

A Rule of Life in the Tertiary Order of the Holy Paraclete

What is a Rule of life?

A Rule of life gives you a shape and a pattern to your approach both to your relationship with God and to the world. A Rule of life is intended to bring freedom and light. It is not intended to bind us with shackles or to make us feel guilty because we have not achieved what we said we wanted to do in our Rule of life. Rules of life should enable and enhance our living in the light of God, not add extra burdens for us to carry or make us feel as if we have failed.

So how might you go about developing your own Rule of life as a tertiary member of the Order of the Holy Paraclete?

The Rule of the Order

The Tertiary Order Rule is based on the Rule of Life that the Sisters use and is Benedictine in inspiration. Every Tertiary is asked to draw up a personal Rule of Life to enable them to live out more fully their baptismal promises. It should be drawn up in consultation with either your link tertiary, your spiritual director, group co-ordinator or the Warden of the Tertiary Order.

Firstly, start from where you are.

When we go on a journey, we will look at a map to find the way, but if we don't know where we are starting from in the first place, we are not going to get anywhere. In starting to put together a Rule of life, it can be tempting to immediately write down all you have ever wanted to do in your prayer life and assume because you have done this, it will become reality overnight! It won't – it will soon evaporate as quickly as a new year's resolution! So, spend some time looking at what you already do and gently ask yourself some questions:

What is your pattern, your rhythm of prayer, worship and service at the moment and how do you feel about this?

What is your context? Do you have family commitments, church commitments, work commitments? How do these affect your walk with God?

What is your desire as a tertiary member of the Order of the Holy Paraclete and how do you understand what the Order is asking you to commit to?

Your Rule of Life should be based on Gospel principles which will underlie your life as a Tertiary, and should remind you of your initial calling into life as a Tertiary. Your Rule should also ground you in what gives you life, joy, guidance and hope, especially in times when where your pilgrimage encounters times of difficulty.

You could talk these issues over with your spiritual director and/or link tertiary, or, if you don't have a spiritual director, your local priest or minister. By thinking about what you already do and where you are, you can identify where the potential for growth might be, or you can come to a realisation that what is there is already working and perhaps only needs a bit of tweaking.

Secondly, be honest about what is possible.

It is tempting when putting a Rule of life together to throw everything into it, including the kitchen sink! A Rule of life should be about the quality of our relationship with God, not the quantity! Less can often be better than more. Look carefully at the eight sections of the Rule. Take time to see what you currently do. It may be that you can add significantly to what you already do, but it may not be the case. Everyone's Rule will be different because we are different people with different circumstances and personalities, all of which we bring to bear on developing our own Rule of life.

Thirdly, pray about your Rule of life

Let God in! Spend some time offering your thoughts about your Rule in your prayer, allowing God to draw your attention to what he is calling you to be and how He wishes you to be a member of Order. Let God draw your attention to what is needful and helpful for you.

Fourthly, do not let your Rule bind you

A Rule, a rhythm, of life should not be something that binds you, but something that helps to set you free. Once you have written down your Rule of life, it should be flexible. If you decide you are able to add to your Rule of life having had experience of trying it out, amend it. If you are finding it heavy going, have another look and again amend it to take account of what is not working. It is your Rule and it needs to move with you at all times.

Remember it is not a Rule book, but a rhythm and rhythms can change, they can ebb and flow allowing you the freedom to respond to God's call at all times.

So how might you approach developing your Rule of life?

It is important to look at each section of the Rule and the commentary on it and maybe spend some time with each section. Each section has a biblical quote, a short outline of the Rule and a commentary on it (which tends to be longer than the actual Rule). You could read or pray through each section at a time (maybe concentrating on one each day – it would take you a week to do this, see below!) so that the wording and the prayer it inspires can be considered carefully as you develop your Rule (not someone else's!).

Once you have something in place, try it out for a couple of months, and see what works for you and what God might be calling your attention to (which could be to do less, or more, or to notice how you might have changed in that time).

Talk through your Rule with your link co-ordinator, group co-ordinator or your spiritual director. Don't forget to talk to your family as well – your Rule may also impact on them! It is always helpful to have someone else to talk it through with you – they may notice things that you have not, and their insights might help you to further refine your Rule. But remember, it is your Rule!

When you are ready, write your Rule down and make a note in your diary to review it again in a few months. Your time as a Novice will give you the chance to try your Rule out, to live by it and see if it fits alongside your other commitments and responsibilities and to review it regularly. When you are happy that it helps you in both the spiritual and everyday aspects of your life,

you will be able to commit yourself to it when you take your vows as a full member of the Order. But always remember that personal circumstances may change and may mean that you have to amend your Rule – don't be afraid to do this.

Looking at the Rule of Order, what sort of things might you consider including in your own Rule?

Being a member of the Order, it is important to maintain a connection with the Sisters at St Hilda's Priory. You may well already have visited the Priory, but you might like to add to your Rule an intention to go regularly to share the life of the Sisters. Depending on where you live and your circumstances, this will be easier for some Tertiaries than others.

You will also need to add in your membership of, and attendance, at your local group meetings and attendance at the annual chapter. Again, depending on where you live and your circumstances, this will be easier for some than others. Lone tertiaries should have an intention of connecting with the Lone Tertiaries contact.

Don't forget to ensure that you include the prayer of the Order in your daily prayer activity.

Looking at each section of the Rule now, here are some things for you to consider. You might like to use them as a basis of discussion with whoever is supporting you as you grow into the life of a Tertiary. Don't forget to pray each section through (maybe using the suggested questions) and to make your own notes as you go.

THE PRELUDE

Ephesians chapter 3 verse 7

How am I rooted and grounded in love, in my family, in my community, in my church, in my life?

How do I intend to live my Rule?

What does it mean for me to be "under daily obedience to the guidance of the Holy Spirit?"

SIMPLICITY OF LIVING:

Stewardship and the responsible use of all created things

Matthew chapter 5 verse 3

How effective is the stewardship of what I have – money, time, the world around me?

How do I ensure a good Benedictine balance in my life between worship, work and recreation?

How do I shape my prayer time and my spiritual reading?

CHASTITY: living lives of Christian love

Matthew chapter 5 verse 8

What does it mean for me to see myself as a “temple of the Holy Spirit”?

In what ways can I see God in everyone, in every thing and in every place?

OBEDIENCE: Listening to God to know His will

Luke chapter 8 verse 21

What helps me to listen to God?

What helps me to discern what it is that God wants me to do?

How do I understand my calling as a Tertiary?

WORSHIP AND PRAYER:

Regular participation in public worship and private prayer

Revelation chapter 4 verse 11

Think about your commitment to:

Attendance at the Eucharist/Mass/Communion

Bible study and spiritual reading

Your life of daily prayer

Your times of stillness with God

Whether it is appropriate for you to seek the Sacrament of Reconciliation

Your times of retreat (either at the Priory or elsewhere) and how often this might be possible

FAMILY LIFE AND FELLOWSHIP:

Generosity, forgiveness and trust

Romans chapter 12 verse 4

How do I show my commitment to the various communities with which I am involved?

My immediate and extended family

My Church

The Tertiary Order

My community

The world

Are there challenges to my calling as a Tertiary?

HOSPITALITY: Openness to all we meet

Hebrews chapter 13 verse 2

How can you best serve God by being available and open to others in their joys and in their sorrows, in times of plenty and in times of need?

How open are you to receiving the hospitality of others and of God?

FIDELITY:

the life of a Tertiary is a pilgrimage to be faithfully undertaken

The first letter to the Thessalonians chapter 5 verse 24

How can you be faithful to the Rule of the Order, and to your calling to be a Tertiary?

How can fellow Tertiaries support you in your pilgrimage?

PRAYING THE RULE

It is important to keep the Rule of the Order always in the forefront of your thoughts and prayer. One way of doing this is to read a section of the Rule each day, maybe as part of your daily prayer. You could use this weekly cycle to help you to do this:

Sunday: The Prelude

Monday: Simplicity of living

Tuesday: Chastity **and** Obedience

Wednesday: Worship and prayer

Thursday: Family life and fellowship **and** Hospitality

Friday: Fidelity

Saturday: Of the observance of the Rule (reproduced below)

OF THE OBSERVANCE OF THE RULE

Each Tertiary undertakes to draw up a personal Rule of Life giving practical application of the ideals here laid down as is appropriate for his/her circumstances.

The personal Rule should be made after consultation with the Warden, the link tertiary or his/her spiritual director.

It should be reviewed not less than triennially before the renewal of vow in order to ensure that it is still an appropriate instrument for living in according with Gospel ideals laid down in the Rule of the Tertiary Order.