



Exeter
Cathedral

A Rule of Life



www.exeter-cathedral.org.uk/spirituality



A RULE OF LIFE

As those who share in community at Exeter Cathedral,
we commit ourselves to:

worship

with others, pray daily,
and read the scriptures regularly

grow

in faith and in love for God,
and discern where God is calling us

give

of our time, energy, skills, and resources
in service of one another and the world

care

for ourselves as beloved children of God
and be accountable for living this rule of life

Through this Rule of Life to take our
part in the vision of Exeter Diocese:

‘We seek to be people who together are:

Growing in prayer

Making new disciples

Serving the people of Devon with joy’

INTRODUCTION

We all have a sense that living well doesn't happen by accident. We have habits and patterns to get us through the day: alarm clocks to get us up, regular meals and exercise, and budgets for expenses. If we don't have these things, life becomes chaotic. Even though keeping a diary or getting exercise can feel a chore, really these liberate us to be healthier and happier people.

The Rule of Life adopted by Exeter Cathedral is an invitation to our community to notice and choose those habits that make us whole – that lead to God's deepening life within and among us. It is the Rule of Life for a community and so acknowledges our belonging together. At the same time it is adaptable to a wide variety of situations; each person will need to put flesh on these bones and determine what this Rule means for themselves.

We invite members of our community to commit to this shared Rule by completing the response contained within. We would like also to give you the opportunity for a conversation with one of the clergy if you would like to discuss further how you might integrate this commitment into your daily living.

May God bless us on our journey in company with God and the people of God.

Worship with others, pray daily, and read the scriptures regularly

'O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness' [Psalm 96.9]

Worship and prayer are the spring of Christian living from which all else flows. We tend to see our work or service of others as the real material of life, and worship as an optional luxury. Archbishop William Temple helps us to see them in different relationship: '[It] is not that conduct is supremely important and prayer may help it, but that prayer is supremely important and conduct tests it. If prayer is real, the conduct inevitably follows'

[Christus Victor p45]

We need to lay a foundation of prayer if all else is to fall into place. The Rule of Life invites us to consider what we will do in three areas:



'Worship with others...'

Gathering for worship is an important sign of belonging.

It is a demonstration that we are pilgrims together on the road towards God. Central to worship with others is the Eucharist, in which we are invited to unite ourselves with the loving self-offering of Christ to God.

Opportunities for worship with others include also Morning and Evening Prayer and times of less formal prayer.

'... pray daily...'

Everyone prays in different ways and this Rule of Life invites you to discern what leads you closer to God. It may involve using the liturgy of the Church on your own, or other set prayers. It may involve using your own words to express to God your adoration, sorrow, gratitude, or desires. It may mean escaping words, and seeking an inner silence through meditation or contemplation. It may mean using a repeated word or prayer to centre yourself.

Whilst there are many ways to pray and exploring these can be helpful, it is more important to give time to actually praying than to investigating different methods. God is waiting for us to give our time and our hearts.



‘... read the scriptures regularly’

The Bible can seem a formidable and baffling – and very long – book. It grew over many centuries and reflects cultures and experiences very different from our own. But it tells the story of God and the people of God, a story of which we also are a part.

It can be helpful to use some kind of scheme to guide our reading – choosing readings from the lectionary or using bible reading notes, such as those published by the Bible Reading Fellowship. We can study the Bible with others or alone, read theology to expand our understanding, or pray with the scriptures.

As Christians, we read the Bible to hear God speak. We can ask: What do I hear God saying through my reading? How is God prompting, consoling, challenging, or healing us as we read the scriptures?



Daily Prayer

The church's services of Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer fulfil these three areas: they bring together scripture and prayer in a form that we share with others. Even if we pray them on our own, we are praying what others are praying at the same time.

To pray these services using books you need a Prayer Book (either **The Book of Common Prayer** or **Common Worship Daily Prayer**), a Bible, and a lectionary. The Church of England offers a simple alternative in its Daily Prayer smartphone app, which brings together all you need in one place. And remember, it is possible to use only parts of each service, if a shorter time of prayer is appropriate for you.

Grow in faith and in love for God, and discern where God is calling us

‘to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge’ [Ephesians 3:19]

Growing spiritually is something that comes naturally given the right conditions. Just as a plant flourishes with good soil, water, and light, so we flourish in our relationship with God when we have the prayer, fellowship, learning, and support to feed us.

This part of the Rule of Life invites us to consider how we can create the conditions for our growth in faith

‘...in faith and love for God...’

Faith is about trusting God. It arises from the deep conviction that God is good and faithful and does not abandon or harm us. Just as trust between human beings can grow as they get to know each other better, so trust in God enlarges when we take time with God in prayer or discover God’s presence in difficult moments in our lives. It is often these difficult times that are the most fruitful in helping us to grow in faith, because it is in our need and weakness that God’s grace is most apparent.

Similarly, love for God springs from the discovery that God loves us. St John puts this well: ‘We love because God first loved us’ [1 John 4:19]

Although both faith and love spring from God’s initiative, we can put ourselves in the way of God’s faithfulness and love. Some of this comes from intentionally choosing to pray and to serve others. We can also choose to read about our faith or explore Christian discipleship in company with others, through study groups. There are many opportunities for these in the cathedral and diocese.



Personal Vocation

Fr Herbert Alphonso wrote one short book in his life, **Discovering Your Personal Vocation**. He describes our 'personal vocation' as the 'name' that God has given us uniquely – God's meaning for our lives. This is less about what we do and more about who we are. It may be something that sounds vague to others, but is intensely meaningful to you. One person describes their personal vocation as 'care for creation', another as 'companion'. Alphonso suggests that Jesus' personal vocation is to know God as 'Abba', Father.

Reflecting on your gifts, desires, and walk with God, what words might you use to describe your personal vocation?

How is this reflected in your daily life?

What changes might help you live your vocation more fully?

'... and discern where God is calling us.'

Discernment is about having a sufficiently strong relationship with God that our instincts lead us towards God's will. It is more like recognising a face than solving a problem!

We contribute to discernment within community by listening to others in an open way, offering our own insights, and seeking what we believe will lead to God's deepening life for the whole community, mindful especially of those who are vulnerable.

Sometimes we are swayed by undue attachments to things – like craving admiration or wishing to be wealthy – that cloud our vision of God, but when we return our hearts to God we more naturally respond to God's desire with joy. We then discover that God's will and our deepest desire are one.

American theologian Frederick Buechner wrote, 'The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.' [**Wishful Thinking: A Seeker's ABC**]. Discernment is about discovering what we truly want!



Give of our time, energy, skills, and resources in service of one another and the world

'It is more blessed to give than to receive' [Acts 20.35]

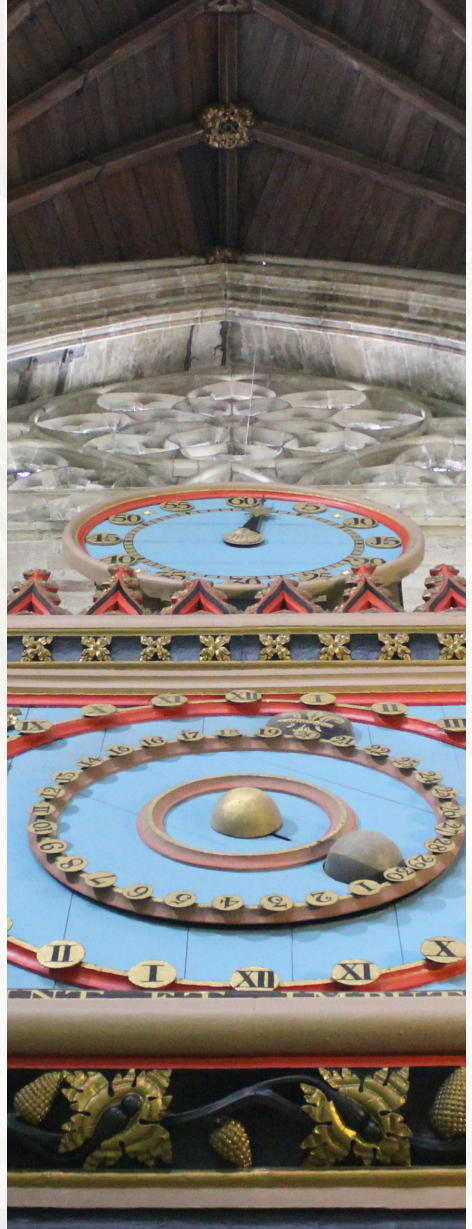
Think of the pleasure you take in giving a present to someone you love, seeing their delight and gratitude in opening a gift chosen with devotion and care. Giving, in our walk with God, is a chance to discover the same pleasure in living generously each day. Everything we receive comes from God – it is God's gift in creation – and when we give, we are sharing with others what has been entrusted to us.'

'... time, energy, skills, and resources...'

In a world where many people are busy, giving time is a precious commodity. Being with someone, being patient in listening, and turning up regularly are great gifts to others. Our diaries will reveal our priorities. They are theological documents: they tell us whom we serve!

Our energy and skills are easy to overlook in our giving; we often take them for granted, rather than seeing them as gifts we have received and can give. They can be very diverse – physical strength, mental agility, ability in making music, playing sport, or analysing accounts. There is no strength that cannot find a role in the service of God and the people of God.

Our resources include all the things at our disposal. For many people this is the hardest area in which to be generous, and this is often rooted in anxiety – the anxiety we might need tomorrow what we give away today. But others who have far less than we do are often filled with joy and life; we need less than we think, and our generosity to a charity or church helps other to thrive in body, mind, and spirit. Our bank statements are theological documents too!





‘... in service of one another and the world.’

A great question to ask is, how am I good news for others? This stops us seeing service in narrow or overly worthy way, and frees us to be good news, gospel, for those around. Service includes making someone laugh, encouraging a friend, washing up, writing to our MP in support of social justice, cheering a child on at sport, making music for others, doing our daily work with diligence, proof-reading material for publication, befriending a lonely neighbour, giving to charity, stacking the shelves in the supermarket, serving as a board member, volunteering at the food bank, taking action to reduce our carbon footprint, and much more. Any activity, paid or unpaid, that contributes to human flourishing is an act of service.



Five Marks of Mission

The Church of England describes these ‘marks of mission’ to express just how broad is the mission of God in which the church cooperates. ‘Service’ can be simply another word for mission understood in this wide sense. Where does your passion lie amongst these marks of mission?

1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
3. To respond to human need by loving service
4. To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth

Care for ourselves as beloved children of God and be accountable for living this rule of life



'I am fearfully and wonderfully made' **[Psalm 139:13]**

We matter! God made us, loves us, and desires our well-being. If we ignore our own needs, we will be of no use to anyone else, and, more importantly, we will be working against God's own creative spirit in the world.

'Care for ourselves as God's beloved children...'

Good parents create a place of nurture and growth where children receive the nourishment, stimulation, love, and learning they need to grow. As children grow up, parents learn to let go and allow their children to take responsibility for themselves; love is expressed in new ways.

Similarly, God has given us everything we need to flourish, and gives us space to take responsibility for ourselves. Key aspects of this are choosing to get enough sleep, eat well and healthily, keep our minds active, have a balance of work and recreation, of solitude and company, seek healthy relationships, share in community, and make time for prayer. It means seeking to be free from the unhealthy impulses of our addictive culture, hooked on success, approval, work, unhealthy substances, sexual thrills, or extreme experiences – which we often use to avoid the uncomfortable aspects of life.

Examen

This ancient prayer is a way of noticing in company with God what has led us towards and what has led us away from God in the past day. This modern take on the Examen is adapted from **Sleeping with Bread: Holding what Gives you Life**, by Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn, and Matthew Linn.

To prepare, become still, ready to experience love. Breathe deeply; notice and feel your breath.

1. Place your hand on your heart, and ask Jesus or God as you understand God to bring to your heart the moment today for which you are most grateful. If you could relive one moment, which one would it be? When were you most able to give and receive love today? Ask yourself what was said and done in that moment that made it so special. Breathe in the gratitude you felt and receive life again from that moment.



2. Ask God to bring to your heart the moment today for which you are least grateful. When were you least able to give and receive love? Ask yourself what was said and done in that moment that made it so difficult. Be with whatever you feel without trying to change or fix it in any way. You may wish to take breaths and let God's love fill you just as you are.

3. Give thanks for whatever you have experienced. If possible, share as much as you wish of these two moments with a friend.

A smartphone app, **Reimagining the Examen**, is available to guide you deeper into exploring the Examen.

When we live healthily, we open ourselves to what Jesus calls 'life in all its fullness' [John 10.10]. This doesn't mean just a fun life, but a life lived without anaesthetic – in which we are able fully to feel the joy and pain of living, trusting that God stays with us through all.

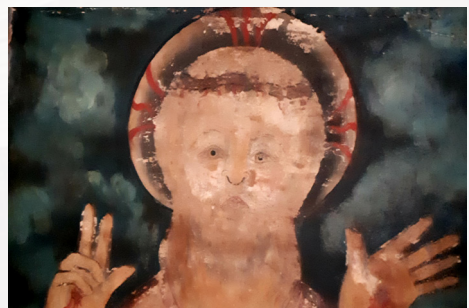
'... accountable for living this rule of life.'

A curse of modern society is that, despite the rise in communication technologies, many people have no one to talk with about what most deeply matters. We are good at discussing facts and can shout our opinions across social media, while going deeper into feelings, and deeper still into values and beliefs – the things that are most meaningful to us – becomes harder and harder.

Jesus invites us to share what matters – just as Nicodemus came to Jesus in the night to talk or the woman at the well sought life-giving water. If we are to live a Rule of Life well, then we must find a way to give an account of our walk with God.

We might do this with a trusted friend who is also intent on living the Christian life, or with a small group, or with a spiritual mentor. The key thing is that these conversations are 'real' – they go to the heart of our desire and fear and shame and joy.

A wise person said that the thing you cannot talk about is the thing that is controlling you. Finding someone to whom we can say anything is key to a good rule.





**To talk further about this Rule of Life please contact
Canon Chris Palmer, Canon Chancellor**

**1 The Cloisters, Exeter, EX1 1HS
01392 285984
chris.palmer@exeter-cathedral.org.uk
www.exeter-cathedral.org.uk**