This issue of Cowley builds on the conversation begun by our Lenten series, “A Living Tradition,” in which we Brothers shared reflections on the SSJE Rule. Here we look deeper into the history and experience of monastic rules, to encourage readers to develop a rule of life.

For the fourth Monastic Wisdom for Everyday Living article, Br. David Vryhof has designed a workbook of questions and guided reflections to help readers sketch out the main points of their own rule of life.

Br. David Allen shares his memories of the earlier version of the Rule of SSJE, as well as the process of revision that brought the Rule to its current state.

In an interview, Br. Curtis Almquist shares the new perspective on the Rule he gained during his time of sabbatical, as well as his experiences of returning to life together.

Br. Mark Brown shares the Brothers’ vision for raising up a generation of subversives (like Jesus!) in the Interns Program and Br. James Koester looks to the future of Emery House.

And four FSJ members relate their own personal experiences of living by a rule: eucharistically, in translation, everyday, and without a written rule at all.

Letter from the Superior | Construction News | Community News

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To follow the latest news from the Brothers, visit www.SSJE.org where you can listen to weekly sermons and view photo galleries of construction at the Monastery.

We would welcome hearing what you think of this issue of Cowley Magazine. Visit www.SSJE.org/cowleymagazine to share comments, ask questions, or see Cowley Magazine in color!

Cover photo:
Light streams through the newly cleaned clerestory windows, brightening the Chapel for the triumphant reentry on Palm Sunday, the first service of worship held in the Chapel since it closed for renovations.

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"Lord, it is good that we are here" (Matt 17:4). Those words of the disciples when they gazed on the transfigured Lord came to my mind during our worship on Palm Sunday. After many months of cleaning, repairing and restoration, at last we were back in our beloved Chapel. The morning sun streaming through the clerestory windows added to the sense of joy and wonder, and above all of thanksgiving to the Lord who makes all things new!

During these past months as we Brothers have prayed for and envisioned the future, we have become very conscious of how important our Rule is in our lives. Every morning we read a chapter together, and spend time praying and reflecting on the words. The Rule has been for us an anchor and a deep source of strength and wisdom. To have a personal rule of life can be one of the most important ways of deepening one’s life of discipleship. The word ‘rule’ can sound rather off-putting, but the Latin word ‘regula’ seems more helpful, as it suggests the re-ordering of our often disordered lives and the establishing of a pattern of practice and discipline which can help us to live a full and balanced life. In this Cowley we are pleased to share various Brothers’ reflections on living and wrestling with the challenges and graces of our Rule.
As we Brothers begin to move back into the Monastery we are very aware that God is calling us into a new and exciting future. In the 39th chapter of the Rule, we hear the words of our founder Fr. Benson: “The call of the religious life is progressive . . . because God’s voice will come to us in the future ever new, calling us to fresh opportunities, and bringing gifts beyond what we know now.” We believe that God, in giving us the gift of a newly restored Monastery, is also calling us to fresh opportunities to share with others the wisdom of the monastic tradition. Over the next few years, and beginning this fall, we are planning to hold a regular series of Saturday workshops, drawing from this tradition and focusing on the gifts which we believe God longs to give to each one of us. The first five workshops will be entitled: The Gift of Intimacy with God, The Gift of Meditative Prayer, The Gift of Gratitude, The Gift of Forgiveness, and The Gift of Sabbath Rest. They will be held in our beautiful new undercroft.

We are pleased to announce the Monastery Guesthouse will reopen in September. We are also very much looking forward to resuming our Tuesday evening Eucharist then as well, and beginning on the first Tuesday of October, and on every first Tuesday of the month thereafter, the Eucharist will be followed by a soup supper, which we hope will be appealing to hungry students! We are calling it “First Tuesdays.”

We are currently interviewing candidates from across the country for our new intern program, which will be starting in September. These young men and women will be living alongside us from September to May, both at the Monastery and at Emery House. During this time they will have the opportunity to share our monastic life, to work on different projects, and to deepen their own life of prayer and service. Br. Mark Brown, who serves as Interns Director, offers a theological reflection on the internship program in this issue of Cowley.

Fr. Benson believed that as God continues to call us to larger life, so he offers us gifts “beyond what we know now.” One of the greatest gifts which we Brothers have received during this time of renovation and renewal has been the gift of friendship with so many of you. On September 17 we plan to hold a service of thanksgiving for the newly restored Monastery and Chapel. It will give us a formal opportunity to give thanks to God for all of you who have supported and encouraged us in so many ways, and to give thanks to God for the inestimable gift of that new and abundant life which is ours in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Faithfully,

Geoffrey Tristram SSJE
Superior
What do you think of when you hear the word ‘rule’? For many of us, the word has negative connotations. We are likely to think of rules as boundaries that forbid us from doing something. But a rule of life is something else. Rather than being a set of laws that forbid us to do certain things, a rule of life is a set of guidelines that support and enable us to do the things we want and need to do.

The word ‘rule’ used in this sense comes from the Latin word regula, which suggests not so much a code of legislation (lex or ‘law’) but a means of regularizing and regulating our lives that can help us focus our time and attention on the things that are most important to us. A rule of life expresses choices we have made about our values and priorities and about how we want to use our time, energy and resources. Its importance is that it helps us to live more intentionally, by bringing order and discipline to our daily existence.

Monastic rules of life originated in the deserts of Egypt in the 3rd and 4th centuries as desert hermits began to live in proximity to one another in order to share food and other resources and to offer one another support in living the ascetical life. Although St. Anthony the Great (251-356) is generally recognized as the father of Christian Monasticism, St. Pachomius (292-346) is regarded as the founder of cenobitic monasticism; that is, monastic life lived in community with others. Pachomius was converted and baptized in the year 314 and established his first monastery in the Egyptian desert between 318 and 323. By the time of his death he had established nine monasteries, some with over 100 members. When these desert dwellers began to live together in communities, they found that they needed some way to regularize and regulate their common life. Rules of life were developed that laid out the community’s values and standards and gave direction and purpose to its life.

In the Introduction of The Rule of the Society of Saint John the Evangelist, we suggest four purposes for a monastic rule of life: A rule (1) sustains the identity of the community by mandating rhythms of worship, spiritual discipline, prayer and rest, work and ministry; (2) sets the
patterns by which authority is distributed and where accountability is expected; (3) delineates the bounds of the community and describes the process of initiation; and (4) connects the ideals of the particular community or order with the gospel and the Christian mystery.

Several ancient monastic rules are still in use today. *The Rule of Saint Basil* (4th century) is the most widely-used rule in the Eastern Churches. Rather than being a rule in the standard sense, it is a collection of St. Basil’s responses to questions about the ascetical life. *The Rule of Saint Benedict* (6th century) has been the most widely-used rule in the Western Church since the 8th century. It is a book of precepts written by St. Benedict of Nursia for monks living communally under the authority of an abbot.

Modern-day communities that choose to follow an ancient rule do so because of the time-tested wisdom these rules contain. St. Benedict’s rule, for example, is known for its moderation and balance and has proved to be a helpful guide for countless monastic communities for nearly 1500 years. It contains instruction on aspects of monastic life such as how to say the Divine Office, how sick brethren should be cared for, how silence is to be observed, what kind of man the abbot ought to be, how a monk can grow in humility, and so on. It recommends a balance between work and study and prayer. Many people today are rediscovering the importance of finding a balance in their lives between work and play, between time spent in groups and time spent alone, etc. The chief disadvantage of an ancient rule is that as times change, certain parts of it become outdated. The rule then needs to be re-interpreted by each generation and by each community that adopts it.

*The Rule of the Society of Saint John the Evangelist* is a modern rule, written specifically by and for our community in
the late 1980s and early 1990s. During these years we undertook a lengthy process which involved thinking, praying and talking together about all aspects of our common life. Drafts were written and tested, reviewed and modified. In the end we produced a rule of 49 chapters, which is for us both descriptive of how we live and prescriptive when we fall short of our ideals. It is our practice to read and discuss together one chapter each day. Many other individuals and groups have found it profitable to read and study our Rule, in order to adapt its principles to their own lives. You can read some of their testimonies in the “Letters from the Fellowship,” printed in this Cowley and online, as a part of our Lenten series, “A Living Tradition.” Our Rule is available electronically in text and audio formats on our website, www.SSJE.org. The published version is available from either Cowley Publications (www.cowleypublications.org) or our own online store at www.SSJE.org/store.

Both ancient and modern rules can provide guidance for living well in our contemporary world. But a growing number of people are finding it helpful to design their own personal rule of life, in which they set out their values and priorities, and describe the spiritual disciplines they will take on in order to live a life that reflects their values. For those interested in designing their own rule, we include in this issue of Cowley a workbook to guide your thinking.

A rule must be realistic. Its expectations should not be so high that we are consistently failing to realize them, nor should they be so low that they require little or no discipline or effort on our part to keep them. The rule should challenge and stretch us, but not overwhelm us. Its chief importance is to support us in living the new life we have been given in Christ. If it accomplishes that, it can be an instrument of divine grace in our lives.

The lane at Emery House.
I lived for a year in the early 1980s in the town of St. Andrews on the east coast of Scotland. This year was my first serious time of engagement with a rule of life, (although I didn’t think of it in those terms then), including the daily office, regular conversations with a wise friend, times of solitude and retreat, as well as my first forays into disciplined theological study. It was also a year of living within sight of St. Rule’s Tower, an eleventh-century, immensely tall, stone tower built at the headland of the town overlooking the harbor and the often-stormy North Sea. By legend, St. Rule (or St. Regulus) brought the bones of the apostle Andrew from Greece to this Scottish headland in the fourth century. St. Rule’s Tower is what remains of the church built to house these relics, and it served as a beacon to travelers and pilgrims—at sea and on land. It is not known if St. Rule existed or if this name arose out of the foundation of Christian life and practice in that place. To my mind, the name may well enshrine the monastic rule by which the early communities in that place lived—enshrining the notion of the rule in the memory of the holy person, St. Rule. It is a “rule” because it holds the apostolic witness, the sign of Jesus’ death and resurrection dwelling there.

One of the primary graces for me in forming a rule of life in conversation with the Rule of SSJE has been the Rule’s emphasis on the indwelling of God (e.g. chapter 21) and on the cruciformity of love (e.g. chapter 2). The Johannine insight that in Christ God makes a home with us has become a touchstone as I shape a rule of life for myself. It makes me desire that my way of life be shaped in such a way that I have an ever-greater capacity for God. I understand my rule of life as shaping a hospitable space and a hospitable life for the dwelling of God. I understand my rule of life as a way of cooperating with the mystery of resurrection and thus of creating greater capacity to take the needs, sorrows, and desires of others into my life, work, and prayer in order to offer them to God for healing and for life.

A rule, in my experience, turns what I desire for my way of life into practice, practices that are flexible and transformable, but practices nonetheless. A few examples: At home, our breakfasts and our dinners are eaten unrushed, with candles lit, attention to the food and drink, however simple, and a spaciousness for conversation. These are moments when we gather the thoughts of a busy day and whether there are guests or not it recollects me toward a life lived hospitably toward God. Or at work at the university, amid innumerable demands, deadlines, emails, the rule helps me to remember that the person in front of me,
in conversation with me at that moment, is to have my full attention, the undistracted capacity of my heart and mind. The rule recalls me to the practices of listening for both sorrow and joy, strength and struggle in my students, my colleagues, and my staff. The rule helps me, though not without much difficulty, to make decisions about my calendar and time, so that there is the necessary spaciousness and freedom from distraction.

What I recognize as less well seasoned in practice for me are the ways of entering more directly, more intentionally into the capaciousness of God. These are practices of solitude, the nurturing of creativity and delight, and, for God’s sake, times of doing nothing except abiding in God. The rule—like a beacon—recalls me to such practices, tells me to wrestle with my schedule and calendar so that I do them, and reminds that these practices too are part of sharing in the mystery of death and resurrection.

In the spring of 2005, Lucas Fleming, my friend and Sigma Chi fraternity brother, convinced me to head to Boston for a brief retreat at SSJE. I needed it. Soon thereafter I joined the Fellowship of SSJE and committed to a personal rule of life. The more I understood SSJE’s powerful ministry, the more I wanted to help; but given my reality, writing a big annual check was not possible. So I decided that my gift to the ministry would be to translate the SSJE Rule into Spanish, making it available to Spanish-speakers worldwide. I envisioned essentially a technical undertaking: the Rule was masterfully written and all I had to do was “masterfully” translate it. When I received the Word document in English, I told the Brothers I’d have it done in a few months.

Not quite: the full translation of the Rule took me over two years. “How,” you might ask, “can it possibly take that long to translate a relatively short book?” The answer: the SSJE Rule is a treasure chest of wisdom, insight, and Christian spiritual guidance distilled from centuries of profound Christian introspection. As I translated, it soon became apparent that literal translations of many of the concepts resulted in Spanish phrasing that omitted the sense and subtlety of the original. One nuance in the original Rule turned bland in literal Spanish; conversely, an eloquent sentence translated literally took the Spanish reader
into an unintended direction.

Consider the opening sentence of Chapter One:

“He was lifted up from the earth in his crucifixion and resurrection from the dead in order to draw all people to himself.”

A literal translation of that underscored clause into Spanish would convey, using the first-response word choice (e.g. dibujar – “to draw”) gave a nonsensical result. To get the true meaning of the clause—the selflessness of His return to the world—the right word to translate from English was not “draw” but, rather, “attract.” And even that adjustment required finessing:

“…para atraer a todo el mundo a él.”

Close but not right: in Spanish, while that is grammatically correct, the power of the original language is totally missed; it turns this extraordinarily brief and powerful expression of the utter gift of Jesus into something that sounds, in Spanish, more like something a carnival Barker or soap-box pundit would do. To complete the sense of purpose, it is necessary to add what is a slightly awkward ending, literally “to draw all people to himself.” Accordingly, the translation reads like this in Spanish:

“…para atraer a todo el mundo a sí mismo.”

And all that was only for the first sentence!

As a second example, consider Chapters 9-11, dealing with celibacy. That was perhaps the most difficult section to translate, not only because many of the Spanish words were new to me but also because of the cultural nuances which, generally speaking, require a more limited and conservative word choice than what English gives us. What appears as a clear and open comment in the Rule in English can appear crass and disrespectful in Spanish. Consider this sentence in Chapter 9:

“The exploration of our sexual solitude through prayer will reveal the depth of Christ’s desire to be the one joy of our hearts.”

I wrestled with this one for awhile: to most Spanish speakers, the discussion of “exploration of sexual solitude” however subsequently qualified, has no business in a document as profound as the SSJE Rule. I tried various other wordings in order to circumvent this issue (e.g., “Recognizing our sexual solitude” etc.) but when I did so, I was distorting the message. I finally realized that the mention of the “exploration of sexual solitude” could be translated accurately if the balance of the sentence tempered that initial, somewhat-shocking-in-Spanish clause with devotional word choices overriding any such reaction. And so that sentence became:

“La exploración de nuestra soledad sexual a través de oración revelará la profundidad del deseo de Cristo para ser la única alegría en nuestros corazones.”

The process of translating the Rule forced me to rethink and reexamine every phrase and thought contained therein, and I treasure it more than ever as a result. As so often happens when we delve into the divine, the “gift” of my translation pales when compared to the blessings I received through the experience.
Besides it being so beautifully crafted and profoundly compelling, the SSJE Rule is a gracious mirror by which I can assess the reality of my spiritual life. So often I approach it with confusion and illusion, only to see not just me, but God’s longing for me. Nowhere is this truer than in the Rule’s frequent reference to eucharistic living: an entire way of being made possible with a loaf and a cup and a life of divine love. Eucharistic living involves all aspects of our work, hospitality, community and worship. It is the central act of our lives, beginning, of course, with the actual meal. As a priest, I have the honor of presiding over it several times a week, feeding hundreds with tangible holiness. Yet among all these meals, there is one that truly fills me.

Every Tuesday morning, for the last four years, once we have coffee perking, volunteers settled, and our voicemails activated, our staff gathers to celebrate the Eucharist. The whole affair is intentionally informal with someone grabbing any small table from a hallway, another drawing a circle of chairs, and my pulling a tea candle from a box. We meet in a tiny chapel, respectfully eschewing the beautifully appointed marble, silk and mahogany worship space of our gorgeous church. Every time it is different. Every time we build a new altar, break our own bread and pour our own port; thereby intentionally offering our own lives to be that “living sacrifice” in the ancient prayer. It is intensely intimate, with unplanned spans of quiet and unscripted reams of prayer. Within the freeing bounds of the Eucharistic prayers we laugh, we cry, we worry and we grow. And by the urging of the Rule to keep our worship, prayer and Eucharistic celebrations fresh, this band of twelve has become, for all of us, the holy of holies, where we, the feeders of the church, retreat to be fed.

On any given Sunday, our large, southern church and its associated buildings seethe with humanity in perpetual motion. With several choirs, children propped on every pew and cushion and hundreds of wonderfully devoted people, our brightly lit worship space can feel like O'Hare on Thanksgiving eve. It is, as the rector says, joyful chaos. But it is chaos nonetheless. The worship moves at a decidedly un-monastic clip and the space, at times, seems to crackle in its preparedness to break into its next move; be it the prayers, the offering, or the recessional. And, when I have failed to attend Tuesday’s gathering of holiness, the chaos can preside over me, as opposed to me over it. Rather than a rhythm, it becomes a race.

Sure, I can fake it. It is my job after
all. I can feign calm even as my mind flits like a honey-high butterfly. I can lace my words with inflection and intonation even as my eyes are darting about, cueing a LEM or searching a hymn text. I can win the race even as I pretend to be oblivious to it all. And I can also starve in the midst of a banquet, but I don’t want to do that either. None of us do. This is the irony of our faith; the more we live into it…the more demands are put upon us…the more easily we lose sight of what it was we were living into in the first place.…

And so, every Tuesday, I pass through the great hall, genuflect to the towering hand-carved table dedicated to our Lord to take my place at a card table, so that I might be fed. So that I might live the bread I eat and the wine I drink.

Why Don’t I Have a Rule of Life?

John Shibley

Why don’t I have a Rule of Life?

I’ve been thinking about this question since November, when the Brothers sent a letter asking all the members of the Fellowship to reflect on creating and living by their rule of life. At first, I asked it of myself as an accusation… “Hey, why don’t you have a rule of life, huh? All the other members of the Fellowship have one! What’s the matter with you!?” Then, my tone got softer, more an expression of curiosity than anything else. “Hmm… No rule of life, huh John? That’s interesting. What’s that about?”

Finally, I discovered that I was asking the wrong question. I realized that, despite the fact that I don’t have a rule of life, there are rules to my life. I didn’t write these rules on my own. I got them the way a sponge gets water. I unconscious soaked them up from the world around me, mostly as I was growing up. They direct my behavior, again unconsciously, just as surely as any set of written precepts could—maybe more. When I work backward from the pattern of my life, I can see these rules, or at least the Table of Contents they suggest. Some of the chapter titles are predictable—“Being a Good Friend”, “The Love of Learning”, “Working Hard is a Good Thing”, “Career and Achievement”… pretty conventional stuff.

But when I consider the chapters about God—well—I get a shock. What I see is that I live as if my God chapters had titles like “God Will Only Love Me If I Am Good,” and “Getting to God is Awful Rowing I Have to Do Alone.” Somewhere along the way, I soaked up these rules, writing them on my mind and heart, and then forgetting that I was their author, treating them as given truths. A lot of the work of my life with God is seeing these rules, and trying to...
Letters from the Fellowship

Someone once said that you don’t write poetry, you rewrite it. I think that’s probably true about rules of life as well. We re-write them. The paper is not blank. It’s full of the rules we’ve been carrying around without knowing we were doing so. Before I can write new rules, I have to erase the old rules, and before I can erase them, I have to face that they are there. And, of course, I do not do any of that work alone—I turn to it, well, the way a plant turns toward the sun, guided in my labor by His light and warmed by His Grace.

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Thank you for supporting the Brothers, who support so many of us.
A Life with the Rule(s) of SSJE

Remembering Earlier Versions of the SSJE Rule

David Allen, SSJE

Some time within the first day or two after I was received as a postulant at SSJE on July 11, 1958, then a newly ordained deacon, I was given a small pamphlet with a dark blue cover of heavy paper. It was 3 ¼ inches wide by 5 inches tall, small enough to be carried easily in a shirt pocket or cassock pocket. The title read *The Statutes and Rule of Life SSJE*. Inside, there were 61 pages of Statutes and 49 pages containing the 33 Chapters of the Rule. I was told not to reveal the contents of the Rule of Life to anyone outside the SSJE. So I find it somewhat ironic that we now have our Rule on sale in our bookstore and available online to anyone who wants it.

After a few months of reading this Rule, I came to recognize that a good part of its contents were also included in another book I’d already read, *The Religious Vocation* by Richard Meux Benson, the founder of the SSJE. This volume was published in 1939, edited by H.P. Bull, SSJE, with an introduction by Lucius Cary. Many of the chapters from the SSJE Rule were included in that other volume as a way of explaining the religious vocation.

I had bought a copy of this book back in 1954, when I was first beginning to think seriously about the religious vocation. At the time, I was stationed in Oakland, California, serving in the U.S. Navy for three years between college and seminary, and I found a copy in a church bookstore in San Francisco. Four years later, I would encounter many of the same words in the Rule of the Society Benson founded, to which I had just been admitted as a postulant.

That early Rule was written in a completely different style from the one we now follow. From the first chapters, “The Object of the Society” and “Candidates for Admission,” it goes straight into outlining specific topics like habits for novices and retreats before profession. Then it moves on to broader matters like demeanor, fasting and mortification, private reading and leaving the house (we always had to have permission to leave the house). During my first five or six years in the Society, almost every meeting of the Annual Chapter made a few minor changes to this Rule, but they were mostly changes to phrasing and punctuation.

Then in 1966, the Centenary Year of
the founding of the SSJE, the first major revision of the Rule of Life was made. This revision consisted mostly of removing many “Victorianisms” that remained from the age in which that first Rule had been written. These anachronisms advised on issues like: When visiting parishioners, a member of the Society must be careful to try to avoid sitting on sofas or to be careful not to lounge upon them. Other outdated instructions included not speaking with women outdoors, except in country places with one’s family, tipping one’s hat when walking, and bowing to a more senior member of the Community. An almost completely new chapter on Mental Prayer replaced an older one that had come to seem unhelpful and cluttered with various suggestions on ways to pray.

After that major revision in 1966, we continued rewriting small parts of the Rule periodically—about once every ten years between 1966 and 1980. And then one morning at our chapter meeting, Br. Tom Shaw made the point that the chapter of the Rule we’d just read didn’t really describe the religious life we were living. It gave instructions we should keep in mind, as well as guidelines, but it no longer really described the life we actually lived. We talked about that discrepancy and decided that it was time to do a complete rewrite of the Rule.

Very early in those discussions, we decided to shift the Rule from being a list of rules and behaviors to be followed toward a spiritual commentary on the meaning of each aspect of our life. The whole process of forming task forces and brainstorming ideas, submitting them to the collective group, rewriting chapters, and revising the whole into a coherent text took nine years. When we first finished the new Rule, the point was raised that we ought to agree not to make any further revisions until 25 or 30 years later. We’re now approaching that 25 year mark and, on the whole, we still feel that we have a Rule that describes the ideals by which we still live.

Yet there is one guideline I miss from the old Rule, one that appeared in that outdated chapter on “Demeanor.” It’s true that the general tone of that chapter no longer fits our life—“The demeanor of the brethren should be at all times grave and religious”—with its regulations about not sitting with crossed legs and rising at the entrance of the Superior. Nevertheless I admit that I wish that one sentence from that chapter could have found a place in our new Rule: “Haste and noise must always be avoided.” Although I suppose I would omit the word “always,” for reality’s sake.
Since the early days of monasticism large numbers of Christians who follow the more usual paths of discipleship as single or married working people have found challenges and inspiration for their lives by meditating on the rules of religious orders. In the last ten years, for example, a number of books that explore ways in which contemporary lay men and women can discover profound guidance for their lives in the Rule of St. Benedict have become bestsellers. Here we provide some suggestions for ways to use the SSJE Rule as a resource for developing a personal rule of life.

Creating a personal rule of life is a spiritual practice with deep roots and a close connection with monastic life. For a community the rule of life is not a rigid law that makes daily life into the working of a machine. Rather, it is a kind of constitution or bill of rights that makes sure that all the different elements of a Spirit-filled life in Christ are valued and given their due place in the whole. A rule recognizes that we are subject to all sorts of pressures that work to make life one-sided, and repress essential aspects of our calling.

Each individual is in some way a miniature community, subject to internal and external pressures to avoid or neglect some aspect of her or his wholeness as a member of Christ. So it is the practice of many serious Christians to make a covenant with themselves, a pattern of practice and discipline to which they commit themselves to live in as full and balanced a way as possible. This personal rule of life is not a rigid law but a constitution that helps hold together the many elements of the whole self.

Studying The Rule of Life of the Society of Saint John the Evangelist might prove to be a valuable stimulus for some to enhance or create a personal rule of life by setting out a wide range of issues that call for attention and commitment. One way of using the Rule may be to survey the whole Rule and list the kind of questions of commitment it raises, questions such as: How shall I commit myself to regular prayer and worship? How shall I feed on the scriptures regularly? How often should I go on retreat? How shall I express my commitment to ministry? What kind of discipline should I adopt to make sure that I keep learning and growing as a Christian through reading and study? A personal rule of life can be valuable even in its simplest form. It gives strength to that inner part of ourselves that wants to resist scatteredness and haphazardness in our lives. It can reinforce the dignity that comes with commitment.

Some readers may discover an inner sense of identification and empathy with the monastic way. From the very beginning of this movement in the church there have been many who are not called actually to belong to a religious community but who have a deep sense of sharing in the monastic spirit.
and values. This is the phenomenon of “interiorized monasticism,” to use a phrase of the Eastern Church. You may discover that you want to use the Rule as a resource in drawing up a substantial personal rule of life that expresses this inner identification. Regular reading of it may act as a constant encouragement to live monastic values in the context of your everyday life. If you dip into the Rule here and there you will soon discover that it is a very condensed and rich kind of text that does not lend itself to quick reading. Many insights are distilled into each page and, to be assimilated, these insights require a special kind of reading that is rather different from the usual method. Monastic rules call for the kind of reading that was given the name lectio divina, divine or holy reading, in the monastic tradition. This kind of reading takes things very slowly, and stops to ponder particular sentences and phrases in a leisurely way. It is reading that calls for gentle rumination on phrases and a patient expectation that hidden depths of meaning will emerge from praying with and around them. After surveying and dipping into the Rule you might want to choose one particular chapter and spend several sessions of meditation on it by reading slowly and dwelling on particular sentences and phrases that attract your attention. If it is your practice to devote regular times to meditation you might find that there is in some chapters material for six or seven sessions.

You may be bringing to your reading basic questions such as: What is prayer and meditation? What are we doing when we worship together? What does it mean to pray for others? If you are looking for insight into prayer and worship some chapters set out a rich fare of teaching and distill a whole tradition of spirituality. See, for example, the chapters “Worship,” “The Eucharist,” “The Mystery of Prayer,” “Prayer and Life,” “Meditative Prayer,” “The Mystery of Intercession,” and “The Practice of Intercession.”

Other chapters offer springboards for reflection on a wide range of topics in Christian discipleship. Because this is the contemporary rule of a community that is actively engaged in the wider community you will discover many chapters whose teaching is applicable to your situation and may help you reflect on your response to the gospel. Chapters such as “Maintaining Our Health and Creativity” or “Rest and Recreation” do not need much translating. We are all alike in our need of encouragement to live creative, sane, and balanced lives responsive to the divine invitation to sabbath. You may wish to make your own notes on such chapters, spelling out the questions they raise for your own life.

The chapters that appear to be devoted to the particular disciplines of monastic life may seem less promising at first as sources of insight for your own life. However, their monastic perspec-
tive may prove helpful in casting light on unexplored dimensions of the Christian life. One example would be the chapter “Hospitality.” While this deals with the responsibilities of the ministry of hospitality to which our Society is called, hospitality is a central theme in scriptural teaching about discipleship. The chapter could lead you to reflect on your own call to hospitality, the way you make others welcome in your home, the way you respond to strangers, the possibility that your practices of welcome and acceptance have a powerful spiritual dimension.

Two further examples would be the chapters “The Cell and Solitude” and “Silence.” These chapters might raise questions for you to pursue such as:

- How much time do I allow myself to be alone to reckon with my own particular uniqueness and personhood? Do I allow myself to be so completely consumed by the claims of others that I lose touch with my own solitude and the axis of relationship with God on which my life really turns?
- Is my own private living space a place of prayer and meeting with God? Is there a place in my home where I can know what it is to be centered in God and seek his face?
- Am I allowing the over-stimulus and bombardment of modern life to saturate my soul? Do I ever seek silence in which I can recover a sense of who I really am? Am I able to find an inner resource of silence that can help me let go of preoccupations, resentment, and the accumulating wear and tear of everyday pain?

Contemporary spirituality is gradually becoming more faithful to the New Testament teaching that all baptized persons are called to ministry. The chapters “Mission and Service,” “The Spirit of Mission and Service,” and “Ministry in Practice” could be used as the basis for considering your own call to ministry, lay or ordained. They might stimulate a wide-ranging self-examination about the experience of being called to serve others, what your particular gift is, and the spirit in which you fulfill your ministry.

To buy a copy of The Rule of Life of the Society of Saint John the Evangelist, visit www.SSJE.org/store or www.cowleypublications.org
Q: How did you shape your sabbatical time? And what role did the Rule play in helping you shape it?

Sabbatical is a wonderful word, coming from the noun Sabbath, which is more about being than doing. Behind the notion of Sabbath is simply the experience of being. It’s about living into the holiness of time, the sanctuary of time. We speak to that in Chapter 45 of our Rule, on Rest and Recreation, or, as I like to say, re-creation: “When we regularly cease from our labor and enjoy rest as a holy gift, we can grow in trust that our worth in God’s sight lies simply in our very being, clothed with Christ.”

Sabbath is about being in God, being re-created in God.

I came to my sabbatical from years filled with the expectation that I do a great number of things. Life is like that: we all go through seasons of life when certain things are demanded of us, when it’s simply not an option to fold our arms over our chest and say: “But if I do that all day or all week, all month or all year, I’m going to be out of balance.” Sometimes the demand comes from emergencies in life and sometimes it is simply because of life’s various callings. My sabbatical was so very needed to restore balance after a season of life filled with expectation and a great many things to be done.

So my sabbatical was simply about being. It was not so much about what I did during that time, as what I was—a human being rather than a human doing. My experience resonated with a theological window through which I’ve been looking at life for quite a number of years now, inspired by one of the turns of phrase of French theologian Jean Pierre de Caussade: the Sacrament of
A lamppost in the park bordering the Columbia River Gorge in Oregon.
Present Moment. It’s a practice of being really present to the here and now. My sabbatical allowed me to live into that truth: being really present to the present moment, to God’s presence in the present, and to the practice of being rather than doing.

My sabbatical allowed me to redress a long-coming imbalance, which we anticipate in our Rule. Near the end of Chapter 45, we say, “We shall endeavor to provide opportunities for special times of renewal from time to time especially when a Brother has had some years of hard work in particular ministry.” I’m so grateful that we thought to include that in the Rule and I’m so grateful for this provision that Br. Geoffrey and the Community opened up for me.

Q: How has it been for you to come back to life together? What fresh perspective do you bring from your time away?

What comes to mind is a paraphrase of T.S. Eliot in the “Four Quartets”: doing something again for the first time. I’ve been in the Community for more than twenty-four years, so I’m familiar with the lay of the land. I know all the Brothers and have the privilege of knowing so many of our dear friends personally. So much about this life is familiar to me.

And yet, now that I’m back, I am no longer a designated leader of the Community; I’m not in the leadership circle. A lot of things have happened in the months that I’ve been away—some of them quite profound, some pretty domestic, like “the smallest spoons go here now and the bigger spoons go there.”

On my return, I’m finding a real invitation to find my voice afresh and to learn some new dance steps. I’m familiar with the dance floor and I certainly know steps from the past, but I’m being invited to do some new moves right now. Much of this comes under the aegis of learning followership rather than leadership. I’m finding there’s a real grace to be learned in being an engaged, cooperative follower: to co-operate with leaders not unlike how we’re invited to co-operate with God.

Q: How is your perspective on the Rule different now that you are no longer the “chief interpreter of the Rule,” as the Rule names the Superior?

There’s a very important adjective in that passage: chief. The Superior is the chief interpreter of the Rule, but every Brother is an active interpreter of the Rule. This is why, in our daily Chapter Office when all the Brothers meet for a private service without the public, we read a chapter of the Rule aloud. After the reading, there is a period of silence and then an opportunity for us to share with one another what has come to mind, what we have heard.

Without fail, we hear new things. The Rule is a living document. Something always catches a Brother’s attention, maybe because of what’s going on in the world or the Church or the Community life; maybe because of what’s going on in our own souls, something resonates afresh. And then we have a really fascinating conversation. It doesn’t last long—we spend maybe ten or fifteen minutes—but we speak from the heart: What did we hear?

This shared conversation is an example of something bigger that I deeply, deeply missed during my sabbatical: the experience of life together. You know, I’m not a bachelor living under disciplined rules, I really am a member of a Community. I am one member of a body. While away, I greatly missed that kind of
Sculpture in the Japanese Garden, Portland, Oregon.
sharing, which is an example of the way we live our life.

The single most difficult thing during my sabbatical was being away from that gracious synergy of the Community, in which we do a great deal of listening to one another. The etymology of the word obedience is the Latin ob - audire, which means to listen deeply. This is how we Brothers live out our vow of obedience: We do a great deal of listening. We are listened to and we’re responsive to one another. I missed that a great deal. It was probably the single most disorienting thing about my time away.

Q: The Rule delineates a careful balance between solitude and community in the religious life. How did the solitude of your sabbatical differ from the solitude you experience when living in community?

The nine months I spent away from the Community included a great deal of solitude. For large parts of that time, I saw very few people; I would go days without speaking. This time redressed the experience of being Superior, in which I was “on” a great deal, had to have an opinion on all kinds of matters, and was recognized in many different places. By the time I left, I was longing for solitude.

The hallmark of solitude is being on good speaking terms with oneself. Solitude invites you to be a very good friend to yourself, to enjoy your own company. It means being able to look in the mirror and wink at yourself, to smile when you’re brushing your teeth, to fold your hands under your chin and say, “So what are we going to do today?”

Unless I can be a very good companion to myself, I probably cannot be a good member of a community, because I’m going to externalize, I’m going to project a great deal of what is missing for me, a great deal of my longing, unwittingly and unfairly, onto other people, who simply are never going to be enough. This is true if you’re called into the religious life, and there is probably a parallel to marriage and committed partnership. You have to be reconciled to yourself, you have to be grateful for, delighted in, and
proud of all the good stuff about you, so that you can be a good companion to another.

Jesus talks about loving our neighbors as we love ourselves. This is just what happens: We love our neighbors the way we love ourselves. I believe that some of what Jesus says is descriptive, before it's prescriptive. So in this case: The degree to which you can love yourself sets the bar for how you're going to love others.

Because of this, solitude is essential to life together. It's a necessary—not sufficient, but necessary—quality of any life together. And, of course, the quality of this solitude is important too. After all, you can be alone, you can have no one else around, and yet find that solitude is elusive. It's possible to be incredibly alienated from yourself, even in solitude.

If you embrace the kind of theology that we do as Anglicans, a theology that venerates the real presence of Christ, then it's important to be really present to life, really present to your life. This allows you to experience the very real presence of Christ who comes knocking at the door of your life. Without being present to yourself and your life, that other presence, the real presence of Christ, will be elusive.

Q: What would you say to someone who was considering creating a rule of life?

A rule of life affords an opportunity to clarify what's really important to you. It's a proactive claiming of what's important. We oftentimes hear this awareness expressed in moments of tragedy: After a radical change in work or health, in the face of death or terrible loss, so many times I have heard someone say, “I now know what’s important.”

When you make a rule of life, you engage this same kind of energy to clarify what's really worth living for. In this way, a rule is descriptive of what is most important to you, what you most value. In another way, for those (like me) who miss the mark on a fairly regular basis, a rule is also prescriptive: When I've missed the mark, the Rule helps me find my way back.

A rule is both descriptive and prescriptive. It's a source of clarification about your life, as well as a source of encouragement to live your life in a way worth living, so that at the end of the day—or at the end of your days—you can say, “It's been terrific.”

Q: Making a rule of life seems incredibly daunting. How do I even begin?

Less is more. I often encourage people to draft their rule of life on an index card. If you don’t have a rule of life written down, then just put five bullet points on an index card. Say to yourself: these five things make my life worth living. Five things. Write them on an index card and put it in your pocket, then look at it ten times a day. Start with that and see where it takes you.
Since moving back to Emery House last summer, one of my most frequently worn articles of clothing, besides my habit, has become my rubber boots. On an almost daily basis I put on my boots and head off to feed the chickens or check the bees, or just tromp around the property. Brothers and guests have commented on seeing me in my boots and report that I look increasingly quite comfortable in them.

For the last ten years the community has spent a great deal of time and energy thinking about the physical space of the Monastery; planning for the renovations and dreaming about the kind of ministry we could have there. Now that the Stone & Light campaign has gone so well, and the renovations are nearing completion, we are able to begin that same imaginative work for Emery House. We are beginning to dream about what the future might look like at Emery House, both in the short term and the long term.

Until now, the focus at Emery House has been on retreat ministry and the property that the retreat ministry—the hermitages and the main house—sits on. But we have not really considered the property as a whole. All told, the Emery House property consists of about 150 acres of land. We understand that it is one of the largest undeveloped pieces of privately-owned land in eastern Massachusetts, yet until now most of it has been unused, at least by us. For a number of years, a local tree nursery used parts of the property for growing stock; and for the last several years, a dairy farmer has grown feed corn, alfalfa, and hay on it. In many ways we have been passive observers of the land, but that is now beginning to shift as we look for ways to become actively engaged with it. As a result we are beginning to imagine what the whole piece of property could be and do in terms of our ministry.

As a part of our larger ministry, we are hoping that Emery House can give people a small taste of being reconnected with Creation. That may be as simple a thing as coming to Emery House and eating a salad that, ten minutes before, was growing in the garden 50 yards from the refectory. Or it could mean that when somebody asks, “What can I do?”
we’ll say, “Well, the tomatoes need staking or the raspberries need picking.” We hope to give people an opportunity to get reconnected, even to get a little dirty.

Our Brother Jonathan put it this way: Over and over again in spiritual direction we try to help people move out of their heads and into their hearts. Here at Emery House we have the opportunity to move them into their hands, and even their feet.

In our experience, this is what monastic spirituality is all about: inviting people to become connected: connected to their breathing; connected to their feelings; connected to the movement of the Spirit in their life. Part of being connected is about paying attention to what’s going on in your life and seeing the threads that connect everything. In spiritual direction, we try to help people really to be planted and to have a grounded connection with their lives. Now we’re looking to see how Emery House might help people literally to be grounded. Emery House, because of its setting and natural beauty, can be a place for getting reconnected and rooted, for discovering once again that intimate relationship with our surroundings to which God invites us. Emery House invites us to start paying attention not only to our feelings or to the other people in our lives, but also to our surroundings. Emery House holds an invitation to us all to be in relationship with the Creation.

In many ways the Chapel at Emery House is a wonderful icon for this relationship with the Creation: It was designed so that it would feel as if the outside was invited in and the inside was invited out. Even in the Chapel there is a sense of being connected to Creation as we look out onto the meadow and really see it as it changes day by day, season by season, and year by year. This is one thing that Emery House offers that the Monastery doesn’t: the ability to watch our surroundings as we worship.

A friend of the Community recently observed that Emery House can also help make alive for people the agricultural im-
agery of Scripture with which we’ve lost touch. And even though Emery House is not a true farm, I know I’ve had several ah-ha moments during my times there. For instance, just last week, I had an ah-ha moment when I did the math about the chickens: A hen lays an egg a day, more or less. Once she has laid about a dozen eggs she will then have what she regards as a clutch of eggs, or enough to hatch; and it takes about 3 weeks for an egg to hatch. If you do the math, you’ll get approximately 40 days: the Lenten fast. Most people don’t make the connection between the Lenten fast and an agricultural fast. Yet this agricultural fact informs our spiritual practice: You can’t eat eggs this spring if you want chickens this fall. I no longer see the Lenten fast in the same way—because of chickens.

One of the chapters in our Rule states, “Christ in his wisdom draws each disciple into that particular expression of community which will be the best means of his or her conversion.” We’re placed in the communities that God knows are best for us, and not only in human communities, but also in a created community that includes the natural world. At Emery House, we want to invite people to become aware of the larger community of Creation of which we are one part. In this we are joining in the environmental movements such as the green movement and the locavore movement. The Church has something to say about our environment and what and how we eat, because they raise spiritual, not just ethical or environmental, issues. Monasticism also has something to say.

In addition to the spirituality of connection, monasticism has something to say about the spirituality of place. While we in the Society don’t take a vow of stability, as the Benedictines do, we in fact live it. When we make our vows of poverty, celibacy and obedience within this community we promise to abide within the community for the rest of our lives. Part of that abiding is to live where the community lives, which for the last ninety years has meant the Monastery in
Cambridge, and since 1952, Emery House. This monastic sense of place also helps to connect us to our surroundings and gives us the desire to care for them in such a way that we can pass them on to the next generation of Brothers enhanced and improved. In many ways, that sense of place is what propelled us to forge ahead with the renovations at the Monastery: We did so, not simply for our sake, or the sake of those who currently make use of the building, but for all those who will come after us. The same is true for Emery House. Our vision needs to be not just about the present, but about the future and one way to do that is to invite people into the experience of getting dirty and being reconnected with their surroundings.

It is perhaps no accident then that we actually don’t own Emery House. The Emery Trust owns it, and we are the beneficiaries of that trust. We actually cannot do whatever we want with Emery House—we can’t tear everything down and turn it into a parking lot. The Emery sisters entrusted us with this property for the sole purpose of enabling ministry to happen in West Newbury. So this word “trust”—being entrusted—is a very monastic principle connected with stability. Stability is not just about staying put, it is also about being entrusted with a place.

One of the consequences of stability, or being entrusted with a place, is that you actually cannot do anything you want there, because in the monastic tradition, you have to pass that place on to the future.

It is this sense of future that propels us to take seriously what it is we are passing on. We are not “going green” simply for the sake of going green but because we have been entrusted with something that we also need to pass on to future generations. In that way, being entrusted with something compels us to be careful stewards of it so that we can pass it on to the next generation better than we received it.

These are exciting days for the community as we begin to make preparations to move back into our newly renovated Monastery in Cambridge, a building that has been entrusted to us by our forebears in the Society and which we hope one day to pass on to a future of monks. In the same way we are looking forward to the future here at Emery House, as we begin to imagine again how we can be responsible to that trust placed in us by the Emery sisters. Part of the way I have begun to fulfill that trust is putting on my rubber boots each day and getting dirty. In the days and years to come, we’ll invite you to do the same.

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**Come and See Weekend**

*Ever wondered if God could be calling you?*

**October 27-30, 2011 • May 3-6, 2012**

We welcome men interested in learning about a vocation to SSJE to join us for a “Come and See” weekend at the Monastery. For more information, please visit our website at www.SSJE.org/brother.
Construction Update

Despite the difficult winter weather and a very rainy spring, our intrepid construction team has made wonderful progress on the renovations at the Monastery!

Thanks to their hard work and accommodation, we had the incredible joy of being able to worship in the Monastery Chapel during Holy Week, even though it was still a construction site—with no running water, minimal heat, and no bathrooms. It was our experience that the Holy Spirit filled in the gaps. How wonderful to be back, with so many Friends, in the beautifully restored Monastery Chapel: the light from the stained glass windows lighting up the floors and walls with incredible colors.

Since that week, more milestones have been met: the scaffolding on the outside of the building has come down. The newly constructed bathrooms in the Guesthouse, which are now individual bathrooms for greater guest privacy, are complete. And the Brothers are delighted at the prospect of having again a library.

As we watch the sheetrock going up on walls and await the new lighting fixtures that will illuminate the Chapel, our thoughts turn eagerly to the day when we will move back into the Monastery and reopen the Guesthouse. 📚
Many of you who have visited us in the last few years will know that we’ve often had young adults living alongside us. It’s been a time of exploration of new possibilities. Having reflected on this experience we have now formalized a new Monastic Internship Program. You may have already heard of this and read about it on our website www.SSJE.org. If you haven’t yet, check it out!

Part of our thinking behind this new program is a desire to honor what we might call temporary vocations. Buddhist monasteries have done this for many centuries: spending a season of life in a monastery is in some eastern societies a component in a rounded education. Spending time alongside a monastic community is an opportunity to reflect and discern at a time when decisions are being made about one’s life work. It allows for a deeper appropriation of one’s faith and training in the disciplines of prayer and worship that become a vital resource for the life ahead. Few are called to a life-long commitment to a monastic vocation; but more, we believe, will feel drawn to a time of immersion in the rhythms of prayer and work of a religious community.

Ministry to and with young adults has been part of our ministry from the beginning of our Society. The establishment of the SSJE in the 1860’s near Oxford University was intentional; the mother house of the Society in the United States was, by intention, built in close proximity to another great university—actually quite close to several. Why do we see our work with students and young adults as part of our vocation as a community?

Reinhold Niebuhr put it succinctly: “Nothing worth doing is completed in our lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope. Nothing true or beautiful makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore, we are saved by love.”

The Kingdom of God can’t be accomplished alone, often doesn’t make
complete sense in our historical context, and is not completed in our lifetime. We participate in the fulfilling of the Mission of God in a kind of relay, each generation passing torches and tools to the next. In our student and young adult initiatives we are responding to a kind of gravitational pull to the future, God’s future. Young adults are the most powerful agents of change, especially today, as we have seen recently in the Middle East and North Africa. But grounding in wisdom of the past—often hard won by previous young adults like, say, Jesus!—is essential to making the right kind of change, change that leads the human enterprise into the fullness of God’s vision for humanity.

Or, to put it another way: realizing the fullness of God’s vision for the future has always relied on subversives—like Jesus! All Christians are called not only to conversion, but to subversion. Our baptismal promises obligate us to resist and subvert all structures, patterns and relationships that bind and degrade our humanity (“Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons…and respect the dignity of every human being?” BCP p. 305). The chief means and goal of our conversion is love. The chief “weapon” of subversion is, again, love. The coming of the Kingdom, the fulfilling of God’s Mission, depends on subversion, subversion empowered by love: the subversion of fear through love, the subversion of violence, greed and oppression through love. The subversion of death in all its manifestations through love.

Perhaps we can think of our work with young adults as raising up a new generation of subversives. Perhaps all Christian formation could be thought of as raising up new generations of subversives. We seek personal conversion for our own immediate benefit; genuine personal conversion eventually informs and energizes our participation in the human community around us.

Monasticism, at its most authentic, is an intentionally subversive mode of Christian witness. Monasticism began in the deserts of the Middle East and North Africa as a way of opting out of the newly official Christianity of the Roman Empire. The church has ever since Constantine struggled to maintain integrity while allied with ruling powers and structures of coercion and militarism, the Episcopal Church being no exception. Monastic communities—with their subversive vows of poverty, celibacy and obedience—have been one way the people of God have striven to maintain the integrity of authentic Christian witness. (Of course, people in monasteries “fall down and get up, fall down and get up…” like people everywhere.)

The conversion of our hearts, the subversion of all that would deny or
degrade our humanity and the fulfilling of the Mission of God is a very high-minded sounding thing. The irony is that it is accomplished in the mundane, the ordinary, even “the trivial round, the common task” (as John Keble put it). Interns will join us in the ordinary and mundane, living alongside us and the many people who come for silent retreat, participating in the daily rhythm of prayer and work, activity and reflection. They will be guided in their prayer and study by mentors from among the Brothers. They will meet for regular theological reflection and for processing their experiences. Schedules will provide time not only for work and study, but also for rest, recreation and retreat.

Some will have the opportunity for a few hours a week of working with outside organizations such as the Diocese of Massachusetts’ “Life Together” internship program, or university chaplaincies or organizations like Kids4Peace Boston. One young man who has recently begun an internship is helping Kids4Peace Boston with improvements to its donor database. [Kids4Peace, which has been written about in previous issues, is an international, interfaith organization founded at St. George’s College in Jerusalem that brings groups of Jewish, Christian and Muslim kids from Jerusalem to the United States for two weeks with American counterparts.]

We hope and pray that the interns’ time with us will be a significant part of their ongoing conversion in Christ. We know it will be a great blessing to us—and one way of participating in God’s Mission in a new generation.
RETREATS AND WORKSHOPS
at the Monastery and at Emery House, 2011-12

We Brothers are excited to share with you the following dates and descriptions of programs being offered this year at our newly-renovated Monastery in Cambridge and at Emery House, our retreat center in West Newbury. For additional information and to make reservations, visit our website at www.SSJE.org.

Workshops at the Monastery
A series of five workshops celebrating the gifts that God offers us will be held at the monastery on Saturday mornings, from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. (Participants are invited to stay and join the Brothers for the Midday Office at 12:30 p.m. following the workshop.) The suggested fee for each of these Saturday morning workshops is $40 ($20 for students). For more details and to register (online only), go to www.SSJE.org/workshop.

The Gift of Forgiveness – Br. Kevin Hackett, SSJE: March 17, 2012

In addition, we will be offering one full-day workshop:

The Pastoral Art of Hearing Confessions – a workshop for priests and seminarians – Br. Curtis Almquist, SSJE: February 18, 2012 (10:00 am-3:00 pm)
This full-day workshop will focus on both the theology of the Sacrament of Reconciliation and its practice. It will cover topics such as: for whom the Sacrament will be helpful, what the penitent and confessor anticipate, how the “boundaries” of the Sacrament are designated and maintained, when the need for forgiveness (unbinding) and healing (binding up) overlap, the words and gestures that accompany the ministration, and the aftermath of the confession. Suggested fee: $65, includes lunch.

Programs at Emery House
Emery House will be open throughout the program year (September through July) for individual and small group retreats. In addition, we will be offering two special programs:

The World Charged with God’s Grandeur – Br. Curtis Almquist, SSJE; Thursday 5 pm to Sunday 2 pm; October 13-16, 2011.
This retreat will focus on the iconic beauty of God’s creation, drawing on our senses and imagination, the cadence of poetry, the gift of silence, and the holy space of SSJE’s rural sanctuary – Emery House – for pondering, prayer and praise. Suggested fee: $375.
Behold the Beauty of the Lord – an intensive icon-writing retreat – Br. James Koester, SSJE; Tuesday 5 pm to Sunday 2 pm; March 6-11, 2012.

During this week-long intensive icon-writing workshop, participants will be introduced to the technique of creating an icon. They will learn and experience the various steps of writing an icon, and will also gain an understanding of the theology and spirituality of icons. Registration is limited to six participants. All materials will be provided. Suggested fee: $675.

To register for a retreat or program at Emery House, visit our website at www.SSJE.org or send an email to guesthouse@SSJE.org.

Pilgrimage

Ways in the Wilderness – Br. Robert L’Esperance, SSJE; chaplain
September 28-October 11, 2011 – Sponsored by St. George’s College, Jerusalem

Wilderness Spirituality is the theme of this pilgrimage, which begins in Jerusalem and travels to Cairo and the deserts of Egypt, where we will visit several ancient monasteries, including St. Anthony’s Monastery and St. Catherine’s Monastery at the foot of Mount Sinai. Our journey continues to the ancient city of Petra in Jordan before returning to Jerusalem. Participants will spend some nights under the stars, in tent encampments, and in monastery guesthouses. The course will offer many opportunities for prayer, for reflecting on the significance of the desert and the wilderness in Scripture and in the Christian tradition, and for exploring the deep silence of the desert. Applicants must be physically fit (i.e. capable of doing some fairly strenuous hiking). For more information and to register, visit the website of St. George’s College at www.sgcjerusalem.org. (A slide show of photographs from the 2010 “Ways in the Wilderness” pilgrimage is available at www.SSJE.org/gallery.

Come & See Weekend – a program for men interested in exploring religious life with SSJE – October 27-30, 2011 (Thursday 5 pm – Sunday 2 pm)

Men between the ages of 21 and 45 who are interested in learning more about a vocation with SSJE are encouraged to join us for this three-day program. Participants join in the monastic rhythm of worship, work, and study; learn about the history and mission of SSJE; and meet with SSJE Brothers individually and in groups to talk about our life. There is no charge for the program beyond the costs of getting to the Monastery. Limited to six participants. Contact Br. David Vryhof, Novice Guardian, at vocations@SSJE.org for further information and reservations.

Important Dates for the Fall

The Monastery Guesthouse and Emery House reopen for guests on Tuesday, September 12, 2011. Come and stay in the newly-refurbished Monastery Guesthouse, where you can enjoy the quiet, nourishing atmosphere of the Monastery, join the Brothers as they chant the Daily Office, and walk along the banks of the Charles River. Or join us in the countryside at Emery House, our
rural retreat center in West Newbury, Massachusetts, just 45 minutes north of Boston and accessible from Boston by public transportation. To make a reservation at either house, email us at guesthouse@SSJE.org.

**A Service of Thanksgiving – Saturday, September 17, 2011.** The Brothers invite you to join us in celebrating 75 years of prayer in our newly restored Chapel. The Eucharist begins at 10:30 a.m., with a reception following. Refreshments will be served, and the public areas of the Monastery will be open for viewing. All are welcome.

**“Meal with the Monks” – Tuesday, September 20, 2011.** The Brothers welcome local students to join us for a festive meal following the Eucharist. This is a great way to get to meet the Brothers. We encourage you to bring along a friend.

**NightSong at the Monastery,** an evening service blending the creative energy of the emergent church with the rich tradition of monastic worship, will return this fall. Check the website for details in September.

**Conversations On the Way** – a four-part preaching series especially for young adults, begins on Tuesday, September 27 and continues on October 4, 11, and 18. Following the Eucharist and sermon, everyone is invited to join the Brothers for a soup supper and a chance to interact with the preacher. We invite you to bring along a friend or two.
Br. Geoffrey Tristram led a two-day program at St. Michael & All Angels Episcopal Church in Dallas, Texas, March 3-5. He also conducted a retreat for the clergy of the Diocese of Southwest Florida in Venice, Florida, on March 10, and preached at the diocese’s Chrism Mass.

St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church in Richmond, Virginia, hosted a weekend program led by Br. David Vryhof, March 11-13. He spoke about “The Disciple Whom Jesus Loved” in John’s Gospel and gave a workshop on “Gratitude.” On Sunday, he preached and spoke to the adult forum on the topic of “Vocation.”

Br. Kevin Hackett was chaplain for a group of pilgrims participating in the “Palestine of Jesus” course offered by St. George’s College in Jerusalem, March 11-24. Following the pilgrimage he spent a week in Cairo, visiting Coptic Christians whom he has come to know in recent years and witnessing first-hand a revolution that is still in progress.

Br. James Koester traveled to Canada to lead a weekend program for the Anglican parish of St. Barnabas in Ottawa, March 30-April 3. The program was entitled “Faces of Jesus: Praying with Icons of our Lord.” The Church of Our Saviour in San Gabriel, California sponsored a weekend program led by Brs. David Vryhof and Kevin Hackett, April 8-10. During their stay, the Brothers were hosted by the Community of Divine Love, a new Benedictine community in the Episcopal Church.

Br. Curtis Almquist led a day of reflection for the “Fresh Start” program, a monthly gathering of newly ordained and transitioning clergy in the Diocese of Massachusetts. He spoke about coping with disappointment and failure in our lives and in our ministries.

In May, Br. Mark Brown participated in a CREDO Conference held at the Chapel Rock Conference Center in Prescott, Arizona. CREDO is a week-long conference for priests which gives them a chance to evaluate “where they are” and to set goals to enhance both their life and their ministry.

Br. David Vryhof led a retreat for the clergy of the Diocese of Jamaica, May 16-19, at the invitation of the Rt. Rev. & Hon. Alfred Reid, Bishop of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands. Br. David was confirmed at St. Andrew’s Anglican Church, Half-way Tree (Kingston) in the early 1980s, when he was teaching at the Mico Teachers College in Kingston. Bp. Reid was his spiritual director during those years when he was discerning a call to monastic life.

On May 25, Br. David Vryhof gave a half-day workshop on “Issues in Spiritual Direction” at the Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Massachusetts, as part of their doctoral training program. On May 31, he gave a workshop on “Gratitude” for “Selah,” a spiritual direction training program associated with Leadership Transformations, Inc.
Update your contact details: to update or remove your name from list see postcard inside.
Living Intentionally

A Workbook for Creating a Personal Rule of Life

Br. David Vryhof
Monastic Wisdom for Everyday Living is a continuing series of sermons, workshops and teachings from the Brothers that seeks to distill the collective wisdom of the past and offer practical timeless messages to live by in today’s world.

Want to think more about developing a rule of life? Check out “A Living Tradition,” an online series of posts in which the Brothers reflect on the process of revising the SSJE Rule and offer guidelines to others interested in developing a rule: www.SSJE.org/monasticwisdom.

To order more copies of this workbook and other resources visit www.SSJE.org/goodnews.

To read and listen to the Brothers reading from the Rule, visit www.SSJE.org/audiorule. You can purchase a printed copy of the SSJE Rule at www.cowleypublications.org.
A rule of life allows us to clarify our deepest values, our most important relationships, our most authentic hopes and dreams, our most meaningful work, our highest priorities. It allows us to live with intention and purpose in the present moment.

Sometimes when people hear the phrase “rule of life,” they imagine a list of rules which they would be bound to follow. It’s not an inviting image for most of us, and more often leads to ‘death’ rather than ‘life.’ (Have you ever noticed how difficult it is to keep New Year’s resolutions?) But creating a list of rules to follow is not the intention of a rule of life.

The word “rule” derives from a Latin word, regula, which implies not so much a system of rules or laws, but rather a way of regulating and regularizing our lives so that we can stay on the path we have set out for ourselves. A rule is like a trellis which offers support and guidance for a plant, helping it to grow in a certain direction. A rule of life is descriptive in that it articulates our intentions and identifies the ways in which we want to live. And when we fall short of these intentions, the rule becomes prescriptive, showing us how we can return to the path that we have set for ourselves and recapture our original vision. It is not something fixed and rigid, but something which can and should be adapted to our present circumstances and shaped to fit our current needs and desires.

Rules of life grew out of the monastic tradition of the Church and have their origins in the 3rd and 4th centuries, when Christian monastic communities first came into being in the deserts of Egypt.

Even though rules of life were originally developed for communities, they can also be useful for individuals. In a rule of life an individual can put into words those things that he or she values most and can identify ways in which they can be achieved or lived. In the pages that follow, we suggest a number of questions to guide individuals and groups in developing their own rules of life.
We strongly recommend that you keep it simple, and that the goals you set be realistic and achievable. You might want to begin by identifying five or six principles that describe the kind of person you want to be and the ways in which you want to live. Writing these on an index card and keeping them nearby to remind you of your purpose may be a good way to start. You can always elaborate or add to your rule later, if need be. For now, start small and keep it simple.

Like any spiritual discipline, adopting a rule should help you to live more faithfully. It is a tool to aid you in living a rich and meaningful life. Designing a rule is not an end in itself, but rather a means to an end: namely, to live our lives for God with purpose and intention.

Two prayer exercises you might find helpful in beginning to design a rule of life:

In prayer, imagine yourself in a conversation with Jesus in which you describe to him what it is you value most and how you want to live faithfully in the world. Ask what he values most and how he wants you to live.

You might imagine yourself at the end of your life and reflect on what you would like others to think of you or say about you at that time. You might even write your own eulogy. This meditation helps clarify what is most important to us by helping us reflect on who and what we want to be/become.
Suggestions for Use

In the pages of this workbook, we offer some topics and questions you might want to consider in designing your own rule of life. Here are some suggestions for how you might use this workbook:

- **Invite God into the process**: Say a prayer for God’s guidance as you sit down to meditate on these questions. You may want to pray about each question, or stop and say a prayer as you come to the end of each section.

- **Take time**: Allow yourself time to dwell with each of the questions here. You may not immediately know the answer and your answers may change over time. You might find it helpful to work through the workbook’s sections over a series of days.

- **Be gentle**: Remember that this is a chance for you to celebrate and sanctify what matters most to you, not to berate yourself for what you aren’t doing.

- **Be realistic**: Being honest about what you are capable of accomplishing and what your schedule allows is essential in creating a rule. An overly strenuous rule will not be sustainable or enjoyable to keep.

- **Write your goals down**: Putting pen to paper asks you to engage in a more concrete way than simply thinking about a theme or question. Use the space provided in the pages of this workbook to write down concrete goals.
My Relationship with God and with the Church

How would I describe the relationship with God that I desire and seek?

What spiritual practices or disciplines do I already know feed this relationship?

What spiritual practices or disciplines might I adopt that would help me grow in this relationship?
What pattern or rhythm of prayer (including times for silent reflection or for retreat) would fit my present circumstances?

How will I incorporate times for regular worship, alone and with others, into my life?

How can I take advantage of the sacraments of the Church (for example, the Holy Eucharist and the Rite of Reconciliation) to deepen my relationship with God?
From the preceding pages, synthesize your thoughts for how you will shape your relationship with God and the Church into two or three achievable goals.

Write them here:
My Relationship with Others

To what relationships in my life should I be giving special attention?

What guidelines can I identify that would help me grow in love for my spouse, my family, my friends, my colleagues in the workplace, and others?
What specific roles and responsibilities do I have?

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How will I carry them out faithfully in my day to day life?

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How will I carry them out faithfully over the long term?

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How will I seek and serve God in others, especially in those who are different from me?

In what ways can I contribute to the work of God in the world, advancing the cause of peace and justice and bringing healing, reconciliation and hope to my community, my Church, my nation and the world?
From the preceding pages, synthesize your thoughts for how you will shape your relationships with others into two or three achievable goals.

Write them here:
My Relationship with Myself

Where in my relationship with myself do I recognize the need for change or balance?

How will I care for myself (e.g., by eating healthy foods and by getting regular exercise and adequate sleep)?
How will I preserve a “balance” in my life, so that one area of life (for example, my work) doesn’t dominate other areas?

How will I express my creativity and develop my mind (through study and reading, the arts, music, etc.)?

How can I incorporate times for rest and recreation into my day, my week, my year?
From the preceding page, synthesize your thoughts for how you will shape your relationship with yourself into two or three achievable goals.

Write them here:
My Stewardship of Resources

How can I be a good steward of the resources God has entrusted to me (money, possessions, talent, time, education, experience, etc.)?

How can I best employ my gifts in the service of God and for the benefit of others?
'What commitment will I make to God and to the Church regarding my talents, time, and resources?'

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'How will I care for the environment (e.g., by living more simply and avoiding wasteful extravagance)?'

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'What cause(s) am I drawn to support?'

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From the preceding page, synthesize your thoughts for how you will shape your stewardship of resources into two or three achievable goals.

Write them here:
You might find it helpful to collect the goals you articulated at the end of each section into one space. Take a moment and write the major points of your rule here.
Living a Rule of Life in Association with SSJE: The Fellowship of Saint John

The Fellowship of Saint John is comprised of nearly 1,000 men and women throughout the world who desire to live their Christian life in special association with the Society of Saint John the Evangelist. They have a vital interest in the life and work of the community and support it with their prayers, encouragement, and financial gifts.

Members of the Fellowship seek to live an ordered life of prayer and service in association with our community, and follow a rule of life which expresses a common commitment to faithful discipleship. The purpose of the rule is to strengthen our abiding in Christ by bringing rhythm, order, and balance to our discipleship. The rule helps us offer the whole of ourselves to God each day and keeps us open to God’s love and purpose for us. Members are encouraged to adapt the Rule of the Fellowship to their particular life circumstances, describing for themselves how they will endeavor to live out its principles.

For more information on the Fellowship of Saint John and their Rule of Life, visit our website at www.ssje.org.