*Order of St. Benedict*

Anglican Communion Benedictines

Fundamentals for Discernment & Formation

Approved: Spring 2018



TAble of Contents

Introduction 2

Terminology 3

Focus & Discussion 5

Founder of Western Monasticism 5

The Rule of St Benedict 6

Anglican Communion Benedictines 7

ACB Charism & Faith Statements 7

ACB Leadership & Priories 8

ACB Formation Process 9

The Aspirant 11

Objectives 11

Digging Deeper in Prayer 11

Required Readings 12

Suggested Readings 12

The Postulant 13

Obectives 13

Discussion 13

Digging Deeper in Prayer 14

Required Reading 15

Suggested Reading 15

The NoVice 15

Obectives 15

Discussion 16

Digging Deeper in Prayer 17

Required Reading 17

Suggested Reading 17

The Juniorate 17

Required Reading 18

Suggested Reading 18

The SOLEMN VOWED 18

Appendix A 19

# Introduction

The purpose of the Anglican Communion Benedictines (“the Order”) is to make our Lord Jesus Christ known and loved as we form Christian men and women in the Benedictine Tradition.

“Listen, O my son, to the precepts of thy master, and incline the ear of thy heart, and cheerfully receive and faithfully execute the admonitions of thy loving Father, that by the toil of obedience thou mayest return to Him from whom by the sloth of disobedience thou hast gone away.”

This booklet is not intended to be an exhaustive text, but instead a guide to assist those on their spiritual journey walking with God. Each step of spiritual formation will be broken down into specific elements that build upon each other to encourage your relationship with God, including:

* Objectives & Terminology
* Focus & Discussion Questions
* Digging Deeper in Prayer
* Required & Suggested Readings
* Notes

With time, scholarly research, and prayerful discernment, elements from this document may be edited to reflect a more definitive work with the Abbot’s approval. For questions concerning this booklet, the formation process, or the Order, please contact the Abbot.

## Terminology

* ACNA - Anglican Church in North America. The Anglican Church in North America unites 112,000 Anglicans in nearly 1,000 congregations across the United States, Canada, and Mexico into a single Church. The Anglican Church in North America affirms the Church’s clear commitment to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, the authority of Holy Scripture, and the historic faith of the Church declared in the three catholic creeds.
* Aspirant - a person who tries to become something; seeking to attain a desired position or status. Aspirants for the Order of the Anglican Communion Benedictines include anyone who has demonstrated a serious interest in pursuing formal communion with the Order by preparing for vows to pursue Benedictine Spirituality as practiced by this community.
* Book of Common Prayer - The Anglican Prayer Book is known worldwide as one of the finest expressions of Christian prayer and worship. The 1662 Prayer Book is predominantly comprised of scriptures formulated into prayer. It has been the standard for Anglican doctrine, discipline and worship, and for subsequent revisions in many languages.
* Brother – A brother is any male religious, vowed to obedience, stability, and cruciform transformation (ever growing into the likeness of Christ our Lord) and is part of a community of others so vowed. ***Brothers***, in other words, typically mingle with lay people more and serve in schools, hospitals and similar institutions. ***Monks*** are devoted to prayer, live in cloister, and have less contact with the outside world.
* CANA - Convocation of Anglicans in North America. The Convocation of Anglicans in North America is a missionary jurisdiction of the Church of Nigeria [Anglican Communion].
* Charism – The unique ministerial gift from God to a person or group of lay, religious or ordained persons.
* Cloistered - separated from the rest of the world; being or living in a monastery or convent.
* Eucharist - the Sacrament in which Christians receive the real presence of Christ through once common elements of bread and wine.
* Juniorate - a period of reflection and study for candidates for the priesthood, brotherhood, or sisterhood. The Junior vowed monastic lives in the full disciplines of solemnly vowed monastics. This is a trial period before taking perpetual (life-long) vows.
* Liturgical – of, relating to, or having the characteristics of liturgy (a Eucharistic rite).
* Liturgy – transliterated as “The Work of the People” and practiced in worship by a sharing by clergy and laity together through shared readings, prayers and responses by the parish, and active participation by all present through prayers, responses, confessions, hymns of praise, and Holy Communion.
* Monastic – religious brothers and sisters who live a rule of life centered around prayer, study, and service.
* Monk - A monk is a contemplative brother, *(usually cloistered, or isolated from the world),* as opposed to those involved in apostolic work in open communities.
***Monks***, in other words, are brothers devoted to prayer and have little contact, if any, with the outside world, whereas ***brothers***, *who are not monks*, typically mingle with lay people more and serve schools and similar institutions.
* Nicene Creed - the universal creed of the believing and worshiping community. The original Greek text used "We Believe," because this Creed reflects the belief of the whole Church as a united body, as contrasted with the Apostles' Creed which is a personal profession of faith used at baptism. The Nicene Creed was presented to the Council of Nicaea in the 4th Century to provide a clear statement of faith for the Church.
* Non-Cloistered – one who lives and works in the world.
* Novice - a person admitted to probationary membership in a religious community. This is the initial stage of vowed life.
* Nun - a woman who is a member of a religious order and lives in a monastery or convent.
* Order - a community under a religious rule.
* Postulant - a person admitted to a religious order as a probationary candidate for membership.
* Prayer Log – a record of daily prayers.
* Priest - a man ordained to the ministerial priesthood who can consecrate the Eucharist and perform other sacraments. A priest can be either secular (diocesan, meaning he belongs to a diocese) or religious (see below).
* Religious - In the Christian tradition, public vows are made by the religious of the Catholic Church, Anglican Communion, and Eastern Orthodox Churches, whereby they confirm their public profession of the Evangelical Counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience or the Benedictine equivalent (humility, stability, obedience, and conversion). The vows are regarded as the individual's free response to a call by God to follow Jesus Christ more closely under the action of the Holy Spirit in a particular form of religious living.
* Sister - a woman who is a member of a religious order and does not live in a convent.
* Third Order - an organization composed of lay people living in secular society under a modified religious rule as directed by a religious order (e.g. Oblates).
* Vocation - a divine call to religious or secular life.

## Focus & Discussion

### Founder of Western Monasticism

Our only real knowledge of Benedict of Nursia comes from Pope Gregory the Great, who was himself a Benedictine monk, and who either wrote or commissioned a history of Benedict to be written. Since Gregory’s purpose in writing the biography was didactic, the historical details of Benedict’s life are uncertain. However, we do know that he actually lived and that the Rule he developed became the basis for Western monasticism and, indeed, for much of Western civilization itself.

According to Gregory, Benedict was born into a distinguished family who desired that he receive his higher education in Rome. Once in Rome, however, he was struck by the dissolute lives of his fellow students and soon determined to leave Rome in order to pursue a life of prayer and penance. His first hermitage was in a cave on Mt. Subiaco where he lived in such an inaccessible place that a friend who was a monk from a nearby monastery had to lower bread and other supplies down to him in a basket. For some three years, Benedict lived in solitude and prayer, battling the temptations of evil spirits and of his flesh. During one particularly difficult temptation to lust, he became so desperate that he stripped off his clothes and rolled naked in a briar patch, a treatment that cured him of lust ever after. Icons of St. Benedict often include a depiction of stinging nettles, alluding to this episode. Thus purified after his time of isolation and prayer, and his secret hermitage having been discovered, local peasants begin to search out Benedict for spiritual direction. Soon a group of undisciplined monks came and asked Benedict to become their abbot. Aware of their slothful ways, Benedict tried to dissuade them with a warning that he would impose strict discipline upon them. Heedless, they pressed him and soon enough found that he was serious about the disciplined spiritual life. The wicked monks, tired of strict observances, eventually hatched a plot to poison their abbot. Gregory reports that the plot was foiled by a miracle when Benedict blessed the pitcher of poisoned wine and it shattered “as though struck by a stone”. Discerning what had happened, Benedict took his leave and went back to his cave.

The solitude was not to last long, for stories of Benedict’s holiness began to circulate and other disciples gathered around him. At Monte Casino, he grouped these disciples into twelve monasteries of twelve monks and one abbot each. He himself guided them and led his own group as well. Eventually, around 525 AD, Benedict wrote his Rule, codifying the principles he had been teaching for many years. He must have been well aware of the desert fathers of Egypt for he makes reference to the works of John Cassian and incorporates portions of the earlier “Rule of the Master” in his own work.

Until the end of his life in 547, Benedict guided the monks of the holy mountain. His twin sister, Scholastica, also entered into religious life and founded her own convent that followed the Rule.

Gregory records numerous stories of miraculous happenings that demonstrate Benedict’s wisdom and prophetic insight. Many of these stories involve the discovery of some sin committed by a monk with the subsequent confrontation and eventual repentance and restoration of the sinner. Once two of his monks were sent on an errand in the town and ate a meal in the modest home of some generous townspeople, despite strict instruction not to do so. Upon their return to the monastery, Benedict exposed their disobedience quite precisely and the two brothers, humbled and chagrined, knelt and confessed their disobedience. In another story of divine provision, the monastery’s bread began to run short and the monks started to grumble. Benedict reproved them and, the next day, two hundred measures of flour appeared on the monastery’s doorstep, thus illustrating the Christ-like character of the Abbot.

### The Rule of St Benedict

For those interested in committing themselves to lives of deeper prayer and community, the place to begin is The Rule of St. Benedict, often called simply The Rule. The Rule remains the fundamental guide of Christian monastic communities around the world. The Rule consists of seventy-three “chapters” that cover nearly every topic that one may consider regarding inter-personal relations and spiritual discipline. Some chapters are a few paragraphs long. Other chapters consist of a couple of sentences.

The Rule can be quickly read, but as an African bishop once described St. John’s Gospel, “It is shallow enough for children to wade, but deep enough for elephants to swim.” Though a first reading of Benedict’s Rule may seem harsh to modern readers, the true spirit of Benedict and of his Rule is that of a loving father who greatly desires the salvation of his charges.

The wisdom of Benedict’s Rule gives non-heroic, specific instructions for becoming Humble, the essence of Christ-likeness. Because he is deeply humane and knows human nature, we also see a remarkable spirit of moderation and balance manifested. It is this balance of zeal and moderation that has established Benedict as the father to many generations of religious. He continues to serve as the inspiration for those of us in the Anglican Communion Benedictines. Questions that may be helpful guides to lead aspirants through The Rule are provided in Appendix A.

### Anglican Communion Benedictines

The Anglican Communion Benedictines are a dispersed Order of brothers and sisters. Living within the broader secular society, we practice our monasticism within our homes by living daily a Rule of Life reflecting the charisms of prayer, spiritual formation, and stability. We strive to be living icons for the Church, celebrating each day the Liturgy of the Hours and fulfilling the Lord’s precept to pray without ceasing. Our monastic vows are to obedience, stability and conversion.

### ACB Charism & Faith Statements

Our Charism (gift and mission from God) is prayer, spiritual formation of cruciform conversion, and stability.

Our ministry of prayer includes the holy prayers of the Divine Office, also called the Divine Hours or the Liturgy of the Hours. *From ancient times the Church has had the custom of celebrating each day the Liturgy of the Hours. In this way, the Church fulfills the Lord’s precept to pray without ceasing, at once offering praise to God the Father and interceding for the salvation of the world.* We pray for the special concern of the bishops of the Anglican Church of North America and for those who request prayer for themselves or others.

Spiritual formation is a constant and continual process of the Holy Spirit shaping us into the likeness of Christ. This is cruciform conversion. In Benedictine Spirituality, this is an intentionally structured way to be submissively transformed (*metamorpho*) for the glory of God and the sake of others. Brothers and Sisters grow throughout their lives. Movement from novice toward solemn vows is simply evidence of deeper desire to be as Christ. There is no attempt to increase our value or status before God or man. Our conversion is perpetually occurring and ever changing us into vessels of God’s love for others, for His glory alone.

In our transitory culture, we devote ourselves to stability. Stability is produced through God’s grace to grow our faith. It is exercised in our homes by our commitment to care for our families, in our parish communities where we bless the local Church with prayer and service, and within our Order as we grow in commitment from postulant to solemn vowed. Stability is essential to healthy community.

The initial steps along the Benedictine path (e.g. postulant, novice, and juniorate) are intended to introduce the practices and charisms of Benedictine Spirituality. These steps are opportunities to “try it on” and develop habits of prayer, study, and service. As a solemn vowed Brother or Sister, one is committing to a lifetime devoted to God through these manners of grace.

### ACB Leadership & Priories

The Anglican Communion Benedictines are led by an abbot who serves with compassion for the all members “like a prudent physician” to show care for the flock entrusted to his care. The abbot guides the Order with advice from mature members who he safely trusts to share his burden. The abbot appoints deans and priors who are trusted to serve as extensions of himself. Deans and priors are merely extensions of the abbot as branches of the vine. They are not autonomous or separate entities.

Deans are entrusted with specific duties directed at building up the community (e.g. Dean of Monastic Formation, who develops and administers the formal process of spiritual formation for new brothers and sisters). Deans may also act in the capacity of priors if needed.

Priors are entrusted to carry out the vision of the abbot and implement his guidance within their local areas. Priors are appointed by the abbot to guide others within the Order and ensure compassionate care is extended to all.

### ACB Formation Process

St. Benedict commends to the community that entry of postulants into the community’s life should not be made too easy, but that we should hear St. John’s precept to test the spirits to see if they are from God. (Chapter 58, The Rule of Benedict & 1 John 4:1)

Benedictines are not a centralized order. Rather, each community enjoys a considerable degree of autonomy, since it is the Abbot who interprets *The Rule* for that particular community. Therefore, a great deal of difference may be experienced from one community to another. In his chapter on the procedure for receiving new members, the only qualification that Benedict stipulates in his Rule is that the person is a seeker, genuinely searching for God. It is this radical centeredness on Christ that is the starting point for Benedictine life. Whatever is done must flow from that heart. The whole of the Benedictine life is a process of conversion, being transformed more fully into the image of Christ.

Our Order of Anglican Communion Benedictines, welcomes men and women 21 years of age and older, who desire to seek God in this ancient way of discipleship. We are open to the possibility of non-Anglican Christian members who adhere to the faith passed down by the Apostles and uphold the authority of Holy Scripture. We believe in the sanctity of human life and that marriage can only be between one man and one woman. Candidates may be ordained (male) or lay (male or female) at the time of their entry. Each request to join the Order is evaluated on its own merits.

Newcomers to our community are welcomed and their vocation tested through a process known as formation or spiritual direction. The formation process occurs in stages known as Aspirancy, Postulancy, Novitiate, and Juniorate (Temporary Profession). These steps allow for the gradual incorporation into life as a Benedictine without rushing. They allow respect for the candidate’s freedom and the community’s discernment. Benedictine spirituality is a gradual formation that gently infuses learning and experience to produce wisdom. One should appreciate the journey much more than desiring some achievement. The contemplative heart yearns for the words of the Psalmist, “Be still and know that I am God.” (Psalm 46:10)

With the approval of the Abbot, aspirants are referred to a professed (solemnly vowed) Benedictine who serves as Novice Master. The Novice Master (Matron) guides the early formation of Brothers and Sisters. The Novice Master presents Brothers (the Novice Matron presents Sisters) to the Abbot as candidates for final Solemn Vows, after they are fully prepared for a perpetual life of Benedictine Spirituality.

The Novice Master and Matron develops and publishes guidance concerning study and accountability for spiritual formation and growth for the Order. Common tenets of Benedictine Spirituality are necessary for the unity of our community, but those tenets may be adapted to the local necessities of each house after the approval of the Abbot. The Novice Master (Matron) is a resource for questions and clarification.

# The Aspirant

*Seeking deliberate relationship with God*

Those who seek to be an Aspirant undergo a period of exploration typically lasting 1-3 months. The Aspirant, who is at least 21 years of age, and the Order come to know each other and together begin to discern the Aspirant’s call to the Benedictine way of life. An Aspirant is requested to complete a personal spiritual biography of one to four pages and obtain a letter of recommendation from their priest (or bishop for priests and deacons). These documents are submitted to the Abbot.

## Objectives

* Recognize who Saint Benedict of Nursia was
* Indicate what the Rule of St. Benedict is
* Define Monasticism
* Explain who the Anglican Communion Benedictines (ACB) are
* Discuss ACB Charism & Faith Statements
* Identify ACB Leadership & Priories
* Understand the ACB formation process

## Questions for reflection

Do you have any questions about Anglican Communion Benedictines?

Does the idea of prayer, study, and reflection appeal to you?

What are you looking to achieve by going through the formation process?

## Digging Deeper in Prayer

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are near to us at all times and will hear us whenever we pray with sincerity. Through each step of discernment, the Aspirant will be exposed to various types of prayer to learn and integrate in their prayer life.

The ways to pray are endless. The Aspirant will see many of these prayer forms presented as time progresses. A few basic forms of prayer are:

* Blessing and adoration
* Prayers of petition
* Intercession
* Thanksgiving
* Praise

The book *To Be a Christian: An Anglican Catechism* provides an excellent prayer for those who are on the road to deepen their faith.

“O God, my Creator, who sent your Son as the Way, the Truth and the Life to save me and all the world, I believe in Your reality. Help my unbelief. I long to understand all that it means to be loved, known, and forgiven by You, and to be made whole: at peace with You, others, myself, and Your creation. I know I have sinned against You, others, myself, and the creation of which I am a part. Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner. Open my eyes to all that You are, and draw me closer to You, I pray. Amen”

## Required Readings

*The Rule of St. Benedict (in English)* edited by Timothy Fry, OSB

*Seeking God: The Way of St. Benedict* by Esther de Waal

*The Rule of Benedict: A Spirituality for the 21st Century* by Joan Chittister, OSB

# The Postulant

*Seeking God through Prayer*

This time of initial formation will typically last six months to one year. The purpose of this period is to give the postulant a "taste" of the monastic life without being too burdensome.

“The entry of postulants into the [community’s] life should not be made too easy, but we should follow St. John’s precept to make trial of the spirits to see if they are from God.”

 – Chapter 58, The Rule of Benedict

## Obective

The Postulant will begin to enter into a rhythm of prayer, study, and service that reflects monastic life. While experiencing the early formation of Benedictine Spirituality, the Postulant will discern if this is their path for deeper relationship with God.

## DiscuSsion

The Postulant seeks support to begin practicing a rhythm of living that places prayer as the central thread of daily habit. During this period of introduction to The Rule, Postulants are encouraged to ask questions and seek ways to allow prayer and study to transform them into the likeness of Christ. Benedictine Spiritual Formation is unique, neither better nor worse than other disciplines that grow one’s Christian faith. It is not exclusive or salvific in itself. It does not earn greater favor with God, but is a means of submitting one’s spirit to God’s Holy Spirit to recognize the grace given to us. During the period of postulancy, grace is given in the practice of praying the Daily Office and reflecting on life in Christ.

In preparing to take the vows of the Novice, the Postulant should:

1. Notify the Abbot of their desire to be accepted into the novitiate, or their desire to wait.
2. Obtain a habit. The Order can help with reliable and professional sources to purchase a habit.
3. Notify the Novice Master [Matron] that they have read the required books.
4. Provide the Novice Master [Matron]with their Meditations on The Rule.
5. Begin meditations on preparing for vows.

## Questions for Reflection

* Do you have any questions about Anglican Communion Benedictines?
* Who should you contact with questions about formation?
* Where do you feel God is calling you?
* What are you looking to achieve by going through the formation process?
* Is there a person or resource that could help you discern your path?

## Digging Deeper in Prayer

Each of the seven offices of Daily Prayer provides a focus of worship. As the Postulant’s awareness grows around these focal points, the habitual practice of the Liturgy of the Hours may become more compelling. The focus of each office is:

* Vigils (or Matins) – To adore the Holy Trinity; thanksgiving for the resurrection of our Lord, and for all the gifts of God, natural and supernatural, especially for Holy Baptism; and to pray for the spiritual resurrection of the souls of all the baptized.
* Lauds (or Prime) – To adore the Incarnation of the Divine Word, especially His being condemned by Pilate, reviled and scoffed at; to pray for those we will meet this day, those dear to us or those for whom we are bound to pray; and to offer ourselves wholly to God.
* Terce – To adore the Holy Spirit in the Church and in the Christian soul; and to pray for the needs of the Church and the unity of all Christians.
* Sext – To adore our Lord in his public ministry; and to pray for the spread of the Faith at home and abroad.
* None – To adore our Savior in His Passion and Death; and to pray for the afflicted, the sick and suffering, and those at the point of death.
* Vespers (or Evensong) – To adore our Lord as he is taken from the Cross, placed in the arms of his Mother, and prepared for burial; thanksgiving for the Holy Eucharist; to pray for a supply of holy, learned, and zealous priests and religious; and to pray for all communicants.
* Compline – To adore our Lord as he is laid in the sepulcher; to pray for the faithful departed, and for our own final perseverance.

## REquired Reading

*Life of the Beloved* by Henri J.M. Nouwen

*The Rule of Benedict: A Spirituality for the 21st Century* by Joan Chittister, OSB

## Suggested Reading

*Soul Custody* by Stephen Smith

# The NoVice

*Encountering God through Prayer*

Following six months to two years of formation, upon the recommendation of the Dean of Monastic Formation and the approval of the Abbot, the adherent may take vows to enter the Novitiate.

## Obectives

* Recognize who was Saint Benedict of Nursia
* Understand what is the Rule of St. Benedict
* Define Monasticism
* Explain who are the Anglican Communion Benedictines (ACB)
* Discuss ACB Charism & Faith Statements
* Identify ACB Leadership & Priories
* Understand the ACB formation process

## Discussion

During the Novitiate formation, the Novice is required to continue their daily and monthly requirements of postulancy and complete further reading assignments. During this period, the Novice will complete a five-page summary/reflection describing how their personal spiritual formation has been informed by the readings and mentoring of the Dean of Monastic Formation and other assigned mentors. This summary/reflection should be developed through regular discussions with the Dean of Monastic Formation and mentors.

With the Abbot’s approval, the Novice is clothed in a black tunic and white rope cincture, indicating their place in the community, and is placed under the direct authority of the Dean of Monastic Formation. This period lasts six months to two years and includes in-depth study of the Rule of St. Benedict, the vows that connect us to the Benedictine way of life, Lectio Divina (the reading of Sacred Scripture which is the basis of prayer for the Benedictine), and the regular practice of silence. The Novice will make a commitment to saying the Major Hours of the Divine Office, which is the sine-qua-non of the Benedictine life. During this period of formation both the Novice and the community seek to discern if the Novice is called to live as an Anglican Communion Benedictine. All through the formation process the community will help the Novice evaluate their calling to live as a Benedictine as well as their fitness for the Benedictine life. St. Benedict wrote that when accepting a Novice the concern must be whether he/she truly seeks God and whether he/she shows eagerness for the Opus Dei – the “Work of God,” and for obedience and trials (RB 58.7).

At the end of this stage, the Novice may petition the Abbot to enter the Juniorate,
making his/her first monastic profession of obedience, stability and conversion of life. This last vow encompasses the other traditional vows of poverty and chastity which we interpret as “simplicity of lifestyle” and “fidelity in marriage or chastity if single.” With a positive vote of the Abbot’s leadership counsel, the candidate may take the vows of a temporarily professed “junior” member of the community.

## Digging Deeper in Prayer

The Daily Office should be a habitual thread that guides the day of the mature Novice. Prior to taking Juniorate vows, the Novice is to mature in the formularies of prayer, study, and service that begin to reflect Benedictines who continue to be naturally transformed through these practices. Humility is a guiding principle in Benedictine Spirituality and must remain evident in one’s daily life.

## required Reading

*The Wisdom of the Desert Fathers and Mothers* foreword by Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove

*The Way of the Heart* by Henri J.M. Nouwen

*Shaped by the Word* by M. Robert Mulholland, Jr.

# The Juniorate

*Encountering God through Service*

Upon approval, the Juniorate enters into temporary vows, which will last three to six years. During this time, the Juniorate is responsible for self-examination, ministry exploration, and further study on his or her own. When recommended for examination, the Juniorate will appear before the Abbot, the Dean of Formation, and his or her prior or prioress. The examination is a discernment process used to determine if the Juniorate is ready to profess final vows to the Order. If everyone agrees that a final profession is appropriate, a date will be set for the Abbot to hear the candidate’s solemn vows.

Solemn profession celebrates what the candidate has already been living, seeking God every day within the Benedictine tradition. Solemn profession is a lifelong commitment to give oneself to Christ and His Gospel in this local community under the guidance of the Rule and the Abbot. The Senior Benedictine embraces not just a period of conversion but a *life* of conversion. At Solemn Profession, the newly professed receives the black cloak that is a sign and symbol of a Senior member of the community.

The Juniorate who is prepared for solemn vows has been equipped for service to others in a focused vocation.

## Required Reading

*Sacred Rhythms* by Ruth Haley Barton

*Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* by Peter Scazzero

## Suggested Reading

Readings associated with the specific service area into which the individual will live through the solemn and perpetual vows.

# The SOLEMN VOWED

*Discovering God through Monastic Life*

This formation guide is intended for those who are in formation toward solemn vows. The Rule of St. Benedict is the guiding document for all, but especially the fully professed. The goal of this document is to lead others to fully incorporate the spirit of The Rule in their daily walk. For the Solemn Vowed, living out The Rule ought to be engrained through years of habitual practice.

## APPEndix a

Reflections concerning The Rule of St. Benedict.

The following questions are provided as examples for personal examination of Brothers and Sisters who study The Rule and seek to apply its tenets to their lives in a dispersed community.

**The Prologue:**

1. How do I struggle with the sloth of disobedience?
2. How will practice in daily devotions bring me closer to God?
3. How do I harden my heart to hearing God?
4. How can the Rule be formative for me?
5. How do my distractions tempt me away from hearing and responding to God?
6. Exactly how does one undertake an action in such a way that people see it and give glory to God?
7. How do I offer myself to God?
8. Why is it so difficult for me to be submissive?

**Chapter 1:**

1. Christian life is best played out in community. How can I show my commitment to the Anglican Communion Benedictines?
2. If I cannot be intimate and honest with my Benedictine brothers, how can I be with Christ?
3. How is it comforting to be formed by something I can trust, The Order, which is bigger and wiser than I am?
4. To train my will to be God’s will I must stay put, which is stability. How can I be stable with the Order?

**Chapter 2:**

1. How can I allow myself to be created from the inside?
2. How do I relate to my Abbot, my Dean of Monastic Formation and other Benedictine Superiors?
3. It is a good thing to want to please our superiors but only if it is motivated by seeing Christ in them and responding to that. Pleasing others so that I will be liked is very self-centered. Why do I want to please?
4. Why is it so hard for me to be honest with others and with myself?
5. Do I let my limitations get in the way, in my mind, from being a truly holy person?
6. Do I refuse to act when and where I am called?

**Chapter 3:**

1. ‘Learning to listen for the Will of God is quite a task. Oddly, I seldom discover it in myself when I approach it directly. Usually it is revealed more readily when my approach is indirect.’ Explain.
2. Stewardship implies an obedience to one who assigns or gives responsibility. When I am asked to do something for the Order do I decline or say that I am not ready?

**Chapter 4:**

1. Why is it so hard for me to value myself as God values me?
2. How will the training of spiritual habits make me respond more spontaneously?
3. How do I daily discover more about my beloved Christ?
4. How can I stay focused on Christ?
5. I am often tempted to strike back. How can I take these moments and turn them into moments of sanctification?
6. Why do I consume so much of this world and other people? How do I engage in emotional self-indulgence?
7. How do I murmur or grumble?
8. How do I do better when I focus on God’s generosity?
9. What will hell be like?
10. How has God moved in my life in the past? How does that affect me today?
11. How can I best manage my fears?
12. Why is it so hard to ‘love the Lord God’?
13. Do I use humor to puff myself up at the expense of others?
14. What struggles do I have with wanting control of my future?
15. How do I look for ways to be gentle rather than confrontational with others?
16. How is it difficult for me to manage the fine line between emotional self-pity and true repentance?

**Chapter 5:**

1. Why do I always ask ‘Why?’ when I am told to do something?
2. Why do I resist “walking at the judgment and command of others”?
3. Regarding the Abbot or the Dean of Monastic Formation, what does it mean that ‘he who hears you hears me’?

**Chapter 6:**

1. Why do I have this constant need to talk?

**Chapter 7:**

1. Why do I enjoy being self-righteous?
2. How do I get caught up in what I am doing rather to whom am I going?
3. How can community and leadership help me to discover God’s will versus my own will? They often look similar.
4. What are the desires of my flesh? Be honest!
5. When have I invited God into a situation and it worked out far better than I could have imagined?
6. When do I give up too easily?
7. How do I feel that I will never measure up, particularly to The Rule of St. Benedict?
8. When have I pressed forward, even a little bit, and God responded greatly?
9. One of the tasks of the consecrated life is to allow oneself to be stripped of pride and to give up one’s sense of entitlement. How have I struggled with this?
10. How have I exercised humility when I look at my weaknesses?
11. How am I petty and self- serving?
12. How have I longed to me a member of a community that celebrates me and accepts me despite my faults?
13. How do I avoid silence within myself, with others, and with God?
14. What gives my life richness and quality?
15. When do I best speak simply and with authority?
16. How am I helpless?
17. How do I respond to God’s love?

**Chapter 8:**

1. Benedict speaks of prayer and the needs of the body all in one breath. How do I separate the body from prayer? Is one holier than the other?

**Chapter 9:**

1) Is the repetition of the daily office boring or does it bring joy?

**Chapter 10:**

1. What “seasons” of fruitfulness and fallow have there been in my life? Is this normal?

**Chapter 11:**

1. How does the experience of the seasons of the church year and week enhance the rhythms of my life?

**Chapter 12:**

1. Meditate on these words and write your response. “Eagerly do I seek you (God). My soul clings to you and your right hand holds me fast.” (Psalm 63:1)

**Chapter 13:**

1. Practice praying Scripture as those they were your own words.

**Chapter 14:**

1. Describe your journey with wallowing in your own and others’ shortfalls, believing that you will never be released from sin.

**Chapter 15:**

1. What does the term ‘Alleluia’ mean to me?

**Chapter 16:**

1. What is praise? How does one come to experience it? Spend some time praising God. Speak your words out loud.

**Chapter 17:**

1. What do the phrases “O God, come to my assistance” and “Lord, have mercy” that we read so often in the Office mean to me?

**Chapter 18:**

1. Benedict calls the Psalms the monk’s zealous service to the Holy One. This is the work of God, to which nothing is to be preferred. What do the psalms mean to me?

**Chapter 19:**

1. ‘The psalms are wonderful grist for this mill of reflection.’ What is my practice of reflection on the Psalms?

**Chapter 20:**

1. Write a reflection on the petition, ‘Lord, teach me the dangers of presumption in my prayer.’

**Chapter 21:**

1. Write a reflection on your honest openness, or lack thereof, with your Abbot and Dean of Monastic Formation.

**Chapter 22:**

1. Benedict is so at home with human weakness, just as he is with the call to each one to share the divine life. Am I?

**Chapter 23:**

1. If I were to be criticized by my superior how would I react?

**Chapter 24:**

1. “How often does my self-will see others as feeding me insofar as they co-operate with or at least do not interfere with my plans and hopes? Insofar as I can possess or manage others, I see them as contributors to my self-enhancement.” Comment.

**Chapters 25 & 26:**

1. How do I confront others who are living in and experiencing the negative effects of self-will?

**Chapter 27:**

1. How does reconciliation come about in this world? How can I facilitate reconciliation?

**Chapter 28:**

1. In what ways do I refuse to accept what I know is good for me? Why do I do this?

**Chapter 29:**

1. If I should leave the Benedictine community, how will it affect others?
2. How have the members and leadership invested their lives in me?

**Chapter 30:**

1. What am I prepared to do for a healthy soul in this life and the next?

**Chapter 31:**

1. How do I serve God during my daily annoyances and interruptions?
2. What can I do make my environment more mutually supportive and peaceful?

**Chapter 32:**

1. How do I battle between carelessness and excessive care?

**Chapter 33:**

1. How am I attached to things?

**Chapter 34:**

1. How do I experience difficulty in receiving help?

**Chapter 35:**

1. How do I serve my Benedictine community?
2. What is value of ritual?

**Chapter 36**:

1. How do I respond to someone who shows weakness, physical or emotional?
2. If I had to take care of someone for a long period of time, how would I manage it?

**Chapter 37:**

1. What is the connection between humility, stewardship, and sacramental awareness?

**Chapter 38:**

1. “O Lord, open my mouth and I shall declare your praise.” (Psalm 51:15) Respond to this verse.

**Chapter 39:**

1. What is sufficiency?
2. How do I know when I have had enough?

**Chapter 40:**

1. How does moderation result in joyous living?

**Chapter 41:**

1. In what ways do I integrate intentional feasting with intentional fasting?

**Chapter 42:**

1. How do I currently experience that by following the RuleI have become more open to God?

**Chapter 43:**

1. How will I have a growing attentiveness to what is actually happening if I value my life?
2. Comment on the statement, “I have always understood that it is good to stress my individuality and to differentiate myself from the common. Yet common is the root meaning of community.”

**Chapter 44:**

1. It is a beautiful experience to humble oneself before those whom I have offended. It is a beautiful thing to pray for the other until I no longer feel the pain of the hurt, all while the offender waits on me patiently. How do I respond to this idea?

**Chapter 45:**

1. Is there an objective moral standard?
2. Why are we so inclined to accept situational ethics?

**Chapter 46:**

1. When I am upset about things, do I talk about it and get it out of the darkness of my mind into the light? Do I keep things in, hidden in the darkness?

**Chapter 47:**

1. Sometimes I just do not want to say the Office. But once I get started it gradually forms my heart. Comment.

**Chapter 48:**

1. “I use to struggle with when to find the time to pray. Finally, I decided to start the day with prayer, and let other things fall into place as they would.” How do I find time to pray?
2. “Sometimes I am astonished at how strenuous is the life of faith. It is hard work truly to be engaged, not only with God, but with God-in-the-midst, that is, with my own given life.” Comment.

**Chapter 49:**

1. Why is it hard to believe that God would actually want something that I might offer?

**Chapters 50 & 51:**

1. It seems that Benedict is really speaking about eating as a community experience and we should watch with whom we form community. What other ways can I form community with someone or others that I should monitor?

**Chapter 52:**

1. What is the relationship between the love of neighbor and the purity of my prayer?

**Chapter 53:**

1. What does it mean to accept Christ in every person?
2. How do I slip into a pattern of exhausting myself in constant business, rather than following the pattern of harmonious stewardship of self, which involves balance and rest?

**Chapter 54:**

1. How tied am I to certain positions that give me definition?

**Chapter 55:**

1. Do I give the proper attention to things “as vessels of the altar”?
2. “Let him, therefore, consider the infirmities of those in want, and not the ill-will of the envious.” What is my experience of this statement?

**Chapter 56:**

1. Do I judge those who surround me by superficial things or do I celebrate the spirit of every person?

**Chapter 57:**

1. Do I practice what I believe or is there a gap between the two?

**Chapter 58:**

1. Usually when we start our spiritual journey there is a great deal of joy. This is typically followed by frustration and difficulty. What has characterized my journey so far with the Benedictines?
2. What are my motivations for being in the Order? What are my motives for wanting to advance in the Order?
3. Stability is difficult. To accept that the Benedictine Order is where I find God and that I do not leave the Order regardless is difficult. How do I feel about this?
4. How willing am I to face *conversatio* and to be challenged to change?
5. Reflect and respond to: “Uphold me, Lord, according to your word, and I shall live; let not my hope be put to shame.”

**Chapter 59:**

1. Because of his/her vows a monastic lives a consecrated life. What does this mean to me?

**Chapter 60:**

1. Why is it difficult for those who are accustomed to leadership roles to submit to another’s authority?

**Chapter 61:**

1. Why must contentment be more than indifference?
2. What would be a good process to determine if a new person in my life would be beneficial or toxic?

**Chapter 62:**

1. Have I considered ordination for myself (males only)? Would I consider speaking to my Dean of Monastic Formation about this?

**Chapter 63:**

1. How do I feel about being ranked?
2. Do I want the highest place?
3. How would I feel if the Abbot placed me lower than someone else?
4. How do I feel about giving others titles, particularly the title of “Lord” to the Abbot?
5. What reasons does Benedict give for titles?

**Chapter 64:**

1. Am I able to put my feelings aside to listen to God speaking through the community?
2. How do I help my Benedictine authorities to fulfill the responsibilities of their position?
3. Am I aware that God will hold my Benedictine authorities accountable? How should I respond to this?
4. Do I quickly and easily forgive my superiors when they are not perfect or do not treat me the way I think I should be treated?
5. Do I question my superior’s motives and judgments?

**Chapter 65:**

1. Should I be appointed to an office, would I accept it willingly or would I be filled with doubt and stuck in my inabilities?
2. Would I trust that God is speaking through my superior?
3. If I should refuse the position, what would that say about my relationship to the community, my superior, and God?

**Chapter 66:**

1. What are the value and benefits of stability?

**Chapter 67:**

1. How easily am I pulled away from my center by the news, gossip, etc.?

**Chapter 68:**

1. How would I respond if my superior asked me to do something that I thought was impossible for me to do?
2. How should I discuss that with my superior?
3. What should my attitude be toward this situation and the “impossible” tasks?

**Chapters 69 & 70:**

1. When conflict happens, how quickly do I take sides?
2. Does taking sides really help towards reconciliation?
3. What would be my most appropriate action when conflict happens?

**Chapter 71:**

1. How would I feel if the Abbot placed someone in authority over me whom I feel should not have that position?
2. Often we feel as though we should be able to have immediate access to the “head person” and not have to deal with a subordinate. How do I feel about this?
3. If I should offend someone, or believe that I have, what should I do?

**Chapter 72:**

1. How can I maintain my zeal for the monastic life?

**Chapter 73:**

1. While the Ruleis a valued, historically proven masterpiece, there is more yet. Benedictines have a rich heritage. What am I willing to do to continue my personal growth beyond the directions that are found in the Rule?