

Moot Discussion Evening on developing a Rule of Life, Led by Wendy, a Leader of the Northumbria Community, Tuesday 23rd October 2005-10-26

Introduction

This week, Moot published its first draft of the potential rule of life, which for the next 3 to five months will be shaped up from this first draft which has been created out of first deliberations from Carey, Philippa, Mike, Gareth and Ian.

Accordingly, Wendy from the Northumbria community was invited to come and talk about her personal experience of developing a rule of life for that community, so that we can learn from their experience, and how a rule of life could be helpful. The following notes were made:

What is a rule of Life?

When I first encountered the word 'rule' I saw it negatively and restrictive – and it is a word that doesn't translate the purpose of a rule of life. So we have called it 'A Way of Living: The Rule of the Northumbria Community'. This has helped us find a more positive understanding of this ancient form.

In its simplest form, a rule is a structure that enables us to explore our communal relationships and relationship with God. It is a form of guide. Markers and guidelines on the journey towards God, a lens through which we can interpret life as we experience it. A form of sign posting. It draws on a re-appreciation for new forms of monasticism that works for today in contemporary life. It makes a space, a structure and a rhythm for us to grow as individuals and as a community in our Christian spiritual life.

The rule also will give an indication of the distinctive spiritual life of the community. It consolidates verbally the spiritual temperature of the group and where it wants to go. It is an aspirational document for life's spiritual journey.

There are two forms of rules – Roman ones that are very prescriptive – you will do this and that, and others that are more Orthodox or Celtic that promotes what it seeks to be rather than you 'must'.

In our community, availability and vulnerability became key values. That offering ourselves and our time was the key gift we could give beyond money and just doing things.

We started with three key questions:

- Who is it that you seek?
- How then shall we live?
- How do we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

Considerations

A rule should not:

- Restrict creativity, growth and development.
- Distract people away from God and/or Jesus.
- Cause the community to serve the rule, the rule must serve the community.
- Just a dull mission statement.
- Create or promote clones who think and act in the same way – must allow for diversity.
- Remain static as some form of doctrine or creed.

A rule should:

- Be empowering and inspiring.
- Reflect the unique qualities of the community.
- Change as the community changes.
- Promote creative spirituality and spiritual questing for the whole of life including work and other areas of life – and therefore integrative.
- Offend and bring comfort at the same time.
- Promote faith formation and development – drawing on questing in prayer, contemplation and other spiritual disciplines.
- Enable one another to live a life in the fullness of God. You are in it together, helping each other to go deeper with it.
- Encourages risk taking as well as security.
- Focus on companionship.
- Promote a spiritual pattern of life drawing on various aspects of a devotional life and action.
- Enable people who do not have faith to be able to explore it as a source of spiritual challenge and nourishment.

Belonging

- We have formalised it in the Northumbria Community, for those who want to, to take vows to commit to our rule of life, that we renew at Easter each year.
- You don't have to have taken the vow to belong or relate to the community, but it is a commitment of the group to live a certain way as a focus to the community instead of what can happen, where personal choice can be the centre of the lives of many churches.
- Taking a vow in the Northumbria Community is taken once someone has a sense of vocation that it is the way they want to live.

Suggestions

- You need to consider some form of formulisation of how people choose to commit to such a rule – not in a legalistic way – but nevertheless in a significant way. This should not be a form of compulsion.
- Start thinking about how you are being distinctive.
- Do develop your draft rule, as the benefits to the spiritual health of community is key to your future.

23.10.05

Ian Mobsby