

# **A Rule of Life for The Presbytery of Wyoming**

Based on

Our Beliefs

Our Values

Our Vision

## **What is a Rule of Life?**

A spiritual Rule of Life is a list of practices we intentionally undertake to maintain and deepen our relationship with the God who calls us to be the church in this unique and challenging time. The term “Rule of Life” may call up connotations of homeroom monitors or black-and-white-shirted referees, whose goal in life is to enforce a list of rules and to penalize any infraction. But in Shakespeare’s English, the term “rule” was not a synonym for “regulation”. Instead, its more common meaning was a straight-edge, for drawing lines and taking measure. In that sense, a “Rule of Life” is a tool that equips us to maintain appropriate boundaries, to open us up the path we need to take and to measure our progress.

## **Why have a Rule of Life?**

Having a Rule of Life calls for us to create an intentional pattern for meetings and committees that opens us to perceiving God’s presence and our direction. It creates a structure for being mindful – of God’s presence and our mission and vision as a Presbytery.

A Rule of Life is just one tool in a backpack of useful tools we can assemble for our journey into a deeper relationship with God and our vision and mission.

## **What does it look like?**

There are many time-tested practices that might be incorporated into the pattern that forms a Rule of Life: reading and meditating on Scripture; praying regularly; participating in the sacraments, especially the Lord’s Supper/Communion; exercising sacrificial self-giving; observing periods of silence; and practicing hospitality. In addition to behaviors, attitudes can be brought under a Rule of Life: response to authority; acceptance of the “other”; rejection of

grumbling or cynicism; forgiveness; respect for others. It is essential that we adopt a Rule that fits us – not simply a comfortable Rule, but also one that opens us up to God.

### **Where does it come from?**

A Rule of Life has been a component of monastic life since the early days of the church. Dr. Corinne Ware in *St. Benedict on the Freeway*, credits the Desert Father Pachomius, who lived in the fourth century, with creating the first monastic community to organize itself around a Rule of Life consisting of prayer, study of Scripture, and manual labor. Through the centuries, numerous religious orders created their own distinctive community rules. St. Benedict of Nursia, living in Italy in the early sixth century, founded the Benedictine Order, whose rule became the model for numerous other communities and is in use to this day. Benedict wrote his rule for simple lay folk – “a little rule for beginners”. He emphasized balance, gentleness with ourselves and with others, and the communal nature of the process. Benedict’s rule, he wrote, was intended to “establish a school for God’s service”.

### **How is it practiced?**

Since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the growing concern for authentic practice and for relating spirituality to daily life has led to a reclamation of the concept of a Rule of Life. Individuals, parishes, lay organizations, and even secular programs for personal development have seized on the creation of a Rule of Life as a strategy for fostering intentional change and growth.

(adapted by Demi Prentiss)

The following are practices that have been discerned by the Presbytery Council over six months that would help shape the life of the Presbytery of Wyoming and strengthen us to live out our Values, Beliefs and Vision:

- 1. Reading and Engaging Scripture**
- 2. Prayer**
- 3. Creative and Innovative Worship**
- 4. Service**
- 5. Generosity**

## Reading and Engaging Scripture

We as Presbyterians are noted for being people of the Book. How can we read Scripture in a way that engages all of our senses and spurs on the spiritual formation of the Presbytery so that we are living more and more in alignment with the mission and vision we sense we have from God?

The Celtic church may help focus us in this pursuit.

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“In the early Irish Church, the Celtic people drew great inspiration from the Apostle John, the beloved disciple. They particularly remembered him as the one who leaned against Jesus’ breast at the Last Supper. He became an image of the practice of listening for the heartbeat of God in the whole of life’s experiences by quiet, silent, contemplative prayer. The early Roman Church drew great inspiration from the Apostle Peter, the undoubted leader of the first disciples. They particularly remembered him as the one to whom Jesus gave ‘the keys of the kingdom’ and who powerfully preached the Word of God to those who would hear. He became an example of the practice of listening for God in the ordained teaching of the Word and in the life of the Church.

Over the centuries these two aspects of listening to God – the reflective, contemplative inner journey of the heart and the analytical, rational hearing of the Word became separated with the result being a cause for division. However, in recent times we have been seeing a coming together – a clear recognition that we need both streams and traditions.

That listening to God within, at the heart of life and experience; and listening to God through the scriptures, the Church, the means of grace, the gifts of the Spirit are not mutually exclusive. They complement rather than contradict one another.

We need both MEDITATION and CONTEMPLATION as both are important aspects of the spiritual life....

a) Meditation is the active use of the mind to analyze, reflect on and discern truth from a passage of scripture or a life situation. In this it is we who actively pursue knowledge of God in relation to his Word and his world. And that’s good, we need to do this...

b) Contemplation is not allowing anything to get in the way of God’s heart... We are simply waiting on God, open and available to His Person and His Presence,...The mind is not in a concentrative ‘pursuit of knowledge’ mode but in a receptive mode. It is allowing the Truth that is God to come to it and not the other way around.” **From the Northumbria Community**

There are many ways to read and engage Scripture so that we live openly and in alignment with God’s mission and vision for us.

### Possible Strategies

- At the beginning of all meetings – Presbytery, COM, ECD/L, CPM, B&F, Council, etc. that a Lectio Divina or Dwelling in the Word begin the time together.
- For long passages of Scripture in worship, utilize two or three voices
- Choose a section of Scripture, have someone develop a Bible Study and invite Sessions and committees and groups to engage in study

- In worship, have the Scripture in the form of a drama.

## **Prayer**

A very wise lady told said, “prayer brings us into the presence of God.” Both in corporate prayer and individual prayer, we seek God’s presence and will.

“Prayer is making connection with God in the silence of our heart. Spend your time in prayer. If you pray you will have faith and if you have faith you will naturally want to serve.” (Mother Teresa in Modern Spiritual Masters, p.27)

As Christ-Followers, “When we pray ‘through Christ’ we are praying through the Body of Christ, which then includes Jesus, the Eucharist, and the body of believers (ourselves) here on earth. We are praying through all of these. Thus, not only God in heaven is being petitioned and asked to act. We are also charging ourselves, as part of the body of Christ, with some responsibility for answering the prayer. To pray as a Christian demands concrete involvement in trying to bring about what is pleaded for in prayer.” (The Holy Longing by Ronald Rolheiser, p. 83) Rolheiser goes on to say that when we are concretely involved in bringing about what we pray for, then we are “putting skin on our prayers.”

Prayer is foundational to the Christian life. In The Study Catechism 1998 the response to question 121 states: “Through prayer God frees us from anxiety, equips us for service and deepens our faith.”

## **Possible Strategies:**

**Corporate worship** is a place where the community of faith gathers. Our united prayers are meant to make us aware of God’s presence and to encourage our involvement in the world as a community.

- In Presbytery Worship and for committees of Presbytery add a time of extended silent prayer.
- In the worship service, utilize a variety of types of prayer from different traditions and cultures.
- Develop worship in a more contemplative format.

## **Presbytery Meetings**

- Format the entire Presbytery meeting agenda as an extended prayer.
- Consider having prayer walks through the community where presbytery is being held. Provide education on what a prayer walk is.
- Where available consider using a labyrinth either indoor or outdoor. Provide education on what a Labyrinth is and the process for walking it.
- Have prayer stations throughout the building where the Presbytery meeting is held and encourage a time for visiting those stations. Provide a description of what each place represents.

### **Individual prayer**

- Encourage the churches to offer studies on different styles of prayer and to practice meditative prayer. Studies such as *Engaging Spirituality* provides a 2 ½ hour weekly study and practice of prayer.
- Provide an annual schedule for the churches to pray for each other and others outreach ministries in our Presbytery such as the Lebanon/Syrian church connection. Church members could sign a letter each Sunday to be sent to those for whom they prayed. For instance, on March 31 if all the churches in the Presbytery prayed for the church in Guernsey during worship, then Guernsey would receive a note signed by those in worship saying “we prayed for you today.”

### **Creative, Innovative Worship**

Every generation on the landscape of the United States has a preference for the style, format and music of worship. The only two that are similar are the Greatest and Silent Generations. A recent article, “**How Does the Church Reach Millennials? Hint: It’s Not Flashing Lights or Rock Band Worship** by Nancy Flory says, “Millennials want authenticity — a genuine Christianity and a legitimate worship experience. Millennials are “not disillusioned with tradition; they are frustrated with slick or shallow expressions of religion,” says David Kinnaman, president of the Barna Group. ‘Millennials are not looking for perfect people,’ says Frank Powell. ‘Jesus already handled that. Millennials are looking for people to be real and honest about struggles and temptations’...While the research indicated that Millennials tend to want more traditional services, they want a space where they can feel comfortable... Kinnaman said. ‘Ironically, most churches offer what they think people want: more to do, more to see. Yet that’s exactly the opposite of what many young adults crave when it comes to sacred space.’ Millennials want to make connections with and learn from older adults. Boomers (and Gen-Xers) used to say, “Don’t trust anyone over 30!” Vaters says that simply isn’t the case with Millennials. ‘[T]his generation is hungry for connection with the wisdom and friendship of previous generations.’ Barna’s research indicated that young people who have an older mentor from their faith community are 59 percent more likely to stay in church than those who do not. “

The style and type of Creative Worship we use is dependent on who we sense God calling us to reach.

### **Possible Strategies**

- Have different styles of creative and engaging worship for specific generations at each Presbytery meeting, such as Taize, a worship engaging all of our senses, worship in a circle like the Table, traditional worship done in a creative way, etc.
- Have COM or ECD/L offer a workshop on preaching and designing worship for those under 40.
- Have a Presbytery Learning event focused on Generational styles of worship.

- Have people share their personal faith story.

## **Service**

“Service that makes God valuable in our lives is the kind that serves God by constantly receiving from God. 1 Peter 4:11 — “Whoever serves, [let it be] as one who serves by the strength that God supplies in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.”

- We know God to be a giver of wonderful gifts.
- Like grace, service is offered freely without judging if the receiver merits our love.
- We respond to God’s invitation to open ourselves up to the possibility of a transformational experience. In community, we recognize our dependence on God and inter-dependence with each other. As a community, we strive to grow being led by the Spirit. We choose to serve believing, that through our humble acts of love, we can learn about God’s character and love for us. We seek to accept people, as they are from the moment they stand before us, as the first step toward relationship. We seek to remain open; an openness of hand and of heart that we might give, receive and understand.
- Through our acts of service, we allow the grace of God to flow into and through our lives. We understand that all people are valuable, carefully fashioned in God’s image and we are freed to accept the essential humanity of each person we meet. In reaching out to others, we follow the example of service set forth by Jesus Christ.
- As with Christ, we serve people whose lives will benefit by our service. We believe that God lives with us and the work we do with our hands and heart. “

## **Possible Strategies**

- In the local community which the Presbytery is held have the church arrange for the Presbytery to go and serve at a homeless shelter, a group working with immigrant families, an agency providing food for the food insecurity people, etc.
- Plan to visit significant sights in the community that are meaningful such as parks or sculptures dedicated to build awareness of our struggles with racism, economic or eco injustice etc. Provide a prayer to be prayed silently or aloud for the group.
- Have education around a Community Walk and then go and do so.

## **Generosity**

Giving sacrificially of our time, talents, and resources to the building up of the kingdom of God.

“As all possessions are gifts, so God ‘loves a cheerful giver, ‘that is, one who imitates Gods’ own limitless generosity...” (Money and Possessions, Walter Brueggemann, p. 222)

## **Possible Strategies**

- Prior to the Presbytery meeting, publish who the offering for that meeting will be given to. Ask the churches to collect offerings from the church members. This may be a financial offering or donation of another kind. If our offering is going to a homeless shelter, we ask them what a specific need might be, for example blankets. We would have the churches collect blankets and bring them to the meeting to be offered during worship.
- Publish well ahead of the Presbytery meeting an opportunity to participate in an outreach or justice event. For example, ask commissioners and others attending the meeting to commit to helping with a Habitat for Humanity build on Friday morning, or marching to the county courthouse to demonstrate solidarity for a particular justice event that is happening on the weekend of our meeting.
- Offering radical hospitality and supporting New Worshiping Communities.
- Perhaps the church that we are holding our meeting has a great need. How can we help to fulfil it?
- Who could we invite to our evening meal during Presbytery meetings? Unaccompanied Students, those experiencing homelessness/poverty, teachers, Social workers? Who in your community is struggling and in need of being surrounded in Christ’s love?