
Letters to a Young Episcopalian: What Is a Rule of Life?

This letter is part of a series of fictional letters by Canon George Maxwell intended for Episcopalians young and old who wonder what it means to be faithful in the world today.

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Dear Anna,

You asked me what people mean when they speak of a “rule of life.”

The word *rule* sounds harsh, but its root, *regula*, means something closer to a trellis than a law. It is not a cage; it is support for growth. The early monks lived by simple rules — times to pray, to work, to rest, to welcome strangers. They found that rhythm steadied their hearts, letting every act become a meeting place with God.

Our Anglican life absorbed this wisdom. The Book of Common Prayer is itself a communal rule. Morning and Evening Prayer, the round of feasts and fasts, the weekly Eucharist — all of these give shape to our days. As you and I have discussed, our Anglican consciousness is dialectical: it holds form and freedom together. A rule makes that possible.

So when you pause for prayer in the morning or keep Advent faithfully each year, you are not adding burdens. You are setting your life on a trellis. Over time, without forcing it, fruit will grow — patience, mercy, joy — ripening quietly on the vine of your days.

Your affectionate uncle,
Ames