

THE ARCHCONFRATERNITY OF ST. STEPHEN



What is the Archconfraternity of Saint Stephen?

A confraternity is a sort of club, or society, for people who are interested in the same things and want to do these together. The Church uses the word 'confraternity' as the official name for societies set up in a parish. We often use another, easier, word instead of 'confraternity' - Guild.

An archconfraternity is a guild, which has been given special power by the Church authorities in Rome. It has special privileges and facilities. Because it is an archconfraternity it can allow other guilds to share in those privileges and facilities.

That is what the Guild of Saint Stephen is. The main Archconfraternity is based on Westminster Cathedral, in London. It has many Guilds in parishes in Great Britain and elsewhere affiliated to it. Strictly speaking, only the Guild at Westminster Cathedral should call itself Archconfraternity, but parish Guilds call themselves branches of the Archconfraternity.



Aims and Objects

The objects of the Guild of Saint Stephen are:

- To encourage, positively and practically, the highest standards of serving at the Church's liturgy and so contribute to the whole community's participation in a more fruitful worship of God.
- To provide altar servers with a greater understanding of what they are doing so that they may serve with increasing reverence and prayerfulness and thereby be led to a deepening response to their vocation in life.
- To unite servers of different parishes and dioceses for their mutual support and encouragement.
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History of the Guild

The Guild of St Stephen is an International Organisation of Altar Servers founded in England in 1904 by Father Hamilton McDonald when he formed a Society of Altar Servers at the Convent of the Sacred Heart in London. In 1905, Pope Pius X gave his approbation to the Canonical establishment of the Guild at Westminster Cathedral and in 1906, the Sacred Congregation of Rites made the Guild an Archconfraternity prima primaria enabling all the parish branches to be linked with it. The Guild spread, and in 1934, Pope Pius XI enabled all Guilds of Altar Servers throughout the British Commonwealth to be affiliated with the Archconfraternity at Westminster.

Constitution and Organisation

The Archbishop of Westminster is the Superior General of the Archconfraternity and he appoints a priest to be the National Director of the Guild. A lay Central Council consisting of a Lay President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer and other members assists him in the running of the Guild. The Central Council is responsible for running the business side of the Guild.

Many diocesan bishops appoint a Priest Director of the Guild for their own diocese and together these form a National Council of Priest Directors, which is an advisory body to the National Director. Some dioceses have organised their own local Lay Councils to assist the Diocesan Director in furthering the work of the Guild.

The Guild may be erected in any parish with the permission of the





bishop of the diocese (see Canon 312 of the new Code of Canon Law) and shall then be affiliated to the Archconfraternity at Westminster Cathedral. Thus, in each parish, while maintaining its objects and keeping the rules of the Archconfraternity, the Guild can be independent in its constitution and organisation.

Rules

- To serve at the altar with reverence, understanding and regularity and with due attention to personal cleanliness and tidiness.
- To say short prayers in preparation for and in thanksgiving after, serving Mass.
- To observe silence in the sacristy and great reverence in the sanctuary.
- To recite the Guild prayer every day.

The Guild Promise

I offer myself to God almighty,
to blessed Mary, our Mother
and to our holy patron, Saint Stephen.
And I promise to do my best
to serve regularly
with reverence and understanding,
for the glory of God,
the service of his Church,
and my own eternal salvation.

Who was St. Stephen ?



Stephen's name means, "crown," and he was the first disciple of Jesus to receive the martyr's crown. Stephen was a deacon in the early Christian Church. The apostles had found that they needed helpers to look after the care of the widows and the poor. So they ordained seven deacons, and Stephen is the most famous of these.

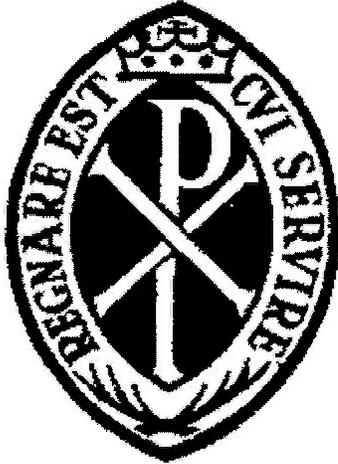
God worked many miracles through Stephen and he spoke with such wisdom and grace that many of his hearers became followers of Jesus. The enemies of the Church of Jesus were furious to see how successful Stephen's preaching was. At last, they laid a plot for him. They could not answer his wise argument, so they got men to lie about him, saying that he had spoken sinfully against God. Stephen faced that great assembly of enemies without fear. In fact, the Holy Bible says that his face looked like the face of an angel.

Stephen spoke about Jesus, showing that He is the Saviour, God had promised to send. He scolded his enemies for not having believed in Jesus. At that, they rose up in great anger and shouted at him. But Stephen looked up to Heaven and said that he saw the heavens opening and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

His hearers plugged their ears and refused to listen to another word. They dragged Stephen outside the city of Jerusalem and stoned him to death. Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" Then he fell to his knees and begged God not to punish his enemies for killing him.

After such an expression of love, the holy martyr went to his heavenly reward. St Stephen's feastday is on 26 December.

The Guild Medal



- In the centre the letters XP are the first two letters of the name 'Christ' in Greek.
- At the top is the crown of victory given by God to everyone who overcomes evil, especially those who die for him.
- At the bottom are the palm branches, traditional signs of martyrs who died for Christ.
- Around the edge are the Latin words of the Guild motto:

**CVI SERVIRE REGNARE EST.
TO SERVE CHRIST IS TO REIGN.**