



The Episcopal Community

Marked as Christ's Own For Ever

Creating a Personal Rule of Life

How many times have we pondered what we would like to do in the future? With a goal in mind, it becomes easier to chart a path toward the goal. The stepping stones along this path help us focus on our goal and journey towards it. A personal Rule of Life is much like a path of spiritual stepping stones that help guide our growth toward a broader and deeper relationship with God.

Begin with Some Examples

The examples below suggest practices for each of the four parts of our vow: to **grow, connect, support, and serve**. These are a starting place for contemplating a personal Rule. They are only suggestions. The lists will never be complete even though some are extensive. It may be surprising to find that we have already made some of these a part of our life. In reality, we aim to be practical in creating our Rules, so each of us chooses one, two, or three of these practices or perhaps different ones where the Spirit leads us in each of the four parts of our Rule. There is a Rule of Life Worksheet containing two columns: “What I Am Doing” and “What I Would Like to Do” on page 5. The first column is for current practices, whether for a first Rule or from a current rule.

Grow - Examples

- *Daily prayer*
 - Pray during daily activities such as driving, showering, gardening, cooking, exercising.
 - Live in conversation with God, both talking and listening.
 - Collect and use books of personal devotions.
 - Commit to regular, intentional prayer times for rhythm of life.
 - Use ACTS (adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication).
 - Try different approaches to prayer, such as Anglican Rosary, centering prayer, the Daily Office, meditation, contemplative prayer.
 - Join a prayer group or chain praying for the needs of others.
- *Study of scripture and spiritual writings*
 - Participate in Bible study and adult formation classes and groups.
 - Join a book group with a spiritual focus.
 - Explore other spiritual traditions, such as the Celtic expression.
 - Engage in the practice of *lectio divino*.
 - Find a spiritual director for guidance.
- *Worship*
 - Participate in the Eucharist (Sunday and/or mid-week) regularly.
 - Attend alternative services such as Taizé, Evensong, an experimental liturgy, or a prayer-and-praise group.
 - Join in special observances like the Easter Vigil, the Stations of the Cross, or a Passover meal.
 - Celebrate fasts, feast days, and festivals.
- *Quiet time*
 - Live in awareness of the presence of God’s spirit.
 - Practice the traditional spiritual disciplines.
 - Establish Sabbath time – turn off radio during commute; listen to Taizé or traditional chants while working out, walking, cooking, driving, etc.

- Make an annual retreat.
- Join in leading and attending quiet days.
- Walk a labyrinth.
- Practice self-examination as a prelude to confession.
- Make a commitment to journaling.
- Engage in discernment and thoughtful reflection.
- *Healthy habits*
 - Set aside Sabbath time for renewal each week to experience beauty, creation, and nature.
 - Set realistic health and fitness goals for myself.
 - Foster my gifts through hobbies and other activities.
 - Practice responsibility and accountability in all my tasks.
 - Commit to doing rather than planning to do.
 - Seek moderation and a balanced life style.
 - Accept that God has placed me where I can do the work God has in mind for me.
 - Assess whether there is a need to withdraw from any unhealthy relationships.
 - Remember to have fun!

Connect - Examples

- Seek Christ in all persons.
- Love my neighbor as myself.
- Proclaim Christ through the ministry of hospitality: welcome and acceptance.
 - Join in fellowship with family, friends, and my church community.
 - Greet visitors to worship services; welcome newcomers.
- Be totally present for others.
- Practice kindness and restraint in all situations.
- Develop and exercise skill in listening to the needs of others.
- Reach out to others outside my comfort zone.
- Create new relationships.
- Proclaim Christ by example in the holiness of my life.

Support - Examples

- Learn to see Christ in other members of the Community.
- Be open to welcome and invite women to visit your circle meetings.
- Love and accept Community members.
- Be responsible companions for other members of the Community on their life journey.
 - Be trustworthy and kind toward each other.
 - Develop and sustain shared bonds.
 - Walk with one another through life's grief, joys, thanksgivings, anxieties, needs, and "dry spells."
 - Serve one another as a source of courage and strength.
 - Support each other with prayers, reflections, listening.
 - Stay in touch with one another.
 - Continue to study with other members of the Community.
 - Be open to learning from each other.
 - Share in the fellowship and worship of the Community.
 - Respect one another's confidences.
- Be responsible to the Community.
 - Stay informed about Community business.
 - Share my talents for the benefit of the Community.

- Submit dues and other payments promptly.
- Attend Community retreats and gatherings.
- Contribute to the Community's projects for women and children.
- Be open to a call to leadership in the Community.
- Share the Community with other Episcopal women.

Serve - Examples

- Proclaim Christ through good works and acts of charity.
- Search out the holy in everyday tasks and duties.
- Make a realistic commitment to a personal ministry in my congregation or the world.
- Commit some of my time, talent, and resources as a grateful response to God's love.
- Care for the environment, God's creation.
- Assume servant leadership in my church and community.
 - Church office volunteer.
 - Altar, flower, wedding guilds.
 - Make home visits.
- Participate in healing services and other acts of compassion.
- Educate myself about issues related to peace, justice, and dignity.
 - Make myself aware of the needs of others.
 - Consider undertaking advocacy and action.

Review Present Practices

The next step in creating a personal Rule of Life is to review and reflect upon current spiritual practices. This check-up is for those creating a first Rule and those reviewing and revising a present Rule. The Collect for Guidance is offered as a prayerful way to begin.

Collect for Guidance

O God, by whom the meek are guided in judgment and light rises up in darkness for the godly: grant us, in all our doubts and uncertainties, the grace to ask what you would have us to do, that the spirit of wisdom may save us from all false choices, and that in your light we may see light, and in your straight path may not stumble, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen** *BCP, 832*

First, list current spiritual practices under "What I Am Doing" on The Rule of Life Worksheet on page 5. The examples from above may help to bring these to mind.

Next take some quiet time to reflect on these practices using the following questions as a guide.

- How do my current spiritual practices help me to live intentionally?
- How do they help bring rhythm to my daily life?
- How do they help me focus on things that are most important to me?
- How do these practices help me lead a simpler and more spiritual life?
- How do they help me grow and mature in my spiritual life?
- Do I expect too much of myself?
- Are there areas that I would like to emphasize or de-emphasize during the next year?

Plan a Rule of Life

After a period of reflection and discernment using but not limited to the questions above, list possible spiritual practices for the coming year under "What I Would Like to Do" on the Rule of Life Worksheet on page 5. The focus here is on being practical and realistic for one's self and particular situation. It is quality, not quantity, that is sensible and useful. Simplicity is a key to success.

Serious and honest reviews of the list of practices under “What I Would Like to Do” using the questions from above will help simplify the list. Which items are actually possible based on my lifestyle and present situation? Which items are nice but not feasible at this time? Will the remaining practices support growth? Items that remain are the basis for a personal Rule of Life.

An individual Rule of Life is not static, so a plan to revisit it regularly will keep it useful. Posting a Rule where it is seen often, as on a mirror or desk, serves as a reminder of the commitment. Sharing a Rule within Community circles, with a local chaplain or another member is sometimes helpful. Some like to keep their rules private. If a Rule is not supporting growth for whatever reason, prayerfully change it so it becomes beneficial. It might be useful to keep a log of Rules over the years to view the spiritual journey always remembering that even Mother Teresa had “dry spells” in her life.

Below is a prayer of dedication to offer upon completion of the Rule writing process.

A Prayer of Self-Dedication

Almighty and eternal God, so draw my heart to you, so guide my mind, so fill my imagination, so control my will, that I may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated unto you; and then use me, I pray you, as you will, and always to your glory and the welfare of your people; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

BCP, 832-833

Sample Rule of Life

Below is a sample Rule of Life. It is only an example. Each Rule will be different because it is the result of individual discernment. Predictably, Rules have similarities because of our common practices. There is no correct Rule for all. That is why we each create and strive to live our own Rule. Keep in mind this sample is not the standard for judging any Rule but a way to see what practices a Rule might contain. The review that is helpful is one that reveals whether or not a Rule is a good set of personal practices for an individual.

What I Am Doing	What I Would Like to Do
Grow: to deepen and strengthen my relationship with God	
Read the Bible using the Daily Lectionary or <i>Forward Day by Day</i> . Worship – Sunday. Healthy habit of daily walking.	Continue what I am doing. Participate in a Bible or study group. Daily quiet time to meditate and be silent. Pray regularly throughout the day. Journal.
Connect: to nourish my relationships	
Listening and being present to others.	Continue listening and being present to others. Greet and introduce newcomers. Greet the Christ in others through the Christ in me.
Support: to support fellow members and The Episcopal Community	
Practice responsibility and accountability. Communicate regularly.	Set up a small online study group.
Serve: to serve others and the whole of God’s Creation	
Healing service. Recycle. Volunteer at thrift store that benefits children.	Continue what I am doing.

Rule of Life Worksheet

What I Am Doing	What I Would Like to Do
Grow: to deepen and strengthen my relationship with God	
Connect: to nourish my relationships	
Support: to support fellow members and The Episcopal Community	
Serve: to serve others and the whole of God's Creation	