

Benedictine Education Today

Hello, I am Laura Campbell. I am proud to be a member of the Education Department at Belmont Abbey College, and most recently, the Director for the First-Year Experience for freshmen students. My focus today will mostly be on the importance of understanding the Benedictine Hallmarks and the virtues that they can teach us for everyday life experiences.

The Benedictine Hallmarks are the first things that are introduced in the First-Year Experience seminar, along with "The Rule of Saint Benedict." The First-Year Experience is designed to actively inspire a student to explore the unique contexts where they feel success, to highlight a student's unique strengths, and the intention of expanding those strengths in other areas. We also want to support our students in the beginning of an adult life of learning and development. Educational persistence will require more than good grades and study strategies. Educational persistence will require that our individual values, aspirations, and dreams drive our hard work, and so discovering, honoring, and supporting those individual values, aspirations, and dreams form the foundation of not only student success but our development as human beings.

To help the first-year students begin their journey, in my classes, I teach them to write a personal mission statement. The most challenging feature of a personal mission statement is discovering what is most important to your life, your core values. When I encountered the Benedictine Hallmarks, I finally had that perfect guide for developing and exploring values. I finally had my "aha" moment where I knew how to help my students discover their values. The inspiration came from "The Rule of Saint Benedict."

In the sixth century, a man named Benedict, who was from Norcia, in Italy, designed what he called "the little rule" in order to help the monastic community that he founded to better love God, love themselves and each other by providing some guidelines on how to live in the spiritual life. The Rule covers topics like prayer and worship, forming healthy relationships, how to use time and maintain a balanced life, personal conduct, leadership, hospitality, and service. The Rule itself fosters a way of life that is rooted and grounded in Christ and becomes a tool that we can find as a center of stability. I love teaching the unit to my freshmen because the Rule is designed for ordinary people who live ordinary lives. It was written to provide a model of spiritual development for the average person who intends to live their life beyond the superficial or the uncaring.

Exploring the Hallmarks can bring valuable ideas from the monastic rule into the everyday twenty-first century. Benedict's message was find God by being in relationship with one another. Achieve holiness by being normal. Recognize that your role as a Christian is to love God, to serve others, and to seek eternal life. You can see why I was so excited to bring this message to the freshmen.

The 10 Hallmarks of Benedictine Education came to us when Benedictine educators collaborated and extracted from "The Rule of Saint Benedict" ten core values of transformative importance that inspire Benedictine institutions of learning like Belmont Abbey College. The resulting collection includes ten core values. They are love, prayer, stability, conversatio,



Benedictine Education Today

obedience, discipline, humility, stewardship, hospitality, and community. Simple, everyday values.

As I said before, the first thing I do with my freshmen classes is teach them the importance of writing a personal mission statement. The personal mission statement can help you identify your values and goals, defining what matters to you most professionally, socially, and spiritually. It makes decision-making easier as it clarifies whether the decisions you're making are in alignment with what you want to do for your life. Teaching the Benedictine Hallmarks to these students helps them clarify their own values. It's important to have a personal mission statement, as it motivates you to have positive impact on the world, and it helps you feel more satisfied in everyday life.

There are five simple steps in developing your personal mission statement. Step one is to identify your past successes. Spend some time identifying some examples of where you have had personal success in recent years. Step two, and most importantly, identify those core values. Step three, identify any contributions that you've made to society. And step four, identify your goals. Even though we have had many experiences and successes in our everyday lives, the question remains, what now? Who are we? Where are we going? And most importantly, what do we want to do with our gifts and talents? What does God want from us? And step five is to write your personal mission statement.

To truly relate your mission to life and everyday behaviors, you must identify your core values. Development of this list should outline a list of attributes that you believe best identifies who you are, as well as your priorities. This is where the Benedictine Hallmarks can be used as a guide for these core values. The Hallmarks are ideas of the sixth century that can guide us into a Christ-centered day, even today. When we introduce the Hallmarks to students, we do so briefly so that they can see how they relate to the life experience of each individual.

As I read the brief description of each hallmark, I will include a quote from Saint Benedict found in "The Rule of Benedict" that simply puts the hallmark into focus for us. The first hallmark is to love Christ and neighbor to seek tangible ways that promote the good in persons, the love of learning, and the desire for God. The quote from the Rule: "Never give a hollow greeting of peace or turn away from someone who needs your love." The second is prayer, to always be in conversation with God in liturgy, in lectio, and labor. The quote: "We believe that the divine presence is everywhere." The next hallmark is stability, to commit to one's vocation in a daily rhythm of balanced life. And the quote is, very simply, "To stand firm in one's promises." The next hallmark is conversatio, to commit to personal change or conversion that positively transforms life, conversion of self, by daily commitment to Christ rather than self-centered preoccupations, getting up again after one falls, and letting oneself be transformed, to give glory to God. The quote: "Your way of acting should be different from the world's way."

The next is obedience, listening to one another with mercy, working to understand and anticipate needs of others, and acting to serve those needs, which may be different than our own. And the quote: "Earnestly competing in obedience to one another." The next is discipline, a



Benedictine Education Today

daily dedication to begin again facing responsibilities, stretching beyond one's comfort level to master complex practices and ideas, to practice to make one's own virtues that lead to learning and freedom. And the quote is one that you will see all over the campus of Belmont Abbey College: "That in All Things, God may be glorified." The next hallmark is humility, walking in true knowledge of self in relation to God, in relation to others, and creation, recognizing limitations without losing hope, and accepting gifts without becoming arrogant, to recognize with gratitude and honesty both our gifts and our failings. The quote: "Speak the truth with heart and tongue." The next hallmark is stewardship, revering all of creation in its beauty and proper use, recognizing it as a gift from God, and using what we have for the sake of all people, to care for the good of this place, our time, our talent, and our treasure. And the quote from the Rule, "Regard all utensils and goods as sacred vessels of the altar." The next hallmark is hospitality, an acceptance of others, offering a place in which persons and ideas feel at home, where each can be transformed by one another on a common journey. The last Benedictine hallmark, community, is embracing a shared life in the classroom and in extracurricular activities through prayer, through academic work, for the common good of self and each other for today, tomorrow, and forever. And the last quote from the Rule, "They should each try to be the first to show respect to the other."

I would like to talk a little bit about hospitality, best described as openness to one another. Saint Benedict sees Christ present within the monastery in scripture and literature, and in the person of the Abbot, and each of the members of the monastic community. However, Saint Benedict accords special attention to Christ's unexpected arrival from outside in the person of the guest, whom he describes alternately as poor, and as a stranger. Christ presents himself in the outsider's vulnerability and calls the monastic to put aside individual plans and preoccupations in order to let the unexpected person in, to help him get established, to respond to his most pressing needs. And when the outsider comes to experience being at home in his new place, for however brief the stay, the monastic discovers new awareness of the common journey in which we are all engaged. A blessing accompanies both the offering and the receiving of hospitality. Within Benedictine education, we strive to extend hospitality to each member of our educational community, especially those who are new to the community and coming from other traditions.

After explaining and learning about the Ten Hallmarks of the Benedictine Education, we often ask our students to work in pairs to discuss the hallmark that is most closely related to them and to think about at least two real-life Belmont Abbey-related issues that align with those hallmarks. This exercise not only helps students communicate with each other, it helps them see hallmarks are values that can be used in everyday situations. I would like to share an example of hospitality in the twenty-first century, taken from the book "Saint Benedict's Toolbox: The Nuts and Bolts of Everyday Benedictine Living." "The model of Benedictine hospitality outlined in the Rule provides us with a way to be Christ's welcoming servants today, and in both as receivers and givers of grace." This excerpt puts the concept of hospitality into a real, everyday situation.

"One day last summer, it was late, and at the end of a hectic day, I was tired and anxious to get home. As I stepped out through the church door, I realized that the homeless family who was staying with us at the church must have arrived in the evening. Each summer, we house families



Benedictine Education Today

as a part of the Interfaith Community Hospitality. I thought, 'I should go down there and greet them and see how they're doing, but I really don't feel like it.' However, my sense of responsibility won out. It was important that they knew we cared. And so, with weary bones, I trudged down the steep steps to the church basement, asking God to help me when I felt pretty uninspired. Walking into the room, I was greeted by the glad voices of the mother and the children. After hugs all around, I sat down and spent 15 to 20 minutes with them, inquiring about their day and talking about all kinds of things. When I got up to leave, I was a different person. I felt refreshed, I felt energized, I felt like I had just been on a vacation. In truth, my reluctant offer to hospitality was repaid ten-fold. What small grace I felt I gave poured back onto me as a wave of love.

All you and I need to do to make that space of hospitality around us, as Henry Nouwen suggested in his book, "Reaching Out," is to keep our eyes, ears, and hearts open to what God would have us do. When our center rests in God, we can empty ourselves as Christ did and become free to replace hostility with hospitality. We are then able to welcome friend or stranger as a guest, as Christ. We are often far from this today, yet with our families, in our circle of friends, in our church, at work, and with Christ's help, we can set aside our personal agendas and our expectations about people. We can instead make room inside ourselves for others, one person at a time. We can provide a space of hospitality into which others may freely enter and feel safe because they know that we are accepted. We can meet our families and friends, strangers and guests, 'and expand hearts with unspeakable sweetness of love'" We can start the hallmark of hospitality right in our own families. Some suggestions include talking to your children or your students about hospitality, discovering with them ways to practice hospitality, greeting your family members as Christ, extending hospitality to others in your family, and being fully present to your family during meal times.

Have you ever imagined that the Rule and the Hallmarks of Saint Benedict were written for you, that the Rule is your personal guide to the life in Christ and for Christ? A powerful exercise that I like to use with my students that makes the Rule and Hallmarks more personal is that when you encounter the word brother or sister when reading the Rule, it's powerful to mentally substitute a person's name or a group of people, or someone that is close to you. You could use family, friends, or coworkers, or even a specific person's name. I use my own name, or I. Somehow, the personalizing makes it easier to bring Benedict's wisdom into my own life, to make his wisdom my own.

Let's look at the most beautiful hallmark of love. Students enjoy discussing this topic, and beyond talking about relationships and romantic love, they most often discuss love of family and how they demonstrate this love in their own families. While often embarrassed to discuss love and relationships, students never seem to be shy about expressing their love for their families. What evolves from the discussion is the realization that the hallmark is there to help you develop practice of realizing God's love for you in ordinary things in everyday life. God's love is with us all the time. We just need to open our eyes and our ears.



Benedictine Education Today

To adopt this practice of looking back through the day, or part of a day, to reframe our view of what happened, we should ask these simple questions every night as we contemplate our day: How was God present? How did God show love to me? Both questions can help us reform our perceptions of what happened and help us develop a heartfelt understanding of God's love. Examples of everyday love might go unnoticed unless you are looking for that example and how God shows us His love.

A woman shared two stories about how she recognized God's love after studying the Hallmarks and deliberately looking for signs. She said, "Before I went jogging the other morning, I spent at least five frustrating minutes looking for my red headband. When I asked John if he'd seen it, with a look of gentle humor, he said, "It's around your neck," and gave me a hug. My forgetfulness and my husband's love gave God a way to hug me."

She shared a second story. "Later, a gentleman delivered salt for our water softener. After struggling mightily to carry the 80-pound bags into our garage, he realized that John had ordered 50-pound bags. Lifting either weight was difficult for him, and there was much audible grunting and sighing. I felt compassion for him, and I said a silent prayer that his day be blessed, especially in the light bags. How did God show God's love to me? By giving me compassion and prayer, and I trust, ultimately, I lifted that man's spirits."

Let's look at stability and obedience. If you recall the definition, it was to commit to one's vocation in a daily rhythm of balanced life. Do you know what your purpose is? Do I know what my purpose is? Are we living our purpose? Our sense of purpose guides everything in our lives, how we spend our time, how we spend our money, people whom we are close to, how we choose, how we make decisions. To neglect the purpose is to neglect who God created us to be. So how might we discover and more fully live into the purpose for why we're even on this earth?

Recently I was given a copy of "The Conscious Company," a magazine that explores the emerging definition of success in business. It centers around a company's ability to have a positive effect on society and environment. The magazine highlights companies who are providing new models based on a broader understanding of the responsibility beyond making money. One of the articles was about Eileen Fisher, designer, and manufacturer. She had pledged 100% sustainability in the creation of her clothes by 2020. Formed in collaboration with company employees, the goals and visions of 2020 included using a responsible supply chain for materials, eliminating dangerous toxins in fabrics, minimizing waste in the production process, and intentional care and respect for the people in the production process, and how they are treated, and how they are paid. These goals have come from her sense of purpose, which has grown and developed over time.

A clarifying event for Ms. Fisher came when a workshop exercise where she was instructed to sit in a chair and embody her purpose, in that chair, she became her purpose, and as she explains, "You talk to yourself as your purpose, asking questions like, what are you doing with your life? Why are you doing this? What really matters? Why are you forgetting about me? What



Benedictine Education Today

great questions. I was really struck by this exercise. I thought, "Can I sit in a chair and know my purpose well enough to become my purpose and let it question me?" A purpose needs clarity, and that's not always easy. We are pulled in many different directions. What is my purpose? What is your purpose? That you are exploring this course and that I'm thinking about it so carefully seems to indicate that one of the purposes is connected to the Rule of Saint Benedict and the Benedictine Hallmarks as a way of living. A purpose you and I share in common is the desire to learn more about that way of life, to live it, given the challenges and opportunities, our responsibilities, and personal situations. Yet, there is a purpose we share over and above even that of the Rule itself.

The Rule is a manual for the purpose of seeking God in community. The following are quotes from "The Rule of Benedict." What does Benedict ask about purpose? We are to stay faithful in this search, that would be stability, and to listen for the ways that God calls us through persons and situations to live that purpose, that's obedience. Christ's love is to come before all else, and it is Him we are to prefer above everything. We are not to be daunted by difficulties or challenges, for God will bring our efforts to completion with the result being "a heart overflowing with inexpressible delight of love." And in the Prologue, Benedict reminds us that God's presence is everywhere and that the Lord, in His love, shows us the way of life. We are to seek first the kingdom of God. Our purpose as Christians and followers of Saint Benedict and his Rule is to seek God above all things and in all things. To me, this is the purpose that enfolds what I call our personal purpose, the reason I advocate for students to write a personal mission statement after experiencing the Hallmarks, like Eileen Fisher's commitment to sustainability in her company.

First, there's the underlying search for God in all things, and second, a personal purpose to which we are committed. We need to clarify the personal purpose. What are the chosen daily activities and personal goals within which we will seek God? Over the last several years, my purpose in teaching First-Year Experience has been to present ideas from the Rule and Hallmarks and to offer ways for them to practice this life. This has been done through guiding the students to see themselves within their personal purpose, where they will seek a larger purpose, where they will seek God.

But there may be ways and aspects within the personal purpose yet to be discovered, or maybe even different personal purposes knocking at the door of our hearts. It will take a quiet reflection to discover that. I recommend that you and I follow the exercise by sitting in a chair and embodying our purpose in order to let the purpose help us live it more fully. I encourage you to create a personal mission statement using the Benedictine Hallmarks as a guide for discovering your core values. You can do this with just two easy steps. One, ask what is my personal purpose? Think about your life right now. What is important to you? How do you spend your time? What motivates you and energizes you? What gives you direction? This is all connected to your purpose. Take a moment to define that purpose. And step two, let that purpose question you. I invite you to become the purpose as you sit in that chair. Embody that purpose. Let the purpose ask you questions like the following: What are you doing with your life? Why are you doing this? What really matters? Why are you forgetting about me? What can you do today to



Benedictine Education Today

bring me more life? What plans can you make for the future? And are there changes in your life? As Christians who follow Saint Benedict and his Rule, our abiding purpose is to seek God above all things and in all things. With that in mind and heart, let the purpose of the Benedictine Hallmarks guide you. Thank you.

