

## + The Servants of the Sacred Cross +

On September 14, 2000, the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, the Rev. Everett Hill, then Priest-in-Charge at St. Andrew's Anglican Church, a parish of the Anglican Church of Canada, in Hantsport, Nova Scotia, Canada, received the Vows of the first two Sisters in a new Religious Community, The Servants of the Sacred Cross (SSC). The Most Reverend Arthur G. Peters, Archbishop of the Diocese of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island and Metropolitan of the Ecclesiastical Province of Canada, had given permission for the Vows to be received and thus the Community began. It was the launch of an amazing and ongoing journey. At this Founding Mass, Mother Wendy James and Sister Joan Knipple professed the Vows of Simplicity, Purity, and Obedience. Mother Wendy, the Community's foundress, was instituted as the Superior. \*Mother Wendy has since assumed the title of Superior General. The Rev. Canon Dr. Karl Tufts, now deceased, presented Mother Wendy for her Vows. Canon Tufts and Mother had a rather long association, as he first met her when he baptized her as an infant in 1947!

Following the first Visitor, the Rt. Rev. Donald Harvey, the Rt. Rev. Peter Wilkinson, OSG, served as Episcopal Visitor to The Servants of the Sacred Cross until his recent resignation as a Bishop of the Anglican Catholic Church of Canada. Both Bishop Harvey and Bishop Wilkinson have been most encouraging and supportive of the ethos and spirituality of SSC and the Community is tremendously grateful for the guidance and loving counsel they provided during their tenure. Bishop Wilkinson has since been ordained a priest in the Catholic Church and holds the title of Monsignor.

The Servants of the Sacred Cross was, originally, a sisterhood of women from within the Anglican Communion only. However, in 2004, in the spirit of Jesus' prayer, "***That all may be one***" (John 17:21), the Community expanded membership, due to requests for entrance by Roman Catholics, to include women from certain Continuing Anglican jurisdictions as well as all Catholic Rites and Eastern Orthodox. Mother Wendy and three other former Anglican Sisters were received into full communion with the Catholic Church in 2012. However, the ecumenical model remains. The Community is open to both married and single lay women who, in a spirit of servanthood, dedicate their lives to taking up their cross and following Christ. They do so in service to God, His Church and people in a life of prayer and ministry within a traditional Religious Community, committed to historic Catholic Faith and Order. The Community is international in nature with Sisters presently in numerous Dioceses in Canada, the United States of America and Australia. SSC no longer offers membership to Eastern Orthodox women.

The Religious Life is a particular way of living the Baptismal mystery. The discipline of the Rule and the support of the Community become powerful aids in living out such a calling. Sisters of The Servants of the Sacred Cross live in their own homes and communities, pursuing their vocation in obedience to their Vows and Rule. Some Sisters work in a variety of active ministries in their parishes and local communities. Others are called to a more contemplative expression of service in a life devoted solely to prayer and intercession. Sisters meet together for a week once each year for a Retreat, workshops and Chapter meetings. These days together are a very precious time of bonding and fellowship.

The Holy Spirit never ceases to call into existence new forms of religious life to respond to the needs of the times. However, it is important to realize that SSC is not really a new concept!! The Community has been established in keeping with very historic tradition. In the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century, Orders of Penitents grew into a large movement in Europe. Those called to this life, married and single, adopted a distinctive garb or habit and lived a strict life of prayer and penance. These groups demonstrated it was possible to lead a devout and disciplined religious life while remaining "*in domibus propriis*" – in their homes, in the world, not in a monastery. When this movement began there was neither canonical status nor formal profession. The habit

alone bore witness to the call of the person who wore it. Just as it did centuries ago, this exterior “sign” still speaks to the deeper interior one.

Following those early movements came the founders of the great Orders such as the Franciscans, Dominicans, Carmelites and others which provided “Lay” or “Third” Orders within their foundations for those, both married and single, men and women, who had a vocation to the Religious Life but were unable to leave the world to live in a convent or monastery. These Lay Orders remain active throughout the world, in both Anglican and Catholic expressions, although most have dispensed with the wearing of a habit. Originally, members of the Third Orders wore the full habit - a seemingly little known fact today. The Servants of the Sacred Cross, however, is autonomous - not part of a larger Order. Nevertheless, SSC has chosen to wear a habit in keeping with historic tradition concerning their own particular expression of Religious Life.

The Deaconess movement, especially in the Lutheran and Anglican traditions, sets another historic and interesting precedent. In the present day, the Roman Catholic Church through its Holy Family Institute, Secular Carmelite Orders, and many others, offers the possibility of living the Religious Life under Vows “in the world” for both married and single men and women. Most recently there is a groundswell of a wide variety of new Ecclesial Movements and Communities in the Roman Catholic Church which are being blessed and encouraged by Pope Francis as they were by his predecessor Pope Benedict XVI and, before that, Bl. Pope John Paul II. Some of these are very similar, in many respects, to The Servants of the Sacred Cross. Interestingly, there are several canonically recognized ecumenical associations and communities among these. It is indeed cause to offer high thanksgiving to God for the renewal of Religious Life in the expressions of many new Communities and Ecclesial Movements that are forming in the Church at this time.

The motto of The Servants of the Sacred Cross is ***Crux Mihi Ancora*** - “*The Cross is My Anchor*”. The anchor is an ancient Christian symbol signifying hope. The Sisters wear a pewter profession cross, custom-made for the Community. It is a plain Latin cross with the emblem of an anchor superimposed. While the Sisters’ primary witness is through what they are in living the Gospel, there is an immediate and sustained witness value in being easily identified. Therefore, the Sisters, like the ancient Orders of Penitents nine hundred years ago, wear a distinctive religious habit as a visible witness of their commitment and parochial availability. It is a reminder to the Sister herself, of all that she has Vowed. While they are permitted to wear the habit at all times, Sisters are not required to do so. The habit consists of a navy blue tunic with scapular and a navy veil. Novices wear a white veil. A habit Rosary is optional.

Entrance into The Servants of the Sacred Cross involves progressive stages. There is a period of continued discernment and formation after the aspirant is received into the Postulancy which extends for a period of six months to a year. Next the Sister is “Clothed” in the habit and becomes a Novice, beginning to live “in the spirit” of the Vows. After two years, First Vows are Professed. Vows are renewed annually for five years, after which Life Vows may be Professed. There are basic courses of study and required reading throughout the Postulancy and Novitiate, conducted by distance education and coordinated by the Formation Director.

The Vows of the Community, Simplicity, Purity/Chastity and Obedience, mirror the Evangelical Counsels. The Vow of Simplicity is seen to be a full expression of the Christian discipline of simplicity, surrendering completely to God, without undue attachment to worldly goods. The Vow of Purity/Chastity represents the call for all Christians to be pure and chaste in heart, body and faith. Married Sisters pledge chastity within the married state, not celibacy. For single Sisters the Vow requires celibate chastity. Under Obedience the Sisters Vow, with a wholehearted desire, to learn the Will of God and to do it.

The Rule of the Community outlines, in detail, all that is required on a day-to-day basis. Frequent reception of the Blessed Sacrament, praying of the Divine Office, Adoration, spiritual reading and periods of silence and meditation are at the heart of the life of the Sisters of the Community. All Sisters are guided by their own Spiritual Director with whom they must meet on a regular basis.

With its dedication to, and focus on, the Cross and Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Community holds in particular honour the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, and Saint John, Apostle and Evangelist, remembering them in their place at the foot of the Cross. In their dedicated ministry of prayer for priests, the Community honours St. John Mary Vianney, patron of parish priests. St. Athanasius is held as patron in their prayer for the orthodoxy and unity of the Universal Church. The Community's blue habit honours the BVM.

In an ever-expanding vision and call, eventually Mother Wendy began to receive inquiries from seekers who asked if The Servants of the Sacred Cross have a convent. In addition, some of the Community's present Sisters, who are single or widowed women and were living in their own homes, were discerning a similar call to live "in community". Therefore, in obedience to the leading of the Holy Spirit, the Community prayerfully and slowly explored the possible establishment of a semi-contemplative Religious House. The Community's mandate is, and always was, to continue to have Sisters, married and single, living "in the world", as well. After two years of discernment, by the Grace of God and with full confidence in Him, two Sisters arrived at the Community's first convent, a small rented house in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in August 2007. Sadly, lack of funds resulted in the necessity to close the convent in October 2010.

**Associates:** Both men and women can share in the prayer life, work and fellowship of the Community through affiliation with the Sisters as an Associate. As such, they do not profess Vows but live under a simple Rule of Life, in the spirit of the Sisters' Rule. They assist the Sisters with their work and, where possible, offer financial support and help with fundraising.

**Oblates:** Some of the Community's inquirers do not feel called or are unable, for a variety of reasons, to enter SSC as a member of the Sisterhood. While there is the availability of the Associate vocation, that path has also proven not to be the exact "fit" for some. When the Sisters met during General Chapter in September 2011, they discussed a vision that had been forming within the Community for several months. The result was a unanimous vote to put in place an intermediate category of membership that would be called Oblates. SSC Oblates do not wear a formal habit, do not profess Vows, and are not addressed as "Sister". However, they wear a distinctive cross and, after making Promises which are in keeping with the essence of the Sisters' Vows, there is a particular secular-style garb worn on certain specified occasions. Prior to making Promises, Oblates will complete a probationary year of study and formation. Oblates will be invited, but are not required, to attend the Annual Chapter with the Sisters.

SSC Sisters, Oblates and Associates pray for one another daily, supporting and upholding each other in their mutual but varied vocations within the Community.

SSC publishes a newsletter, "***The Way of the Cross***". The newsletter may be read online, within the Community's web site, where more information and pictures may be found. The Community welcomes and receives, inquiries from around the world on an ongoing basis.

The Servants of the Sacred Cross is legally incorporated as a non-profit society and is a registered charity.

**Those interested in learning more are invited to contact:**

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