

**Clergy Wellbeing: Toward a Rule of Life in Myanmar's Local Context**


by

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A Capstone Project Submitted  
to the Faculty of the Department of  
Practical Theology  
of the Protestant Episcopal Theological Seminary in Virginia  
in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

Alexandria, Virginia

May 1, 2019

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To my dad, who devotes his whole life to serve in ministry, and his fellow clergy colleagues

## **Acknowledgements**

I am grateful for God who gives me strength and wisdom to work on this Capstone Project. I give thanks to those who kept me in their prayers to complete this project especially to my parents. I am greatly thankful for my advisor, Dr. Lisa Kimball, who always opens with prayer every time we meet to discuss about my thesis and the guidance along my journey. Special thanks to Dr. Sharon Heaney, my spiritual guidance, who always encouraged and taught me to be strong. I also want to show my gratitude to Dr. Kate Sonderegger, who is my spiritual formation leader for formation group for pastoral guidance. Thank you so much Ms. Susan Sevier for helping me with editing the papers I have written throughout my seminary life. I am thankful to Dr. Allison St.Louise for giving me time to be my thesis reader. I am thankful for brothers at Society of Saint John the Evangelist especially Br. Keith Nelson and Br. David Vryhof for sharing their insights and experiences of developing Rule of Life for my project.

I wanted to say thank you to my fellow friend, Rev.Wen-en Lin for being a good friend of mine and helping me with my studies. I also wanted to thank all my international friends who gave me energy when I was in stress. I am grateful for the Karen community especially Rev. Buchree and family for their generosity and support during my time in VTS. I also want to send my gratitude to Aunty Kitty who advised me to work on this project and Aunty Linnea who also helped me with resources for my project based on their experiences of being clergy. Thank you to Rev Leh Htoo and Calvary Burmese Church community for being kind and taking care of me. Finally, I am thankful for my St. John the Baptist's youth, all my friends near and there, and my special one to always cheer me up.

## **Abstract**

Clergy hold a place of honor in society in Myanmar's local context. Clergy are the role models for spiritual figures and congregations have high expectations for them. However, the wellbeing of clergy serving in Myanmar is not a priority in the Church and clergy do not pay attention to how to do self-care for them. For this reason, this capstone project explores the importance of self-care for clergy by developing a rule of life in Myanmar's local context from theological, spiritual and contextual perspectives. The intended audiences are clergy who are serving in ministry in Anglican churches in Myanmar as well as seminarians who are preparing to serve in ministry. The guideline of how to develop a rule of life will be a resource for clergy serving in Myanmar that addresses the importance of self-care in doing ministry.

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## Introduction

### A Rule of Life

Stephen Maccia, in his book *Crafting a Rule of Life: An Invitation to the Well-Ordered Way*, gives us a working definition of what is often called a “rule of life”: “A rule of life is a set of guidelines that support or enable us to do the things we want and need to do.” A rule of life is a promise we make to ourselves to take care of our body, our mind and our soul. It is a discipline we practice intentionally to have “personal rhythms and guidelines.”<sup>1</sup> When I was first asked to write a rule of life for one of my seminary classes in practical theology, I did not understand why I had to write a rule for myself. However, as the explanation continued and I finished reading about a rule of life in *the Rule of St. Benedict*, I imagined that it would be nice to have one for clergy and seminarians who are preparing to do ministry.<sup>2</sup> Doing ministry is not only about preaching the Gospel, taking care of people, and conducting sacramental offerings at the altar; it is about taking care of your own heart that brought you there in the first place. A rule of life provides discipline about when we rest and when we play, when we work and when we socialize with family and community. In this essay, I will explore the importance of self-care for clergy by developing a Rule of Life for the Myanmar context.

Last summer, I applied to be a summer intern at the Society of Saint John the Evangelist Monastery in Cambridge, Massachusetts. It is a place where I found my inner peace. Compared to the hectic life of a seminarian, SSJE offered a place where I

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<sup>1</sup> Adele, Ahlberg. Calhoun, “*Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us*” (Downers Grove, Ill. IVP Books, 2005), 36.

<sup>2</sup> Benedict, and Timothy Fry, *The Rule of St. Benedict in English*. First ed (Vintage Spiritual Classics. New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 7-21.



could practice quiet and rest. The brothers who are serving there are friendly, kind and gentle. As an intern, I had to work as well as participate at worship services, not only with the monks but also with the community. Every day, we reviewed and reflected on the Rule of Life crafted by SSJE brothers.<sup>3</sup> The book is not only a guide but also a practice for the monks. The daily morning, afternoon and evening prayer, Eucharist and compline helped me draw closer to God. The quiet meal times helped me to concentrate on the grace of God. At the Seminary, I always have anxiety about meal times, which require me to have conversation with people in the Refectory. It is important to socialize with people, but sometimes quiet meals helped me to slow down and created a peaceful, mindful environment while eating.

The experience of staying at SSJE encouraged me to create my own rule of life that I could use when I went back to seminary. I first started with *Living Intentionally: A Workbook for Creating a Personal Rule of Life* produced by one of the brothers from SSJE. It is a simple book that I can follow and create my own personal rule of life. My rule of life helps me to do self-assessment of my spiritual life so that I can recognize my strengths and weaknesses. It also helps me release things that block me, such as spending too much time on social media. After creating and following my own rule of life, I experienced more balanced and rhythmic routine in my second year of seminary. Self-care is important in seminary life whether we are single or with family. Margaret Guenther, in her book *Holy Listening* affirms that seminary experience is a spiritual transitioning time: “It is a time of movement from one stage to another, a time of change and transformation.”<sup>4</sup> My personal experience

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<sup>3</sup> Society of St. John the Evangelist. *The Rule of the Society of St. John the Evangelist: North American Congregation* (Cambridge, Mas.: Cowley Publications, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> Margaret Guenther, *Holy Listening, The Art of Spiritual Direction* (Cowley Publication, 1992), 103.

living a rule of life has encouraged me to develop a rule of life for clergy back in Myanmar. I have a strong desire to advocate about having a rule of life for everyone.

### **Context and Culture of the Clergy Serving in Myanmar**

Myanmar is well-known for its rich culture and practices. Ninety percent of the population is Buddhist and only 5% is Christian.<sup>5</sup> The number of people who have converted to Christianity from other religions is not great, but their beliefs and devotion are strong. Among Christians, clergy plays an important role in teaching about faith. Clergy hold a place of honor in society in Myanmar. Therefore, social standing is of utmost importance. Congregations have high expectations of their clergy. For this reason, clergy persons are not free to share their struggles. Unfortunately, spiritual direction is not provided for them. Unlike Baptists and other reformed churches that prohibit the consumption of alcohol, Anglican churches in Myanmar do not prescribe behavior in this area and this can lead clergy to become addicted to alcohol, often as a form of self-medication.<sup>6</sup>

The wellbeing of clergy serving in Myanmar is not a priority in the Church. I am concerned about the self-care and wellbeing of clergy and seminarians who are involved in Christian ministry in Myanmar. Some priests are lonely, and some have addiction problems because they have nowhere to talk about their work stress and burdens. Suggesting spiritual solutions can be helpful, but they need someone to listen to them too. The clergy in Myanmar are often responsible for the care of one parish that includes 5-10 villages. Their responsibilities include leading communion every Sunday, preaching, visiting houses, praying for the sick and performing weddings and

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<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Koepping, "India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Burma (Myanmar)," in *Christianities in Asia*, edited by Peter C. Phan (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 26.

<sup>6</sup> Koepping, *Christianities in Asia*, 23.

funerals 7 days a week. And it is not just one congregation they must care for; they have multiple altars spread across many miles. Understanding the importance of self-care including the establishment of a rule of life will help clergy to serve effectively in ministry.

How do clergy manage these expectations and manage the expectations they have of themselves? This capstone project will reflect on these challenges from a theological, spiritual and contextual perspective, moving toward a suggested Rule of Life which supports them in their ministry. In Chapter 1, I will discuss the role of *sabbath* and rest in living a rule of life. In Chapter 2, I will discuss the spiritual practices of prayer and retreat that nourish personal spirituality. In Chapter 3, I will discuss the important roles of family, institution, community support, and worship. I will conclude the paper with sample rules and guidelines that will help clergy write their own rule of life.

## Chapter 1

### Observing Sabbath as a Practice for Rule of Life

#### 1.1 The Definition of Sabbath

The Bible defines *sabbath* as “the weekly seventh day of festal rest which is a day of abstention from secular work that follows each six-day working week.”<sup>7</sup> In Jewish tradition, *sabbath* is to remember and to observe and is a proper day when, each week, people come together for prayer and to hear Torah read and interpreted at the synagogue.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, Jesus also practiced going to the synagogue in his hometown on *sabbath* day according to (Luke 4:16), although it is not mentioned in other Gospels.<sup>9</sup> However, Jesus also performed healing miracles on the *sabbath* day, as described in (Matt 12:10-15, Mark 3:1-6 and Luke 6:6-11). Some scholars argue that healing, such as rebuking an unclean spirit, was not prohibited because it was his way of teaching the people.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, we can see that different period of time has different interpretations of keeping *sabbath* as it is an essential part of rule of life. I will present different practices of *sabbath* keeping from Old Testament, New Testament, Modern days and observing *sabbath* as a practice for rule of life for clergy in Myanmar’s local context.

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<sup>7</sup> Gerhard F. Hasel, “Sabbath,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman, 1st ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 849.

<sup>8</sup> Donna Schaper, *Sabbath Keeping* (Cloister Books. Cambridge, Mass.: Cowley Publications, 1999), 12.

<sup>9</sup> Sharon, Ringe, “Holy, as the Lord Your God Commanded You: Sabbath in the New Testament,” *Interpretation* 59, no.1 (2005):18.

<sup>10</sup> Ringe, “Holy”, 18.

### 1.1.1 Observing Sabbath in the Old Testament

The word *sabbath* comes from the Hebrew word *shabbat*, which means “to cease.”<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the *sabbath* is a day when we have a chance to choose to cease from our normal activities. We can choose to rest, to worship, to pray, to sleep, or read or walk. In the Christian tradition, *sabbath* refers to a day God assigned for human beings to rest, a bonus quality time available daily, weekly, monthly or yearly. An understanding and living of *sabbath* time can help a slow, steady and holy rhythm of life for us. In this contemporary world, finding time to have regular pause and rest sounds difficult. It is difficult not only for us in recent times but also for those who lived in ancient time in order to maintain holy rhythm of life.<sup>12</sup> Dorothy Bass mentions that “God has no regret of taking rest” where she refers to Gen. 2:2-3 (NRSV): “And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.” God is not a workaholic and he rests on the last day after all the creating he has done. God reminds us that we need to rest in order to renew and recharge for better ministry.

Moreover, the *sabbath* or rest is mentioned in Exodus as God commands the Israelites to restrain from working on the *sabbath* day. God commanded the Israelites to observe the *sabbath* day to keep it holy and he allowed people to work six days in Exodus, “Remember the *sabbath* day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a *sabbath* to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work – you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock. Or the alien resident in your towns.” (Exod. 20: 8-10, NRSV) In addition,

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<sup>11</sup> Tony Jones, *The Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 180.

<sup>12</sup> Tilden Edwards, *Sabbath Time*, rev.ed (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2003), 15.

God commanded the Israelites to keep the *sabbath* in Deut. 5:12-15. Here we can see that God wanted his people to appreciate his creation rather than work zealously every day:

Observe the *sabbath* day and keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the *sabbath* day.

In other word, God appreciates rest and he gets angry when the people he loves do not rest. To not rest is to disobey his law. We can see God's anger towards the Israelites when they were supposed to rest on the seventh day, but ignored what God has commanded, "Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a holy *sabbath* of solemn rest to the LORD; whoever does any work on it shall be put to death. You shall kindle no fire in all your dwellings on the *sabbath* day" (Exod. 35:2, NRSV). As a result, workers who work excessive amounts of time on the *sabbath* day found no food on that day.<sup>13</sup> God even scolded Moses for not trying to stop the Israelite people: "How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and instructions?" (Exod. 16: 28, NRSV). Therefore, God delivered the Ten Commandments, where the commandment about keeping the *sabbath* is the longest.<sup>14</sup> God is serious about keeping the *sabbath* because people work to achieve money or certain type of rewards but the *sabbath* is a day for rest and is a reward from God, so that we might take care of our body, heart and soul.

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<sup>13</sup> Edwards, *Sabbath*, 19.

<sup>14</sup> Jones, *Sacred Way*, 180-181.

### 1.1.2 Observing the Sabbath in the New Testament

The Old Testament emphasized keeping the *sabbath* as one of God's commandments. Jesus, however, complicates some of these laws. Jesus healed on the *sabbath* day even though Prophets and others religious leaders practiced and prioritized keeping the *sabbath* as a day of rest. Prophets and other religious leaders were concerned about Jesus's ministry of healing people on the *sabbath* day.<sup>15</sup> However, Jesus claimed that healing was doing a good deed and that it was lawful to do it on the *sabbath* as it was mentioned in Mat. 12:12.<sup>16</sup> Jesus's approach to the *sabbath* can be found in John 5:17 where he claimed that he was working because of his Father. Clearly, God works on this day, too. Jesus proclaimed that he is the Lord of the *sabbath*.<sup>17</sup> Hence, we will find rest if we believe him and have faith in him.

Moreover, Jesus saw people who were busy coming and going and forgetting to eat. He persuaded them to get some rest by saying: "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest" (Mark 6:31, NRSV). Jesus often taught by examples and modeled *sabbath* practice with his followers. For example, in Mark 4:35-40, Jesus left the crowd behind and went on the boat. Jesus had many things to do like healing and teaching. However, he asked his disciples to get on the boat and he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion along the journey. There were people who needed Jesus's healing. Jesus shows us that he needed to rest although he had many things to do. It is important for us to set boundaries between our demanding work and our need for rest. The ministry and life of Jesus portray us what a good shepherd is and how a shepherd must rest as well. Jesus helps us to create a rule of life where we

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<sup>15</sup> Gerhard, *Sabbath*, 854.

<sup>16</sup> Dorothy Bass, *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), 82.

<sup>17</sup> Jones, *Sacred Way*, 182.

live in a balanced social life and personal life. Chris Edmondson, in his book *Fit to Lead*, suggests that clergy need permission to rest and get help, and guidance to seek their inner peace and spirituality.<sup>18</sup> Just as Jesus spared time to rest, sleep, pray, reflect and fast, we must do these things as well. Jesus is not rushing in to do his ministry. He calmed the storm; he woke up only as he needed. In this, we must be like him, we must be good disciples.

### 1.1.3 Observing Sabbath in Modern Day

The Anglican churches in Myanmar observe *sabbath* day mostly on Sunday. However, in our modern day, it is not required to set aside time for keeping Sunday as *sabbath* day. Although people kept Sunday as *sabbath* day to gather at church and worship together in the past, many people nowadays choose to do other leisure activities instead of coming to church and worshipping with community. We passed down the knowledge about keeping *sabbath* day as holy day to worship but the practice has changed over time. We understand that keeping the *sabbath* is a practice taught to us by Judaism, and that it is an important practice that must be passed from generation to generation. Some religious practices still observe the *sabbath* on Saturday and keep Sunday as a celebration day for Jesus's resurrection.<sup>19</sup> Dorothy Boss proposes that people keep *sabbath* because they are "moved by obedience, or by exhaustion or by attraction to the beauty of the *sabbath* and the life patterns that emerge among those who observe it."<sup>20</sup> Thus, people do keep *sabbath* in modern days because they learn and understand the positive consequences of keeping it.

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<sup>18</sup> Chris Edmondson, *Fit to Lead: Sustaining Effective Ministry in a Changing World* (London: Dorton, Longman & Todd, 2002), 32.

<sup>19</sup> Jones, *Sacred Way*, 182.

<sup>20</sup> Dorothy Bass, "Christian Formation in and for Sabbath Rest," *Interpretation* 59, no. 1(2005): 26.



God allows human beings to work for six days and leaves one day to have rest. To have a day of rest is to have communion with God and build relationship with him. In this busy world, it is hard to find time to pause and stop that we are currently doing. However, the primary purpose of God's rest on the seventh day of creation is to let people know that it is a day to reflect and be present with God only.<sup>16</sup> We all face challenges practicing and following Christian tradition these days because practicing takes time and we give up easily. However, God wants us to experience joy from our practice, after we face the difficulties and temptations because we are not perfect. We will face failures, challenges and obstacles in the practice of keeping the *sabbath*, but it is important to try again and again until we gain the final achievement.

## **1.2 Observing Sabbath for the Whole Person**

Honoring your body is one of the Christian practices we must follow as we are created in the image of God. Our body is the temple of God as stated in 1Cor 6:19-20: "Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price." In the *Book of Common Prayer* (BCP), there is a section on the Catechism that is often ignored. Here, the Catechism describes us as human beings, who commit sins and forget about the promise and covenant we made with God during the Baptismal vows. When we study closely the Catechism section, again it reminds us that we are created in the image of God. If we do not obey what we had promised during our Baptismal vows, we are committing sins. Sin is described as "the seeking of our own will instead of the will of God, thus distorting our relationship with God, with other people, and with all creation." (BCP 848). The Baptismal covenant with God affirms that we fail to be a follower of Christ if we deviate from doing what God wants us to

do. Thus, we need to take care of our body in order to fulfill duty of Good citizen as Christians.

### **1.2.1 Sacredness of the Body**

To honor your body is to observe *sabbath* for wholeness. One of the crucial parts of a rule of life is the practice of fasting. Fasting is a practice common to most religions; it is an action of sacrificing something you like and showing the strength of your faith by letting go something of this world that you enjoy. It is a practice of self-control, and actual fasting from eating can help purify our bodies as well as our souls. Many people practice fasting during the Lenten season. Some people practice fasting if they have something special to ask God. However, Jesus warns us that when we practice fasting, we should not make obvious our behaviors for all to see but keep them to ourselves and to God the Father. Fasting is not to gain praise or criticism from people, but it is to honor God.

Moreover, fasting benefits physical health when we do it in a correct manner. Tony Jones suggests that fasting is useful and effective for both body and mind, but we must follow guidance and instruction of physicians, and take good care not to overdo.<sup>21</sup> Another way to fast is to find other practices, such as setting time for prayer or devotion, and give time to those practices instead of to eating and drinking. For example, we could fast by giving up something we like to do, or reducing the time we spend doing unhealthy things, so that we create a steady rhythm in our living. Having a *sabbath* day or *sabbath* time and eating and sleeping regularly will greatly help our well-being.

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<sup>21</sup> Jones, *Sacred Way*, 164.

### 1.3 Observing Sabbath in Myanmar Context

Clergy hold positions as leaders and guides along the people's spiritual journey. People see clergy as shepherds of their souls. Shepherds are models of faith and the spiritual guides of their flocks in Scripture. While taking care of their flocks, shepherds need to take care of themselves, too. One must have a Rule of Life, a set of guidelines for your personal life that will help you in good shape and maintain a healthy mind and spirit. The duty of the clergy is to serve wherever they can. They have a most demanding and stressful job when compared to others. However, they must learn to pause, to rest, to spend time with loved ones and to take care of their physical health. Keeping a *sabbath* day, or a day of rest, a time when we stop our work and refresh, is one part of such a rule. Keeping *sabbath* should have a rhythm and a regularity; people should be serious about that. Most clergy work on days that the congregation would use as a *sabbath* day, such as Sundays. The clergy celebrate the Eucharist for the people, bring people to the communion table and have fellowship with them. The understanding and practice of *sabbath* day of clergy and parishioners are totally different.

In this secular world, it is hard to set aside time for *sabbath* rest for most people in Myanmar. Priorities have shifted over time and people fail to maintain balance in their life. Although *sabbath* keeping for clergy seems different than for other people, clergy face the challenges of modern society, too. Clergy in Myanmar understand *sabbath* day as a day to lead liturgical worships and to visit houses for prayer services and fellowship. They have to conduct the Eucharist in the morning, attend family thanksgiving services after church, and sometimes participate at youth group meetings. Thus, most of the clergy in Myanmar feel burned out and stressed either when they have too much work to complete or when they do not get enough

time to rest. One clergy person described burnout from sermon writing, because “I run out of ideas or supporting resources for my sermon not only for Sunday worship but also visiting houses.” Another one said, “I don’t have a *sabbath*. It is the busiest day for me.” Even though clergy understand what *sabbath* means in Scripture, they are still struggling with their own needs and people’s expectations.

Clergy need time to pause and rest so that they will have full energy to nourish the spirituality of others. The *sabbath* for clergy includes having time relaxing alone or with family, and recharging their energy, both physically and spiritually. *Sabbath* day for clergy means giving time to themselves and their families in the midst of their normal tasks such as pastoral care, sermon preparation, and other things. They should make good use of taking sabbatical leave during their ministry. Clergy persons experience burnout when they are not doing the daily practice of self-care for their bodies and souls, and when they neglect to continue nurturing their theological knowledge and professional ministry.<sup>22</sup>

The clergy in North America are expected to relax and take sabbatical leaves during their ministry. The only problem in Myanmar’s context is that no one pays attention to those rules; rest is not considered important. Therefore, there is an urgent need for advocacy about taking good care of yourself and understanding the *sabbath* rest. Clergy need to be shown how to observe a *sabbath* for the whole person. Tending to the body is the first step towards clergy wholeness. Just as important, however, is spiritual nourishment and fulfillment, an equally important part of a balanced rule for life. In the next chapter, we will examine spiritual practices such as prayer and caring for the body and the creation to support clergy wellness.

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<sup>22</sup> Bruce G.Epperly and Katherine Gould Epperly, *Feed the Fire: Avoiding Clergy Burnout* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2008), 3.

## Chapter 2

### Prayer and Care for the Body as a Practice for ‘Rule of Life’

#### 2.1 The Practice of Praying

The spiritual practice of keeping *sabbath* allows us to restore the energy we have received from God. A rule of life for spirituality includes not only keeping *sabbath* but also having a prayerful life. Tony Jones defined spirituality as “the goal of Christian spirituality is to be enlivened by God’s Spirit.”<sup>23</sup> We invite the Holy Spirit to guide us in our prayer with God. To carry out the mission of God, we need God’s Spirit to guide us in our spiritual journey. The purpose of our spiritual life is to build a relationship with God and get closer to God through our devoted prayer. Crafting a rule of life and creating space for God in our lives requires time and commitment. Example of a rule of life for spiritual practices is *The Way of Love* produced by the Episcopal Church of America. *The Way of Love* provides us with a Jesus-centered rule of life that includes 7 areas to consider. They are: Turn – pause, listen and choose to follow Jesus; Learn – reflect on Scripture each day, especially on Jesus’ life and teachings; Pray – dwell intentionally with God each day; Worship – gather in community weekly to thank, praise and dwell with God; Bless – share faith and unselfishly give and serve; Go – cross boundaries, listen deeply and live like Jesus and finally; Rest – receive the gift of God’s grace, peace and restoration.<sup>24</sup> This practice of *The Way of Love* encourages us to reconsider our spiritual practices along our spiritual journey.

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<sup>23</sup> Tony Jones, *Sacred Way*, 26.

<sup>24</sup> The Episcopal Church, *The Way of Love, Practices for Jesus-Centered Life*, accessed March 14.

[https://www.episcopalchurch.org/files/documents/way\\_of\\_love\\_introduction.pdf](https://www.episcopalchurch.org/files/documents/way_of_love_introduction.pdf).

Henry Nouwen suggests that a spiritual life without discipline, practice and accountability yields no formation along our spiritual.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, Guenther also suggests that “a good rule goes beyond the narrowly devotional.”<sup>26</sup> A rule of life is more than a normal daily routine when we keep track of what we do. It is a rule that helps us not only have balanced and rhythmic lives but also gives us space to grow. There is no exact same rule for all to create a rule of life, but it is to be used as a tool that is flexible and adaptable. In this chapter, I will explore prayer, scripture reading and writing, and caring for the body as spiritual practices that help to nourish spirituality of clergy.

### **2.1.1 Prayer and Meditation as Spiritual Practices for Rule of Life**

A rule of life for spirituality nourishment includes prayer guidance, meditation, and retreats. The first and easiest routine to consider is to reflect on our prayer life. One of the ways to communicate with God is through praying. We need to pray to God with our humble hearts, listen to God’s voice and feel the presence of God around us. However, if we only pray for what we want from God, our prayer life has no relationship with God. Our prayers become selective and good only for our own needs. There will be no connection between our own needs and God’s plans for us. Therefore, we need to have a prayerful life that invites God to our hearts to listen and heal our souls.

There are many styles of prayer that make us feel the presence of God among us. For example, some people like to practice Jesus centered prayer. It is a prayer to

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<sup>25</sup> Henri Nouwen, *Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith* (San Francisco: Harper, Collins, 2006), xii.

<sup>26</sup> Margaret Guenther, *Holy Listening, The Art of Spiritual Direction*, (Cowley Publication, 1992), 72.

invite Jesus by saying out loud or in silence, “Christ, have mercy on me.”<sup>27</sup> It is a way of letting Jesus’ pray in us as Rowan Williams suggests “Put yourself in the place of Jesus.”<sup>28</sup> On the one hand, some people like Centering Prayer that encourages us to choose simple word or phrase to focus on.<sup>29</sup> The chosen word or phrase helps bring us back to our prayer whenever we get distracted. On the other hand, some people prefer to use music, images or icons to pray. Some people find moving their bodies and using their hands as spiritual nourishment. For instance, gardening, hill-side cultivation, farming or cooking can help them more connected to God rather than sitting in silence. Whatever prayer styles we use, the crucial thing is to pray with your whole heart, offer your thanksgiving or concerns to God and listen to what God tells us.

To set up our own prayer time, we can choose specific time or set aside time and place to pray. The place can be at your home or outside where you can be away from any distraction and focus on our prayer. The important part about praying is to be faithful and discipline to yourself. Moreover, praying can be out loud or in silence. Some people find it easy to pray out loud, but some prefer to pray in silence. The problem with praying silently is that when we seek silence, we find more distraction. In this busy world, many people think being silent is a waste of time, and some people even fear silence. In fact, silence and meditation can increase the effectiveness of an individual’s spiritual life. Silence is a time to focus and learn your own mind. Being in solitude and silence nourish our tired souls and draw us nearer to God’s heart. Therefore, having a prayer life is one of the essential tools in improving one’s spirituality.

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<sup>27</sup> Jones, *Sacred Way*, 64.

<sup>28</sup> Rowan Williams, *Being Christian: Baptism, Bible, Eucharist, Prayer* (Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge: U.K, 2014), 62.

<sup>29</sup> Jones, *Sacred Way*, 71.

### **2.1.2 Benefits of Having a Prayerful life for Clergy**

Clergy, committed to what God has appointed, can be overly obsessive in their attempts to fulfill the will of God. They work hard for God as well as for their families. However, neglect to care for the soul leads to emotional and spiritual despair. We lose touch with reality as well as with our minds if we focus too much on our roles and goals. As a result, people lose track of the purpose for living and the purpose in their call, fulfilling their roles without faith. Having a rule of life can help spiritualize organize the daily routines of our lives and help decrease the trend towards busy-ness for busy-ness sake. A rule of life can be seen as just a pattern or a way of repeating the boring activities in one's religious life, but a carefully constructed rule creates a rhythm of prayer and rest alongside worship and community activities.

Clergy are concerned with their parishioners' spiritual lives, but clergy themselves need to have alone time to go on retreat, contemplate and pray. Clergy also need a listening heart for their worries, loneliness and stress. They need someone who helps them to redirect what they are doing and guide what they are thinking. It will be hard for clergy to find time to pause and rest. However, taking rest boosts physical energy as well as spiritual energy. Even though it is difficult to leave our busy work, finding time to rest and be in silence help us grow. Our contemplative time can be anywhere that make us comfortable enough to be alone and spend time with God and see time as precious gift and use it accordingly.

### **2.1.3 Benefits of Having Prayerful Life for Clergy in Myanmar**

For clergy in Myanmar, however, the context of such a rule is different from that of the West. In both places, however, the pace is fast, and rest is never a priority.



The demand to teach and preach carried by clergy leads them into what Bob Burns calls “intellectual ruts,” as demands on their time and energy lead them to neglect the care of their minds as well as their spirits and bodies.<sup>30</sup> Susan G. Zencka, an author who is also a clergy person, admits that she felt exhausted when her workload became intense and she abandoned her Rule of Life. However, she points out that “while the workload continued to be intense, my sense of equilibrium began to return as I undertook these extra disciplines and my efficiency and effectiveness improved.”<sup>31</sup>

Most of the clergy in Myanmar would argue that they will not need to learn how to pray. Some may even show pride about being clergy persons as they are already the teacher of prayer. However, I would like to encourage clergy to set time for their own prayerful life. Prayer is not simply asking God to protect us, it is also praising God for goodness, repent our sinful thoughts and behaviors. However, prayer should not be a simple conversation with God where we only talk about things that it is comfortable to share. Prayer is a time where we have intimate conversation with God and listen carefully to what God is telling us. Nouwen also suggests praying unceasingly; “praying unceasing means to think, speak and live in the presence of God.”<sup>32</sup> Moreover, James Fenhagen proposes that, “At its deepest level, prayer is not something we do, but something which the Holy Spirit does in and through us.”<sup>33</sup> Hence, we are not praying alone but Holy Spirit is with us to guide and be with us.

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<sup>30</sup> Bob Burns, Tasha Chapman, and Donald Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us About Surviving and Thriving* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2013), 90.

<sup>31</sup> Susan G. Zencka, “A Rule of Life for the Preacher: Whole-Life Spirituality and Holistic Preaching,” *Call to Worship* 47, no.3, (2014): 28.

<sup>32</sup> Nouwen, *Spiritual Direction*, 61.

<sup>33</sup> James C. Fenhagen, *More than Wanderers: Spiritual Discipline for Christian Ministry* (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 29.

## 2.2 Intellectual Nourishment for Clergy as a Practice for Rule of Life

Another way to nourish yourself spiritually is to read Scripture and other spiritual writings. It is a good idea to jot down what has been read or take down notes of what has been learned from books that we have read. In Myanmar's context, clergy are the people who preach sermons on every Sunday and prepare the sermons on Saturday night or during the whole week. In some cases, clergy have difficulty finding time to refresh their intellectual skills and minds. Some have to serve in very rural areas, and they have limited access to resources for lifelong learning. Lifelong learning is one of the important parts in a rule of life. It is because the work of learning does not stop once we finish confirmation class, graduate from seminary or become ordained as priests. St. Benedict suggests us that "any split between mind and soul is a false dichotomy; our intellect are integral parts of our spirituality."<sup>34</sup>

When we read Scripture, we need to read as well as reflect. We can reflect on stories and examples taught by Jesus and apply them in our own ministry. Jesus teaches us to open our minds and hearts and get closer to God. When we read Scripture, we learn that God's will and God's word abide in us. "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them." (John 14:23, NRSV) In addition to Scripture reading, keeping a journal of personal reflections of what you have read and experienced in daily living helps you grow in spirituality. The journal can include personal stories, experiences dealing with different people in everyday life, and what God is doing in our life. It is one of the ways of recording what we have experienced about God in our lives. It is not a chore but an activity for the purpose of spiritual growth.

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<sup>34</sup> Guenther, *At Home*, 120.

Some clergy are stressed out because they run out of ideas for writing and delivering sermons. Clergy need specific amount of time to prepare for their sermons. They also need, as part of their rule of life, intellectual nourishment for their mind. It is important to grow and develop intellectual skills, to commit to life-long learning and never stop learning after graduating from seminary. One of my conversations with a priest from Myanmar gave insight about how he struggles with preparing for the sermon. He confessed that there are limited theological, biblical and spiritual books for both clergy and seminarians. Thus, he confessed that he run out of ideas about what to preach and feels devastated. However, he noticed that he needed to seek God and have alone time and converse with God. He looks for resources as much as he can to help him preach better sermons. Even though there are limitations in resources, clergy can try and keep up to date with news and access resources online if there is internet access. Another solution, coming from the Bishops or the Diocesan level, would be to prepare and send out physical resources for clergy with limited access to technology, or to hold regular Bible study groups, clergy support group or education classes at clergy retreats.

### **2.3 Caring for the Body as a Spiritual Practice for Rule of Life**

Eating healthy food and keeping fit is another practice for our rule of life. Ephesian 5:29 stated that, "After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church." We do know very well that we have to take care of our body, but we fail to do it regularly. The temptation of harmful food is all around us, but we must eat healthy food when we can, and we must eat regularly. We should remind ourselves that our bodies are a gift from God. When we are stress, we eat less, or we eat more than we should. Moreover, we cannot sleep well when we have anxious thoughts about our past or our future. When we do not get

enough sleep, we do not eat at a regular time, too. Therefore, we need to balance our eating and sleeping habits so that we will have healthy bodies and minds to create healthy community around us.

The physical wellbeing of clergy needs much attention. We must consider not only the spiritual health, but the physical and mental wellbeing of clergy as well. According to World Health Organization (WHO) definition of health; “Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”<sup>35</sup> Thus, if someone is lacking those qualities mentioned in WHO definition of health, we can assume that they are living an unhealthy lifestyle. An unhealthy lifestyle consists of irregular sleeping hours or eating time, and no exercise – that can lead to stress. Therefore, when a clergy person has stress for a long time, it affects not only clergy, but their families. There are research findings on stress and life satisfaction of the spouses of clergy done in Asian countries that show that clergy persons and their spouse experience “personal struggles and tremendous stress in doing ministry together.”<sup>36</sup> To meet the expectations of their congregations and their call, clergy work overtime and their stress leads to overeating, alcohol abuse, and neglect of exercise. Clergy must be not only spiritual models, but models of healthy living. If clergy do not take care of their health, and the spiritual lives of those who look to them for guidance, they can damage their spiritual journey.

The most common problem I have witnessed with clergy burnout is that they are addicted to alcohol. Alcohol consumption is considered a serious problem among clergy in Myanmar. Clergy rarely discuss their feelings of stress with either the

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<sup>35</sup> World Health Organization (WHO), “Basic Documents,” 48th ed, 2014, accessed March 12, 2019, <http://www.who.int/suggestions/faq/en/>.

<sup>36</sup> Kara Chan and Wong Miranda, “Experience of Stress and Coping Strategies among Pastor’s Wives in China,” *Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling* 72, no. 3, (2018): 164.

members of their families or their superiors; instead, they turn to alcohol and become dependent. They release their stress by excessive drinking instead of searching healthy way to overcome that stress. Although clergy are the people who study the theological aspects of taking care of body and soul, they sometimes fail to apply their knowledge and practice in their own daily life. Living well is all about balancing and managing your habit of taking care of your body. It is crucial for clergy to control what they eat, create a healthy diet plan, exercise regularly and go on retreat to refresh their bodies, minds and souls.

Once we have regular exercise and a healthy food plan, we need to send energy to our bodies and minds by going to retreat. Retreats as described in *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* by Calhoun: “Retreats are specific and regular times apart from quietly listening to God and delighting in his company. Retreats remove us from the daily battle into times of refreshing, retooling, renewing and unwinding.”<sup>37</sup> The retreat can be as an individual or in a group. There are annual retreats for clergy in Myanmar. It is the time when clergy from the whole diocese meet and share their experiences. It is more like a gathering to meet with each other once a year. As a result, sometimes the retreat schedule is tight and filled with more bible studies and lectures, but no personal retreat time. However, retreat is also not about putting more information to our head or catching up things that we have not done. Retreats are to draw us closer to rest, rebuild energy but not to waste them.

The goal of retreat is to give us opportunities to reflect on our thoughts, our words, and deeds.<sup>38</sup> Some clergy finds it hard to spare time to go retreat. However, we sometimes need to travel to different atmosphere to feel the fresh air and experience

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<sup>37</sup> Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 66.

<sup>38</sup> Scott, Stoner, *Your Living Compass: Living Well in Thoughts, Words, and Deed* (New York, NY: Morehouse, 2014), 6.

new things. As a result, we will gain more energy every time we come back from retreat and start our spiritual journey effectively. As healthy mind and body help the spirituality of clergy, the support of family, community and worship also play crucial roles. Next chapter, I will discuss the importance of family, community, institution and worship that support wellbeing of clergy.

## Chapter 3

### A Contextual Perspective on Developing a Rule of Life

#### 3.1 Introduction to Rule of Life for Family

Individual practices such as praying, meditating, exercising, having healthy diet or resting help the wellbeing of individuals. Family and community support also plays a vital role in enhancing the ministry of clergy. Instead of keeping all of their problems to themselves, being open with family members or friends can help clergy as well. “A healthy marriage and family strengthens pastors.”<sup>39</sup> The rule of life clergy practice will impact their marriage and family. The marriage and family life of an individual clergy person also affects the churches for which they care. If clergy have healthy relationships with family, and are well supported by family, they can work more productively. This chapter will explore the importance of self-care and having a Rule of Life that balances family and work life to help clergy to take care not only of themselves, but also of their family, and to create a healthy environment for effective ministry.

##### 3.1.1 The Importance of Support from Spouses

The wellbeing of the congregation depends on the leadership and example of the clergy. The wellbeing of clergy also depends on the supportive family, especially spouses in Myanmar context. Thus, healthy self-care benefits not only the individual leader but also the spouses and children of the clergy and the congregation. Therefore, it is important to have mutual understanding and respect among family members. A clergy rule of life must prioritize time for family, time for spouses to talk. Spending

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<sup>39</sup> Bob Burns, Tasha Chapman and Donald Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us About Surviving and Thriving* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 170.

time with family will enhance relationships with family members as well as help the individual feel more connected to their family members. The potential for clergy to get support and love from the family members is great in Myanmar because of the extended family structure. However, the clergy must be helped to find the courage to overcome their resistance to feeling ashamed for needing support and their worries about being a burden on the family in difficult times.

Apart from family members, clergy rarely have reliable friends in their lives with whom they can share their feelings. Hence, all the things they want to say, and the feelings they want to express are thrown onto their spouses. The spouses become the “nuclear dumping ground” of the ministry.<sup>40</sup> Clergy need to take care of how they share with their spouses and their problems and feelings can be shared without blaming their partners. The spouses cannot be the people who take in everything and become emotional dumping grounds. However, the couple can set boundaries between them about what to talk about and share, and when to stop. The goal of sharing problems and feelings with spouses, as part of a rule of life, helps the partners become more connected and bonded to each other, and to maintain a balanced family life. Most clergy chose their spouses because they recognized these women also had a vocation, a vocation to support them and to help them in their ministry. Both clergy and spouses are ministry partners. They work together, share and support each other in their ministry by actively involved in activities, such as organizing training for women, being the Christian Educators in their respective diocese and pastoral visit to parishioner’s house with their clergy husbands on every Sunday after services.

Myanmar is a country where most families are extended families. Although the cultural assumption that men are the only breadwinners has changed in recent

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<sup>40</sup> Burns, *Resilient Ministry*, 174.



times, men are still expected to act as breadwinners of the family. The church of the province of Myanmar (Anglican) still does not allow the ordination of women. Therefore, the clergy are men, expected to be the breadwinner of their houses, and be honorable in all things. They are under pressure to carry many responsibilities. People have high expectations not only of clergy but also of their family members. As a result, it is not only the responsibility of clergy to take care of congregations, but that responsibility is shared by their families too.

As I have mentioned, the stereotypical view of males in Myanmar is that they do not share their problems with others because they may look weak. Since people see clergy persons as having authority, clergy are often scared to share their stress, their difficulties and their loneliness. Since there is no regular tradition of spiritual direction or guidance for clergy, the family often becomes the only place where they share what is really going on. Being a clergy person often isolates individuals and requires them to sacrifice ordinary social attachments. The clergy do not usually hang out with friends like they used to in seminary because of their busy schedules or because they are serving at different places and moving around the diocese. Therefore, they may lack friendships and find it difficult to have a healthy social life. As a result, spouses are the people with whom they share their thoughts, difficulties, and stressful experiences of service.

The clergy feel safe to talk about their internal conflicts to their spouses because they are the only people who are near to them. Sadly, some of the wives of clergy expressed their feeling of stress with me when I interviewed them privately that they do share the ministry work but their clergy spouses rarely disclose their emotional stress and disappointments with them. Equally, if the spouses are not available to share the problems with the clergy husbands, the priests can become more

isolated and turn to habits such as drinking alcohol. Their marriages can become more strained. Therefore, a healthy rule of life will incorporate respect for both husband (priest) and wife (co-minister) and for the importance of their marriage.

### **3.1.2 The Importance of Relationship with Children**

Finally, clergy also need to be aware of their relationship with their children. Spending quality time with children should also be part of a balanced rule of life for clergy. Too often, clergy children experience their father (and sometimes their mother) as giving more attention to other people because of the demands of ministry. Clergy couples need to explain their vocations to their families and nurture their children to understand the purpose of their ministry and how they are loved by their parents and by their congregation. Thus, children will not be as likely to misunderstand their parents and they will be more willing to help with their work.

Moreover, the parents can share the feelings about their ministry with their children in an age-appropriate manner, but parents need to be careful about sharing inappropriate information.<sup>41</sup> Children grow up faster than we think. Thus, parents who share the ministry together need to spend their time wisely with their children. Plan family trip or retreat together to understand more about each other and build healthier relationship among family members.

### **3.1.3 Benefits of Developing a Rule of Life with family members**

The relationship among clergy and their spouses and children can be enhanced by spending time together as well as by sharing spiritual practices together. One of the studies conducted on how clergy and spouses cope with stress shows that “clergy and their spouses who rely on family support and intrapersonal strategies such as prayer,

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<sup>41</sup> Burns, *Resilient Ministry*, 177.

meditation or positive thinking in coping with stress, seldom seek professional counseling and coping measure.”<sup>42</sup> Since I also come from a clergy family, my mother has always taught me that a shared prayer life between parents and children is one of the key factors that helps the relationship go stronger in a clergy family. Prayer bonds the family members together and helps them feel more connected to each other and to God. Praying together is another way of sharing faith within family. Therefore, both clergy and their spouses need to be intentionally encouraged in their spiritual life.<sup>43</sup> The family members need to invest time in spiritual practices to have healthier family and spiritual life.

It has been a good thing to learn spiritual experiences from each other within our family. It is a safe place and safe manner by which we can learn more about what we struggle with in our own spiritual lives. We (as the children) might not need advice, but we appreciate the listening hearts of our parents. If we do not share our problems with family, it will hinder our relationship. I would like to suggest that sharing some prayerful time with family and practicing active listening skills will greatly improve the spiritual health of clergy in Myanmar. These practices will help them learn about themselves, their spouses, and children, and build stronger relationships throughout their family system. This will be challenging work. It will take time to establish the trust of clergy in order to make the family’s emotional health a priority in their rule of life.

### **3.2 The Importance of Church-Wide Community**

The most common problem clergy share about their lives as clergy is that they feel lonely because they lack intimate friendship. Once people are called to serve as

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<sup>42</sup> Chan, *Stress and Coping Strategies*, 165.

<sup>43</sup> Burns, *Resilient Ministry*, 184.

clergy for their vocations, they experience not having enough time to spend with other friends who are not in ministry. Most of the time, clergy meet other clergy as friends. Thus, clergy who are working as clergy are the immediate friends and colleagues they can talk to. Studies show that positive relationships at work are another factor affecting clergy's wellbeing.<sup>44</sup> The workplace environment of clergy is not like business workplace and the colleagues are not their business partners. Consequently, the wellbeing of clergy at work depends on spiritual friends and mentors who care and support for them. Even though it is hard to do social activities with friends, a supportive workplace environment helps the productivity of clergy in ministry. The work community fills with love and a listening heart will have an impact on clergy wellbeing. Clergy can form a small group to meet up and create a space to share struggles and failures. A group of people, who share their stories reciprocally, gives encouragement and hold in prayer.

The working community of clergy includes not only the clergy friends but also the superiors such as diocesan bishops. Anyone who is in authority need to recognize the problems and struggles the clergy are facing. The mentors for the clergy are bishops. The vocation of bishops is to be the guardians of the souls. Bishops are described as *pastores pastorum* (pastors of pastors) and hold the roles as examples, teachers, supports, leaders, managers, team-persons, and servants.<sup>45</sup> The relationship between clergy and bishops need to be supportive of each other. Bishops are the people clergy can comfortably go to and seek help from their struggles, issues, and problems as well as advices. Bishops are recognized not as bosses with authority and

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<sup>44</sup> Chris Adams, "Flourishing in Ministry: Wellbeing at Work in Helping Professions," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 36, no. 3 (2017): 256.

<sup>45</sup> Roy Warke, *On Being a Bishop: Reminiscences and Reflections* (Blackrock Co Dublin: Columba Press, 2004), 182.

power, but as fathers who guide and care for their flocks who are under stress and pressure.

Clergy in Myanmar see bishops as guardians and show great respect. Clergy rarely approach bishops to talk about the problems they face in their ministry. Clergy will look for the help of bishops to do some sacramental events, or administration issues. However, they do not think it is appropriate to share their emotional problems with them. The description of a bishop from the *Book of Common Prayer* from the Episcopal Church of America explains very clearly the roles of bishops. It says, “the ministry of a bishop is to represent Christ and his church, particularly as apostle, chief priest, and pastor of a diocese; to guard the faith, unity, and discipline of the whole Church; to proclaim the Word of God; to act in Christ's name for the reconciliation of the world and the building up of the Church; and to ordain others to continue Christ's ministry.”(BCP, 855) Therefore, bishops are responsible to advocate for the wellbeing of clergy as chief priests. They are responsible for the leadership roles and arrange psych educational programs during clergy retreat or whenever appropriate for clergy both at Diocesan level and at local churches. When clergy feel that they are supported by their bishops, they will not be afraid to approach them and share their problems with them. As a result, their ministry together will become communal and interdependent with each other.

Moreover, other professionals advocate for the wellbeing of clergy, and the tools they need to recognize and be aware of burnout. Some people argue that doing ministry is a calling, not a job and clergy's job is to be available all the time. However, Dr Gary Bell, consultant psychologist who is a mental health leader for St Luke's Healthcare for the Clergy from UK, points out that

We know now how much constant availability contributes to work-related stress. Clergy are human beings and need time for work, recreation, socializing, exercise – each one balances the other. If your life lacks this, and there are major imbalances, then it's going to manifest itself in either physiological problems or as a mental health problem like anxiety, stress, fatigue or depression. Saying it's your vocation – well yes, that's true, but it also implies that you're slightly superhuman.<sup>46</sup>

This suggests that people in community also need to be aware of clergy wellbeing and understand the capabilities of their clergy. As a result, clergy and community can work together and have better relationship with each other that strengthen the wellbeing of clergy.

### **3.2.1 Congregational Community Support**

Our spiritual journey starts with individual spiritual practices and continues with people around us in community as Jesus did his ministry in this world. Jesus did not do his ministry alone. His chosen disciples are not only followers but also companions of him throughout his ministry. We start the day with our own prayer and interact with others in the community to do ministry. According to Henri Nouwen, he points out that our spiritual journey begins with communion with God in prayer, gathering in community and going out to the world to do ministry.<sup>47</sup> We are created to live in a community, fellowship with God and with others. We need others to see us from their perspective to know about ourselves. Beside family members, friends or colleagues, institution and community support also have positive effects on clergy wellbeing.

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<sup>46</sup> St. Luke's Health Care for the Clergy, "Clergy Stress: What Our Survey Reveals," 2015, accessed April 3, 2018, <http://stlukeshealthcare.org.uk/for-dioceses/clergy-stress-what-our-research-reveals/>.

<sup>47</sup> Henri Nouwen, Michael J Christensen, and Rebecca J Laird, *Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith* (HarperOne: NY, 2006), 111.

As Nouwen writes, “Ministry is a communal and mutual experience.”<sup>48</sup> Community for clergy means spending time with family, clergy colleagues and bishops and also with the church members. The church members or parishioners help clergy to grow more by giving feedback on how they feel about being in a community with their clergy. Christian community is a place where believers come together to worship, share stories and get connected with each other. The Christian community is recognized as “God’s one plan for reaching the world is rooted in the community of broken people who gather with a desire to love him and bring in his kingdom.”<sup>49</sup> A community is where we share love and encourage one another to proclaim the good news to the world. Therefore, a healthy and sustainable community with supportive members helps clergy wellbeing.

A community is a place where the community members know how to welcome the soul and listen to different voices. Parker Palmer suggests a Christian community needs to be a circle of trust, a practice of being alone together and present to one another as a community of solitudes.<sup>50</sup> A circle of people, who share and learn to support each other. In that circle of trust, clergy can make rules to share their struggles and feelings and give feedback without being judged. A healthy circle of trust for the clergy is a place of gathering where it provides how to support the soul and wellbeing of the clergy. Moreover, we can assume community as a Trinitarian life of God with others because following Jesus is not only individual spiritual act but sharing a spiritual life with others. Adele Calhoun says, “Keeping company with Jesus is not just a private spiritual act, it is the way we share the Trinitarian life of God with

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<sup>48</sup> Nouwen, *Spiritual Direction*, 132.

<sup>49</sup> Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 130.

<sup>50</sup> Parker, J.Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life: Welcoming the Soul and Weaving Community in a Wounded World*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (San Fran, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 54.

others.”<sup>51</sup> The spiritual practices both clergy and community do together is worship. I will explore more about how worship helps in clergy wellbeing and the relationship with community in next session.

### **3.3 Worship with Community as a Practice for Rule of Life**

Worship in Hebrew word is *shachah* which means “to bow down or pay homage” and worship comes from Old English *weorthscipe* that is worthiness or respect.<sup>52</sup> The *Anchor Bible* describes Christian worship as “the reverent homage paid to God and Christ in the context of a Christian assembly.”<sup>53</sup> Christians have assembled to do various rituals, celebration and gathering with different purposes since ancient times. Worship forms people and people experience transformational moment by participating in the worship. When we worship, we encounter the presence of God, Jesus Christ and Holy Spirit. Before any liturgical celebration, the liturgists have to plan and organize. The worship service must be planned intentionally, and the planning team is composed of both clergy and lay people. The role of the clergy is to prepare the sermon, and to choose and assign different people to different roles in serving. Even music matters in worshipping. Thus, a worship service is not done by the work of clergy alone. It is done by the whole community.

We need to remind ourselves that we are created in and for community to share love and gifts for one another. Both clergy and lay people possess unique gifts to share and contribute in the community. Clergy need personal prayerful time as well as participating or leading worship such as morning and evening prayer, Holy

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<sup>51</sup> Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 121.

<sup>52</sup> Jacqueline, J. Lewis and John Janka, *The Pentecost Paradigm: Ten Strategies for Becoming a Multiracial Congregation* (Louisville: Kentucky, WJK, 2018), 59.

<sup>53</sup> D.E. Aune, "Worship, Early Christian," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, edited by David Noel Freedman, 1st ed, (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 973-989.



Communion and other services. In worship, people find themselves drawn into a new reconciliation with themselves and with each other. For clergy, they are not only leading and participating in the worship but also, they plan and design the service. Clergy not only lead the service but conduct the service. Leading and participating at worship is another way of spiritual discipline for clergy. Joy in worship is a gift for the wellbeing of the clergy. When clergy find delight in worshipping with others in community that can help their wellbeing of clergy. When clergy finds delight in leading, participating and managing services, they produce effective ministry that strengthen the wellbeing of clergy and community. Worshipping with community is a necessary part of a rule of life for clergy, because, through worship, clergy will be with others, in community, to share their spiritual practices together.

However, if clergy find no pleasure in planning, preparing and designing, there will be a problem. If clergy do not care about preparing and conducting worship and do without the heart, it is not helpful for their wellbeing. As a result, they will feel exhausted. Doing a sacramental thing with no heart (perfunctorily) is not helpful for clergy wellbeing. There might be anxiety to be at front, but good preparation before every service will help in reducing anxiety. Moreover, clergy are responsible to practice what they preach from the pulpit. They are also expected to lead the whole worship service although people know that they also have their responsibilities to lead in the service. Clergy cannot lead sacramental services alone. For example, worship services include servers, helpers, choir members, torchbearers, crucifers and other liturgical roles. Clergy are not only the leader of performance but participants in the worship of God with the community. Therefore, the main role of clergy is to invite God and allow God to lead the worship and work together with the congregation. When both clergy and community build mutual respect and understand about their

roles, they can produce fruitful ministry that will benefit the wellbeing of the whole congregation.

## Chapter 4

### **Application: Crafting a Rule of Life for Clergy in Myanmar Context**

This section will provide possible guidelines and suggestions on how to develop a rule of life for clergy in Myanmar context. The guidelines I will suggest are adapted from various resources, but most are my own suggestion that accommodate the specifics of Myanmar's culture. A personal rule of life will vary, depending on the experiences and life situation of a specific person. Although we all understand prayer is the most important task we do as believers, we sometimes cannot do it the way we want to. The rule of life is intended to create space for us to have regular prayerful life as one of the spiritual practices. It is a chance to revisit what are the spiritual practices that benefit or harm us. Therefore, developing a rule of life is meant to encourage us to develop our own intentional pattern of spiritual discipline.

#### **4.1 Self-assessment Process Sheet**

The first method I would like to suggest is developing a self-assessment sheet. The purpose of this assessment is to help clergy to know about their current life and reflect on what to prioritize in their personal lives and ministry. The respondent has the rights to share the answers with the assessor or keep it for personal reflection. The answers will be kept confidential if the respondent share them with the assessor. The assessor will have the rights to suggest possible guideline to create personal rule of life. The purpose of doing assessment first before developing a rule of life is to measure what extent do clergy experience burnout or stress in themselves. They can choose 5 options:

0 – not at all

1 – Sometimes

2 – Usually

3 – Most of the time

4 – Always

This exercise will only be of benefit if the respondent responds truly, honestly, and accurately. The sample assessment can be seen in Appendix A.

#### **4.2 Develop a Rule of Life**

After the assessment, clergy can develop their own personal rule of life. The rule of life I would like to suggest is adapted from *Living Intentionally: A Workbook for Creating a Personal Rule of Life* by Brother David Vryhof from SSJE. The three categories ask us to write about the kind of relationship with God, Self, Family and Community that you want to develop. The categories are adjusted, and the questions are accommodated to Myanmar context. When creating personal rule of life, it is recommended to keep it simple. The answers require you to be honest and the goal need to be realistic for personal life. Before going into those four categories, you can write down prayer that they are using, or the prayer they want to use along their personal spiritual journey. It is always encouraging to pray before writing personal rule of life. It is a way of inviting God and work together with God. Another important thing is to set aside the time to answer every question thoughtfully. After writing down your own prayer, and set aside, you can start answering the reflection questions from those four categories.

Another guideline to write a rule of life is to write down how a person takes care of themselves. This rule of life will be in table form with four sections. These four sections will ask you to write down what practices you are currently doing in terms of physical, mind, social and spiritual practices first. There will be another sheet with the same format asking about what you want to change and develop in those four

areas. The respondent has opportunities to compare the practices they have done and practices they want to develop. The sample will be in Appendix b.

*Crafting a Rule of Life* by Macchia provide more open space to create the rule of life. It includes 5 areas such as my roles, my gifts, my desires, my mission and my vision. The sample rule of life will be in Appendix c. Moreover, for those who like art can put icons, images, and prayer that they like in their personal rule of life. They can write down and reflect on the images they use. Different situations will create different feelings on interpreting the images and icons.

#### **4.3 Accountability, Practice and Revisit Process/follow-up**

My other alternative suggestion for creating a rule of life is to look for a safe space to share. The rule of life can be shared in clergy support group or with the person you trust. The assessment and rule of life materials can be distributed to all the clergy who are serving in ministry. These rules of life materials are not only assessing or reflecting your personal and ministry lives, but also educating you about how to take care of yourselves before caring for the community. The clergy person needs to commit to their rules and disciplines and practice. Most importantly, it is recommended to revisit and follow up your rule of life frequently. Suggested reading and resources will be provided at the end of this chapter.

## Conclusion

As we are beloved of God, we understand that we have to take care of our bodies, our minds and our souls. We all know that we want to be the center of God's heart and we long for the embrace of God. In order to be closer to God and feel the loving presence of God, we need to make time for God. It will take time to develop new spiritual practices, but we can do it with the help of Holy Spirit. When we listen carefully to the voice of God, and follow his guidance along our spiritual journey, we will get fruitful spiritual life. As the Scripture says, "The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail." (Isa. 58:11, NRSV)

In this capstone project, I have discussed and presented the need to educate clergy about their wellbeing and the importance of developing a personal rule of life. I have shared my experiences as seminarian and how I started developing my own personal rule of life. I have reflected the ministry done by clergy in Myanmar context and the needs to work for their self-care. The first chapter on observing *sabbath* will help the clergy to realize the importance of giving rest to their bodies, minds and souls. The second chapter will guide them to have their personal prayer time. And the last chapter will help them recognize the importance of family support in doing their ministry. Lastly, the self-assessment sheet and sample rule of life will help clergy to develop their own rule of life. I am hoping to translate all the assessments and rule of life into our own language to use.

It is crucial to develop a rule of life and share with a clergy colleague group and revisiting the rule of life regularly as well as taking accountability. Once you

develop a rule of life, it is also vital to grow habit of keeping a rule of life you have developed. Clergy person needs to make commitment to himself and put realistic goals and activities to achieve in his rule of life. Whatever you decide and commit to do for your rule of life, you need to remind yourself that you have the responsibility to take care of it. It is also good to let your family members know about your rule of life so that they can work together with you or encourage and remind you. Moreover, it is crucial to know your limitation and identify obstacles and hindrances that will hinder you from keeping your habit of developing a rule of life. Some people keep their good habits by rewarding themselves that make them feel good and motivate them to keep going. Thus, treating and rewarding yourself for keeping your rule of life regularly will also help in developing a habit of keeping it. Other resources can be getting encouragement from your diocesan bishop, senior clergy and fellow clergy group.

I hope this project will be a starting point for clergy in Myanmar to consider creating a rule of life for them. There is much work to be done, advocating for the wellbeing of clergy. Education about self-care needs to begin during seminary and continue through the life of ministry. Moreover, the rule of life for clergy needs to be mandatory. It is not a short-term discipline or commitment; it is a life-long practice. It is a practice that we cannot neglect in carrying out ministry. Developing a rule of life will be a step for sustainable ministry among the clergy in Myanmar. And I look forward to discussing and working with all the clergy who are serving in their respective ministry. I hope this project will help the clergy to appreciate their gifts and honor their ministry, family and community around them to build a better community with the guidance and loving presence of God.

## Appendix

### Appendix A:

#### Self-Assessment Sheet

The purpose of this assessment is to help clergy to know about their physical, mental and spiritual practices. The answers will be kept confidential. The respondent has the rights to share the answers with the assessor or keep it for personal reflection. Be honest with your answers.

For each item, circle or tick the response that defines your actions most of the time.

1. I have no time to do outside activities because I am too busy with church work.

<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Not at all</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Usually</b>	<b>Most of the time</b>	<b>Always</b>

2. I feel tired easily.

<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Not at all</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Usually</b>	<b>Most of the time</b>	<b>Always</b>

3. I feel that I am a giver and not a receiver in any relationship.

<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Not at all</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Usually</b>	<b>Most of the time</b>	<b>Always</b>



4. It is difficult to express my feelings, anger or stress.

<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Not at all</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Usually</b>	<b>Most of the time</b>	<b>Always</b>

5. I try to show that I am strong even when I feel devastated because of my overload work.

<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Not at all</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Usually</b>	<b>Most of the time</b>	<b>Always</b>

6. I am superior to the members of the church and my family.

<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Not at all</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Usually</b>	<b>Most of the time</b>	<b>Always</b>

7. I have regular prayer time.

<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Not at all</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Usually</b>	<b>Most of the time</b>	<b>Always</b>

8. I spend time with family and friends.

<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Not at all</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Usually</b>	<b>Most of the time</b>	<b>Always</b>

9. I go to a clergy retreat each year.

<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Not at all</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Usually</b>	<b>Most of the time</b>	<b>Always</b>

10. I am satisfied with my spiritual life.

<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Not at all</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Usually</b>	<b>Most of the time</b>	<b>Always</b>

11. I exercise regularly.

<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Not at all</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Usually</b>	<b>Most of the time</b>	<b>Always</b>

12. I eat healthy food to maintain my weight and health.

<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Not at all</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Usually</b>	<b>Most of the time</b>	<b>Always</b>

13. I have someone to talk to when I am stressed.

<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Not at all</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Usually</b>	<b>Most of the time</b>	<b>Always</b>

14. I feel frustrated when things that I plan do not work out.

<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Not at all</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Usually</b>	<b>Most of the time</b>	<b>Always</b>

15. I read Bible or other kind of spiritual books regularly.

<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Not at all</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Usually</b>	<b>Most of the time</b>	<b>Always</b>

16. I feel connected to God when I pray.

<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Not at all</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Usually</b>	<b>Most of the time</b>	<b>Always</b>

17. Meditation helps me to focus better.

<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Not at all</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Usually</b>	<b>Most of the time</b>	<b>Always</b>

18. I do not have confident in whatever I do.

<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Not at all</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Usually</b>	<b>Most of the time</b>	<b>Always</b>

19. I do not keep regular sleeping hours.

<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Not at all</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Usually</b>	<b>Most of the time</b>	<b>Always</b>

20. I am satisfied with the amount of my income.

<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Not at all</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Usually</b>	<b>Most of the time</b>	<b>Always</b>

Scoring

40 points or more – Highly recommended developing a rule of life focused on your physical wellness and spiritual nourishment.

30 points or more – You are in good shape but need to put concrete routine

20 points of less – You are in good shape and continue the routine.

After you have completed this assessment, you can reflect on the scores and develop your own personal rule of life.

## Appendix B

### Crafting a Rule of Life

Please write down your own words of prayer.

#### **My Relationship with God**

- What practices make up your spiritual life?

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- Briefly, describe your relationship with God?

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- How do you define prayer?

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### My Relationship with Myself

- On average, how many hours do you sleep each night?

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- On average, how many days per month do you rest/take sabbath?

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- How often do you take leave and travel other places?

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- How do you take care of yourself, physically?

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### My Relationship with Others

- How does your family support you in your ministry?

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- Who can you talk to when you are under stress?

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- What is your schedule like on Sundays?

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- What skills, knowledge or support do you need to improve your ministry?

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## Appendix C

## Self-care Sheet

What do you do for your self-care? Please fill each box with the practices you have been doing for your self-care. After that, fill another sheet to write down the practices that you want to develop or practice in the future.

<p>Body</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sleep</li><li>• exercise</li></ul>	<p>Mind</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Rest</li><li>• Read</li></ul>
<p>Social life</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Go out for dinner</li></ul>	<p>Spiritual</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meditate</li><li>• Pray in solitude</li></ul>



### Suggested online resources for developing a rule of life

- 1) SSJE is a community of men giving their whole selves over to living the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Rooted in the ancient monastic traditions of prayer and community life, and critically engaged with contemporary culture, they seek to know and share an authentic experience of God's love and mercy. They live a common life shaped by worship, prayer, and their own Rule of Life. <https://www.ssje.org/growrule/>
  
- 2) CREDO is an intentional Christ-centred community where it encourages participants to rediscover the passionate essence of their life and ministry in the context of their faith, their relationships, and their community. Check CREDO Rule of Life in following link <https://www.cpg.org/active-clergy/learning/credo/resources/credo-books-publications/>.
  
- 3) Episcopal Church is one of the members of the Anglican Communion in the United States and Episcopalians believe in the following of the teachings of Jesus Christ, whose life, death, and resurrection saved the world. You can find out more about developing a Rule of Life in following link. <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/way-of-love/about-rules-of-life>.

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