

Creating a Rule of Life The Community of Reconciliation

at Washington National Cathedral

a collaboration of

Washington National Cathedral and The Friends of St. Benedict

A Benedictine Spiritual Community

B A L A N C E

Prayer | Study | Recreation | Work | Hospitality



“...Listen carefully, my child,
to the master’s instructions,
and attend to them
with the ear of your heart.

This is advice
from a father who loves you;
welcome it,
and faithfully
put it into practice.”

St. Benedict, The Rule of Saint Benedict


Creating A Rule of Life | Beginning a journey

For more than 1500 years Benedictine communities have been guided by a simple document known as The Rule of Benedict. Deeply rooted in Judeo-Christian texts and tradition, The Rule continues to provide a model for integrated living, lives of balance, and reconciliation in the world.

All who associate with The Community of Reconciliation are encouraged to create their own unique Rule of Life. Each individual Rule reinterprets Benedict's document and practices as a guiding framework for daily life in a complex world.

As you write your Rule of Life, you are taking the first step of a lifelong journey.

With the support of others in The Community of Reconciliation you will continue becoming a reconciling presence in the world. Creating your Rule of Life is a work in progress. If you already follow a Rule of Life, we encourage you to use this guide to review your own Rule in light of Benedictine practices.

A second booklet, The Community of Reconciliation at Washington National Cathedral introduces the Community, explains some of the many ways you can participate, identifies gatherings of the Community at Washington National Cathedral along with other networks and resources for support and encouragement. These booklets are available online, by e-mail, and available in the Cathedral Center for Prayer and Pilgrimage. 

Creating A Rule of Life | Listening

Benedict begins his Rule with the words, “Listen carefully, my child...” So we too begin the process of writing our Rule of Life by listening. We pay attention to the present shape of our lives, recognizing that we each have different temperaments, needs and gifts. We do this work individually and in community with one another.

Sister Joan Chittester reminds us, “... the ability to listen to another, to sit silently in the presence of God, to give sober heed, and to ponder is the nucleus of Benedictine spirituality. It may, in fact, be what is most missing in a century saturated with information but short on Gospel reflection. The Word we seek is speaking in the silence within us.”

Consider your Rule of Life as a trellis upon which you plant, water, and cultivate your relationship with God, with your deepest self and with one another.

Remember, your Rule of Life is for your support and growth.

In November of 2007, at his inaugural blessing of The Community of Reconciliation, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Desmond Tutu articulated the need for a new global reconciling spirituality stating, “...the heart of the Christian gospel is reconciliation, pointing to ‘at-one-ment’ with God and with every human being.” Our Rule of Life becomes a guide toward the journey of the reconciling life. ✎

Foundations | Stability | Obedience | Conversion

The Benedictine way of life rests upon the foundations of stability, obedience and conversion. While, taken as vows by monks in Benedictine communities, we

engage these foundation principles in our everyday life. Listen for the deep strength residing beneath each of the foundations.



Stability

Our intention to remain with God by being faithful in prayer and by honoring community

Obedience

Our intention to faithfully hear and respond to God's word by living the life to which God calls us

Conversion

Our intention to seek continually the change which allows for God's holiness to transform us and bring reconciliation to the world.

In this moment, take time for reflection upon stability, obedience and conversion.

FOR REFLECTION

- What in my life reflects stability and community? How can I tell?
- What areas of my life could benefit from greater constancy?
- In what ways am I faithful in prayer?
- In what ways do I honor community?
- What helps me pay attention and respond to the promptings of the Spirit?
- What opens me to God's transformational power?
- Where might I see the need for reconciliation, "at-one-ment" in my family, my relationships, my community, my work, and my world?

INTENTION

Consider these questions, alone and in conversation with others, as you prepare to explore the practices of Benedictine spiritual life.

Benedictine Practices | Prayer | Study | Recreation | Work | Hospitality

The Rule of Benedict articulates five practices— prayer, study, recreation, work and hospitality, that lead us toward lives centered in God. These practices guide us to the heart of radical balance— the transforming love of God.

the practices reveal about my life? What deep part of my being seeks balance and renewal? Where do I need to hear the voice of God?” How might these practices bring me to more clearly hear the voice of God? ∞

As you begin to write your Rule, reflect upon each of the practices. Sit with them, and listen intently. Ask yourself, “What do

FOR REFLECTION

- How do I understand prayer, study, recreation, work and hospitality?
- What would a life of balance look and feel like?
- What areas of my life are calling me to seek balance?
- In this season of life, how might I intentionally engage these practices?

INTENTION

Set aside time each day for prayerful silence, listening to and for the voice of God. Begin to explore the practices of prayer, study, recreation, work and hospitality. Become aware of what you already know, what you believe, and how you might expand your understanding.

Allow yourself to wait. Allow yourself to not know “the answer.” Join a gathering of spiritual seekers. Listen to the voice of the stranger. Seek the counsel of trusted friends as you explore your life. Decide to begin the process of listening. Open yourself to hear the voice of God. Relax. Renew. Listen. Take your time. Waiting is an important part of the journey.

The Practice of Prayer | Reconciliation with God

Prayer expresses, nurtures, and sustains our relationship with God. It is a conversation by which we nurture this relationship. Through prayer we open ourselves to the presence of God and become available to the Spirit in our lives.

As people of faith, both individual and communal prayer is vital parts of our lives. Gathering with a community for worship and liturgy reminds us that we are part of the larger body of spiritual seekers and allows us to hear voices other than our own. This is another way of realizing and

more fully opening ourselves to the action of God.

A daily practice of prayer encourages growth in our relationship with God. In his Rule, Benedict offers instructions to the monks for practicing what he calls “the work of God”: that is, a schedule of set prayer times throughout the day. As we establish a regular time to incorporate the reading of scripture with prayers of petition, praise, thanksgiving, and intercession we allow a rhythm of prayer to profoundly shape our lives. ✞

FOR REFLECTION

- What ways of praying support my desire to be open to God’s guiding presence throughout the day?
- Where do natural transition points in my daily life occur that might create moments for prayer?

INTENTION

Set aside time each day for prayerful silence, listening to and for the voice of God. Spending time in silence may help us to become more aware of the presence of God who is always with us. Silence allows a time of direct experience of open availability to God. Prayer is our opportunity to listen. Look for the creative “languages” that might help you listen. These might include writing poetry, drawing, listening to music, or viewing a work of art. Maybe you will participate in the ancient practices of meditation and lectio divina or walk the labyrinth.

The Practice of Study | Reconciliation with Wisdom

Christian tradition teaches that we are surrounded by “a great cloud of witnesses” whose wisdom and stories have been passed on to us through the generations. Benedict drew upon the spiritual wisdom of his forbearers in order to provide insight and guidance for the community in which he lived.

We actively engage the wisdom of our ancestors in faith and integrate the insight of contemporary voices as sources of reconciling wisdom. Meditating upon scripture, reflecting on spiritual writings and experiencing art and beauty engage our minds. They also allow us to tangibly

experience God’s Spirit at work in the challenging world in which we live. We participate in study individually and communally. Individually, this might include prayerful reading of sacred texts or spiritual classics from various religious traditions. Communally, we might join or start a group to explore contemporary literature or poetry, a spiritual classic, or theology. We might attend a lecture at a museum or university; participate in a retreat or pilgrimage or join a group that studies the Bible, a sacred text or the Rule of Benedict. Exploring wisdom in community stretches us into new ways of seeing the world. ∞

FOR REFLECTION

- How might I access the wisdom of my forbearers in faith?
- What contemporary voices might awaken me to the needs and wisdom of the world?
- What spiritual resources and gatherings might stretch me to see the world differently?
- What sources of art, music and beauty might help me explore sacred wisdom?

INTENTION

Set aside regular time for thoughtful study, individually and with others. Study brings to us wisdom of the ages and new ways of hearing the voice of God. We might study biblical texts, the great works of theologians and scholars, sacred literature and poetry from other wisdom traditions. Participating in Benedictine life groups, study circles, library groups, and book clubs all offer meaningful ways to engage wisdom, individually and in community.

The Practice of Recreation | Reconciliation with Our Deepest Selves

Benedict teaches that mindfulness and holy leisure are integral practices of a balanced life. A balance between prayer, study, recreation, work and hospitality provides an inner stability in the face of life's contradictions and complications. Recreation is necessary if we are to be effective stewards of our bodies, our hearts and our minds, all gifts from God.

As we play, we become as children, the beings that Jesus said most reflect the kingdom of God. Play brings us openness and renewal that restores us and our capacity for being active in the world. Recreation is an essential aspect of the spiritual journey. ✪

FOR REFLECTION

- What brings me joy and how might I bring more of that activity into the balance of my life?
- How might I create space in my life for relaxation, reflection, re-energizing?
- How might I more intentionally experience recreation and renewal with family and friends?

INTENTION

Incorporate regular time for recreation, play, and joy. Our embrace of recreation might include physical activities (such as walking, skating, rollerblading, sailing, bicycling, exercise, rock climbing and yoga.) It also might include creative activity (such as singing a song with the kids on the way to soccer practice, playing an instrument, quilting and painting) and times for play with our children, our family and our friends. Could I memorize poetry while jogging on the treadmill instead of watching the television?

Sports and shared recreation, theatre and public events, arts and creativity all provide meaningful and fun opportunities for growth, laughter, building of community, and sustaining renewal.

The Practice of Work | Reconciliation with God's Creation

Work connects us to the world and to the creation that God has given us. In work, we engage and shape the creation's resources side by side with our neighbors. Our work is spiritually important. The Rule of Benedict teaches that even the tools of the kitchen and garden are to be

treated with the same respect as the vessels at the altar. As we recognize that our daily labor can hold sacred meaning we can view our work as an act of prayer, as a way of service, as a setting for community, as an act of stewardship as a meaningful contribution to the world. ✎

FOR REFLECTION

- How might I approach my work as a ground for spiritual renewal and reconciliation?
- In what ways might I serve my colleagues, neighbors and friends at work and at home?
- How am I being called to exercise compassionate stewardship toward God's creation?

INTENTION

Begin to recognize your work as a spiritual part of life. See your co-workers as spiritual companions. Seek opportunities to serve and support them. Discover new ways to celebrate your co-workers and value them as spiritual beings. Create new projects that bring compassionate stewardship to God's creation. Begin to imagine how your work might be an activity of God's reconciling presence in the world.

Consider getting physical. Find an opportunity to volunteer skills and service. Help repaint a house, bring meals to a shut-in or neighbor. Join a gardening group and raise vegetables for the homeless. Serve meal in a homeless shelter. Incorporate these actions into a life of balance. Actions like these can re-orient the priorities of our world.

The Practice of Hospitality | Reconciliation with Others

Hospitality is one of the most celebrated aspects of Benedictine spiritual life.

Benedict writes, “All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ, who said: ‘I was a stranger and you welcomed me.’”

Sister Joan Chittester comments, “The message to the stranger is clear: Come right in and disturb our perfect lives. You are the Christ for us today.” Hospitality is Christian spirituality in action. Hospitality forms the heart of community.

The Rule of Benedict calls us to welcome all guests as Christ. From our families to our work places, from our communities of faith to our neighborhoods, we are part of a number of diverse communities. We live in relationship with one another. Communities offer us fellowship, hospitality and support. We seek ways to build, nurture and heal relationships within all the communities to which we belong. ∞

FOR REFLECTION

- What are the overlapping communities that make up the life I live?
- How might I practice hospitality in each of these communities, seeing Christ in everyone I meet?
- How well do I receive and enjoy hospitality from others?
- How might my practice of hospitality encourage reconciliation?

INTENTION

Make a practice of welcoming the guest. What we often consider interruptions may be the sacred encounter that awakens us to the life of God. Search out opportunities to create welcome. Invite an extra guest to your dinner table. Offer a ride to a neighbor on your way to the grocery store. As we truly recognize the spirit of God dwelling in one another, we are transformed into people of invitation and welcome.

Writing My Rule of Life | A Lifelong Journey

This guide provides a simple framework for creating a Rule of Life. You will make it a living work-in-progress.

In this guide you will find a bibliography of resources for creating a rule of life, a place for your reflections as you work through this guide, and a place to begin writing your Rule. Additionally, you will find samples of three very different Rules of Life. These may help you decide how you wish write your own Rule. Your Rule of Life is as unique as you! Your Rule of Life is a living document, whatever its

form or length. Keep it close at hand to serve as a framework for your spiritual life.

Your Rule of Life can become a north star on a lifelong journey of life in God. You will not travel alone. In fact, you will follow a path that has been traveled by thousands through the centuries, and now, you will travel it anew with family, friends, and The Community of Reconciliation.

Live the journey.

Resources | Sample Rules of Life

A Sample Rule of Life | A

As a **Companion** in **The Community of Reconciliation** with God's help I will . . .

The Practice of Prayer

- I will find ways to remind me of God's guidance throughout the day
- engage in a daily practice of prayerful listening, such as Centering Prayer.
- pray each morning for my friends, family and those in need, including my fellow Companions in the Community of Reconciliation.
- support my community of faith with my regular presence and prayers during worship.
- Meet with a spiritual director once a month

The Practice of Study

- include lectio divina as part of my daily devotions.
- attend the Benedictine Life and Prayer gathering on a regular basis.

The Practice of Renewal

- spend some time each week walking outdoors and enjoying creation.
- set aside time at the end of each day to reflect upon and journal on where I felt God's presence in the day that has unfolded.
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The Practice of Work

- seek ways to be a reconciling presence in my workplace.
- engage in advocacy and action relating to environmental issues.

The Practice of Hospitality

- share a meal with family and friends each week.
- greet others as Christ.

My Rule of Life

With the help of the Blessed Trinity, I will strive to keep the following Rule of Life each day:

Set aside time each day for prayer, which will always include intercessory prayer.

Read from Scripture or from some other sacred or spiritual text.

Do something for someone else.

Do something for my own self: body, mind and spirit

Seek the holy in the everyday tasks and duties.

Try to see Christ in everyone I meet.

A Sample Rule of Life | C

My Life Rule for Balance and Reconciliation

Spirit/Prayer

Ongoing prayer

I will set aside a time each day for meditation and quiet. I will use this time to listen, to really listen. I will also meet at least once a week in a setting with other people to pray or meditate. This will help me center my own being in God.

Wisdom/Reflection/Study

At least once each week, I will spend time reading and reflecting upon something that evokes wonder and beauty. I will look to spiritual writings along with poetry to stretch me into new ways of seeing things. I will look at works of art and see how they illuminate my spiritual life. I will regularly participate in the Benedictine Life and Prayer Gathering at Washington National Cathedral and reflect upon the assigned readings of the group.

Creation/Renewal/Recreation

I will spend time in a garden or place of refreshment for a few moments each day. I will return to my practice of walking most evenings. At least once every week, I will visit a setting that has great works of art, music, nature or beauty. I will allow myself to experience this beauty and be renewed by it.

Productivity/Work

I will order my days to be able to see positive productivity. I will reflect upon what has been accomplished at the end of each day. I will use the benchmark of kindness to determine what has been of value. At my work place each day, I will set aside specific moments to reflect upon the meaning of my work and how it contributes to enriching life for others and the world. I will seek ways to help my work mates accomplish their tasks.

Hospitality/Kindness

I will make decisions to include others. I will allow kindness and welcoming presence to guide my decision making. I will invite others into my home for a meal at least once a month. I will make certain that I join others in a spiritual practice at least two times each month.

I intend to do all of these with joy and a sense that it will help me bring balance to my life in ways that reconcile me with myself, with Spirit, with others and with all creation.

Resources | Bibliography

At Home in the World: a Rule of Life for the Rest of Us, by Margaret Guenther (Seabury, 2006.) The Reverend Margaret Guenther explores ancient and contemporary meanings of the Benedictine ethos. A series of short essays follows on the different elements of a rule of life. The final chapter gives practical ideas for crafting a rule of life that encourages each of us to grow and flourish.

Beginning to Pray, by Anthony Bloom. (Paulist Press, 1988.) A classic introduction to prayer

Finding Sanctuary: Monastic Steps for Everyday Life, by Abbot Christopher Jamison, OSB. (Liturgical Press, 2006.) Abbot Jamison takes seven steps from the Benedictine monastic tradition to metaphorically build a virtual sanctuary, a place of refuge within one's own life.

The Rule of Saint Benedict in English (RB 1980), edited by Timothy Fry, OSB (Liturgical Press, 1982.) This little red rule book contains the text of the Rule, with a short introduction.

The Rule of Benedict: Insight for the Ages, by Joan Chittister, OSB (Crossroads, 1992) Sister Joan Chittister, OSB combines daily readings from the Rule along with her commentary. Her insight illustrates how the Benedictine way is the spirituality of the twenty-first century as it deals with issues facing us now--stewardship, relationships, authority, community, balance, work, simplicity, and prayer.

Seeking God: The Way of St. Benedict, by Esther de Waal (Liturgical Press, 1984.) Dr. Esther de Waal has become known as an authority for lay persons and monastics on the Rule of St. Benedict. Her ability to communicate clearly the principal values of the Rule when applied to lay people is the ultimate strength of this book. She follows each chapter with a page or two of thoughts and prayers, contributing to its meditative quality.

To Love as God Loves: Conversations with the Early Church, by Roberta Bondi (Fortress Press, 1987.) St Benedict. commends the writings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers. In this good introduction to their writings, the author focuses on their teachings about God, love, prayer and humility.

Wisdom Distilled from the Daily: Living the Rule of St. Benedict Today, by Joan Chittister (Harper & Row, 1990.) An examination of how the Rule of Benedict is still a relevant model for spiritual growth and connecting with God, with others, and with the inner self.

To access a full bibliography of resources on the Rule of Benedict, visit www.benedictfriend.org and click on the “Reading Room” tab.

The Community of Reconciliation at Washington National Cathedral is an emerging ecumenical network of individuals seeking radical balance in life and a deepening commitment to reconciliation in the world. The Community engages the ancient Christian wisdom and practices of Benedictine spirituality as an alternative way of life to our often-fragmented existence. All are welcome.



— WASHINGTON —
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For additional details visit <http://www.nationalcathedral.org/worship/cor.shtml>

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