

The Canterbury Way for Clergy Groups

The initial and guiding purpose of the Canterbury Way is to enrich nurture, and strengthen clergy for their ministries. It is a means of promoting the overall health and spiritual growth of those who participate and assists in strengthening the spiritual lives of those the clergy serve.

Because of the call to serve others and a tendency in ordained ministry toward personal martyrdom, clergy often fall short in self-care. Why is it important for clergy to take seriously his or her responsibility for self-care? We live in a stress filled world in which the average church member in the pew is overextended and not properly taking care of his or her spiritual, physical, emotional, or family well being. It is important that clergy serve as role models in these areas. Most importantly, clergy serve as the shepherd of the congregation he or she serves. *An exhausted, starving shepherd eats the sheep.*

Clergy often live fragmented lives in isolation, both physically and spiritually, from communities of support. These stresses, along with the many demands on clergy time and energy, can contribute to the disintegration of their public and private lives, interfere with their ability to minister effectively. Marital relationships and family life may pay a particularly heavy part of the toll. An intentional, collegial spiritual life may ameliorate some of these forces.

The Canterbury Way involves the intentional engagement of three important areas: **stability, conversion, and acceptance of authority and mutual accountability.**

Stability is a commitment of one's whole being to Christ as Christ is incarnationally experienced within the Christian community. It implies a wholehearted covenantal pledge of one's life to the community and to its various members, in good times as well as bad.. Within the Canterbury Way, clergy are offered the support of other clergy who share their steps toward living out their personal rules of life, listen (non-judgmentally) as others share their similar efforts, encourage one another, and make a commitment to pray for one another.

Participation in the Canterbury Way involves a pledge to an ongoing process of **conversion**. Conversion balances stability. As stability provides an anchor, conversion provides a sail to catch the wind of God's spirit – the breath of God – which leads to ongoing change and growth. In embracing a life of collegial spirituality, clergy affirm flexibility and openness to the work of the Holy spirit, who is always calling people to conversion.

Acceptance of authority and mutual accountability arise from being in relationship in a community of faith. Included here is a wholehearted, highly intentional commitment to follow Christ through the stewardship of one's talents and assets and in the conduct of ministry. In participating in the Canterbury Way, clergy seek to discover opportunities to uphold one another, to learn from one another, and, when necessary, to challenge one another.

Rule of Life

The principles of the Canterbury Way are based on St. Benedict's Rule of Life of prayer, study and work. This rule has served monastic life and has been incorporated into various approaches to Christian formation and evangelism, such as Cursillo and Walk to Emmaus. The Rule of Life is meant to support further the believer's spiritual transformation and Christian work. It is based on the principles of intentionality and balance. One has to be intentional in the various disciplines and maintain appropriate balance in all aspects of life. Following this concept of the Rule of Life, the Canterbury Way assists participants to be intentional and to maintain balance in the following areas.

Prayer: Each member maintains an active, daily prayer life using methods and approaches to prayer from his or her denominational teachings or borrowed from others.

Study: Each member studies daily. This study includes reading and reflection on Holy Scripture and may include other readings which promote his or her spiritual formation and work.

Work: The normal daily work schedule involving office time, pastoral care, consulting, liturgical leadership is a major part of the clergy person's ministry. However, work must be kept in balance with other areas. Work also should include some form of regular (if not daily) physical exercise or labor. Physical exercise or labor incorporated into each week allows balance with other endeavors that may be more sedentary.

Stewardship: The clergy person is called to be an example of following Christ wholeheartedly and intentionally through the stewardship of one's talents and assets in the conduct of one's total ministry as a baptized persona and as a cleric.

Rest and recreation: The clergy person must be intentional about self-care, assuring he or she gets adequate rest each day and at night, balances work with personal and family recreation, being intentional in nurturing and sustaining such relationships on a daily basis.

Family: For clergy person who is married, a parent, or has a care-taker role for a parent or sibling is expected to nurture and celebrate the covenant of marriage and fulfill the responsibilities of family life daily, with adequate time allowed for healthy growth and development of those marital and family relationships.

Format for Meetings

The purpose of the meetings is to assist the participants to better live the Rule of Life in a disciplined way. The format for doing so is as follows:

Gathering and Grounding in Prayer

The designated convener opens the group with prayer and/or a reading of Scripture.

Personal Sharing

Each member shares with the group his or her efforts in living the Rule of Life. This may include sharing a recent accomplishment in one of the areas of the rules, how something within one of the rules has recently had a transforming effect in his or her life or ministry, acknowledgment of an rule which the minister has failed to follow, a plan to better follow one of the rules, a request for suggestions from others in better following one of the rules, request for others' prayers in being able to follow one or more of the rules. Each person must be sensitive not to dominate the group time and to allow time for others to speak.

Reflection and Support

Other members may non-judgmentally offer observations, share similar experiences, offer suggestions, on issues that have been raised. A member or members may offer to support another through prayer or through specific methods of support. Any of this may be respectfully be declined.

Sending out

As each may desire, members commit to actions to be taken, request prayers and support of others, agree to report at the next gathering.

Prayer

Each member offers prayers as he or she desires. The convener for that gathering closes with prayer, and all say the Lord's Prayer together.