

## **St. Mary's Abbey, West Malling**

### **Introduction to the Rite of Profession**

At profession as Benedictine nuns we commit our lives to God in vows of stability, conversion of life and obedience according to the Rule of St. Benedict. These vows are embodied in a path of practical self-giving love, grounded in all the demands of a life lived in common with our sisters.

Our vow of stability honours our need to put down deep roots in order to grow in love, and ties us to this particular community of women.

In conversion of life we respond to the call of Jesus to follow him and to allow our lives to be shaped by the Gospel. We are on a life-time's journey, continually growing into his likeness in a daily turning to him.

Our obedience is offered in love to the God who created and redeemed us and who calls us to go beyond ourselves. We entrust ourselves to the will of God as expressed in the life of this Community and in the person of our Abbess.

As monastics we choose celibacy as a way to an open and inclusive love of all people. We embrace a life of simplicity as we rejoice in the abundance and goodness of God's provision for us.

Today our sister makes her vows to God in the presence of all gathered here as the Body of Christ in the celebration of the Eucharist. Bishop Laurie Green, the Bishop Visitor of our Community, presides as the one who is the guarantor on behalf of the wider Church of the integrity and authenticity of our life.

Before the offertory she comes forward carrying the candle symbolising the light of Christ that was given to her when she was clothed as a novice. It will next be lit at her deathbed and will burn to the end at her requiem.

After she has been questioned by the Bishop we call on the Holy Spirit in the ancient hymn "Veni Creator Spiritus" before she makes her vows. In common with all Benedictines she has written out a chart with her vows in her own hand and will read and sign them before us. The Bishop Visitor and Abbess also sign the chart, which our sister then places on the altar as a symbol of her self-offering.

With hands raised she sings the 'Suscipe', a verse from Psalm 119 asking God to uphold her. The word 'suscipe', here translated as 'uphold', can also be translated as 'receive' and was used in the time of St. Benedict of a father picking up a new born infant to acknowledge it as his own. She then asks for our prayers and prostrates as a sign of her total offering to God.

As a sign of her profession she receives a cowl, which is a garment that professed Benedictines wear on solemn occasions. It is made in the form of a cross as a reminder of the cost of discipleship and the promise of eternal life. After her death it will be her shroud.

After a final prayer and blessing of our newly professed sister the celebration of the Eucharist continues with the offertory, concluding with the Te Deum. The professed sisters of the community then retire to the Chapter house to welcome the newly professed sister. There she will entrust herself to her Abbess and sisters and share the kiss of peace with them.