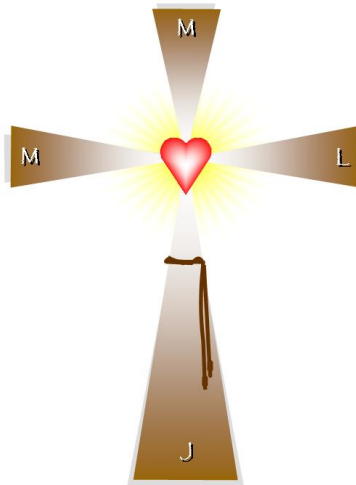


Personal Rule of Life

for

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Community of the Gospel

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I. PREAMBLE

This section contains my personal articles of faith, principles of spiritual formation, and the spiritual postures, all of which form the basis for this Rule.

Personal Articles of Faith – The foundation of my Personal Rule of Life rests with my Baptismal Covenant, upon which these Personal Articles of Faith rest:

I. People were created by God out of His love for us. He wanted to share His creation, and have us help Him as co-creators further this creation by spreading His love. He placed a piece of Himself in each of us – we call it the soul. We are a part of Him; He wants us to be like Him.

II. For us to be able to love, God gave us **free-will** since love can't exist without free-will. He added a sense of yearning to stay united with Him, and gave us a conscience to guide our free-will.

III. Sin is the choice of self-will over God's will. It is using free-will incorrectly. It creates a state of separation from God.

IV. The fact that each person is susceptible to misusing free-will is demonstrated in the story of Adam and Eve. As our **false-self** grows because of various influences in our lives, it overshadows our true self, makes bad choices, and causes a separation from God.

V. While wrong choices damage our relationship with God, His love and mercy prevails, creating a way for our **reconciliation** with Him.

VI. In an act of immense love, **God came to us** as Jesus Christ through the Blessed Virgin Mary. He came to His people to be with them, heal them, and teach them the truth about what needed to be done to rebuild a proper relationship with Him. He brought the way of salvation through His life here on earth.

VII. While the message of reconciliation is simple to state, it is impossible to do without **God's help**. To believe in His Name means to shed all that is our false self and begin to live a life based on His teachings of love, which include acts of forgiveness and reconciliation where needed. We cannot do this alone.

VIII. The separation of the false self from the true self can be painful, difficult and costly; but it can also be joyous. It begins with an outward expression of commitment and cleansing we call **Baptism**.

IX. The **truth** of His message of love was, and is, highly nourishing to the true self, but very toxic to the false self. The collective egos of Jesus' day found His message too threatening, so they crucified Him.

X. But even death could not stop Jesus' love, for as St. Paul says, "Nothing can separate us from the love of God." (Romans 8:38-39) Jesus **overcame death** to demonstrate that His love was far more powerful than mere physical death. His resurrection helped prove that He was indeed the Messiah, and that His message was true.

XI. The Advocate, the **Holy Spirit**, was sent to us to teach us and guide us in our lives today. We blend an understanding of Holy Scripture with our relationship with Christ to help us grow spiritually.

XII. God will find a way to **reclaim** every person's soul for Himself, to bring us all home. No one will be left behind. For some people, shedding the false self happens quickly; for others it may take a very long time. Hell is a place where the false self imprisons the true self. We put ourselves in this state when we turn away from God. We stay there as long as it takes us to let God in.

Principles of Spiritual Formation – Each person's spiritual journey will follow a different path, but they will all be based on similar foundational principles. These are the ones I try to adhere to in fulfilling my vows:

(1) I admit that I need help in finding and understanding the true loving nature of God and what it means for my life.

(2) I seek a loving and compassionate relationship with my Creator as I understand Him. I come to believe, *really believe*, that He loves me no matter what.

(3) It is ultimately through God's grace that I find my true self, the way He made me in my His own special way.

(4) I will turn my will and my life over to God's care so that He can help me remove my shortcomings.

(5) I will take regular inventory through reflection, observation and nonjudgmental self-awareness of my character and nature, and continually learn about my true self, the image of God in me.

(6) I will admit to God, to myself, and to another human being the current nature of my spiritual growth needs.

(7) I will humbly ask God through a life of prayer, reflective study and service to allow my true nature with its special gifts to be free to be used in His service.

(8) I will identify all persons that I may have harmed and be willing to reconcile with them directly where possible, unless to do so would cause greater harm.

(9) I will carry these principles with me moment by moment, bringing God's Presence into my life, to demonstrate God's love for others and the world.

(10) Knowing that this is a life-long journey, I will allow myself "do overs" as often as I need them.

Spiritual Postures – These reflect the spiritual “attitude” I try to maintain in any given moment. They reflect my attempt to create nonjudgmental awareness in my thoughts, words and deeds, making room for the Presence of God in my life:

- Ego Awareness
- Present Moment Awareness
- Acceptance
- Detachment
- Presence of God

II. CORE VOWS

Our lives are part of an integrated system that stretches from our soul to the far corners of the world. Every person is part of the body of Christ; we are all connected to each other and to nature. What affects a part of this system affects it all.

“If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.” I Corinthians 12:26

One’s Personal Rule of Life is a **roadmap** for moment to moment living. It is a **response** to God’s love for us. This Rule of Life reflects on the interconnected levels of “houses” within each of our lives, as it strives to connect with each of these on a daily basis through prayer, reflective study and service, reminding us that we are part of an integrated system.

These levels of “houses” include:

- Care of Our Soul – the core gift from God
- Care of the House of our Soul: Our Bodies
- Care of the House of our Bodies: Our Homes
- Care of the House of our Homes: Our Communities
- Care of the House of our Communities: Our World

Our first purpose (our *inner* purpose) is to awaken to God’s love and the connectedness we have with Him and the world. This means dissolving the bonds of the ego. This is a fundamental task and one that is ongoing. Our soul was planted in us as the image of God, and is fueled by the Holy Spirit. As an image of God, it is connected to every other person. We are a family, and God is Our Father.

It should be noted that at some point the three vows blend together, and it is hard to distinguish them – but it is not necessarily important to do so, either. Activities written in one section could easily be placed in another with the least amount of justification. They are separated below only as a basis for understanding.

Appropriate **music** is to be a part of fulfilling my vows.

A. Prayer

Prayer and Worship (with reverence, intention, imagination and persistence):

- Eucharist - weekly
- Daily Office – 4 services daily, except Sunday
- Rosary – on the Days of Our Lady
- Stations of the Cross – Lent; Good Friday
- Stations of the Manger – Advent & Christmas

B. Reflective Study

The purpose of reflective study is to learn more about God, the world, other people, and ourselves. Like prayer and service, reflective study tends to build a closer relationship with God, which brings deeper understanding that leads to greater love, compassion and mercy for the world.

In the area of **meditation**, I plan to engage in

- Contemplative activities as the occasion and opportunity arise, such as lectio.
- Silent Retreats of 1-3 days, preferably each quarter
- Nature walks as weather permits
- Daily Awareness Examen, usually conducted in conjunction with compline.

Part of reflective study is getting feedback from those trusted advisors around me. My **spiritual direction team** includes a spiritual director, a priest, a CTG Formation Guide, the Community Chaplain, and several close friends.

As for a **study focus**, I am currently engaged in exploring the concept of “integrative health” based on spiritual principles.

C. Service / Mission

Our *outer* purpose is to serve God through Christ in our own unique way, applying the skills, talents and interests we may have to a very specific corner of our world. This may be a visible mission, or behind-the-scenes.

Service to my Body as House of my Soul:

Our bodies are God's temple. It is sacred, and therefore needs to have social and spatial boundaries. Limit contact with those who lack a sense for this sacredness. Ultimately we come to view our actions as sacraments of God's love. We become instruments of God's action in this world. Our hands become His hands, our feet become His feet, and our heart becomes His heart. We need to care for our bodies with proper nutrition, exercise (movement), rest and hygiene.

- Proper food and nutrition based on the Weston A. Price traditional diet
- Movement and exercise through things like hiking, biking, gardening, yoga, and tai chi
- Proper rest by honoring the Sabbath, nightly sleep, and periodic time-outs

Service to my Home as House of my Body:

The house of our bodies, and therefore our souls, is our home. Home, whether it is a house, apartment, or mobile home, is to be a sacred space. This sacred space needs to have spatial and social boundaries. Presence should be limited to those who have a sense for the sacredness. It is the monastery of the dispersed monastic. We strive to live simply and within our means, allowing for excess to be shared with others. We learn to treat physical things as gifts from God. Within, we find place for prayer, eating, rest, and study to prepare us for our outer purpose. We care for our homes as a gift from God. It is a temporary abode, as we all will one day live within the heart of God.

- Maintain a prayer space, study area, and places for rest
- Offer hospitality to well-intentioned guests
- Maintain a garden to supplement food and to provide a contemplative activity
- Complete service on needed repairs
- Move toward a "green" use of energy
- Live within the spirit of simplicity

Service to my Community as House of my Home:

Our *outward* purpose is to know, love, and serve the Lord in our own unique way. It begins with the community around us. Once we have diminished the power of the ego over our selves, we can better discern how to use our unique talents, skills and interests in God's service. This may simply be to respond to what God puts before us in the present moment. Regardless of what this ends up being, it includes treating others with respect in a spirit of fidelity.

- Community of the Gospel – serve as an active member, and as Guardian while in that role
- All Saints Episcopal Church – serve as Bible Study leader, lector, and chalice-bearer as called as a monastic
- Community area Bible studies – serve as Bible study facilitator as there is interest
- Local Volunteering – as needed and available: Warming Shelter, jail ministries

Service to the World as House of my Community:

Although it appears that we have less influence on the extended world, this is far from the truth. On the physical side, we live in a global economy that is impacted by our purchases, contributions and actions. On the spiritual side, every act and thought we have flows into the world and impacts it in some way. Our prayers and intentions change the world in ways we don't always know.

We treat nature as sacred. We realize that we are not above nature, but are part of it. We strive to learn to live with other people and with plants and animals. Dominion over the earth means responsible care for it, not exploitation.

- Offer prayer and monetary support world-wide organizations that work for justice, peace and the dignity of all persons
- Be aware of my life impact on nature and the environment

III. SUPPORTING VALUES

Honesty

Critical to the success of one's spiritual development is the ability to be honest with one's self, with God, and with others. Honesty comes from the soul, and not the false self surrounding it.

"Honesty before God requires the most fundamental risk of faith we can take: the risk that God is good, that God does love us unconditionally. It is in taking this risk that we rediscover our dignity. To bring the truth of ourselves, just as we are, to God, just as God is, is the most dignified thing we can do in this life." Gerald May, Christian psychiatrist

Humility

Humility is what is left over after all of the false self has been shed. It is a natural outcome of the true self, the soul, which God placed in each of us. Humility grows from inward reflection and outward practice.

Fidelity

We try to treat others and ourselves with respect, dignity, and justice. It is our understanding that all people have been called to live a life of responsibility and accountability through their Baptismal vows.

We feel that we have a special obligation to hold creation and its universal family sacred. Like all sacred things, special attention is made in how we approach, touch and care for others. We recognize that God dwells within the hearts of each person, and we will try to act toward others as though they are the image of God Himself.

Simplicity

We strive to live as simply as possible. The purpose of simplicity is to keep our heart free and clear of all encumbrances so that we focus is on the most valuable of all possessions, our life in God Himself. By not consuming more than we need, we leave more for others who may be in need.

Responsibility

We must be responsible for our overall care. If a need has been identified (regardless of whether it is a medical, psychological, spiritual or emotional issue) it must be addressed by appropriate professionals.

Interconnectivity

The false self tries to convince us that we are alone and separated from God. The truth is that we are very connected with God since He is in us and our soul was made in His image. And since this is true of all people, we are therefore connected in a spiritual way to everyone. We are the family of God, the Body of Christ, together.

Health

We strive to live as healthy a life as possible. We need to learn what is best for our body and mind in terms of safety, nutrition and exercise, and work toward optimizing my health so that we can effectively serve God in prayer, reflection and service. We recognize that we are one of God's temples and that each person has a unique responsibility as custodians of His life-giving force.

Rest

The rhythm of nature has it that we must rest. The balance between work, play, and rest must be maintained for optimum health. The Sabbath Day should be observed as a rest from the activities of this world. Our prayer time serves the same purpose. Rest rejuvenates us and prepares us to re-enter our world of Service to others.

God's Love

God is love, and it endures forever. We must come to know that He really loves us, no matter what, and that some day He will bring us home to Him to complete His plan for us.

IV. APPENDICES

“To become truly humble we must become fully who we really are – the person who God made us to be – so that we can fully serve Him in a way He wants us to serve Him. It is at this point that humility and sanctity are the same thing. And to know who we really are we must become truly humble. That is why we must work at both.” (Thomas Merton)

KEEP TRUSTING GOD’S CALL

By Henri J. M. Nouwen

As you come to realize that God is beckoning you to a greater hiddenness, do not be afraid of that invitation. Over the years you have allowed the voices that call you to action and great visibility to dominate your life. You still think, even against your own best intuition, that you need to do things and be seen in order to follow your vocation. But you are now discovering that God’s voice is saying, “Stay home, and trust that your life will be fruitful even when hidden.”

It is not going to be easy to listen to God’s call. Your insecurity, your self-doubt, and your great need for affirmation make you lose trust in your inner voice and run away from yourself. But you know that God speaks to you through your inner voice and that you will find joy and peace only if you follow it. Yes, your spirit is willing to follow, but your flesh is weak.

You have friends who know that your inner voice speaks the truth and who can affirm what it says. They offer you the safe space where you can let that voice become clearer and louder. There will be people who tell you that you are wasting your time and talents, that you are fleeing from true responsibility, and that you fail to use the influence you have. But don’t let yourself be misled. They do not speak in God’s name. Trust the few who know your inner journey and want you to be faithful to it. They will help you stay faithful to God’s call.