



The Parish of
St Mary the Virgin
STANWELL
&
St Matthew
ASHFORD

Parish Rule of Life

How we endeavour to live out God's mission for us and his Church

"God is love." - 1 John 4:16

"Father, this is eternal life, that they may know you, the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." - John 17:3

"God our Saviour desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." - 1 Timothy 2:3-4

All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." - Matthew 28:18-20

*"It is the hour now for you to awake from sleep. For our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed; the night is advanced, the day is at hand. Let us then throw off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light; let us conduct ourselves properly as in the day, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in promiscuity and licentiousness, not in rivalry and jealousy. **But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the desires of the flesh.**"* - Romans 13:11-14

The purpose of this rule of life is to root all our lives in Christ Jesus. A life in Christ calls for dying to self and living in the Spirit. St. Paul exhorts us to put on the Lord Christ Jesus. Obedience to this rule of life leads us to form certain Christ-like habits, transforming us into witnesses of the Gospel, regardless of our age, location, or state in life.

GLORIFY GOD IN PRAYER

*"Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because, without me, you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me will be thrown out like a branch and wither; people will gather them and throw them into a fire and they will be burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you. By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. **As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love.**"* - John 15:4-9

"For my house will be called a house of prayer for all peoples." - Isaiah 56:7

Prayer—remaining in Christ and in his love—is non-negotiable. This entire rule, or way of life, depends on prayer. We can do nothing if we do not remain in His love. The spirituality of the rule can be defined as “dynamic orthodoxy”—fully in-line with the Universal Church, which includes an openness to the continuing work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Our **Rhythm of Prayer** is the heartbeat of our community. Specifically, our commitment includes:

Personal prayer time, including Holy Hours before the Blessed Sacrament

Adoration: *"I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst."* - John 6:35

"Come to me, all who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest." - Matthew 11:28

Scripture: *"If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* - John 8:31-32

"Ignorance of scripture is ignorance of Christ." - St. Jerome Spiritual reading

Morning and Evening community prayer (Liturgy of the Hours)

Weekday Mass

Regular opportunity for the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

"Jesus said to them, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' And when he said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.'" - John 20:21-23

Celebration of Solemnities, feast days and baptismal days

Prayer - Fasting

"Fasting is the soul of prayer, mercy [almsgiving] is the lifeblood of fasting. Let no one try to separate them... So if you pray, fast; if you fast, show mercy." - St. Peter Chrysologus, Doctor of the Church

"When you fast, anoint your head and wash your feet, so that you may not appear to be fasting except to your Father who is hidden." - Matthew 6:17-18

"Do you wish your prayer to fly toward God? Make for it two wings: fasting and almsgiving." - St. Augustine (En. ps. 42, 8).

"Fasting represents an important ascetical practice, a spiritual arm to do battle against every possible disordered attachment to ourselves. Freely chosen detachment from the pleasure of food and other material goods helps the disciple of Christ to control the appetites of nature, weakened by original sin, whose negative effects impact the entire human person... The ultimate goal of fasting is to help each one of us to make a complete gift of self to God." - Pope Benedict XVI

As a community, we are committed to a communal fast (Lent and Easter). Because we want to freely embrace fasting and the grace that comes from choosing it, each person will decide and commit to how they will fast as a community.

Prayer - Holy Spirit

Praying in the Spirit using the gifts of the Holy Spirit: we will live into the charisms of the Holy Spirit - personally and communally.

"With all prayer and supplication, pray at every opportunity in the Spirit." - Ephesians 6:18

"The Spirit too comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes with inexpressible groanings." - Romans 8:26

Prayer - Marian Devotion

“All generations will call me blessed.” - Luke 1:48

“When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, behold, your son.’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother.’” - John 19:26-27

The Church’s devotion to the Blessed Virgin is intrinsic to Christian worship and has been a fundamental part from the earliest times.

As a community, we will pray the Rosary (an “epitome of the whole Gospel”), celebrate Marian feasts, and seek a deeper devotion to our Blessed Mother Mary.

Worship as a lifestyle: we strive to mould every aspect of our lives into acts of worship, where our thoughts and actions are driven not by us but by the love of God. Our Blessed Mother Mary is the best example of living every moment as worship.

GLORIFY GOD IN THE SACRAMENTS

“The whole liturgical life of the Church revolves around the Eucharistic sacrifice and the sacraments.” - The Catechism.

All seven sacraments were instituted by Jesus Christ himself. - The Catechism.

“Sacraments are ‘powers that come forth’ from the Body of Christ, which is ever-living and life-giving. They are actions of the Holy Spirit at work in His Body, the Church. They are ‘the masterworks of God’ in the new and everlasting covenant.” - The Catechism.

The sacraments “manifest and communicate to men, above all in the Eucharist, the mystery of communion with the God who is love, One in three persons.” - The Catechism.

“The fruit of sacramental life is both personal and ecclesial. For every one of the faithful on the one hand, this fruit is life for God in Christ Jesus; for the Church, on the other, it is an increase in charity and in her mission of witness.” - The Catechism.

We will offer people the chance to partake in the Sacrament of the Holy Mass, the Eucharist, every Sunday, on Holy Days of Obligation, and as often during the week as possible, and the Sacrament of Reconciliation regularly.

We will trust in and call on the sacramental grace available to us through the seven sacraments as we strive to be a sacrament to one another.

GLORIFY GOD IN COMMUNITY

(I) We are a **catholic community**, fully in line with the Universal Church, striving for the communal life described in Acts 2:42: *“They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread, and to the prayers.”*

While all people are welcome, we will not deviate from a prayer life in line with that of the universal Church, particularly the celebration of the sacraments, devotion to our Blessed Mother, and faithfulness to the Church and her teachings.

“...or my house will be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” - Isaiah 56:7

Our community is a place of on-going prayer, filled with people striving to **make worship a lifestyle**. All people are invited to join in our rhythm of prayer, which is the basis of our communal life. Our goal is to build a community where adults and children, families and singles, are welcome to join us as we, the body of Christ, experience God as a family and serve God as brothers and sisters.

“If there is any encouragement in Christ, any solace in love, any participation in the Spirit, any compassion and mercy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, with the same love, united in heart, thinking one thing.” - Philippians 2:1-2

Our Community is a **welcome place** where people are refreshed, restored, and revived, where the focus is not to escape “normal life,” but to pursue the face of God and encounter Him personally.

“Come to me, all you who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest.” - Matthew 11:28

Our Community and Churches are lighthouses. Whenever people lose their way, they should be able to look to the Church and they should be welcomed back with open arms. Adults, families, priests, and religious are encouraged to come and participate in the life of our communities. We will continue to strive to provide many opportunities to encounter the living God personally.

Our Community is a mission school. We strive to conform our lives to the ultimate mission of the Church, the Great Commission:

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.” - Matthew 28:19-20

Fuelled by the Holy Spirit, we are committed to teaching God’s loving plan of salvation, empowering all Christians with prayer and the truths of the Church, and launching them into God’s mission.

We are committed to living out the core values: Love, Joy, Eucharistic Spirituality, Vocation, Affirmation, Evangelization, and Authenticity. These values serve to guide our response to the Holy Spirit.

Community - Trust and Trustworthiness

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.” - Proverbs 3:5-6

Healthy community life is built on a foundation of trust. Often times, there are unexplainable gaps between what we expect people to do and what they actually do. We can choose to fill the gap with trust or suspicion. As Christians, we have been called to trust; anything else erodes our participation in God’s mission to the world.

GLORIFY GOD IN HOSPITALITY

“As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.” - John 13:34-35

“Above all, let your love for one another be constant, for love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God’s varied grace. Whoever preaches, let it be with the words of God; whoever serves, let it be with the strength that God supplies, so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” - 1 Peter 4:7-11

“Do you realize what I have done for you? You call me ‘teacher’ and ‘master,’ and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet. I have given you a model to follow so that as I have done for you, you should also do.” - John 13:12-15

We are foot-washers. We will humbly love each other and all our guests sacrificially.

“Hospitality requires not grand gestures, but open hearts. Hospitality is not necessarily keeping guests occupied or entertained. Instead, Benedict tells us to offer an open heart, a stance of availability, and to look for God lurking in every single person who comes through the door.

St. Benedict teaches us that if we close ourselves to the stranger, we close ourselves to the sacred. Little acts of giving, one upon another, pile up to create a huge force capable of repelling the darkness and transforming the world.

Your life is not personal property; you belong to God. We are simply stewards of what God has given us. We are to serve one another in love. Everyone is a guest – even those of us who live here. God is the host, but God also becomes the guest we receive in others.

The challenge of hospitality is to preserve our way of life while we continue to welcome the stranger. Hospitality, rather than being something you achieve, is something that you enter. It is not something you do, but something you become. You try. You fail. You try again. You make room for one person at a time. We become more hospitable by welcoming one person when the opportunity arises. Receive every person as if you are receiving Christ himself.” (As found in Lonni Collins Pratt’s “Radical Hospitality: Benedict’s Way of Love”)

GLORIFY GOD IN DISCIPLESHIP

“I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me.” - John 17:20-21 “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations...” - Matthew 28:19

To be a disciple requires a total commitment to Christ. We are committed to sharing the love and guidance of Christ through intentional discipleship. The goal of discipleship is to journey together and help one another live our faith in the everyday routine of life. Christ spoke to thousands while truly investing in twelve through personal relationships. Each of these twelve invested in a few others and so on. This discipleship model that helped the Church grow depends on soul-to-soul personal investment. We are completely rooted in discipleship. We will serve the New Evangelization on the foundation of the six “C”s of discipleship:

1. Contact (all) - Reach out to all people the Lord puts in our path and show interest in them.
2. Connect (most) - Ask questions, get to know them, and find connections we have with them.
3. Care (many) - Show we care for them.
4. Challenge (some) - A call to action - give them a specific prayer challenge or relational challenge that we will follow up on the next time we see them.
5. Commitment (few) - Enter into committed discipleship relationships with a few. Journey with them. The goal is to disciple and evangelize them into disciplers and evangelizers.
6. Co-workers in the Vineyard - Support them as they go out as evangelizers and disciplers.

In relational ministry, we identify where we are with each and intentionally move deeper into the C’s.

In this way, we will make disciples and build the Kingdom of God.

GLORIFY GOD IN OUR DEPENDENCE ON HIM

“Do not worry about your life, what you will eat [or drink], or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds in the sky; they do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are not you more important than they? Can any of you by worrying add a single moment to your life-span? Why are you anxious about clothes? Learn from the way the wildflowers grow. They do not work or spin. But I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was clothed like one of them. If God so clothes the grass of the field, which grows today and is thrown into the oven tomorrow, will he not much more provide for you, O you of little faith? So do not worry and say, ‘What are we to eat?’ Or ‘What are we to drink?’ or ‘What are we to wear?’ All these things the pagans seek. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides.” - Matthew 6:25-33

God is worthy of our trust. He desires our complete dependence on Him. God does not ask for more of us, he asks for all of us, for everything. He is our everything. We are committed to depend on God with our worries, our finances, our fleshy desires, our passions, our attitudes, our fears, our joys, and all that we are.

GLORIFY GOD IN LOVING ONE ANOTHER.

“Love the Lord your God with your whole heart, your whole soul, with your whole mind and all your strength... Love your neighbour as yourself.” - Mark 12:30-31

“As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.” - John 13:34-35

“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” - Matthew 5:44

“Let love be sincere; hate what is evil, hold on to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; anticipate one another in showing honour. Do not grow slack in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the holy ones, exercise hospitality. Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Have the same regard for one another, do not be haughty but associate with the lowly; do not be wise in your own estimation. Do not repay anyone evil for evil; be concerned for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, on your part, live at peace with all.” - Romans 12:9-18

“Your way of acting should be different from the world’s way; the love of Christ must come before all else... Live by God’s commandments every day; treasure chastity, harbour neither hatred nor jealousy of anyone and do nothing out of envy. Do not love quarrelling; shun arrogance. Respect the elders and love the young. Pray for your enemies out of love for Christ. If you have a dispute with someone, make peace with him before the sun goes down. And finally, never lose hope in God’s mercy.” (Rule of St. Benedict, Ch. 4, 20-12; 63-74)

GLORIFY GOD IN HUMILITY

“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” - Luke 14:11

“I have not come to do my own will but the will of the one who sent me.” - John 6:38 “Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests, but also everyone for those of others. Have among yourselves the same attitude that is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,

that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” - Philippians 2:3-11

“The first step of humility is unhesitating obedience, which comes naturally to those who cherish Christ above all.” (Rule of St. Benedict, Ch.5, 1)

As a community, members commit to humble obedience for a full life in Christ through this rule.

GLORIFY GOD BY DYING TO SELF

“Live by the Spirit and you will certainly not gratify the desires of the flesh.” - Galatians 5:16

“Those who belong to Christ have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires.” - Galatians 5:24

“Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.” - Matthew 16:24

“I have been crucified with Christ, yet I live no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me.” - Galatians 2:19-20

“We who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us must please our neighbour for the good purpose of building up the neighbour.” - Romans 15:1-2

Dying to self is a sacrifice. Our love is made sacred when we give of ourselves for the sake of another out of reverence for Christ. In living the Christian life, especially in community, we will be presented each day with opportunities to deny ourselves, pick up our cross and follow Jesus.

GLORIFY GOD IN OUR PERSON

“Many are the plans in a man’s heart, but it is the Lord’s purpose that prevails.” - Proverbs 19:21

“So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.” - 1 Corinthians 10:31

“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been purchased at a price. Therefore glorify God in your body.” - 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

The Holy Spirit is alive in us and empowers us not only to be holy but also to be whole. Through the Holy Spirit, we have everything we need to walk in complete freedom – spiritually, intellectually, physically and emotionally. Spiritually, we pray and worship. Intellectually, we read and study. Emotionally, we practice forgiveness, trust, and healthy interactions with others. Physically, we exercise and recreate (re-create). Use your bodies to recreate and not desecrate the beauty that God has created in you. What is required of us is discipline:

“Every athlete exercises discipline in every way. They do it to win a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one. Thus I do not run aimlessly; I do not fight as if I were shadowboxing. No, I drive my body and train it, for fear that, after having preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.” - 1 Corinthians 9:25-27

Within our personal rules, we will schedule a time for physical activity and rest:

- Exercise: make time for some physical activity that helps us be our best.
- Rest well: find what works for us within the context of the rule and live into it.

Glorify God in what we eat and drink together: treat food and drink as a blessing, a gift, and do not waste it.

GLORIFY GOD IN OUR SPEECH

“Encourage one another and build one another up.” - 1 Thessalonians 5:11

“No hurtful language should come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for needed edification, that it may impart grace to those who hear.” - Ephesians 4:29

“A cheerful glance brings joy to the heart, good news invigorates the bones.” - Proverbs 15:30

The three cancers of community life are complaining, insincerity, and gossip.

We strive to use our speech to encourage, affirm, and show gratitude.

GLORIFY GOD IN BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

(I) Building appropriate Friendships

“A clean heart create for me, God, renew a steadfast spirit within me.” - Psalm 51:12

“Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith.” - Hebrews 12:1-2a

Relationships with one another are to flow out of our love for God and more importantly, His love for us. All community members are committed to engaging only appropriate relationships centred on Christ.

(II) Through Reconciling with One Another

“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have won over your brother. If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, so that ‘every fact may be established on the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If he refuses to listen to them, tell the church.” - Matthew 18:15-17

We are committed to intentionally loving all people in our community, to reconciling quickly, and to forgiving as often as God forgives us. We will hurt one another, but God can build a relationship even through these challenging situations.

GLORIFY GOD IN HOW WE TREAT THE PROPERTY OF OTHERS

“Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come, share your master’s joy.” - Matthew 25:21

With everything we own, we must be good stewards. We will treat all property with respect as gifts from God – from big things like vehicles, offices, and houses to small things like rubbish and eating utensils. We are mindful of how we use heating and air conditioning, electricity, and water. We strive to recycle and to put things back where they belong.

Glorify God in Communication with Others

“I give thanks to my God at every remembrance of you, praying always with joy in my every prayer for all of you.” - Philippians 1:3-4

People who have joined us on the pilgrimage of faith through their commitment to that faith are vital to our mission. Communicating with them is of utmost importance. It is our responsibility to communicate with the rest of the body.

- Pray for every member of the community before the Blessed Sacrament (at least monthly).
- Ask community members, and those we come in contact with, how we can pray for them and intercede for them.
- Provide a monthly Magazine sharing the good news of what is happening in the community
- Invite people to follow our Social Media and keep these updated.

We commit to communicating with others to the extent that it glorifies God. We limit our communication with others only to free ourselves to be more available to communication with God.

In our culture of constant connection and availability through mobile phones and computers, we strive to be in constant connection and availability to Christ. All community members are encouraged to be intentional in communication with others and to schedule time accordingly.

GLORIFY GOD IN RECEIVING VISITORS

Receive others as if you are receiving Christ himself.

“All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ.” (Rule of St. Benedict Ch.53, 1)

GLORIFY GOD WITH OUR FINANCES

“Honour the Lord with your wealth, with first fruits of all your produce; then will your barns be filled with grain, with new wine your vats will overflow.” - Proverbs 3:9-10

“My God will supply whatever you need, in accord with his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.” - Philippians 4:19

We commit to keeping in the forefront of our minds that we are stewards of the money given to us. These gifts are investing in our commitment to join God on His mission through our common life. We are committed to a budget that accounts for all money donated and generated for mission and common life.

GLORIFY GOD IN OUR COMMON WORK

“Whatever you do, work at it with all of your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.” - Colossians 3:23

“Do all things without grumbling or question.” - Philippians 2:14

“Teach us, good Lord, to serve you as you deserve, to give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds, to toil and not to seek for rest, to labour and not to ask for any reward, save that of knowing that we do your will. Amen.” - St. Ignatius of Loyola

Conclusion Following this rule is a great way to live out our loving relationship with God, built on the foundation of the Universal Church. May it be a blessing. Since God called us to Himself, we are committed to live this Rule of Life.

We will be aware of anything that may distract us from our yes to this life. And in the words of St. Benedict,

“may the strong have something to strive for and the weak have nothing to run from.” (Rule of St. Benedict Ch.64, 19)

“Rejoice always, pray constantly, and give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” - 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

After all, *“God is love.” - 1 John 4:16*