



## **Saint Angela Merici Writings**

- **Counsels**
- **Legacies**
- **Rule**

*Angela's words taken from the book "Commentary on the Writings of Saint Angela Merici" by M. Ignatius Stone, OSU.*

*Counsels and Legacies dictated by Angela to her scribe, Gabriele Cozzano, around 1539-40.*

*Introduction to the Counsels of Saint Angela:*

*COUNSELS ADDRESS TO THE LEADERS (Colonelle, or local superiors):*

Sister Angela, unworthy servant of Jesus Christ, to her beloved daughters and sisters, the leaders of the Company of St. Ursula,

May the strength and true consolation of the Holy Spirit be in you all,  
So that you can sustain and carry out vigorously and faithfully the charge laid upon you,

And at the same time look forward to the great reward which God has prepared for you if you strive, each one for her part, to be faithful and full of concern for his spouses who have been entrusted to you, to guard them and watch over them as most vigilant shepherds and good servants.

How much, therefore, must you pray God to enlighten you, and direct you, and teach you what you have to do for love of him in this task –  
And there cannot be another more worthy than to be guardians of the spouses of the Most High.

So also, you must consider in what manner you must esteem them,  
For the more you esteem them, the more you will love them; the more you love them, the more you will care for and watch over them.  
And it will be impossible for you not to cherish them day and night, and to have them all engraved in your heart, one by one, for this is how real love acts and works.

And this charge must not be a burden for you; on the contrary, you have to thank God most greatly that he has deigned to see to it that you are among those he wants to spend themselves in governing and safeguarding such a treasure, his own.  
Grace certainly great and destiny inestimable, if you are willing to recognize it.

Do not be afraid of not knowing and not being able to do what is rightly required in such a singular government.

Have hope and firm faith in God, for he will help you in everything.  
Pray to him, humble yourself under his great power, because, without a doubt, as he has given you this charge, so he will give you also the strength to be able to carry it out, provided you do not fail for your part.

Act, move, believe, strive, hope, cry out to him with all your heart,  
For without doubt you will see marvelous things, if you direct everything to the praise and glory of his Majesty and the good of souls.

(Modern American translation: “Do something, get moving, be confident, risk new things, stick with it, get on your knees, then be ready for big surprises!”)

And among the other things which, with the grace of God, you have to do,

I ask you all, or rather I beg you for love of the Passion of Jesus Christ and of our Lady,  
that you strive to put into practice these few counsels  
Which I am leaving you now to carry out after my death; they will be for you a reminder of  
at least a part of my will and desire.  
And by this I shall know whether you are really eager to please me.

For understand that now I am more alive than I was when I lived on earth,  
And see better and hold more dear and pleasing the good things which I see you constantly  
doing,  
And now, even more, I want and am able to help you and do you good in every way.



*FIRST COUNSEL (Humble Service):*

In the first place then, my daughters and sisters most dear in the Blood of Jesus Christ, I remind you to strive, with the help of God, to take hold of and plant within you this right conviction and humble sentiment: do not consider yourselves worthy to be superiors and leaders.

Rather, regard yourselves as ministers and servants, reflecting that you have more need to serve them than they have to be served by you, or governed, And that God could very well provide for them by other means even better than you, But in his mercy he has wanted to use you as his means for your greater good, so that you could merit more from his infinite goodness, and that he would have reason for rewarding you.

Learn from our Lord who, while he was in this world, was as a servant, obeying the Eternal Father even unto death.

And this is why he says: *“Ego fui in vobis non tamquam qui recumbit, sed ut qui ministrat”*; that is, I have been among you not as the one who is served, but as the one who serves.

And St. Gregory, even though he was Pope, still called himself servant of the servants of God.

Thus he fulfilled the office of superior and Pope, but in his heart he regarded himself as less than the others, and servant of the servants of God, mindful of the evangelical saying, *“Qui maior est inter vos, fiat sicut minor.”*

In like manner, you also be superiors in the same way, that is, know and consider yourselves less than they.

Because if you do this, then God himself will exalt you as much as you have humbled yourselves.

For not in vain, and not without reason, a true and prudent servant of God humbles himself in his heart, and annihilates in himself his own feelings, and delight in his own feelings, and delight in his own reputation,

Because he hopes and expects from God another delight and truer inner glory and honour, For he firmly believes what the Gospel says: *“Qui se humiliat exaltabitur”*; that is, he who humbles himself shall be exalted.



*SECOND COUNSEL (Piacevolezza or Kindness/Gentleness):*

Be gentle and compassionate towards your dear daughters.

And strive to act solely out of the sole love of God and out of the sole zeal for souls when you admonish and advise them or exhort them to some good and dissuade them from some evil.

For you will achieve more with kindness and gentleness than with harshness and sharp rebukes,

Which should be reserved only for cases of necessity,

And even then, at the right place and time, and according to the persons.

But charity, which directs everything to the honour of God and the good of souls, charity indeed teaches such discretion,

And moves the heart to be, according to place and time, now gentle (*piacevole*) and now severe, and little or much as there is need.

If you see one faint-hearted and timid and inclined to despondency, comfort her, encourage her, promise her the blessing of the mercy of God, lift her heart with consolation.

And on the contrary, if you see another presumptuous, and who has a lax conscience and little fear of anything, into this one instill some fear;

Remind her of the rigour of the justice of God,

And how sin is an insidious thing, and how we are in the midst of snares, and how we always have reason to stand in fear, as Scripture says: "*Beatus qui semper est pavidus*"; that is, blessed is he who always stands in fear.



*THIRD COUNSEL (Obedience to a Higher Authority):*

Remain obedient to the principal mothers whom I leave in my place, since this is just. And what you do, do it as obeying them, and not as following your own judgment.

For obeying them, you will be obeying me; obeying me, you will be obeying Jesus Christ, Who, in his immense goodness, has chosen me to be mother, both alive and dead, of such a noble Company, even though, for my part, I am most unworthy of it; And having chosen me, he has also given me the grace to be able to govern it according to his will.

Now, if it should happen that you have some just reason to contradict or reproach them, do it with discretion and respect.

And if they do not want to pay you heed, have patience.

And know that it is right to love the mothers if they are good, and bear with them if they are eccentric.

And be very careful never to complain, or grumble, or speak ill of them, whether with others or with your daughters.

But always and everywhere preserve the honour and respect due to your mothers, seeing that if God commands us to honour our natural fathers and mothers, how much more our spiritual (mothers) should be esteemed.

And so, make sure that they are always held in esteem and respect, especially among your daughters.

And remember, if they are good you do not deserve them, and if they are bad you deserve even worse.

Still, if you have something in your heart that disturbs you in them, you may rightly and without scruple talk about it in confidence with some person who is good and faithful in many respects and ways.

Know, however, that where you see clearly that the salvation and honour of your daughters are in danger, you must on no account consent to it, nor tolerate it, nor have any hesitation. Yet, all this always with discernment and maturity of judgment.



*FOURTH COUNSEL (Shepherding the Flock):*

You will be careful and vigilant to know and understand the behaviour of your daughters, and to be aware of their spiritual and temporal needs.

And then, as far as possible, you yourselves provide for them if you can, because you must give the matrons as little trouble and bother as possible.

But if you cannot provide for them yourselves, go to the principal mothers, and quickly, and without any hesitancy explain to them the needs of your lambs.

And if you see them slow to provide, be insistent;

And, in that case, in my name even be importunate and troublesome.

For if ever, through your fault and negligence, one of them were lost, God would demand from you a strict account of it on the day of judgment.

For you must know this and hold it certain: that he will never fail to provide for their needs, material as well as spiritual, so long as nothing is lacking on your part.

For if God has planted this Company, he will never abandon it,

Because as Scripture says, "*Numquam vidi iustum derelictum nec semen eius quaerens panem*"; that is, never have I seen the just abandoned, nor his children go begging.



*FIFTH COUNSEL (Practical and Spiritual Recommendations for the Members):*

Please go often, as you have time and opportunity, especially on feast days, and visit your dear daughters and sisters,

And greet them; see how they are, comfort them; encourage them to stand firm in the life begun;

Invite them to desire the celestial joys and treasures, to long for those joyful and new feasts of heaven, those blessed and everlasting triumphs,

And henceforward to abandon totally all love for this miserable and treacherous world, where there is never either rest or any true contentment,

But only empty dreams, or bitter hardships, and every kind of misery and wretchedness.

Remind them to behave well in homes (they go to), with good judgment, with prudence and modesty,

And to be reserved and moderate in all things.

Let them eat and drink, not for pleasure and to satisfy their appetite, but only out of the need to sustain nature in order to serve God better.

Let them be moderate also in sleep, sleeping only as much as necessity requires.

Similarly in laughing, let them be reserved and moderate.

In listening, not taking pleasure except in hearing modest and licit, and necessary things.

In speaking, that their words be wise and reserved, not harsh, not rude, but compassionate and leading to concord and charity.

Tell them that, wherever they are, they should give good example.

And be to all a good odour of virtue.

And be obedient and submissive to their superiors.

And seek to spread peace and concord where they are.

And above all let them be humble and gentle.

And let all their behaviour, their actions and their words be with charity; and let them bear everything with patience, for with these two virtues especially, one crushes the head of the devil.

And when you visit them, I give you this charge, to greet them, and shake hands with them, also on my behalf.

And tell them that they should want to be united and in concord together, all being of one will, remaining under obedience to the Rule, for this is everything.

That they should do honour to Jesus Christ, to whom they have promised their virginity and their very self.

That they should place their hope and love in God alone, and not in any living person.

Comfort them, encourage them, let them go forward willingly.

And tell them this good news which I announce to them on behalf of Jesus Christ and our Lady:

How much they have to exult and rejoice, for in heaven a new crown of glory and joy is prepared for all of them, one by one,

Provided they stand firm and steady in their resolve,

And strive to observe the Rule.

And they should never ever doubt this.  
Although at times they will have troubles and anxieties,  
Nevertheless this will soon pass away and be turned into gladness and joy.  
And then, the suffering of this world is nothing in comparison with the blessings which are  
in Paradise.



*SIXTH COUNSEL (Setting a Good Example):*

As for you, live and behave in such a way that your daughters may see in you a model. And what you want them to do, do it yourselves first.

Act therefore in such a way that, also following your example, they may stir and spur themselves to virtuous living.

How will you reprove or admonish them for some defect if it is still in you?  
Or counsel them, and urge them to any virtue which you do not first possess, or at least, do not then begin to practice yourselves together with them?

And willingly do, as they do, every act of integrity and virtue appropriate and possible for you, especially with regard to behaviour, to going frequently to confession and communion, and other similar good works.

For it is right and fitting that the mothers be an example and a mirror for their daughters, especially in modesty, and in behaviour, and other actions, ordinary and extraordinary.



*SEVENTH COUNSEL (Sensus Ecclesiae/The Church):*

Know that you have to defend and protect your lambs from wolves and robbers, that is, from two kinds of pestilential people: worldly persons or false religious with their deceits, and heretics.

Firstly then, concerning worldly relationships, take care especially that they do not become familiar with young men, and other men, too, even if they are spiritual, because too great a spiritual familiarity with men always degenerates into carnal familiarity.

Neither let them, as far as you can see, associate with idle women who do not like to live chastely, and who willingly enjoy hearing about vanities and worldly pleasures.

Be on your guard lest a confessor, or some other religious, turn them away from some good inspiration,  
Or from fasting,  
Or from the firm purpose of virginity,  
Or from esteem for this holy Rule divinely ordained,  
Or other similar good things.  
Because many, under pretext of good advice, are accustomed to turn the minds of many poor girls from their good intentions and purposes.

Now, as for protecting them from the pestilential opinions of heretics, when you hear that some preacher, or other person, has a reputation for heresy,  
Or preaches new things outside the common practice of the Church,  
And contrary to what you have received from us,  
Then, tactfully, prevent your dear daughters from listening to such a person.

For it often happens that certain bad seeds are planted in the mind, which cannot then be uprooted except with great difficulty.  
Therefore, do not yourselves be on familiar terms with them, either.  
Leave them alone.  
Consider each one as good,  
But be prudent for your own good,  
For it is better to follow what is certain, without danger, than what is uncertain, with danger.

Keep to the ancient way and custom of the Church, established and confirmed by so many Saints under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. And live a new life.  
As for the other opinions that are arising now, leave them aside as not concerning you.

But pray, and get others to pray, that God not abandon his Church, but reform it as he pleases,  
And as he sees best for us,  
And more to his honour and glory.

For in these perilous and pestilential times, you will find no other recourse than to take refuge at the feet of Jesus Christ.

Because if he directs and teaches you, you will be (well) taught, as the Prophet also says: “*Beatus quem tu erudieris, Domine*”; that is, blessed is the one whom you, Lord, have taught.

Therefore humble yourselves under his powerful hand, crying out with the Prophet: “*Illumina oculos meos ne unquam obdormiam in morte*”, and you will be enlightened.



*EIGHTH COUNSEL (Love All Equally):*

Love your dear daughters equally; and do not prefer one more than another,  
Because they are all creatures of God. And you do not know what he wants to make of  
them.

For how do you know, you, that those who seem to you to be the least and lowest are not to  
become the most generous and most pleasing to his Majesty?

And then, who can judge the heart and the innermost secret thoughts of any creature?  
And so, hold them all in your love and bear with them all equally, for it is not up to you to  
judge the handmaids of God; he well knows what he wants to make of them,  
Who (as Scripture says) can turn stones into children of heaven.

As for you, do your duty, correcting them with love and charity if you see them fall into  
some fault through human frailty,  
And thus you will not cease to prune this vine which has been entrusted to you.  
And after that, leave it to God; he will do marvelous things in his own time, and when it  
pleases him.



*NINTH (LAST) COUNSEL:*

My last word to you, by which I implore you even with my blood, is that you live in harmony, united together, all of one heart and one will.

Be bound to one another by the bond of charity, esteeming each other, helping each other, bearing with each other in Jesus Christ.

For if you strive to be like this, without any doubt, the Lord God will be in your midst.

You will have in your favour our Lady,  
The apostles,  
All the saints,  
The angels,  
And finally all heaven and all the universe.  
Because God has so ordained from all eternity, that those who for his honour are united in doing good enjoy every prosperity, and that what they do turns out well, because they have God himself and every one of his creatures in their favour.

See then how important is this union and concord.  
So, long for it,  
Pursue it,  
Embrace it,  
Hold on to it with all your strength;  
For I tell you, living all together thus united in heart, you will be like a mighty fortress, or a tower impregnable  
Against all adversities,  
And persecutions,  
And deceits of the devil.

And moreover I assure you that every grace you ask from God will infallibly be granted to you. And I shall always be in your midst, helping your prayers.  
Therefore encourage them to continue courageously the task they have begun,  
And at the same time rejoice, because, without doubt, what I say to you will be so.

Not to mention the immense and inestimable grace that my Lover, or rather ours, will grant you at the supreme moment of death,  
For in times of great need, true friendship is recognized.

And believe firmly that then, especially, you will recognize me to be your faithful friend.  
Now I leave you; be consoled, and have a lively faith and hope.  
But first I want you to be blessed, *in nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti* (in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit). Amen.



*TESTAMENT OF MOTHER SISTER ANGELA*

*Bequeathed to the Lady-Governors:*

Sister Angela, unworthy servant of Jesus Christ,  
To Countess Lady Lucrecia, principal mother of the Company of St. Ursula, and to the  
other lady-governors and mothers, the noble matrons, Lady Genepra di Luciagi, Lady  
Maria di Avogadri, Lady Veronica di Bucci, Lady Orsolina di Gavardi, Lady Giovanna di  
Monti, Lady Isabetta da Prato, Lady Lionella di Pedeciocci, Lady Caterina di Mei.

May the eternal benediction be on you all, granted by Almighty God in the name of the  
Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

My honorable sisters and mothers most loving in the Blood of Jesus Christ, God willing in  
his eternal wisdom to call forth from the vanity of the world many women, especially  
virgins, that is, this our Company,  
And being pleased in his infinite goodness to use me as his instrument in this great work of  
his,  
Even though for my part I am a most inadequate and useless servant,  
He has also, in his usual goodness, given and granted me such grace and gift as to be able  
to govern them according to his will,  
And to provide for their needs and wants, especially those concerned with directing them  
and sustaining them in the life for which they have been chosen.

And among the good and necessary means that God has granted me, you are one of the  
most important,  
You, who are found worthy to be true and loving mothers of so noble a family,  
Confided to your hands  
That you may have for them the same care and guardianship you would have if they had  
been born from your own body, and even more.

Now, on this point I would, a little, like you to open the eye of your mind to consider your  
great grace and good fortune,  
That God has deigned to make you mothers of so many virgins,  
And confided his own spouses to your hands, and entrusted them to your government.

Oh, how much you have to thank him for this,  
And at the same time to pray to him,  
That as he has deigned to place you at the head of so noble a flock,  
So he would deign also to give you such knowledge and capacity that you may be able to  
do work worthy of praise in his sight,  
And to put all your zeal and strength into carrying out your duty.

Therefore you must make a sound and firm resolution to submit yourselves totally to his  
will,  
And with a lively and steadfast faith to receive from him what you have to do for love of  
him.  
And in this (whatever may happen) to persevere with constancy to the very end.

But above all, I ask and entreat you all, by the Passion and Blood of Jesus Christ shed for love of us,  
To willingly put into practice with every solicitude these few reminders  
Which, by the grace of God, you will find here, set out below one after the other.

Because as I am now about to let go of this life,  
Leaving you in my place as my heirs,  
These recommendations will be to you like legacies which, as my greatest desire, I leave you to carry out faithfully.



*LEGACIES:*

*First Legacy: Twofold Charity*

First of all then, my most loving mothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, strive, with the help of God, to grasp and keep in yourselves such conviction and good sentiment, that you are moved to this care and government solely by the sole love of God, and by the sole zeal for the salvation of souls.

Because all your works and actions as governors, being thus rooted in this twofold charity, can bear nothing but good and salutary fruits.

For, as our Saviour says, "*Bona arbor non potest malos fructus facere.*" The good tree, he says, that is, the heart and spirit imbued with charity, can do nothing but good and holy works.

That is why St. Augustine also said, "*Ama et fac quod vis,*" that is, have love and charity, and then do what you please, as if he said clearly, charity cannot sin.



*Second Legacy: Love for each daughter*

Next I beg you that you willingly hold in consideration and have engraved on your mind and heart all your dear daughters, one by one.

Not only their names, but also their condition, and character, and every situation and state. This will not be difficult for you if you embrace them with ardent charity.

For you can see that natural mothers, even if they had a thousand sons and daughters, would have them wholly fixed in their hearts, all and each one separately, because this is how real love works.

Indeed it seems that the more children they have, the more their love and care for each grows.

How much more spiritual mothers can and should do this, since spiritual love is beyond comparison much more powerful than natural love.

Therefore, my most loving mothers, if you love these dear daughters of ours with a burning and passionate charity,

It will be impossible for you not to have them all depicted individually in your memory and in your heart.



*Third Legacy: More “piacevolezza”*

Third, please, I beg you, willingly strive to lead them with love and with a mild and kindly hand, and not imperiously, not harshly, but in everything, willingly be gentle.

Pay attention to Jesus Christ who says, “*Discite a me quia mitis sum et humilis corde*”; Learn from me, he says, that I am gentle and meek of heart.

And about God we read, “*Disponit omnia suaviter*,” that is, he orders and governs all things with mildness.

And again Jesus Christ says, “*Jugum meum suave et onus meum leve*,” that is, my yoke and service is light and sweet.

So you also must strive to do, and use all possible gentleness.

And above all, be on your guard not to want to get anything done by force, because God has given free will to everyone, and wants to force no one, but only proposes, invites and counsels.

As he does also through the mouth of St. John, saying, “*Suadeo tibi emere coronam immarcesibilem*,” that is, I counsel you to buy the crown which cannot wither. I counsel you, he says, and not, I force you.

I do not say, however, that it will not be necessary occasionally to use reproaches and severity, at the place and time, according to the importance, condition and need of the persons, but we must be moved solely by charity and by the sole zeal for souls.



*Fourth Legacy: Spiritual motherhood*

Fourth, you must be eager and ardent in putting all your zeal and concern into ensuring that your daughters are adorned with every virtue, and with all regal and refined manners, so that more and more they may please Jesus Christ, their spouse.

And you must be especially solicitous and careful that they keep themselves intact and chaste, and that in every action and gesture they behave with modesty and prudence, and do everything with patience and charity.

Now one sees temporal mothers putting a great deal of care and effort into attiring, adorning and embellishing their daughters in many different ways, so that they may please their earthly spouses,  
And the more important and noble these men are, the more the mothers strive with diligence to make their daughters more and more attractive, especially in what they understand to be agreeable to them.

And they have and place all their contentment in being the mothers of daughters who are so pleasing to such noble spouses.  
For in this way they also hope, because and by means of their daughters, to have the love and favour of their sons-in-law.

How much more must you do this for these heavenly daughters of yours, who are spouses not of earthly husbands, corruptible and ultimately stinking, but of the immortal Son of the eternal God.

Oh, what a new beauty and dignity to be lady-governors and mothers of the spouses of the King of kings and Lord of lords,  
And to become in a way the mothers-in-law of the Son of God,  
And thus, by means of the daughters, to win the favour and love of the Most High.

Indeed, happy will you be if you are ready and alert to recognize this new and unique destiny of yours.



*Fifth Legacy: Firm but loving correction*

Fifth, you will be advised when you have gently counseled and warned one of them three, or at most four times, about some notable fault, And you see that she does not want to obey, then leave her alone, and stop sending her the leaders and other visitors.

Especially because it might happen that the poor child, seeing herself thus abandoned and dismissed, would be moved to repentance, and would more desire to want to stay and persevere in this Company, For God also dismissed Adam from Paradise so that, thus knowing himself better, he would have to do penance.

So, if being sorry for her fault, she wants to return, she must be received, But on condition that she asks pardon of you all, and also of her leader. And as a penance, she should be given to fast one Friday on bread and water.



*Sixth Legacy: Prudent discernment*

Sixth, you will be forewarned when you see that one of them finds great difficulty in deciding to give up fashionable trifles and other similar frills which in themselves have little importance,

Do not have too high a hope about her that she will persevere under this Rule.

For if she does not want to do what is lesser, much less will she do what is greater.

But here, however, you must be prudent, because it can happen that a person has set almost all her desire on a bagatelle, so that, having conquered herself on this point, she will no longer find any other too difficult.



*Seventh Legacy: Council meetings*

Seventh, make sure that you all meet with the leaders twice, or at least once a month, and thus confer together, and make a careful examination of the government.

And especially of what the leaders will report to you about the behaviour of your dear daughters, and about their necessities and needs, both spiritual and material.

And provide for everything as the Holy Spirit inspires you.



*Eighth Legacy: Meeting together*

Eighth, you must take care to have your daughters come together from time to time in the place you think best and most convenient.

And then (according to whether you have at your disposal a suitable person) have them listen to a short sermon and exhortation,  
So that, together like this, they might also meet each other as loving sisters, and thus, talking over spiritual matters, rejoice together,  
And together encourage one another,  
Which will be no small help to them.



*Ninth Legacy: Careful stewardship*

Ninth, know that if it were not useful and suitable that this Company have some income, God would not have begun to provide it.

I warn you, however, be prudent in this matter, and be good and true mothers, and such income as you have, spend it for the good and the development of the Company, according as discretion and motherly love will suggest to you.

In this matter, I do not want you to seek outside advice.  
You decide, only among yourselves, according as charity and the Holy Spirit will enlighten and inspire you,  
Directing everything towards the good and spiritual benefit of your dear daughters,  
As much to urge and move those who are already in (the Company) to greater love and obligation to do good, as to attract still others to do it.

Because just as for example, a girl takes and accepts some present and gift from some worldly stranger, she remains obliged to gratify the wishes of that person,  
And it seems that she is no longer able to say no, so, neither more nor less, by gifts and alms, people are drawn and somehow compelled to do good; and thus they remain almost bound to do good.

Follow this road and you cannot go wrong.



*Tenth Legacy: Unity of the flock*

Tenth, I beg you with all my heart, please be watchful and most vigilant, like so many caring shepherdesses, for this heavenly flock entrusted to your hands, That no weeds of discord or other scandal grow up among them, And especially that they not sully themselves with other poisonous and heretical opinion in these pestilential times.

And consider that the devil never sleeps, but in a thousand ways seeks our ruin.

Be on guard, then, and take care, especially that they are united and one in will, as we read of the Apostles and other Christians of the early Church, "*Erat autem eorum cor unum,*" that is, they were all of one heart.

In the same way, you also strive to be like this with all your dear daughters, Because the more you are united, the more Jesus Christ will be in your midst as a father and good shepherd.

And there will be no other sign that you are in the grace of the Lord than that you love one another and are united together, For he himself says, "*In hoc cognoscet mundus quod eritis mei discipuli, si diligeretis invicem,*" that is, by this the world will know that you are mine, if together, you love one another.

And thus, loving each other and living in harmony together are a sure sign that we are walking the path right and pleasing to God.

Therefore, my sisters and mothers, be vigilant on this point, for on this point especially, the devil will set snares for you under the guise of good.

So if you become aware of even the slightest shadow of such a plague, remedy it at once, according as God will enlighten you.

And on no account let such a seed grow in the Company, Because it would be a plague of bad example also for the city and even beyond. For where there is disparity of wills, inevitably there is discord; Where there is discord, without any doubt there is ruin; as the Saviour says, "*Omne regnum in seipsum divisum desolabitur,*" that is, every government in discord with itself will fall into ruin.



*Last Legacy: Final farewell*

Finally, take the greatest care that the good directives given, especially those in the Rule, be most diligently observed.

And if, according to times and circumstances, the need arises to make new rules or do something differently, do it prudently and with good advice.

And let your principal recourse be to gather at the feet of Jesus Christ,  
And there, all of you, with all your daughters, to offer most fervent prayers,  
For in this way, without doubt, Jesus Christ will be in your midst, and as a true and good master, he will enlighten and teach you what you have to do.

Hold this for certain: that this Rule has been planted directly by his holy hand, and he will never abandon this Company as long as the world lasts.  
Because, if he has planted it in the first place, who is there who can uproot it?

Believe it, do not doubt, have firm faith that it be so,  
I know what I am saying.  
Blessed are those who will take very good care of it.

If you faithfully carry out these and other similar things, as the Holy Spirit suggests to you, according to the times and circumstances, rejoice, go forward willingly.

See, a great reward will be prepared for you.

And where the daughters are, there also will be the mothers.

Be consoled; do not doubt; we want to see you in our midst in heaven,  
For the Lover of us all wants this, too.  
And who is there who could resist him,  
Whose light and joyful splendour of truth will surround you at the moment of death,  
And will deliver you from the hands of the enemy.

So, persevere faithfully and joyfully in the work you have begun.

And take care, take care I say, not to lose your fervour,  
For every promise that I make to you will be fulfilled for you beyond measure.

Now I am going, and you, in the meantime, do what has to be done.  
But first I embrace you, and to you all I give the kiss of peace,  
Begging God to bless you. *In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti. Amen.*



*RULE:*

*Prologue:*

In the name of the blessed and indivisible Trinity,  
Prologue on the life of virgins recently begun under the name Company of St. Ursula,  
To the beloved daughters and sisters of the Company of Saint Ursula.

Because, dearly beloved daughters and sisters, God has granted you the grace of setting you apart from the darkness of this miserable world and of uniting you together to serve his divine Majesty.

You have to thank Him infinitely that, to you especially, He has granted such a singular gift.

For how many important persons and others of every condition do not have nor will be able to have such a grace.

Therefore, my sisters, I exhort you, or rather I beg you and entreat you all, that having been thus chosen to be the true and virginal spouses of the Son of God,  
You be willing first of all to recognize what such a thing implies, and what a new and astonishing dignity it is.

Then that you strive with all your might to remain as you are called by God,  
And to seek and desire all the ways and means necessary to persevere and make progress to the very end.

For it is not enough to begin, if one does not also persevere. That is why Truth says, "*Qui perseveraverit usque in finem, hic salvus erit,*" the one who has persevered to the end, that one will be saved.

And again, "*Beati qui audiunt verbum Dei et custodiunt illud,*" that is, blessed are those into whose hearts God has breathed the light of truth, and to whom He has given the will to yearn ardently for their heavenly home; and who then seek to preserve within themselves this voice of truth, and this holy desire.

Undoubtedly, only that person will be able to remain faithful who is also willing to embrace the ways and means necessary to this end,  
For there is little or no difference between outright: "I will no longer serve God," and the not wanting the ways and means necessary to be able to remain in his service.

And, all the more, my sisters, must we be vigilant as our undertaking is of such importance that there could not be a greater,  
For our life and salvation are at stake,  
And we are called to so glorious a life as to be spouses of the Son of God and to become queens in heaven.

But here we must be wary and prudent, because the greater the value of what is undertaken, the greater the labour and danger which one can be expected.

For here there is no kind of evil which will not try to stand in the way, seeing that here (on earth) we are placed in the midst of snares and perils,  
So that water, air, and earth, with all of hell, will take up arms against us, since as yet our flesh and sensuality are not dead.

Neither does our adversary, the devil, sleep, he who never rests, but (as St. Peter says) like a roaring lion, is always watching and seeking which approach he could use to devour any of us, and with his so many devious ways and wiles that no one could count them.

But, in spite of this, my sisters, you must not be frightened,  
For if you strive in the future, with all your might, to live as is required of the true spouses of the Most High,  
And to keep this Rule as the way along which you have to walk and as that which has been drawn up for your benefit,

I have this firm and unquestioning faith and hope in infinite divine goodness, that not only shall we easily overcome all dangers and adversities, but also, to our great glory and jubilation, we shall defeat them.

We shall even spend this very short life of ours in consolation,  
And our every sorrow and sadness will be turned into joy and gladness, and we shall find the thorny and stony paths blossoming for us, and covered with paving of finest gold.

For the angels of eternal life will be with us, that is, in so far as we share in an angelic life.

Come then, let us embrace this holy Rule which God in His grace has offered us.

And armed with its sacred precepts, let us behave so bravely that we too, like holy Judith, having courageously cut off the head of Holofernes, that is, of the devil, may return gloriously to our heavenly home,

Where, from everyone in heaven and on earth, great glory and triumph will burst forth for us.

And now, therefore, all of you, please be attentive, with great and eager hearts.



*RULE:*

*Chapter 1: On the manner of receiving*

First: let it be recalled that everyone who is about to enter or be admitted to this Company, must be a virgin,  
And have a firm intention to serve God in this way of life.

And then: that she must enter joyfully and of her own free will.

Third: that she should not have promised herself to any monastery nor to any man of this world.

Fourth: that if she has father or mother or other superiors, she first ask their consent; Thus, the lady-governors and colonelle and the men-governors of the Company will also be able to speak with them, so that they would have no legitimate reason if later, by chance, they wanted to prevent her from entering into this holy obedience.

Fifth: that she must be at least twelve years old.  
However, let it be remembered that those under twelve may be accepted in the group so as to form them to the reality of this singular life.



*RULE:*

*Chapter II: How they should be dressed*

Let it also be recalled that their clothes and manner of wearing them should be modest and simple, as truly befits virginal modesty:

Therefore, each one should wear her bodice properly fastened, and over it, a shawl or scarf of some kind of linen, or cotton material not too fine and in no way transparent; and the same applies to the kerchief.

Now the dresses should be of coarse cloth or serge, brown or dark tan, or grey, or dark grey, as is convenient for each one according to her possibilities.

Nevertheless, the sisters may wear the dresses they happen to have when they enter the Company, but only as long as these last, and provided they never have flounces or slit sleeves, or any kind of openwork decoration, embroidery or any other similar ornamentation.

And let them wear a leather belt around their waist as a sign of exterior mortification and perfect interior chastity.

They will not wear silk, or velvet, or silver, or gold; nor slippers or shoes that are not black and plainly fashioned.

Nor shawls or kerchiefs that are coloured, or of silk, or of any other sort too fine and transparent; nor ruffles on their camisoles.

Finally, nothing too fashionable or ornamental or transparent, and no other vanities that could sully their own consciences or those of others, and might be contrary to virginal modesty.



*RULE:*

*Chapter III: On the manner of behaving in public*

Furthermore, let it be recalled: First: that they should have nothing to do with women of bad reputation,

And then: that on no account should they listen to the approaches of men or women, especially in secret.

Third: that they should not go to weddings, or balls or jousts and other similar entertainments of worldly taste.

Fourth: that they should avoid standing about on balconies or on doorsteps or in the streets, either alone or with others, for many reasons.

Fifth: that walking along the roads or streets, they should go with their eyes lowered and be modestly covered by their shawls and walk quickly, not lingering, or stopping here and there, or standing about to gaze curiously at anything.

For everywhere there are dangers and various diabolical snares and traps.

Sixth: that if their mothers or other secular superiors should want to lead them into these or similar dangers,

Or want to prevent them from fasting, or prayer, or confession, or any other kind of good, They should immediately refer the matter to the governing members of the Company so that they may see to it.



*RULE:*

*Chapter IV: On fasting*

Let it be recalled as well that each one should be willing to embrace bodily fasting also as something necessary,

And as the means and way to true spiritual fasting through which all the vices and errors are cut away from the mind.

And to this example of all the holy persons very clearly invited us,  
And above all, the life of Jesus Christ, the only way to heaven.

That is why the holy mother Church proclaims all this explicitly in the ears of all the faithful when she speaks thus to God: “*Qui corporali ieiunio vitia comprimis, mentem elevas, virtutem largiris et praemia,*” that is, O God, you who through bodily fasting curb the vices, lift the mind, give virtue and rewards;

For as gluttony was the origin of all our ills, so it is fitting that fasting and abstinence be the source and means of all our spiritual good and profit.

That is why the holy canonists say: “*Indictum est ieiunium abstinentiae, lex a Domino Deo, praevaricatio legis a diabolo,*” that is, fasting, a law of abstinence, was commanded by the Lord God, and the transgression of the law is induced by the devil.

For this reason, we exhort each one to fast, especially on these days of the year: First: all those commanded by the holy mother Church, that is the whole of Lent, the Ember days [Wednesday, Friday, Saturday following first Sunday in Lent, Pentecost, Holy Cross Day on Sept. 14, St. Lucy’s Day on Dec. 13], and all the vigils of obligation.

Then: the whole of Advent.

Third: they should fast immediately after the Epiphany forty days, to subdue the senses and the appetites and sensual desires which then, especially, seem to lord it over the world, and also to implore mercy before the throne of the Most High for the many dissolute actions committed by Christians during that time, as is more than obvious to all.

Fourth: after the octave of Easter they should fast three days a week, that is the Wednesday, the Friday, and the Saturday.

Fifth: they should fast on the three Rogation days, or Litanies, which the Church celebrates before the Ascension to implore divine help for the Christian people.

Sixth: they should fast every day after the Ascension,

And at the same time they should remain in prayer with as much strength of spirit as possible, until the day of the sending of the Holy Spirit, that is until the Easter of May (Pentecost),

Asking for that great promise made by Jesus Christ to his ones who are well disposed.

Seventh: after the Easter of May they should return to the above-mentioned three days a week until Advent.

But, as unreasonable things are not to be desired, then it must be stressed that no one is to fast without the consent especially of her spiritual father and of the governing members of the Company, who are to reduce and diminish these fasts as they see that to be needed, Because to afflict one's body indiscreetly, "*esset offerre holocaustum de rapina,*" that is, would be to offer in sacrifice something stolen, as the sacred canons also say.



*RULE:*

*Chapter V: On prayer*

Let it also be recalled that each one be diligent in prayer, mental as well as vocal, which is the companion of fasting; that is why the Scripture says: “*Bona est oratio cum ieiunio,*” that is, prayer with fasting is good.

And one reads in the Gospel about that Anna, daughter of Phanuel, who in the Temple day and night served God unceasingly “*in ieiuniis et orationibus.*”

Because, just as by fasting one mortifies the appetites of one’s flesh and one’s own feelings, so by prayer one obtains from God the grace of a spiritual life.

And although one needs always to pray in spirit and mind, given the continuous need one has of God’s help, which is why Truth says: “*Oportet semper orare,*” that is, one must always pray,

Nevertheless, we also advise frequent vocal prayer, through which the bodily senses are awakened, and one disposes oneself for mental prayer.

For this reason, each one will say at least the office of Our Lady, and the seven penitential psalms with devotion and attention, Because saying the office, one speaks with God, as Blessed Alexander the Martyr also said. And those who do not know how to say it will have it taught to them by the sisters who do.

As for those who do not know how to read, they will say daily at Matins thirty-three Pater Nosters and thirty-three Marias in memory of the thirty-three years Jesus Christ lived in this world for love of us;

Then at Prime, say seven Pater Nosters and seven Ave Marias for the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit,

And, similarly, say the same at each of the other canonical Hours, that is at Terce, at Sext, at None, at Vespers and at Compline.

And to give matter and also a means to mental prayer, we exhort each one to raise her mind to God, and every day to practice this, and in the following, or in a similar manner, in the secret of her heart, to say:

“My Lord, light up the darkness of my heart,

And give me the grace to die rather than ever today offend your divine Majesty.

And strengthen my affections and senses so that they do stray, neither to right nor to left, Nor turn me away from that dazzling face of yours which contents every afflicted heart.

Alas! How grieved I am that, entering into the secret of my heart, for shame I dare not raise my eyes to heaven,

For I deserve to be devoured alive in hell, seeing in myself so many errors, so much ugliness and vileness, so many monstrous and frightful wild beasts and shapes.

Therefore I am compelled, day and night, moving, staying still, acting, thinking, to call out and to cry to heaven, and to beg for mercy and time for penance.  
Deign, O most loving Lord, to forgive me (my) so many offences, and every fault that I have ever committed from the day of my holy baptism to this hour.

Deign also to forgive the sins, alas, of my father and mother, and of my relatives and friends, and of the whole world.

I implore this of you by your most sacred Passion and your precious Blood shed for love of us,  
And by your holy Name, be it blessed above the sands of the seas, above the drops of the waters, above the multitudes of the stars.

I deeply regret that I have been slow to begin to serve your divine Majesty.  
Alas! Until now I have never shed even the smallest drop of blood for love of you,  
Nor have I ever been obedient to your divine precepts,  
And every adversity has been hard for me because of the littleness of my love for you.

Lord, in place of those poor creatures who do not know you,  
And do not care to be partakers in your most sacred Passion,  
My heart breaks,  
And willingly (if I could) I would shed my own blood to open the blind eyes of their minds.

I pray that you receive my free will,  
Every act of my own will, which by itself, because it is infected by sin, does not know how to discern good from evil.  
Receive my every thought, word and deed,  
Everything that is mine finally, both interior and exterior.  
All this I lay down as an offering at the feet of your divine Majesty.  
And I pray that you deign to receive it even though I am unworthy of this.  
Amen.”



*RULE:*

*Chapter VI: On going to Mass every day*

Also, each one should go to Mass every day, and hear at least one entirely,  
And attend it with modesty and devotion,  
For in the holy Mass are to be found afresh all the merits of the Passion of our Lord.  
And the greater the attention, faith and contrition one brings to it, the deeper is one's  
participation in these blessed merits and the greater the consolation one receives.  
Indeed, this will be a communion in spirit.

However, it is recommended not to linger too long in churches;  
But (if they wish to pray longer) they should go to their rooms, and there, shut in, pray as  
long as the Spirit and their conscience dictate.



*RULE:*

*Chapter VII: On confession*

We also exhort (each one) to go frequently to confession, necessary medicine for the wounds of our souls.

For no one will ever be justified from sin, if he does not first, with his (own) lips, confess his faults to the priest, as Scripture says: “*Dic tu prius iniquitate tuas, ut justificeris*”, that is, first, tell your sins, so that you may be justified.

And Truth says to St. Peter: “*Tibi dabo claves regni caelorum, et quodcumque ligaveris super terra merit ligatum et in caelis, et quodcumque solveris, super terra merit solutum et in caelis*”; that is, I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you unbind on earth shall be unbound in heaven.

By which is clearly demonstrated that sin cannot be taken away except by a priest and through confession.

For how will the priest be able to absolve a sin if he does not know it?

And how will he be able to know it, if the one who has committed it does not manifest it with his own lips, since the sin remains hidden within him?

Let each one, then, willingly present herself before the priest as if before God, eternal Judge,

And there, full of sorrow,

With honesty and in truth of conscience, confess her sin,

And ask forgiveness for it,

And always with fear and reverence, remain before the confessor until she has received the absolution.

Regarding this, let it be known that a place or a particular church has to be designated, where a common spiritual father, prudent and of mature age, will be elected, to whom each one will, at least once a month, confess herself;

And then, every first Friday of the month, they will gather in this church and there, all together, receive communion from this same father.

In addition to this, we exhort each one to go to confession and communion in her own parish on solemn feasts.



*RULE:*

*Chapter VIII: On obedience*

We also exhort each one to keep holy obedience,  
The only true abnegation of self-will, which is in us like a dark hell.  
This is why Jesus Christ says: “*Non veni facere voluntatem meam; sed eius qui misit me Pater*”; that is, I have not come to do my will, but that of the Father who sent me.

For obedience is in man like a great light which makes his every action good and acceptable;  
That is why we read: “*Melius est obedire quam sacrificare*”; that is, it is better to obey than to sacrifice.  
And the sacred canons say, “*Nullum bonum est extra obedientiam*”; that is, our every action, if it is to be good, must be done under obedience.

Because of this each one has to obey: first of all, the commandments of God, for Scripture says: “*Maledictus qui declinat a manatis tuis*”; that is, cursed is the one who does not observe your commandments.

Then: what the holy mother Church commands, because Truth says: “*Qui vos audit me audit, et qui vos spernit me spernit*”; that is, the one who listens to you listens to me; the one who despises you despises me.

Third: to obey one’s own bishop and pastor, and one’s own spiritual father,  
And the men and women governors of the Company.

Moreover: to obey fathers and mothers and other superiors at home,  
Of whom we advise to ask pardon once a week as a sign of submission and to preserve charity.  
To obey also the laws and statutes of the lords, and governors of the states.

And above all: to obey counsels and inspirations which the Holy Spirit unceasingly sends into our hearts,  
He whose voice we shall hear all the more clearly as we have our conscience more purified and clean.  
For the Holy Spirit is the one who (as Jesus Christ says) “*docet nos omnem veritatem*”; that is, teaches us all truth.

So, in conclusion: to obey God and every creature for love of God, as the apostle says,  
Provided that nothing is commanded us contrary to the honour of God and our own integrity.



*RULE:*

*Chapter IX: On virginity*

Each one should also preserve sacred virginity,  
Not making a vow on account of any human persuasion, but voluntarily making to God the  
sacrifice of her own heart.

Because virginity (as also the canonists say) is sisters of all the angels,  
Victory over the appetites, queen of the virtues,  
And she possesses all good.

That is why each one should behave in everything in such a way that she would not, within  
herself or in the presence of others, do anything unworthy of the spouses of the Most High.  
And so, above all, let her keep her heart pure and her conscience clear of any evil thought,  
of any shadow of envy and ill will,  
Of any discord and evil suspicion,  
And of any other wicked desire and purpose.  
But let her be joyful and always full of charity, and faith, and hope in God.  
And let her behaviour towards others be reasonable and modest as St. Paul says: “Modestia  
vestra nota sit omnibus hominibus”; that is, let your moderation and prudence be clearly  
visible to all; and so, let every action and word be honest and moderate.

Not taking God’s name in vain.  
Not swearing, but only saying simply: Yes, yes, or No, no, as Jesus Christ teaches.  
Not answering haughtily.  
Not doing anything grudgingly.  
Not staying angry.  
Not grumbling.  
Not repeating any malicious gossip.  
Finally, not performing any act or gesture which would be unworthy, especially of those  
who bear the name of servants of Jesus Christ.

But let all our words, actions and behaviour always be for the instruction and edification of  
those who have dealings with us,  
Always having charity burning in our hearts.  
Moreover, each one should be prepared to die rather than ever consent to stain and profane  
such a sacred jewel.



*RULE:*

*Chapter X: On poverty*

Finally, we exhort each one to embrace poverty,  
And not only effective poverty of temporal things,  
But above all the true poverty of spirit by which man strips his heart of affection  
And longing for created things,  
And of his very self.

And in God he has all his wealth; and apart from God sees himself to be completely poor,  
and a total nothing, and with God to have everything.  
For Truth says: "*Beati pauperes spiritu quoniam ipsorum est regnum caelorum*"; that is,  
blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

And so, let each one strive to strip herself of every thing,  
And to place all her wealth, and love, and delight, not in goods,  
Not in food and gluttony,  
Not in relatives and friends,  
Not in herself and in her own resources and knowledge,  
But in God alone and in his gentle and ineffable Providence alone.

That is why the Gospel says: "*Primum quaerite regnum Dei, et haec omnia apponentur vobis*"; that is, seek first the kingdom of God and all these other things of yours will be set before you.

And again it says: "*Nolite solliciti esse quod comedatis neque quod bibatis: scit enim Pater vester quia his omnibus indigetis*"; that is, do not be anxious in seeking what you will have to eat or what you will have to drink, because your heavenly Father knows very well that you have need of all these things,

As if to say clearly: do not trouble yourself about any of your temporary needs,  
Because God, and he alone, knows, can and will provide for them,  
He who wants nothing for you but only your good and your joy.



*RULE:*

*Chapter XI: On government*

To govern this Company it is arranged that four of the most capable virgins of the Company shall be elected,  
And at least four widowed matrons, prudent and of honest life,  
And four mature and experienced men.

The virgins should be as mistresses and guides in the spiritual life.  
And the widows as mothers, full of concern for the good and welfare of their spiritual sisters and daughters.  
And the four men as agents and even fathers with regard to the needs of the Company.

And so, let the four virgins have especially this as their task, that is, to visit every fortnight,  
Or more or less often as they will see the need,  
All the other virgins, their sisters, who are scattered through the town,  
To comfort them and help them if they should happen to be in some situation of disagreement or other trouble, of body as much as of mind;  
Or if their superiors at home did them any wrong,  
Or wanted to prevent them from doing something good,  
Or to lead them into danger of doing something wrong.  
And if they themselves could not provide a solution, they should refer the matter to the matrons.  
And if these cannot set things right, either, let the four men also be called in so that, all together, they can concur to find a remedy.

If it should happen that one of the sisters, being an orphan, could not get what is hers,  
Or if, being a servant, or a maid, or the like, she could not obtain her wages,  
Or if there should arise another such situation which would make it necessary for her to go to court and through legal proceedings,  
Or to come to an agreement (which would be the best thing to do),  
Then let the four men, out of charity, in the manner of fathers, take the matter in hand and assist according as there is need.

If members of the government should be lacking either through death, or through being relieved of office, then the Company should meet and elect others to complete the legal number.  
Also, if one of them were unable to fulfill her office or behaved badly, that person should be removed from the government.

If, by God's will and bounty, it should happen that they have money or other goods in common, let it be remembered that these must be carefully administered,  
And prudently distributed,  
Especially to help the sisters and according to each need which may arise.

If there were at least two sisters left alone, without father and mother and other superiors, then, out of charity, a house should be rented for them (if they have none) and they should be provided for in their needs.

But if there is only one, then let one of the others receive her in her house,

And be given the subvention which seems suitable to those who govern.

If, however, she wanted to go to work as a servant or maid, those who govern should see to it that she be placed where she can feel at home and live honestly.

If there were sisters so old that they could not support themselves, they should graciously accept being assisted and served as the true spouses of Jesus Christ.

Finally, if one of the sisters is ill, it is recommended that she be visited, and assisted, and served, by day and by night, if it is necessary.

And if she is near death, she should leave a little something to the Company as a sign of love and charity.

When one of them has died, then all the others will accompany her to the grave, walking two by two, with charity, and each one with a candle in hand.

And those who know how to read will say the Office for the Dead;

And those who cannot read will say thirty-three Pater Nosters and as many Ave Marias, So that if this soul were in the pains of Purgatory on account of some sin, our gentle and loving Spouse Jesus Christ, would draw her out of these pains,

And lead her to the glory of heaven with the other virgins, crowned with the golden and most shining virginal crown.

