

My brother in law raises grapes in Phoenix. I know that sounds odd, raising grapes in the desert, but he does-- and very successfully. He says that the most important thing about raising grapes is to have a good trellis.

The trellis supports the vines that the grapes grow on-- allowing them to stretch out and grow higher. Without a trellis, the grapes just grow along the ground-- prey to all kinds of insects, and scavengers, and dust.

The trellis provides structure for the grapevine.

All human bodies are supported by structure. If we didn't have the structure of a skeleton, we wouldn't be able to stand or even talk, for that matter.

Artists need structure to create: musical notes, or paint or movement or words.

We also have structure in our faith. We have the 10 commandments, we have the summary of the law, we have the Beatitudes. And we have something else. They're called Rules of Life, and they came out of the monastic tradition.

Sometimes in our journey as Christians, it's helpful to have something to hold us up. Sometimes we get tired, dragging on the ground. We need more sunshine -or a gentle breeze. Sometimes we just need some additional help.

We need trellises to enable us to stretch out and grow higher. That's what a Rule of Life is.

A rule of life is different than setting goals, intentions, or resolutions—like we often do at the beginning of the calendar year. Goal making is task-based and measurable, and it's focused on what we *do*, what we *accomplish*. A rule of life, on the other hand, helps us become. Become a better follower of Jesus, a more loving person, a more centered and calm individual.

So who needs a rule of life?

Anyone who often feels that life has kind of gotten away from them. That they are overwhelmed with all the things in their life, and their relationship with God, and with others in Christian community always seems to be the very last thing you can get to.

Or, Rules of Life are for anyone who wants to be more deliberate in their walk with Christ, who is wanting a deeper relationship with God, and is open to a new kind of adventure.

Rules of life can look different to different people. Here's one example:

- Weekly worship with others at church
- Saying Morning Prayer every day
- Daily prayers of intercession for those in need
- Making formal confession with a priest once a year
- Service
- Provide free web development assistance to church organizations
- Reading non-fiction Christian books on spirituality, evangelism, etc
- Engaging in Spiritual Direction
- Becoming a lay associate with the Sisters of the Poor

A friend of mine from far away developed that. It's complex, and very detailed. But it really works for him. I'm tired just reading it to you. It's obviously not for me. But—it might really resonate with you.

Here's my Rule of Life from the last time I worked on one.

- Laugh every day---Pray every day --Write every day
- Forgive every day ---Love every day.

My way is not better than the first way—each Rule of Life is unique to the person or community that develops one. Rules of Life are used by both individuals, and by communities.

Deaconess Anne House, is an Episcopal Service Corps community in St. Louis MO. DAH is rooted in Benedictine spirituality and the principles of stability, obedience and conversion of life. The first thing the newly formed group does each year is to make a Rule of life—a structure to support their

time together – and they do this with the help of their program director. Each week at their Community Chapter Meeting they read one section to see how they're doing in following that aspect of the rule and how it's working for them. They discuss it when something is not working.

Every few months they go through the rule and amend it as the needs of the group evolve. Nothing about creating a community is inherently stable, and this Rule gives them structure. It holds them accountable to God and each other.

For the next 7 weeks we're going to look at A Rule of Life developed by the Presiding Bishop for use in our individual lives and in within our communities. It's called the 7 Ways of Love, based on 7 key words. TURN LEARN PRAY WORSHIP BLESS GO & REST. This circle of words is reproduced on your bulletin cover.

These words are deliberately set up in a circle – kind of like a circle of life, because you can start anywhere and there is no ending. It's like a wheel with spokes, to show us that all of these actions—turning, learning, blessing—etc. are constantly coming and going, not necessarily in order, but over and over, gaining traction—like a wheel-- as we get to know them.

For the next 40 days of Lent--7 Sundays--join Abby and I for a sermon one word each week, and how it might apply to our lives as we follow Christ.

And then please join us at 9 each week in the conference room for further conversation about how these actions inform our daily lives as we walk the way with Jesus.

And all during this Lent --listen for God as we learn about building our own trellis' of support that will keep us from being prey to insects and scavengers and dust-- as we turn toward Jesus who loves us, and liberates us, and gives us new life.

A life where we can grow tall, breathe the fresh air, and stretch out. Amen.