

OUR LADY OF DALLAS

Guidelines for the Novitiate

1. GOALS FOR THE YEAR OF THE NOVITIATE

The first step in a lifelong program of formation, the novitiate year is the most important, for it is one's first experience in a life of conversion in which the novice responds concretely to the call: "Leave behind... and come, follow me" (cf. Mark 10:21).

On the one hand, the novice is introduced "to the school of the Lord's Service" and begins to listen to both the One who called him and his own inner self as he responds to the call. In learning both about his call and himself, he discovers his limitations and obstacles as well as his potential. He also learns about the resources at his disposal: the guidance of his abbot, his novice master, the community and the Order with its traditions. And most of all, he learns about the power of grace that can help him overcome the obstacles and limitations.

As the rite of taking the habit says, the novice has the task of divesting himself of his "old self" – his sins, and secular goals and habits leading to sins and temptations – and of putting on a new man. He must put on a new style of thinking and live as Jesus did in obedience, chastity and poverty so that love for God and people flourishes in his heart.

These tasks make it necessary for the novice to be, in some sense, "uprooted" from his previous life and relationships. Such an uprooting requires that he distance himself from his previous life, including his family and friends, and direct and focus all his energies on seeking God in the monastic community.

These guidelines are intended only to sketch out an initial program of orientation with practical advice for succeeding in a life of prayer, community, service, and study.

2. A DAY IN THE LIFE OF THE NOVICE

A) The Framework of Prayer Life

Like everyone in the monastery, the novice is expected to be at the church for community prayer. The two pillars of common prayer are the Office of Readings/Lauds and Mass in the morning and Vespers/Compline and meal in the evening. We have a short common prayer in the middle of the day. This creates the following structure:

6 AM	Office of Reading and Lauds followed by Mass
12:20	Midday Prayer (12:05 on weekends and no-school days)
6 PM	Vespers followed by Evening Meal and Compline

Twenty minutes before 6 AM and 6 PM the novice should be in the church for meditative prayer and spiritual reading. Arriving for prayer at the last minute is detrimental, especially for those who are not familiar with the liturgical books or texts. Thus also for Midday Prayer, one should arrive by 12:15.

Our monastery has Night Prayer or Compline right after dinner. As the final prayer during weekdays, the novices will gather at 9:30 PM in the St. Bernard Chapel to pray the Rosary together. We invite the rest of the community to participate in this prayer as often as they can. After the evening Rosary, the novices may make a last visit to the Eucharist in the church or go directly to their rooms to retire in order to be sufficiently rested for the next day. As a rule, the novices should not associate with others or make telephone calls after the Rosary unless for the sake of talking to their superiors (the abbot, the prior or the novice master), going to confession, receiving spiritual direction or making urgent arrangements about the next day.

B) Daily Work, Meals, and Recreation

Novices should spend 7-8 hours each weekday in work. The novices' workload includes about 12 hours of class and 10 hours of physical labor each week. They are expected to spend about 12-15 hours in preparation for their classes.

The novice should spend 45-60 minutes a day exercising. The Prep School's Gymnasium and track, as well as the seminary's swimming pool are available.

The novice is expected to eat three meals in the refectory, lunch and dinner with the community. If lunch is served buffet style as on school days, the novice should eat preferably after Midday Prayer. In addition, snacks are available throughout the day either in the refectory or the Novitiate refrigerator.

While there is a place for fasting and abstinence, the novice should consult with the novice master before undertaking any such regimen.

During or after meals the novices are encouraged to visit with other members of the community and with each other. These recreations, however, should not be prolonged beyond 1:30 PM after lunch and 8:00 PM after dinner.

Once a week, preferably during the weekend, at a time to be determined by the novice master, the novices will also be offered an opportunity for an outing either to the monastery's Lake House or to another location in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. At these events other community members will also be invited.

3. MATTERS OF DISCIPLINE

A) Silence

A spirit of silence is important for life in the monastery. Needless talk must be avoided in general, but most especially from the evening Rosary to the conclusion of breakfast on the following morning. This spirit of silence should guide the length and frequency of telephone

calls, use of the internet, conversations on the intercom, and conversations with members of the community face to face. As a rule, during the novitiate year the novice may access the internet only in the library and only for the purposes of his studies.

B) Visits and Vacation

During the year of the novitiate, parents and immediate family members are welcome to visit up to four times. Visits should be scheduled in advance. There should be no "surprise visits," unless in an emergency. Parents and friends may be invited to the novice's profession of temporary vows at the end of the novitiate. The novices generally are allowed 7-10 days vacation with other members of the monastery during the summer.

C) Correspondence As a rule, writing, calling or e-mailing relatives about once a month or every six weeks should be sufficient. If a novice feels that, during the novitiate, he needs to maintain correspondence with persons other than his immediate family, he should explain his reasons to the novice master and abide by his decision.

D) Telephone Calls

Writing or e-mailing family may be replaced by a monthly telephone call. If there is a need to call friends or acquaintances, however, the novice master's advice is to be sought and followed. The novice is discouraged from making or accepting social calls from outside. As the case may require, he should politely disengage from such conversations and explain the rules of the novitiate year. Screening the calls by the use of voicemail might be the best way of handling such outside calls. As a rule, however, the novice is asked not to turn off his telephone so that his superiors may more easily reach him.

E) Eating

An important presupposition to any measure of self-discipline and self-denial is that the novice would be willing to eat what is offered at table, and abstain from criticizing the food offered or the eating habits of others. Eating out should be an exception. Missing a meal in the Abbey and/or replacing it by a meal elsewhere should take place only with permission.

F) Drinking

When alcoholic beverages are available, the novice should be especially careful to avoid overindulgence. As a rule, one beer should be enough, or, when wine is served, one or two small glasses of wine should be sufficient. He should not go beyond this measure even at outings or when spending time at the Lake House.

G) Sleep

Healthy sleeping habits must be maintained throughout the novitiate. Depending on his individual need, the novice may take an afternoon nap, but is discouraged from sleeping at other times.

H) Visiting with the brothers

Contact with members of the community, including visiting them in their rooms is encouraged. Especially helpful and constructive are acts of charity aimed at the elderly and the sick. The

novices are encouraged to provide physical help for those who are ill or handicapped. However, novices should not take upon themselves daily chores or work from other members of the community without the permission of the novice master.

When visiting others in the monastery, and especially when visiting other novices, one should avoid sessions of idle talk or improvised recreations. Such encounters should be avoided also with the employees in the kitchen or in the office and with guests or the occupants of the retreat house. In all these matters, however, politeness and proper forms of friendliness must be observed. For longer visits with visitors or the men in the retreat house the novice should obtain permission from the novice master.

Sessions of protracted conversations outside meals (as addressed above) are not to be held in the refectory.

I) The Community's Recreation Room

The novices are welcome to use the recreation room in the morning before 8:00 AM or after dinner until 8:00 PM. They are also welcome to read the newspapers and magazines and watch the news or special programs selected for their value.

J) Trips

The novice should ask the novice master for permission if he leaves the premises of the monastery.

K) Financial Matters/Gifts

For personal needs the novice should request money from the novice master. This includes toiletries, over-the-counter medication, clothes and shoes, supplies for his studies and the like. For special or major expenses, the novice should approach the abbot. All bills from such purchases are to be given to his superiors as well as an accounting for the money he spent.

The novice is discouraged from buying and receiving gifts. He should avoid even the appearance of soliciting gifts for himself, for his friends, or for special projects, including the monastery itself. When receiving unsolicited gifts, he is to present them to the master of novices and ask for permission to accept them. Further, he should inform his parents that he has no monetary needs but should turn to his superiors for such assistance.

Finally, the novice is asked to terminate or turn in to his superiors all credit cards. He should not open new cards.