

RULE OF LIFE



the community of stanselm[†]

A YEAR IN GOD'S TIME

Version approved July 2016



"For as many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Galatians 3:27-28

The Community of St Anselm has been established by the Archbishop of Canterbury to draw together young Christians aged 20-35, from all over the world and all denominations and varieties of Christian expression, for one transformative year of prayer, theological reflection and service to the poor, in the heart of London.

Members experience a year of shared life and spiritual formation that will shape the rest of their lives, equipping them to live lives of integrity in every sector of society.



The Community of St Anselm Rule of Life

As part of their commitment to the Community for one year, each Member undertakes to shape his or her life around the Community's Rule of Life. The Rule expresses our core values and explores some of disciplines that help us grow spiritually in our daily lives.

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1. Learning from Jesus

Come to me ... and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart. (Matt 11:28-29)

Jesus, being fully God and fully human, is our example in everything. Our very identity is in Christ and it shapes how we interact with people – like Jesus we can listen deeply and value the worth of each person, see people like our Father sees them, pray with the deepest assurance. Jesus is our model for life. The way we learn from Jesus is given shape by the inheritance the Holy Spirit has given us in St Benedict, St Francis and St Ignatius.

We choose to offer our whole persons: body, soul and spirit, to be shaped in the likeness of Christ by a complete openness to His Holy Spirit. We hold nothing back: there is no thought or doctrine or attitude or value that is exempt from the transforming presence of our Lord.



2. Desire and Choice

I have called you friends [...] You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last. (John 15:15b-16a)

“I choose you.” The power of choosing someone is possibly the most powerful act of the human experience. I desire you. I choose you. I love you. These are words God is speaking to His Church over and over again. It is an invitation for us to answer the call and respond by living it; learning to love deliberately. The choice to join this Community is a profound choice, a choice to love other people, and to desire to follow this way of life.

We choose one another. Like Jesus has chosen us, we choose to give ourselves to one another in prayer, in service, in support, in forgiveness, in work, in play, in listening. We give ourselves to the task of learning to love one another, receiving each other as a gift from God given at his discretion, not ours. By the grace of God, we choose this way of life in the Community of St Anselm.



3. Being set apart

The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, 'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.' For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. (Mark 6:30-33)

Separation for a time, from just about anything, gives us new perspectives, a distance that can be good or difficult, and often a much-needed break before we return with renewed energy. When used for building ourselves up and increasing our capacity for giving then our withdrawing for a time becomes a gift from God to the contexts where God sends us next as well.

We put a distance between ourselves and some parts of our 'normal' life, in order to pursue a new intimacy with Jesus, a greater capacity for joy and new ways to share the love of God.



4. Sanctification

[T]his is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (Jeremiah 31:33)

St Paul describes the fulfilment of this promise in Romans 6. It is a journey of welcoming the transforming agency of God's Holy Spirit, who makes us holy, set in motion by our participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus. This is the transformation of our will, our actions, our priorities, our desires – the healing and reversal of every ill Jesus assumed in himself on the Cross.

We welcome the work of the Holy Spirit within us. We acknowledge that God calls us holy though our experience says we are not. In humility we say our 'yes' and 'amen' and choose to act in obedience to Him whose Word changes our reality.



5. Sacrifice

Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, 'You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions. (Mark 10:21-22)

There is a deep joy to be found in laying things down, in giving things up, in reducing one's options in one area in order to gain something more valuable in another. Sacrifice is choosing our priorities in life. We prioritise following Jesus. Sacrifice is also risky, because Jesus does not say what He will give us in return.

We use our freedom to restrict our choices, in order to gain greater freedom in areas we think are more important. We do not cling to the right to do whatever we please with our bodies, our money and our time but lay down our self-will. We do this in a joyful adventure: to see what the Lord will give us in its place.

We devote ourselves for this time to pursuing a personal relationship with the living God above all other relationships. We choose to see and discern all our other relationships in light of our relationship with God and our commitment to one another in the Community. While Ordinary Members, we do not begin romantic relationships nor do we increase our commitment if already in one.

We limit our use of electronic communications in order to pursue simplicity, make silence of the mind possible and create freedom to make conscious choices in our relationships.



6. Trust

The purposes in the human mind are like deep water, but the intelligent will draw them out. Many proclaim themselves loyal, but who can find one worthy of trust? The righteous walk in integrity—happy are the children who follow them! (Proverbs 20:5-7)

To live a life of trust, both trusting and deserving of trust, is a mark of a life of integrity. To let our Yes be yes and our No, no is following the example of Jesus, but it also builds the foundation for intimate relationships, that is relationships where we can be more real, more honest, more vulnerable.

We choose transparent lives. We resolve to be wholly transparent before God, who already knows us better than we know ourselves, and to grow also in transparency with one another; to share our hearts with one another, our motives, our struggles, our fears.

We choose to carry the trust we receive with great care and to prove ourselves worthy of that trust.

We consider Spiritual Accompaniment a gift from God to experience transparency with another person in an atmosphere of trust.



7. Community Discipline

[D]iscipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed. (Hebrews 12:11-13)

We are all free persons, except that our freedom and our will are often tainted by echoes of sin and death; we often love our ego and not our neighbour. The truth is we have the ability to hurt one another very seriously. Risking being hurt is part of life in Community. Putting boundaries in place to limit the extent of the hurt we may inflict on each other is part of creating an environment where repentance is possible – because the hope of a boundary is that it makes possible eventual reconciliation.

We seek humility by embracing this Rule of Life, which is given, not negotiated. We receive as God's gift the calling to obedience to one another and to all in positions of responsibility and authority within the Community.

We commit to discern our decisions prayerfully in Community, using the tools for discernment that we are learning together and with the supports that are given us; specifically, in personal prayer, spiritual accompaniment and sharing group.



8. Reconciliation

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us [...] we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:17-20)

We will hurt one another. Sometimes deeply. Not always intentionally, not always consciously. Turning away from patterns of thought, word and deed that cause harm to others and to the Community is a daily act of repentance. That is OK, because as we are being forgiven, we learn to forgive. As we forgive and reflect, we recognise our own shortcomings.

We seek the power of God to change our ways from paths shaped by hurt suffered by ourselves or others. We trust in the mercy of God and the grace of forgiveness that only God can give. We choose to turn our hearts towards one another, maybe especially in the little things, to listen to each other's needs and learn to earn each other's trust again – and to give it.



9. Unity

I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. (John 17:20-23)

Jesus' last public prayer before he went to give up His life is a long prayer, returning to the theme of the unity of His disciples over and over. This prayer is the basis for our unity in the Community of St Anselm; on the one hand a recognition of the unity which is irrevocably ours in Christ, who has given us His Spirit so that we know that we remain in Him, and He in us. On the other hand a prayer, echoing in our hearts our Lord's fervent prayer, for a unity that is visible, tangible and deep, as Jesus prays, "so that the world may know that you have sent me..."

We humbly accept Jesus' prayer as our own hearts' desire. We resolve to pray for the unity of Christians. We seek to model the unity of Christians. We learn to treasure the unity of Christians. In our daily life we will experience together the blessing of unity and the suffering of division. Together we turn to Christ in longing and expectant hope for the day of our reunion in Him.



10. Worship

Day and night without ceasing they sing 'Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come.' And whenever the living creatures give glory and honour and thanks to the one who is seated on the throne, who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall before the one who is seated on the throne and worship the one who lives for ever and ever; they cast their crowns before the throne, singing, 'You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.' (Revelation 4: 8b-11)

Worship is a lifetime's worth of exploration. It is not confined to what we do together, but in Community, sharing with one another the commitment to prayer and worship is vital. The only requirement Jesus expresses for worship is that it be done in spirit and in truth; both refer to His person. We worship in the name of Jesus, offering our souls and bodies to be transformed that our whole beings may be filled with His presence as we are living temples of the Holy Spirit.

We invite the presence of God by gathering in His name. We share the commitment and help each other to worship. We learn from each other's experiences and worship in Spirit and Truth in the freedom that is ours in Christ. We worship in unity because we are one body and of one Spirit.



11. Prayer

[Jesus] was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray...' (Luke 11:1a)

With the Twelve Disciples we say “Lord, teach us to pray...” and we model ourselves on His own prayer life. Jesus prayed regularly and on his own, as well as in community and fellowship. We deeply believe that many issues, which are currently challenging the world, find their future only in the guidance of the Holy Spirit and that prayer is the key to any effective action.

We follow the example of Jesus, like His first disciples did, and learn from him to pray to our Father with boldness and simplicity. We have daily personal prayer times and experiment with praying corporately in different ways. We discuss our prayer life with our Spiritual Accompanier and lay aside our busyness on Spiritual Retreats.



12. Silence

'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in him.' The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. It is good for one to bear the yoke in youth, to sit alone in silence when the Lord has imposed it. (Lamentations 3:24-30)

Silence is uncommon in Central London, and indeed in many parts of the world. Yet silence is so closely connected with listening and receptiveness. Silence is the absence of noise, silence is the quietness of the heart, silence is discipline in speech, silence is reflection, silence is being present in God's 'now'. Silence positions us to be self-controlled, and not be swept away with a sea of unthinking reactions.

We make space for silence and say with Samuel 'Speak Lord, for your servant is listening'.



13. Study

Give instruction to the wise, and they will become wiser still; teach the righteous and they will gain in learning. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight. (Proverbs 9:9-10)

Many of us spend years acquiring skills that help us in our day jobs – and rightly so – but let us devote time also to acquire skills, knowledge and understanding that will prepare us for a life with Christ. 2000 years of people living for Christ has left an enormously rich treasury; we are blessed if we can learn to learn.

We apply ourselves to learn, to reflect, to grow, to gain whatever we can, so that we are transformed and may transform the world, led by the Spirit of God. We learn from academia and from practitioners and we bring as many treasures from the world-wide Church of Christ as we can carry. We make time for God to speak to us through Holy Scripture. We study the Scriptures with all our heart and our mind and spirit.



14. Serving with compassion

We love because he first loved us. Those who say, 'I love God', and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.
(1 John 4:19-21)

To engage with people in deep need in the world around us presents a challenge. It is difficult to know how to meet each other as children of the same heavenly Father; it is hard to know how to meet and become friends when a gulf of unmet need seems to get in the way. Yet Jesus shows us that compassion abounds in the heart of the Father, and we learn from Him who, Scripture tells us, was often moved with compassion.

We follow the example of Christ, and we ask for eyes to see in people the beloved sons and daughters of God; to serve them as our brothers and sisters and to pray to our common Father for their wellbeing and ours. We pray for soft hearts to truly meet them as people of worth, when we serve them in the hospitals and shelters, on the streets and in the prisons, and in all the places where Christ has gone before us.



15. A journey of descents

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11)

Our destination is glory, because our destination is in Christ. Our journey there is also in Christ and leads via increasing humility, surrender of our will, preferring others to ourselves, honouring others, respecting their personhood, living with integrity of thought and action especially when it costs us. These are not only waymarks on the journey, but characteristics of the personality of Jesus. If we want to follow Jesus to the Father's right hand, we must follow Him to the cross, to shame and death – and through it to life. And yes, let's keep our eyes on the glory, on the joy set before us, on the power of Christ's resurrection – we will need to, as we follow Jesus into a world in pain.

We choose to descend, we give up self-promotion and preferment. We choose to descend in society when the world is determined to climb. We follow Jesus into suffering and we bring his risen life as we go. Jesus has taught us that his Glory is found by humbling ourselves, because the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of humans.



Community Testimonies

Being part of the Community of St Anselm has been a journey of personal transformation... where people who love Jesus can journey together towards him. The year's been one where I've developed foundations from which to live the rest of my life.

- Nonresidential Member 2017, United Kingdom

When I signed up to join the community, I had preconceived ideas of what spending a year in God's time might look like: spending hours fasting and praying, reading and studying the bible. Looking back now, we've done all that and have got even more than what I signed up for. I began the year with a desire to know God's will for my life. I expected it to be easy going, but it turned out to be exciting, tough and transforming.

- Residential member 2016, Zimbabwe

During this year I found the abundant love of God and I discovered how important prayer life is in my journey with Christ.

- Residential Member 2017, Pakistan

I think it's very important for someone who is very busy, to be disconnected from that busyness. The Community of St Anselm provides tools to be able to reconnect with God.

- NonResidential Member 2015, United Kingdom

This is a way of saying I want my life, whatever I do – business, commerce, armed services, politics... to be so embedded in Christ that for the rest of my life I am shaped in what I do, say and think by the life of Christ within me.

- Archbishop Justin Welby, Abbot of the Community of St Anselm



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Community Members 2017-2018, with Archbishop Justin (off-centre right)

All photos courtesy of Lambeth Palace

