Diocese of Hereford

FLOURISHING TOGETHER

Season of Renewal

GROWING IN CHRIST

LENT COURSE 2027

Commendation by Bishop Richard

Herefordshire, with its neighbours in south Shropshire and Wales, is world-famous for its fruitfulness, especially for its lush apple harvest. It produces over half of the UK's cider! Our cathedral's west door welcomes you with a mosaic celebrating Christ the Apple Tree, alluding to words from Richard Hutchins' 18th century carol which goes on:

The tree of life my soul hath seen, Laden with fruit and always green;
The trees of nature fruitless be, Compared with Christ the Apple Tree…
His beauty doth all things excel, By faith I know but ne'er can tell
The glory which I now can see, In Jesus Christ the Appletree.

The hymn celebrates the idea that spiritual fruitfulness comes from Jesus Christ, the fount and source of our joy and fulfilment. Herefordshire poet Thomas Traherne (1636-74) tastes felicity and glimpses paradise, and heaven indeed, in growing vines:
The soft and swelling grapes that on their vines

Receive the lively warmth that shines Upon them, ripen there for me…
But better vines do grow, Far better wines do flow Above, and while
The Sun doth smile Upon the lilies there, and all things warm,
Their pleasant odours do my spirit charm. **(From poem Goodness)**

I commend to you this course which invites us to explore patterns of spiritual fruitfulness and pathways to Christian growth. As we look again at Jesus' teaching on the living Vine in John 15, it will encourage and strengthen us in our faith and spiritual practice. This course hopes that we might more confidently live out the Diocese's core values of prayerfulness, Christlikeness and engagement.

After the course, you might want to become part of the Three Saints Fellowship, finding inspiration in our Diocese's seventh and eighth century founding fathers and mother: Edfrith the missionary, Dubricius the teacher and Milburga the abbess. This community, dispersed across our parishes, invites you into a simple, sustainable rhythm of Christian life, and will give you access to some great further resources over the coming months. (Details at end).

I wish you God's blessing in this Season of Renewal.





INTRODUCTION - DEVELOPING PATTERNS OF GROWTH

We will be exploring in this course how a Rule of Life can shape and inspire our Christian living as an intentional framework of practices and rhythms designed to support spiritual growth, balance, and connection with God. Most of us don't like rules, but this one is different – it is liberating and life-giving! It is a traditional idea deriving from monastic origins - St Basil in the East in the fourth century and the sixth century Rule of St Benedict in the West. They sought to develop communities with a creative balance between stillness and activity, sharing and silence, and the needs of body and soul. New monastic communities – including our own informal expression in the Three Saints Fellowship– find inspiration in these historic origins and spiritual disciplines.

But actually, in the book of Acts, we get a glimpse into how the very first Christians ordered their life in the days after the first Pentecost, in the description of essential spiritual practices:

> *The newly-baptised devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.* (Acts 2: 42-47)

Here is the earliest 'Rule of Life'. Breaking of bread may refer to the Eucharist. Here are clues about their daily practice and patterns of generosity.

Let's recall that the word 'rule' actually derives from the Latin *regula*, meaning a trellis or lattice. Without a trellis, a vine grows wild and produces less fruit; with it, it grows in a specific direction. Just as a wooden trellis supports a vine for maximum fruitfulness, a Rule of Life acts as a framework for daily life (rather than a rigid set of laws), helping to prevent burnout and foster a healthier, more focused way of living. It's so easy to become dissipated and distracted in the Christian life, scattered, pulled that way and this. A Rule of Life is a tool that helps us flourish as Christians helping us to shape and structure life, allowing for 'abiding in Christ' and cultivating spiritual, emotional, and physical health, balancing prayer and worship, work, relationships, and rest.

A Rule should be a minimum of spiritual practice—doable even in the busiest week—not a maximalist vision. It celebrates the essentials and clarifies our intentions and deepest concerns. It can act as a reference point and checklist, enabling us to take stock of our Christian life. This course will help you re-evaluate your priorities and re-assess your walk with God.

Your Rule of Life is between you and God, unless you want to share it with a spiritual director/ soul friend or confidante. You do not send it in for approval! It is for your eyes only, though perhaps you might want to undertake this course with a spiritual friend and share your reflections in a small local group if that is possible?

Above all, we pray that through this course Jesus' promise will be true for you: *'I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete'* (John 15:11).

As this course begins, pause for a moment. What is the longing in your heart? What fruit do you want to see growing in your life? (Read Galatians 5:22-25).

Each session of this course will have six elements. You should allow about an hour if alone, and hour and half if in a group.

1 Scripture to ponder 10 minutes (after recap from last session, read twice, slowly)
2 Reflection – ideas to get you started 10 minutes
3 Saints' Story – traditions of Edfrith, Milburga and Dubricius 5 minutes
4 Your Story – read how those who piloted the course responded 5 minutes
5 Questions - for reflection, and discussion if in a group 20 minutes
6 Prayer Exercise 10 minutes

SESSIONS

01. Planting, rooting – abiding in Christ

02. Watering – prayer and worship

03. Feeding - study

04. Branching out – reach out & engage

05. Growing & fruiting – putting it all together



PRAYER

God of our pilgrimage,
You call us in the Diocese of Hereford to proclaim Christ and grow new disciples.
United with Dubricius, Edfrith and Milburga, Lead us forward this day,
Emboldened and empowered by your Spirit and your Gospel,
For the sake of your world. Through Jesus our Lord. Amen.

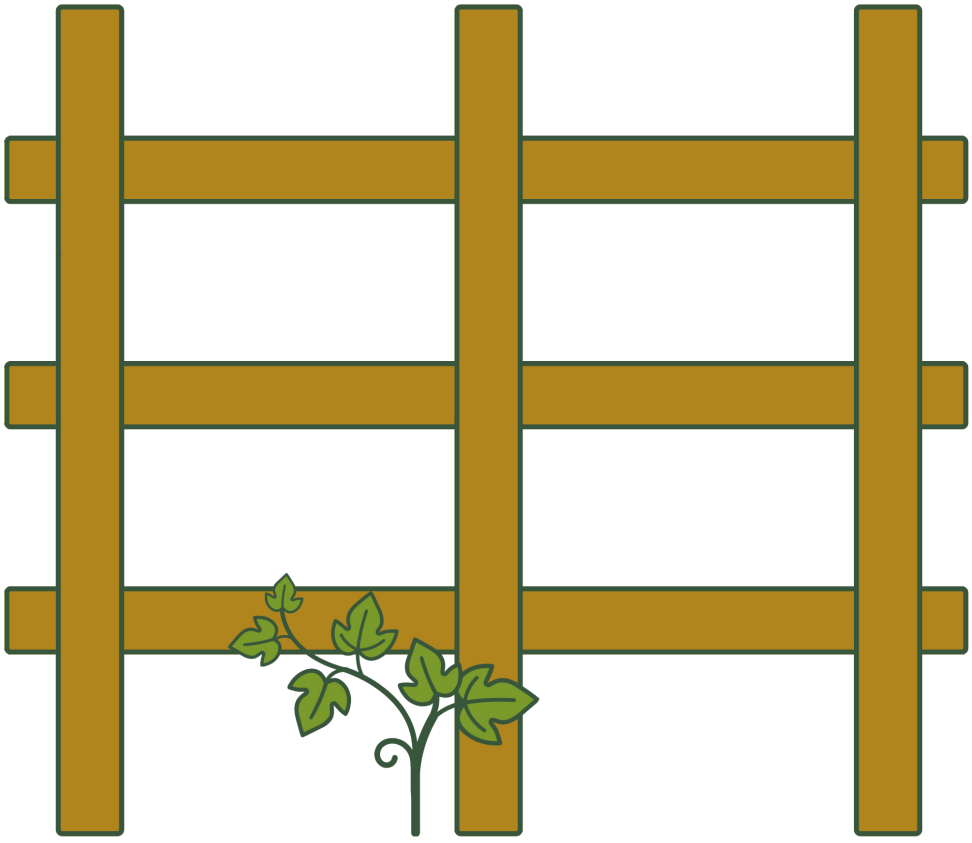
REFLECTING

It would be a good idea to keep a journal or notebook during the journey of this course, for your eyes only, unless you want to share anything with others. Record insights, struggles, resolves as you progress. This will help you write your own Rule of Life at the end of the course.

SESSION ONE

Planting, rooting, abiding

AIM: Today we reflect on our spiritual rootedness



'I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. Abide in me, as I also abide in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must abide in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you abide in me.' John 15:1-4

REFLECTION

Let's begin work on the trellis of our Rule of Life. Let's celebrate the rhythms and commitments that spur us on to grow. As we sink our roots deep into Christ, we hope to flourish and bloom in fruitful Christian living, echoing the prayer: '*Christ will live in your hearts through faith. As a result of having strong roots in love, you'll have the power to grasp love's width and length, height and depth, together with all believers'* (Eph 3:17, 18 CEB), *'rooted and grounded in love.'*

In our trellis, the vertical timbers are the sturdy and robust uprights which give essential support, rooted in the earth but pointing heavenwards, pillars or posts upholding the structure: Prayer, Worship, Study. The horizontal timbers reach out widely towards our needy world, encouraging us to Share, Engage, Grow. The trellis – image of our emerging Rule of Life, uprights speaking of abiding stability and cross-bars representing venturesome ministry – expresses a tension and paradox that we find in Jesus' words in John 15: he asks us to stay and he asks us to go!

'Abide'

John uses the word 'abide' no less than eleven times in chapter 15. The Greek word *meno* which we translate as 'abide' or 'remain' carries a rich range of meanings – imperatives from the mouth of Christ – stay, wait, linger, stand your ground, dwell: *'Make your home in me just as I do in you'* (15:4, Messsage). When you find yourself in a place of stillness, stay at it, don't wriggle – allow yourself to be held by God in a still rootedness. Enjoy and relish the communion with God. Savour his love lavished upon you (1 John 3:1). In this hyper-active and frantic world, practise abiding in prayer. We need time and space in which to send down our roots into God's grace.

'Go and Bear Fruit'

'You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last… You also are witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning.' (John 15:16, 27)

In the next breath, having given the imperative to abide and stay still, Jesus goes on to command his disciples to move – to go and bear fruit. The disciples are to be marturia. The word, of course means witnesses, sharing one's first-hand experience of Christ with others, giving testimony, but it also gives rise to the word martyrs. Jesus is quite clear:

'Love each other as I have loved you. This is what I'm commanding you to do. The greatest love you can show is to give your life for your friends.' (John 15:12-14, Names of God translation)

That little word 'as' (Greek *kathos*) means 'like' or 'in the same way': '*Love one another the way I loved you. This is the very best way to love. Put your life on the line for your friends'* (John 15:13,

Message). We are being called to a Christ-like life: not only to abide in Christ as Christ abides in his Father (15:10) but, like him, to live sacrificially for others.

Love is measured by sacrifice

The experience of abiding, communion, is but a preparation for self-sacrifice. Remember that the Vine discourse belongs in a paschal/ passover setting: John locates it at the Last Supper, on the eve of Jesus' passion, and Jesus says (in the other gospels) over wine: 'This is my blood, to be shed for you and for many.' At the Supper he says *'I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom'* (Matt 26:29). Grapes not to be admired but crushed, to release their goodness or else they wither on the vine.

We are not to luxuriate selfishly in a passive quietude. We are to position ourselves in a place where we can receive and drink in the love of Christ which energizes us for courageous and risky ministry. We draw up the goodness and nutrients we need as we abide, but there must be a readiness – in biblical imagery – for the blood of grapes to be spilt: *'Arranging the offering to the Most High, the Almighty, the high priest held out his hand for the cup. He poured at the foot of the altar a drink offering of the blood of the grape, a pleasing odour to the Most High, king of all'* (Ecclesiasticus 50:14,15). We recall the dramatic words which Christians came to associate with the Passion, and recall each Good Friday:

> *'Why are your robes so red, your garments like theirs who tread the wine press?'*
> *'I have trodden the wine press alone… their juice spattered on my garments, staining all my robes... the year for my redeeming work had come.' (Isa 63:2-4)*

Abiding in the vine renews the love of Christ in us, that we may bear a fruit that needs to be crushed and squeezed before it can be received. Love is measured by sacrifice (a phrase from the Franciscan Rule). As we consider this, we do not forget that Christ promises us that the Counsellor, the Advocate, the Holy Spirit will always be with us (John 15:26). Our emerging Rule may need to recognize God's call to serve others, sometimes sacrificially, as well as building up our own spiritual life. As Conder's eucharistic hymn puts it:

> *Vine of heaven, thy blood supplies this blest cup of sacrifice;*
> *Lord, thy wounds our healing give, to thy Cross we look and live:*
> *Jesus, may we ever be grafted, rooted, built in thee.*

SAINTS' STORY

Our three saints give witness to a creative tension between movement and stillness. They rooted and grounded their lives in community and in quiet waiting on God. They balanced the apostolic with the contemplative. It seems Milburga followed the Benedictine vows of stabilitas and conversatio morum.

Benedict's vow of stability commits the monastic to stay with a particular community for life: the total surrender of one's life to God, within the immediate setting and context of a group of people. In a world where people rush around in ever greater degrees of mobility, this commitment invites us to reconsider a rootedness in the here and now, an attentiveness to the needs of a particular community, and firmly rejects the temptation that 'the grass is greener elsewhere'. Rather, it says; 'Flourish where you are planted.' The vow of stabilitas reminds us of the essentially incarnational nature of discipleship, and of the call to be fully present to a particular historical context. But this vow also calls us to consistency, to steadfastness, as Benedict puts it: 'to persevere in stability.' (Rule of Benedict 58:9) It calls us to the rock of faithfulness and constancy in a sea of change and tempest of transition. In today's context, this vow is about not giving up, not giving way under the pressures which confront today's Christian, which include marginalisation and loss of respect in society. It is about rediscovering God's hesed or steadfast love and faithfulness, expressed in Paul's affirmation: *'I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion'* (Phil1:6).

Yet Benedict both begins and ends his Rule with the dynamic language of movement and motion: 'Run while you have the light of life' (Prologue13); 'Run on the path of God's commandments' (Prologue 49). So the vow of stabilitas stands in tension with Benedict's second vow of *conversatio morum*, the conversion of life, which calls for constant growth and change. This is an echo of the *NT* call to *metanoia*, turning again to God, and resonates with Paul's resolve: *'Reaching out to what is before'* (Phil 3:13).

Such a commitment can be both liberating and unnerving. It invites us to let go of cherished and familiar ways of working, to be ready for risk-taking, open to experimental and provisional patterns of witness and ministry which emerge as Christendom dissolves and the Church discovers different ways of being, in a post-Christian, post-modern world. It calls us to accept the need for life-long learning and continuous development. As Milburga discovered, as she followed this Rule, it requires of us both a thirst for fresh understanding of God's Word and world, and also a vulnerability, a lowering of self-protective barriers, to be open to the God of surprises.



YOUR STORY

Our spiritual ancestors Edfrith et al grew grapes in the monastery gardens. Their first task would be to find a south-facing garden wall and plant the vine close to the wall; as it grew they would have trained the branches left and right like an espalier attached to a trellis or simply attached the branches (cordons) to the wall by hammering in nails and using twine to ensure support.
We need support as we grow out from the vine and as fruit-bearing spurs appear we need to ensure that attachment remains. The source of growth is from the vine (the fruit may be many feet away from the main vine trunk). So we need to 'abide' but also 'go' and produce fruit for our Lord and Saviour but not doing it without support from the Holy Spirit and fellow believers. (Cleaver).

The imagery of the trellis being supported by the three central elements of Prayer, Worship and Study is so very timely… I sense that a very secure foundation of a new monasticism is being bedded in (Suzan)

The tension between staying in place and growth from committing, resonated with me, bringing unexpected joy. The permanent trellis of our midweek communion called out for new outreach and I've just started a Coffee and Chat hour straight after the service, hoping that others might be curious and come into the church. This felt like a new seed… (Margaret)

How would you express your commitment to the dual call to 'abide' and to 'go'?
What is your experience of seeking a balance between activity and stillness?

QUESTIONS

01. How does the interplay between doing and being, action and stillness, play out in your life? How do you observe sabbath rest?

02. In what ways do you face the temptation for things to get 'out of kilter', things getting perhaps too busy?

03. Do you detect any signs of stress in your life? What might this be telling you about taking another look at your spiritual practice?

04. What would you consider the essentials and basics of Christian life, things vital and indispensable to Christian growth?

05. What biblical examples can you recall who model the paradox of stillness and movement? (e.g. Elijah 1 Kings 19:1-18, Mary: Luke 2:19,51; John 2:1).

Notes



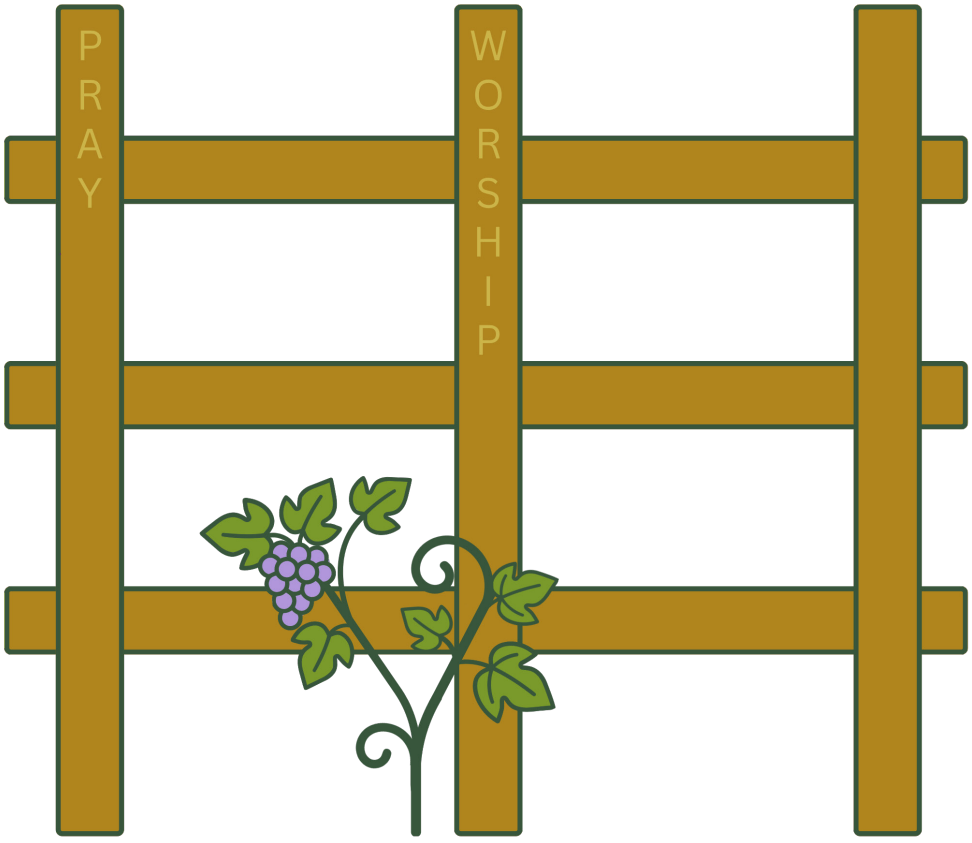
PRAYER EXERCISE

On a clean piece of paper draw a personal ‘timeline’ to recall the transitions you have faced in your life, times of upheaval and change, and times of stability. Draw a horizontal line and mark it into the decades of your life. Above the line, note major events and transitions, including new jobs, house-moves, births and deaths, new ministries. Below the line, try to note down in a few words how you felt both at these moments of change and periods of relative stability. How did you experience God at these times? If in a group setting, you might like to reflect on this with a partner. Bring this to a close by giving thanks for God’s providence in your life, and entrust your future to him.

SESSION TWO

Watering: private prayer, public worship

AIM: Today we reflect on our use of time and resources and the wellsprings of faith



'True worshippers worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I call you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.' (John 4:23, 24; 15:15)

REFLECTION

The vine now sent out its roots from the plot where it was planted and stretched out its branches for water. It had been planted in good soil by abundant water so that it would produce branches, bear fruit and become a splendid vine.' (Ezekiel 17: 7,8).

This image of the flourishing of God's people like a vine seeking water leads us in this session to consider what is refreshing the soul and replenishing ministry.

Safeguarding private prayer
The Prayer of Quiet

St Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) teaches about the Prayer of Quiet using the picture of a fountain:

Let us suppose we are looking at two fountains, whose basins can be filled with water in different ways. In one water comes a long distance, by means of numerous conduits and through human skill; but the other basin has been constructed at the very source of the spring and fills without making any noise. If the flow of water is abundant a great stream overflows from it: no skill is necessary here, and no conduits have to be made, for the water is flowing all the time.

The difference between this and the carrying of the water by means of lengthy conduits is this. The latter corresponds to the spiritual sweetness produced by active meditation. It reaches us by way of the thoughts; we meditate upon created things and fatigue the understanding; and when at last, by means of our own efforts, it comes, the satisfaction which it brings to the soul fills the basin, but in doing so is a bit noisy and busy.

To the other fountain the water comes direct from its source, which is God, and, when it is His Majesty's will to grant us some supernatural favour, its coming is accompanied by the greatest peace and quietness and sweetness within ourselves.[1]

In this passage from the *Interior Castle* (1577) Teresa suggests there are two ways of receiving the water of God. Either, we can stand at a distance from the fountain of God and receive the water of the Spirit as it were mediated through human-made and lengthy aqueducts and conduits, miles of pipelines of active, often noisy, talkative prayer. This in fact might create a distance from the fountain.

Or, we can stand very close to the fountain of God, quieten our spirit, and change our prayer from an active thinking and striving style to a more receptive passive, drinking-in style. We are invited to shift from the fluttering mind engaged with images in meditation, to a more contemplative, essentially receptive mode of prayer where the aim is listening to God. In what Teresa calls

'the Prayer of Quiet', we can drink directly and immediately of the river of the Spirit bubbling up in front of us. How close, she asks, are you to the fountain?

To help you grow, consider including in your Rule of Life a regular Quiet Day or annual retreat. See Retreats Association: retreats.org.uk or Association for Promoting Retreats: promotingretreats.org

Shared and Spoken Prayer

We might be drawn, rather, to extempore and spoken adoration and intercession in a weekly or monthly prayer group. Or we might join others or pray alone a Daily Office which includes psalm, reading, canticle, and intercession: while praying alone, this unites us with Christians across the world. There are great resources for this: Daily Prayer is the official CofE app to help you follow Morning, Evening and Night Prayer, wherever you are. Lectio365.com and PrayAsYouGo, Everyday-Faith and 24-7 Prayer are apps strongly recommended by some – check them out now! For a Celtic Office see northumbriacommunity.org

Using your body in prayer

The Incarnation, affirming "The Word was made flesh" (John 1:18), encourages us to explore the interpenetration of the physical and spiritual. Consider a regular quiet nature walk. Spend some time walking with others or alone in nature and praying silently. Notice what God is saying to you as you walk and what you want to say too. Use your body in prayer: our hands can express our thoughts – clenched fists representing stresses, down-turned palms denoting a letting-go of these, up-turned palms signifying receiving God's grace and empowerment. Or use your breathing, as in the Orthodox Jesus Prayer: on the inward breath pray "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God"; breathing out pray "have mercy on me a sinner." Jesus in, sin out! Orthodox Christians might pray this 50 times, so it sinks from head to heart – indeed, they call it "the prayer of the heart."

More ideas and links are on our website: www.hereford.anglican.org/prayer/
Whichever path we choose, the age-old acronym of ACTS remains relevant as we seek to strike a balance between Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication.

Cherishing Public Worship

The heart of worship is self-offering and our response to God. It invites us to respond to God and his work with grateful and generous hearts.

But it also enables a watering of the soul, as we open ourselves to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In worship we both give and receive. We come before God like thirsty plants craving renewal and refreshment. Jesus promises us the Holy Spirit in John 4:

> *'Those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.'*

In almost visceral language Jesus says in John 6:

> *'I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever, and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.*
> *Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them.'*

Our worship together acknowledges our dependence on God as the source of life. Spiritual life

flows from remaining connected to the Divine. This is perhaps especially clear in the Eucharist: we come to offer our best to Christ, represented in bread (signifying our labour, Genesis 3:19) and wine (symbol of both joys, Psalm 104:15, and sorrows, Matthew 26:39): laid on the Table, these are surrendered to God, In return, Christ offers his self-giving love to us in the gift of Holy Communion.

Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation:
through your goodness we have this bread to set before you,
which earth has given and human hands have made.
It will become for us the bread of life. Blessed be God for ever!

Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation:
through your goodness we have this wine to set before you,
fruit of the vine and work of human hands.
It will become for us the cup of salvation. Blessed be God for ever!

John Newton's great hymn reminds us that Christians, beginning their lives in the waters of baptism, aim to keep wet and drenched as we live out our baptismal calling! Keep watering the soul! Stay hydrated!

See, the streams of living waters, springing from eternal love,
well supply thy sons and daughters and all fear of want remove.
Who can faint while such a river ever flows their thirst to assuage?
Grace, which like the Lord, the Giver, never fails from age to age.

SAINTS' STORY

St Milburga was born into Mercian royalty — her father ruled the borderland kingdom that stretched across much of what is now Herefordshire and Shropshire. She could have lived a life of comfort and status. Instead, she founded a monastery at Much Wenlock, not far from where many of us live and minister today. What grew there was remarkable: a community shaped by prayer, learning, and practical charity. Milburga drew people together around a common rhythm of life, and under her leadership that community became a place of real formation — not just for those within its walls, but for the wider world around it — inspired by the Rule of St Benedict.

She lived with an unhurried attentiveness to God. That quality — the ability to be deeply rooted and deeply fruitful at the same time — is part of what she offers us. Her story is also our landscape. The hills she knew, the rivers she crossed, the borderland she called home — this is our diocese. She is not a distant figure. She is, in a sense, a local. Above all, her ministry and outreach stemmed from her life of prayer, public and personal.

A delightful watery story is associated with Milburga, recorded in a 12th century account written for Cluniac monks.[2] It tells how, escaping from pursuing enemies, after two days and two nights of hard riding, she fell from her horse at Godstoke and hit her head badly on a stone. She desperately needed water to drink and to wash her wounds, and there was none to be found. But the horse, at Milburga's bidding, struck his hoof into the rock and at once a spring of water gushed out. "Holy water, henceforth and forever flow freely!" commanded the saint. Her words came true. Indeed, pilgrims today visit St Milburga's Well, near the church of Stoke St Milborough, NE of Ludlow. Supplying a local reservoir for the benefit of the people, the water still flows to this day!



YOUR STORY

I was struck by the question, "How close are you to the fountain?" As I struggle with the everyday fluttering of activity and generalised anxiety around children and grandchildren and life, I find solace in the idea of remaining where you are and growing from there. I realise in life I have fulfilled jobs and volunteering, some careers and some prompted by God but now, I have made the time to stay put and am being forced to contemplate an inner source of peacefulness... Worship and prayer are becoming more obvious to me as the vertical structures that have fed all those things in the past. (Margaret)

In your own Rule of Life, how will you express your commitment to daily private prayer and regular public worship?
What is your experience of the blessings received personal prayer and corporate worship?

QUESTIONS

01. What space do you make at present for silent waiting on God? How does this length of time compare with the duration you spend, for example, attending to TV, surfing online, preparing meals? What does that say to you about balance and priorities? (Mark 1:35-37; Job 40:1-5; 42:1-6)

02. It is so easy in the Christian life to become spiritually parched, but we can turn aridity of soul into fresh thirsting and longing for God. What is your experience of finding refreshment, even renewed energy, in prayer or worship? (Revelation 19:5-16; Psalm 126:1-6)

03. How do you listen to God? (Revelation 8:1-5; Psalm 27)

04. What does the Eucharist mean to you? Consider how you prepare yourself for worship: revisit your expectations. (Luke 24:28-31; Exodus 16:15-18)

05. Do you consider your financial giving to the Church as an aspect of worship? When was the last time you reviewed that? (2 Corinthians 8:8-10; 2 Samuel 24:21-25)

Notes



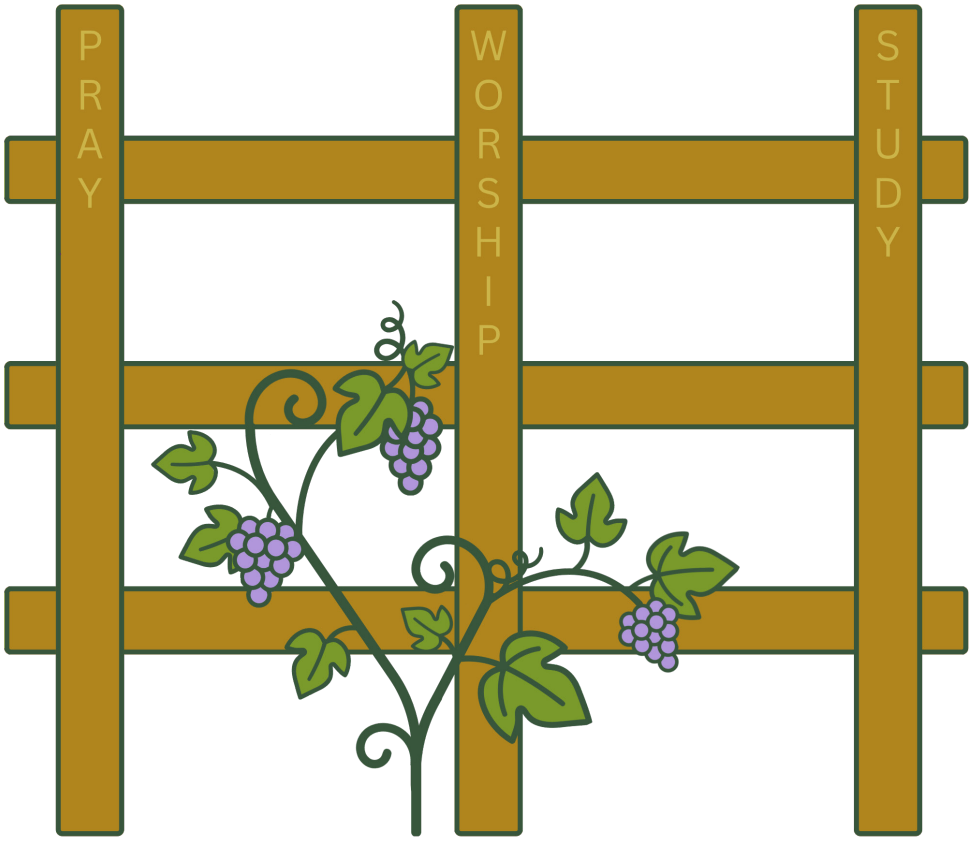
PRAYER EXERCISE

Make a careful review of the previous day or so as in the tradition of the Ignatian examen, which invites us to reflect at the end of each day on where we felt closest to God in that period.
Note down on a piece of paper how you have used time in the last 48 hours. What time was dedicated to prayer, silence, engaging with others, study, recreation, work or daily tasks, rest. Was there any time for worship, be it personal or corporate? Any time for creativity or playfulness? Where and when did you sense God's presence? What do you make of Paul's words: 'Pray at all times' (Ephesians 6:18) or 'pray without ceasing' (1 Thessalonians 5:17)?

SESSION THREE

Feeding: study

AIM: Today we reflect on how we nourish our inner life



'If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you' (John 15:7). 'The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life.' Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.' (John 6: 63, 68)

REFLECTION

Encountering Scripture

Benedictine approach

The discipline of *lectio divina*, the slow, ponderous, meditative reading of portions of Scripture developed by Benedict and the monastic tradition, has been likened to 'slow eating.' There are four stages.

First, *lectio*, invites us to take a bite, to read a passage attentively, alert to particular words that strike us.

Secondly, in *meditatio*, we can hold the word from the text in our mind and heart as a piece of fruit might be savoured in the mouth: we take time to ask the Holy Spirit to lead us to its deepest meaning.

Thirdly, in *oratio*, we notice its taste, bitter or sweet or surprising, and allow this to lead us into a kind of prayer that dare ask questions of God: What are you saying? How might I have to change? In this phase, we expose to God's Word our deepest needs and hopes. The Word will heal, disturb, invigorate.

Finally in *contemplatio* we digest the Word, welcome the Word within our very selves, integrate it, *interiorize* it, absorb it into our very being. The Word, as it were, enters our bloodstream and we allow it to nourish us in our depths.

One may need to practice this form of prayer over time in order to discover its power to transform. At first, it may seem a busy way of prayer, but with practice one can learn the art of 'relishing the Word' and releasing its power and energy into our lives. The deeper we engage with the Bible and get God's Word into our being, the more God can speak to us through these words, stored in our memory.

Ignatian approach

Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) invites us to use to use our five senses and our imaginations vividly as we engage with the text, especially when we read the episodes from the life of Christ in the Gospels. Ignatius says:

Use your eyes to look at the scene, visualize it, imagine it in your mind's eye, place yourself into the picture and become one of the characters. Re-locate yourself. Reach out in your imagination and

touch with your fingertips the characters, the soil, the water, the physical aspects. Even smell the scents of the scene and taste the air, the food, the atmosphere. But above all, Ignatius says, open your ears and listen to what the characters are saying to each other, what they are saying to you and what God is saying to you through all this. Talk with the other characters: What do you hear them saying to you? How do you find yourself replying?

Notice what is happening to you – how you find yourself reacting or responding as the story unfolds. What feelings are you experiencing? Peace, confusion, love, joy, anger? What can you make of this?

Conclude your prayer time with a short personal conversation with Jesus (or God the Father, or the Holy Spirit); speak heart-to-heart, as if conversing with a close friend. Afterwards, briefly review what you experienced during this time of prayer. What are you taking away from it. Has God spoken to you in anyway?

This approach to Scripture once again slows us down and demands time and attention. It leads to clearer discernment of God's will for us in the practice of ministry, picking up clues from our reactions and responses to the Word. That is the point: engagement with Word leads us to echo St Ignatius's own prayer: 'Take, O Lord, and receive my entire liberty, my memory, my understanding and my whole will. All that I am and all that I possess You have given me: I surrender it all to You to be disposed of according to Your will. Give me only Your love and Your grace; with these I will be rich enough.'

Study for Mind and Soul

Essential for spiritual nurture is encountering God each day in Scripture. We will find engaging with just one verse a day transformative. Daily Bible reading notes nourish soul and mind, with user-friendly resources available from the Bible Reading Fellowship or Scripture Union, for example. Readable contemporary biblical scholars include Walter Brueggemann (OT), Tom Wright and Paula Gooder (NT). Study the Story of the Bible With Free Tools | BibleProject™ provides fresh ways of understanding scripture, affirming "The Bible is a unified story that leads to Jesus". Biblegateway.com gives 64 different English translations of the Hebrew or Greek text, with links to bible commentaries.

We can expand and deepen our spirituality by spiritual reading. Some texts have become classics nurturing many generations: Thomas a Kempis' Imitation of Christ (15C), Teresa of Avila's Interior Castle (16C), The Practice of the Presence of God by Brother Lawrence (17 C). Recent 'classics' relevant to making a Rule of Life include Richard Foster Celebration of Discipline and Dallas Willard The Spirit of the Disciplines. Google Henri Nouwen, Richard Rohr, even Andrew D. Mayes!

Spiritual Direction

Spiritual director, spiritual companion, soul-friend, prayer guide - they are essentially about the same thing, having someone who will walk with us on our Christian journey and help us to notice what encouragement, guidance or prompting God might be trying to give you. For help in finding a director contact Sarah Lear Diocesan Spirituality Adviser sarah@barcombe.net.

SAINTS' STORY

Dubricius (also known as Dyfrig or Devereux) was a bishop and teacher whose school in the Wye Valley became a place of formation for some of the great figures of early Celtic Christianity. He belongs to that borderland world that predates our modern maps — a world where what we now call the Welsh Marches was simply home, and the church was being built almost from scratch (though it is possible that the Christian faith reached these parts in a fragmentary way since late Roman times). One account tells us:

> *He increased in growth, and knowledge; being sent to a seminary of learning, he proceeded cheerfully, and with great devotion; and although a child in age, he was soon a man in maturity, with great prudence, and eloquence in imparting knowledge. And when he became a man in growth, age, and wisdom, and skilful in both the modern and ancient law, his fame extended throughout all Britain, so that from all parts, not only scholars who were uninstructed came, but also learned men and doctors flocked to him for the sake of study, particularly St. Teilo, Samson his disciple, and many others. And with those, he retained two thousand clergy for seven successive years at Hentland, on the banks of the Wye, in the literary study of divine and human wisdom; setting forth to them in himself an example of religious life, and perfect charity. During another space of time, he remained with his numerous disciples for many years, directing their studies, in his native district, having chosen a place convenient for wood and fish, in a corner of that island, on the banks of the Wye, giving it the name of Moccas. There he immediately founded and constructed an Oratory and a habitation, where for many years he regularly lived, preaching, and giving instruction to the clergy and people, his doctrine shining throughout all Britain, as a candle on a candlestick, and the whole British nation preserved the true faith without any stain of false doctrine. As the holy man shone in the doctrine granted to him, and was eminent in eloquence, virtue increased in his country, and a more abundant entrance of the people into paradise.*[3]

What is remarkable about him is not so much what he did himself, but what he set in motion in others. His students went on to become saints in their own right. His school shaped missionaries and pastors who carried the faith far beyond anything he could have planned. He understood, it seems, that his task was not to do everything himself but to equip others to do more than he ever could.

That quality — the generous, patient work of forming people for a fruitfulness you may never see — is part of what he offers us.



YOUR STORY

I was not a regular church-goer through most of my adulthood, until my youngest joined the local church choir. To begin with I sat at the back, not quite sure if it was quite for me. After lockdown I got a little more involved. I sat at the front of the church and joined the coffee rota, both of which gave me a much greater sense of belonging. I set myself the target of reading the whole of the Bible; I joined a house group. Faith is like anything; the more you engage and invest in it, the more you grow, the more it gives to you. (Kate)

How will you express your commitment to Bible study and spiritual reading?
What is your experience of Bible study and spiritual reading inspiring and resourcing Christian witness or care?

QUESTIONS

01. What scriptures inspire you the most? Is there a passage that especially speaks into your formation of a Rule of Life?

02. How would you describe your spirituality? What is feeding it, nourishing it in mind and heart?

03. Does your church have a library? How often to you use it?

04. What online resources on following Jesus would you commend to others?

05. What aspects of our faith intrigue/puzzle/draw you?

Notes



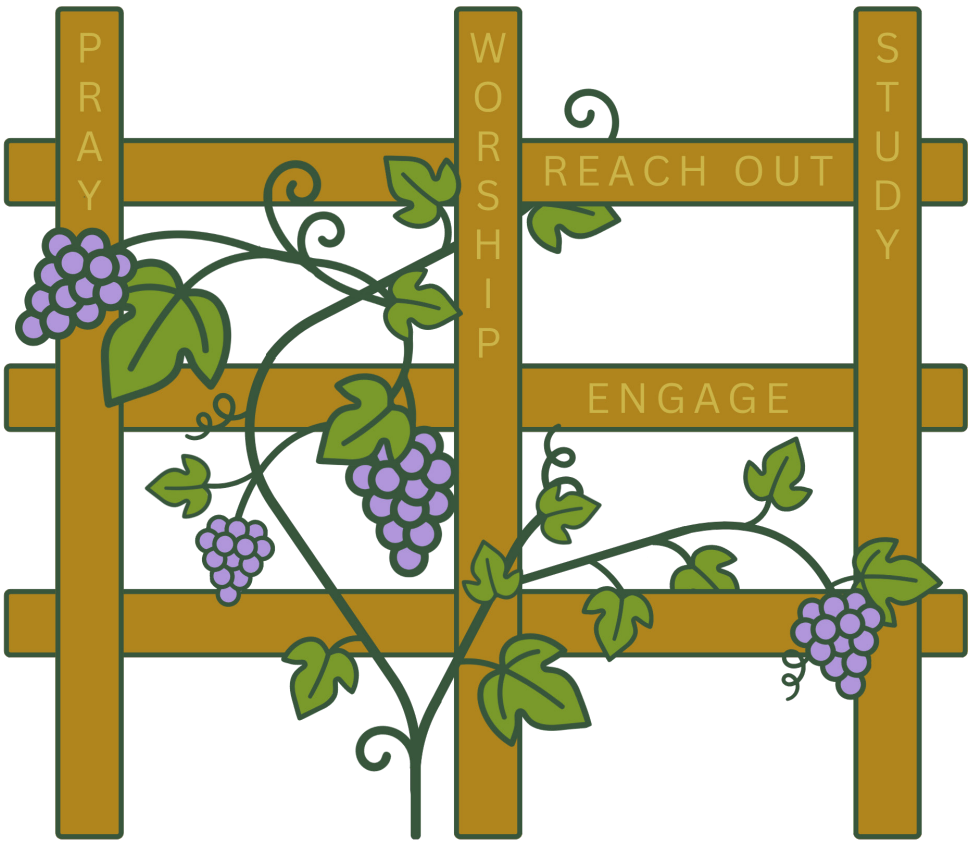
PRAYER EXERCISE

Choose a bible passage to read carefully. Use the Benedictine way *(lectio divina)* with Romans 12: 1-21; Hebrews 13:1-8. Use the Ignatian way with Luke 9:28-36.

SESSION FOUR

Branching out: reach out & engage

AIM: Today we reflect on our involvement both with protecting our environment and our care for hurting people in our communities



'My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.
If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me.' (John 15:12,13,18-21)

REFLECTION

Engaging with Creation

Edfrith brought the Celtic tradition to our area from the Holy Island of Lindisfarne. It may be that he founded his church at Leominster in 660 because it appeared like a Celtic island between three streams (Lugg, Kenwater and Pinsley): its Welsh name Llanllieni means 'church in a place of streams.'

We notice that all our three saints have a strong Celtic connection with creation:
Edfrith's story tells us of his encounter with a fierce lion. The lion turned from threat to friend as Edfrith shared his bread with him.
Milburga became the patron saint of birds because she had a special relationship with them: they would avoid damaging the local crops when she asked them to!
And Dubricius' life story begins in a river! His grandfather threw his mother into the River Wye when he discovered she was pregnant, but failed to drown her. Giving birth in Madley (c.465) she named her son Dubricius/Dyfrig meaning 'water baby'! He was to end his days (550) on Bardsey Island. His symbol is – a hedgehog![4]

The Celtic tradition celebrates the wonder and potential in creation of the 'thin place' where the veil that separates heaven and earth is lifted, and where the door between two worlds seems to be poignantly ajar. This is often in wild places in the landscape. Phillip Sheldrake tells us: 'Living on physical boundaries also symbolized a state of liminality – of living literally and spiritually on the margins or between two worlds, the material one and the spiritual one.'[5] Celtic Christians experienced sites in the natural world as thresholds of the Divine. With Jacob they could say of the landscape: 'How awesome is this place! ...this is the gate of heaven' (Gen 28:17). Celtic Christians saw a universe ablaze with God's glory, suffused with a Presence that calls and beckons – a creation united with its Creator in every atom and fibre. They celebrated grace and nature as good gifts from God and recognised the sacredness of all creation. They valued the Oneness at the heart of life - the inter-connectedness of all – as expressed in the Trinity; the motif of the Celtic knot. Able to move beyond a western, Greek based dualistic worldview – Celtic Christians inspire us to a

return to our true origins in creation – where everything is in harmony – where everything belongs. Esther de Waal in The Celtic Way of Prayer puts it: 'The sense of divine presence and protection is one of the many gifts of the Celtic tradition to us, and it is perhaps the most important.' The ninth century Celtic Psalter exults:

My dear King, my own King, without pride, without sin, You created the whole world, eternal, victorious King.
King above the elements, King above the sun, King beneath the ocean, King of the north and south, the east and west, against you no enemy can prevail.
King of the mysteries, you existed before the elements, before the sun was set in the sky, before the waters covered the ocean floor,
beautiful King, you are without beginning and without end.
King you created the daylight, and made the darkness; you are not arrogant or boastful, and yet strong and firm.
King you created the land out of shapeless mass, you carved the mountains and chiselled the valleys, and covered the earth with trees and grass.
King, you stretched out the sky above the earth, a perfect sphere like a perfect apple, and you decorated the sky with stars to shine at night.
King, you pierced the earth with springs from which pure water flows,
to form streams and rivers across the land…
King, you measured each object and each span within the universe:
the heights of the mountains and the depths of the oceans;
the distance from the sun to the moon, and from star to star...
And you created men and women to be your stewards of the earth,
always praising you for your boundless love…[6]

Engaging with Community

In John's gospel we see an ambiguous relationship with the world (Greek *cosmos*).
On the one hand the world is created through the Word of God (John 1) and John states confidently: 'God so loved the world' (3:16).

But on the other hand, in John 15, the world can be hostile or opposed to Christ and his followers. Today we find ourselves living in a culture with which we cannot always identify as Christians. Its values seem even contrary to Gospel values. As Paul says, our citizenship is in heaven: here below we find ourselves strangers and pilgrims.

Our challenge, as we shape a Rule of Life, is that while we honour and protect creation, we must find ways to engage creatively with the society around us, of which we are a part. Indeed, everyone is part of God's handiwork, longing for the new creation. We recall Jesus' image of the Kingdom like branches reaching out to embrace all:

'With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.' (Mark 4: 30-32)

Let's learn from how Edfrith reached out to local political leaders.

SAINTS' STORY

St Edfrith — known variously across the old sources as Eadfrith, Etfrid, or Eadridus — came from Lindisfarne. The great island monastery off the Northumbrian coast was, in the seventh century, one of the beating hearts of Celtic Christian life. Edfrith knew, and was perhaps mentored by, its founder Aidan (abbot 635, d. 651), an Irish monk from Columba's monastery on Iona.[7] From Holy Island Edfrith ventured three hundred miles south around 660 into the borderland kingdom of Magonsæte (Herefordshire and Shropshire). These were dangerous and uncertain times but the defeat in 655 of ruthless pagan king Penda of Mercia by Christian Northumbrian king Oswiu helped to open doors for the spread of the faith. Perhaps Edfrith, like Aidan (so Bede tells us), did not ride a horse in his long journey but preferred to walk along the lanes, so as to be close to the people, on their level and not over and above them, ready to listen to their needs and share the Good News of Christ, while connecting with creation.

Certainly he came to us as a missionary and evangelist. Tradition tells us he encountered Merewalh, the pagan king of that borderland people. He took time and effort to engage with Merewalh, patiently helping the king to interpret his puzzling dreams. Through Edfrith's gracious approach and support, Merewalh came to faith, directing in 660 that a church be built at Leominster. That conversion changed everything. Merewalh's son Milfrid would go on to build Hereford's first cathedral, while his daughter Milburga founded the community at Much Wenlock. Edfrith's bold journey south was the seed from which many ministries grew.

There is something striking about that chain of faithfulness: Columba goes to Iona, Aidan to Lindisfarne, Edfrith leaves this island, crosses into unknown territory, speaks to a king — and decades later, a community of prayer is flourishing that will shape the church in this diocese for centuries. Edfrith never saw most of what his faithfulness set in motion.

That is often how mission works. We rarely see the full fruit of what we plant. And we need to be ready to cross all kinds of barriers and borders.



YOUR STORY

Reading about Dubricius being represented as a hedgehog prompted the question of what animals we are most like - not very spiritual but entertaining! Maybe the Lion in Edfrith's story is a metaphor for the king? The Celtic tradition perhaps inspires more easily people living in rural landscapes, rather than urban? For them I'd recommend Rob Lacey's Street Bible... We talked about how futile it seems to try making positive changes in our lives when large companies use carbon credits to offset bad practice. We did conclude though that consumers do have power to change things... (Phillippa)

How will you express your commitment to engaging with creation and engaging with your community?
What is your experience of reaching out across divides?

QUESTIONS

01. What things in society cause you concern?

02. What can you do to reach more courageously into your community?

03. How far are you prepared to leave the 'comfort zone' of your life and reach out to engage with those hurting in your community? Are there fresh ways in which you can somehow support the lonely, the refugee, the stigmatised?

04. What part can you play to protect the environment? What do you know about the pollution of our rivers Wye, Clun and Lugg? Why is flooding increasing?

05. What in the world is calling out for a compassionate response right now?

Notes



PRAYER EXERCISE

Use the 'cross-prayers' commended by Francis of Assisi, known among the Celtic saints as the 'cross-vigil'. Open your arms wide – extend them as far as you can, like a tree or vine reaching out its branches.

This is first to embody a solidarity with the Cross. Think of Jesus opening wide his arms on the Cross to embrace all who suffer, all who are in any form of distress. Think of Christ's all-encompassing love and acceptance.

Second, think of the Risen Christ and the way he longs to enfold whole of creation, the little ones and marginalized ones of the earth.

Third, offer this prayer as an act of intercession. It is a prayer that hurts – in the sense that your arms will grow weary and ache. Moses prayed like this and had to have others hold his arms up (Exod 17:11,12). As you feel the ache, let it connect you to those who are in pain, those who are hurting: the sick, the dispossessed, those whose human rights are trampled on. Finally, use this prayer-action as an act of self-offering. Look at your hands that have been uplifted in prayer: who will they touch, and bless today? Offer yourself afresh to God for the part he has in store for you in his mission of reconciliation in the world.

SESSION FIVE

Fruiting: growing as confident disciples

AIM: Today we bring the different elements of lifestyle and discipleship together



'This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.
You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last.' (John 15:8,16)

REFLECTION

The divine vintner and vinegrower is looking for luxuriance: 'more fruit', 'much fruit' (15:2,5). To the extent that we allow the divine life to flow through us, like sap rising in a vine, we will produce a bumper harvest of luscious grapes. This mouth-watering image conveys a life-giving mission. We are being called to be juicy, delightful, attractive, as grapes dangling tantalizingly on the wine waiting to be savoured and enjoyed. In the background lies this passage about Sophia or Wisdom in Ecclesiasticus 24:

I spread out my branches, glorious and graceful.
Like the vine I bud forth delights, glorious and abundant fruit.
'Come to me, you who desire me, and eat your fill of my fruits.
For the memory of me is sweeter than honey,
and the possession of me sweeter than the honeycomb…
Those who eat of me will hunger for more,
and those who drink of me will thirst for more.' (Eccl. 24:16-21)

We hope this course has inspired you to take another look at your discipleship and the fruit you long to see growing in your life. We have reached the point where we can put it all together, clarifying for ourselves six essential commitments. What do you want to commit to? What will both affirm and stretch you?

Writing Your Rule of Life

We suggest two ways you can create your own Rule of Life. Either follow the six-fold pattern in this course – Pray, Worship, Study plus Reach out, Engage, Grow. Or you can use the outline below framed under the Diocese's three core values.

Please use EASTERTIDE as a time to reflect on this and to compose your Rule of Life. Write it out and offer it to God in our special celebration on the EVE OF PENTECOST Saturday May 15 12-2pm at the Bishop's Chapel, Hereford. Bring your Rule in an envelope with your name on it. You will be invited to come up and lay it on the Holy Table/ altar as an act of dedication, and the Bishop will pray God's blessing on it and on what it represents: your yearning to move forward with God. (You will collect it after the service, and it will not be opened!)

This will also be the official launch of the THREE SAINTS FELLOWSHIP. If you would like to receive further teaching resources and take part in a mutually-encouraging monthly Zoom meeting (first Tuesday at 7pm), supported where possible by in-person meetings in your area, please register your interest now via 3SF@hereford.anglican.org

MY RULE OF LIFE

Seeking a closer walk with God, we commit to six essential ways to renew and refresh our Christian life. It is helpful to review these each week.



PRAYERFUL

Safeguarding private prayer – get alone with God, within a daily pattern of prayer. For example:

- Making time for silence each day
- Establishing a pattern & rhythm of prayer right for you, morning & evening
- Going on a regular prayer walk
- Valuing a regular Quiet Day or retreat

With God's grace, I aim to.....

Cherishing public worship – join with others in eucharist, prayer & praise, generous in giving. For example:

- Celebrating the living God at church regularly
- Joining an online prayer meeting
- Sharing in a community agape meal
- Regularly reviewing giving - time, talents and financial

With God's grace, I aim to.....



CHRISTLIKE

Growing as confident disciples – share Christ's love in gracious words & actions.

For example:

- Joining a Christian witness in a political or community setting
- Finding/ starting craft or hobby group to invite friends to
- Inviting people to a community meal or celebration

With God's grace, I aim to.....

Reaching out as compassionate servants – care for hurting people & creation.

For example:

- Taking the initiative in pastoral care visits and contacts
- Making an intentional effort to notice unmet needs, near and far

With God's grace, I aim to.....



ENGAGED

Encountering scripture – study, learn & re-equip ourselves for service

For example:

- Attending a study day with teaching
- Committing to systematic weekly/fortnightly/monthly bible study
- Joining or starting a spiritual book group
- Following Advent and Lent courses

With God's grace, I aim to……..

Engaging community – build relationships inside & outside the Church

For example:

- Getting involved with local community projects
- Taking time to listen to 'forgotten' or marginalized members of church
- Making a walking pilgrimage in our town or village with meditative, reflective pauses

With God's grace, I aim to……..

OR

1 PRAY With God's grace, I aim to……..
2 WORSHIP With God's grace, I aim to……..
3 STUDY With God's grace, I aim to……..
4 REACH OUT With God's grace, I aim to……..
5 ENGAGE With God's grace, I aim to……..
6 GROW With God's grace, I aim to……..

SAINTS' STORY

It is possible that Edfrith brought to our area the Rule of St Columba. Something like it was practised by Aidan on Lindsfarne. It remains one expression of a life in balance:

1. The Three Parts of Work

Balance three labours a day: prayer, work and reading. Attend to

- Your Own Needs: Care for yourself and your immediate space.
- The Community: Do your share of work alongside your brothers or sisters.
- Your Neighbours: Assist others through instruction, writing, or any labour they require.

2. Daily Disciplines

- Live simply.
- Practice almsgiving above all else.
- Do not eat until you are hungry.
- Do not sleep until you feel the desire.
- Share any excess food or clothing with those in need or the poor.

3. Measures of Prayer and Labour

Measure physical and spiritual practices by sincere devotion rather than arbitrary time limits:

- Pray or work until your tears come.
- If tears do not come freely, engage in physical labour or genuflections until your perspiration comes.
- Above all, love God with all your heart and all your strength and love your neighbours as yourself.

4. Relationships and Boundaries

Play your part in cultivating a peaceful and focused environment:

- Distance yourself from those who speak idle, worldly words, or who complain.
- Surround yourself with discreet, religious individuals who can strengthen your faith.
- Forgive everyone from the heart and maintain a mind prepared for spiritual sacrifice ("white and red martyrdom"). [8]

What emerges in the traditions handed down to us about our saints is that each had their own personality, gifting, weaknesses and strengths. Each had particular local contexts and their own challenges to face. Dubricius was studious and scholarly , Edfrith adventurous and daring, Milburga wise and compassionate as abbess of a double monastery (men and women side-by-side).

So as we shape our Rule of Life we are gentle with ourselves and take into account our own unique opportunities and limitations. A Rule of Life will be provisional, and should be revised or updated each year or whenever personal circumstances change.

Above all, we need to strike that balance between stretching ourselves and being realistic, remembering both our frailty and the fact that the Holy Spirit is given to us as we echo the prayer:

> *'I pray that Christ Jesus and the church will forever bring praise to God. His power at work in us can do far more than we dare ask or imagine. Amen.' (Eph 3:20 CEV)*



YOUR STORY

"Retiring from full-time work a dozen years ago, I crowded my newly-free days with volunteering for too many things, becoming a trustee for national charities and local organisations, a school governor, deanery lay Chair. Recent years saw me withdraw from all these engagements, apart from the Church. I have refocused my commitments on the diocese and parish, becoming a local worship leader. In the light of John 15, I now see this as a process of pruning unproductive branches and cherishing those in the Church that may bear fruit. Vines grow and bear fruit because they are cut back, not despite it." (Andrew)

Baptised as a baby, singing in the choir, attending a convent school, it was a good start…then it went terribly awry. I stopped going to church, instead found myself following a path into a world of hedonism, selfishness and greed. I forgot my faith. I ignored God. The amazing thing is, that despite many fruitless years, despite all the rotten wood, the vine has remained. And as soon as I created the right conditions, from the vine, a new branch is appearing…. And today, I suddenly heard that this branch is viable and is capable of bearing fruit… I have a young apple tree in my garden. Last year a single apple set, but it fell off while it was still only the size of a cherry tomato! But this year, for my apple tree and me, I think things are starting to look more promising! (Kate)

What is your next step, do you think, on your spiritual journey?
How is your Rule of Life taking shape?
Do you sense God calling you to something in the wake of this course?

QUESTIONS

01. What have you learned about yourself as you have composed your Rule of Life?

02. What has challenged you or inspired you the most?

03. Is there anything you might change as a result of this exercise?

04. What particular areas of your Christian life have you identified as calling out for development?

05. What fruit do you long to bear in your life?

Notes



PRAYER EXERCISE

Use your hands expressively in this prayer-time in four actions. Begin by clenching your fists tight and holding them before you. Feel the tension and let these fists represent a stress or frustration that bothers you today, a situation in the world or in your own life and community that you feel strongly about. Hold them before God in the solidarity of prayer and intercession.

Secondly, slowly open your down-turned palms and let go of the tension. Let it fall away from you to God. In this gesture give to God any negative feelings or stresses, feel them drip out of your fingertips, as it were. Surrender the situation to God's providence and sovereignty.

Thirdly, turn your hands upwards in a gesture of surrender to God and of receiving from God. Breathe in what God wants to give you right now – perhaps a reassurance that all will be well. Breathe in his empowering Spirit who will give you the courage for action.

Finally, take another look at your hands. Is there an action that God is calling you to make in relation to your initial concern? What should you do as a result of this – something bold, something risky, something compassionate?
Recall 2 Timothy 1:7 : 'God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.'
Maybe use the Serenity Prayer: 'God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.'

CONCLUDING PRAYERS

You may like to conclude with this Pentecost commission[9]

Rooted in Christ and in the witness of our local saints, we look to the future with hope:
With St Edfrith we share the good news with courage and wisdom.
With St Milburga we nurture prayer, learning, and care for others.
With St Dubricius we teach, build community, and send out in loving service.
We joyfully renew our Rhythm of Life, to flourish as Christlike, Prayerful, Engaged disciples.

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, will you dare to walk into God's future, trusting him to be your guide? **By the Spirit's power, we dare!**
Dare you embrace each other and grow together in love? **We dare!**
Dare you share your riches in common and minister to each other in need?
We dare!
Dare you pray for each other until your hearts beat with the longings of God?
We dare!
Dare you carry the light of Christ into the world's dark places? **We dare!**

God of life
You invite us to flourish and grow in your love
that we might discover for ourselves and share with others
the joy and hope of the gospel.
Bless our Rule of Life which we surrender to You.
Lead us confidently into the future You have prepared for us
in the power of Your Spirit
and in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

End with this hymn by James Quinn (tune My song is love unknown)

I am the holy vine, which God my Father tends.
Each branch that yields no fruit my Father cuts away.
Each fruitful branch He prunes with care
to make it yield abundant fruit.

If you abide in Me, I will in you abide.
Each branch to yield its fruit must with the vine be one.
So you shall fail to yield your fruit
if you are not with Me one vine.

I am the fruitful vine, and you My branches are.
If you abide in Me, I will in you abide.
So shall you yield much fruit,
but none if you remain apart from Me.

We seek to grow in You, Your love alive in us,
our Rule of Life a way to thrive and others bless.
May we bear fruit in joy and peace
And serve your world in daring faith.[10]

INTO THE FUTURE

What to do with your Rule of Life ?

Write it out simply on a card to keep in your Bible or prayer book. Some parishes or Lent groups may wish to have a simple service of prayer in which to dedicate to God their completed Rule of Life - perhaps at the Easter Vigil or in Eastertide? See below for the upcoming Diocesan event...

Ongoing support

Continuing encouragement, teaching and resourcing is offered by way of the 3 Saints Fellowship. We meet 7pm first Tuesday of every month on Zoom, and have regular in-person meetings across the diocese. See hereford.anglican.org/our-faith/3-saints-fellowship/

Bishop Richard will formally commission and inaugurate the Fellowship on the Eve of Pentecost Saturday 15th May at the Bishop's Palace Chapel, when you will be invited to lay on the altar your Rule of Life (in a sealed envelope for you to collect afterwards) as a symbol of surrendering to God your resolve to grow in Christ in these 6 ways.

Whether you're seeking deeper prayer, meaningful community, or fresh purpose in discipleship, there's a place for you in the 3 Saints Fellowship! To join the mailing list or for more information contact 3SF@hereford.anglican.org

[1]Teresa of Avila, Interior Castle (Sheed and Ward, 1974), p. 37.
[2]Peter Klein, A Guide to Stoke St. Milborough Parish Church, (Orphans Press, Leominster, 1992).
[3]The Liber landavensis. ed. W. J. Rees. Welsh MSS. Society, Llandovery, W. 1840. https://www.maryjones.us/ctexts/dubricius.html See also Patrick Thomas in his inspiring book Candle in the darkness: Celtic Spirituality from Wales (Gomer Press, Llandysul 1993).
[4]He became bishop of Ergyng (ancient Archenfield), an old Celtic name meaning "Land of the Hedgehog".
[5]Philip Sheldrake, Living Between Worlds: place and journey in Celtic spirituality (DLT, 1995), p.30.
[6]Traditionally ascribed to Oengus the Culdee, an Irish hermit of the ninth century in Robert Van de Weyer, Celtic Fire: An Anthology of Celtic Christian Literature (DLT, 1990).
[7]About 698 Edfrith's namesake created the stunning Lindisfarne Gospels, testifying to the devotion to Scripture on the island.
[8]Adapted from st-columba.com
[9]Adapted from Archbishop's Council, Common Worship, Times and Seasons.
[10]Last verse by Andrew D. Mayes, who wrote this course, aided by Deborah Jackson and Josiah Beynon.

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