

To Bishops and Priests of the Anglican Communion

Concerning those who have a call to Religious Life

Dear brother or sister in Christ,

Grace and peace be yours in Our Lord Jesus Christ.

You are probably reading this letter because of a personal interest or someone you know is contemplating Religious life and desires your support. For many in the church the concept of Religious life is either unheard of, or believe that it was 'something' that King Henry VIII dissolved in order to break away from Rome and therefore appears as a foot-note at the bottom of a history book.

But in fact, Benedictine life returned to the Anglican Communion at the turn of the 20th century when the Archbishop of Canterbury (Temple) permitted a young monk by the name of Aelred to take Benedictine vows at Malling Abbey, England. In the United States, other forms of Religious life were already in place, especially in the areas of teaching, nursing and care of orphaned children. Religious life in the Episcopal Church continues to grow and is generally known as 'contemplative or active'. The House of Initia Nova is a blend of traditional and contemporary elements all held together under the Rule of St. Benedict.

With that thumbnail sketch of church history, let me introduce myself. I am Michael-John Austin, Benedictine Superior of the House of Initia Nova (House of New Beginnings). I come to you as one formed within the institutional church. I was formed during the episcopate of The Right Reverend Frank Griswold of Chicago and made my Annual vows to The Right Reverend John Charles, FODC, in 1992 who was Warden to the Order of St. Ann in Chicago. Three years later, I made Solemn vows to The Right Reverend William F. Sheridan of Northern Indiana. In 2006 I was consecrated a mitered Abbot at Conception Abbey, MO, The Right Reverend Alan Scarfe receiving my promises. After founding, bringing a community to national recognition and having served as a Religious for almost 20 years, I stepped down as superior and moved to warmer climates where another opportunity awaited – the House of Initia Nova.

The House of Initia Nova is a Benedictine community of men and women, single and married, living at the motherhouse or in the larger community. Religious are individuals who through the waters of baptism affirm (again) their consecration,

desiring to live an intentional life as defined by the vows they have taken at baptism and integrating the principles of Benedictine life, which enhances these intentions. Such a vocation does not set the Religious apart from the local community, but places it at the center, as a living and breathing example of intentional living.

As someone who knows the benefits of having a community recognized by the Church, it is with some sorrow that I feel that the House of Initia Nova should not at this time request recognition from any province within the Anglican Communion outside of the See of Canterbury. To do so could suggest an affirmation of a theological position or agreement with an action taken by one province directed at another. No 'spiritual path' should ever have to take sides so to exist. The House of Initia Nova **will not** claim any proprietary theology that places any brother or sister against another. We proclaim the Christ Incarnate, who lived, died, and rose again so that we might have life. We claim our inheritance through the water of baptism and as a response to such LOVE, love with intentionality.

We believe that ALL have sinned and fallen short of the Image of God. In Christ there is no east or west, no north or south, no person or people exempt from God's love. There is no Jew or Gentile, no master or slave. We live into the Image of God, the New Jerusalem, working out our own salvation as we follow Christ's example of living, dying, and being raised again to new life, new possibilities, new beginnings.

I hope it is clear that our decision not to align ourselves with a particular province is not about a lack of willingness to submit ourselves 'one to another', but a decision to free 'a spiritual path' (as best as we are able) from influences that could hinder rather than promote real growth.

As part of 'the prayer engine of the church', we hold the Anglican Communion, your province, your diocese, your parish, your ministry in our prayers daily. We ask the same of you as we walk together in love, recognizing the diversity of charisms that come from the Holy Spirit, whose ultimate goal is union with God.

With blessings of every kind,

Abbot Michael-John Austin

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