bishop of the Nordic Catholic Church at all times (Reg. Aug. VII,44). The Order is an integral part of the Church and a servant of its spiritual life. The Priors of other Convents do not hold jurisdiction over members who do not belong to their own convent. The directives of the Bishop of the Church must always be respected and honoured by the Convents and their Priors. Should a Convent become incapable of functioning, the Bishop shall determine the future of the Convent and the fate of its brethren. A Convent

[2] There was a historical precedent for this around the year 1158, when the Frenchman Guillaume de Malavalle (Saint William the Hermit) founded a highly popular Augustinian order, the Williamites, which was later named after him: *Ordo Fratrum Eremitanum Sancti Guilelmi*. The original order had neither a general chapter nor a central superior. Source: Melville, *The World of Medieval Monasticism*, p. 262.

cannot be dissolved by a Chapter decision; only the Bishop holds the authority to suppress a Convent, just as he alone is competent to release a member from his religious vows or to grant permission for a friar or sister to transfer (*transitus*) to another Convent.

Final Provisions

Amendments to the Constitution may be made solely by the Bishop of the Church, and only with the consent of the majority of the Priors. Neither the majority of Priors nor the Bishop alone may alter the Constitution independently; both conditions are essential and must concur. In all other matters, the Holy Scriptures and the Rule of Saint Augustine shall be the guiding norm.