Spiritual Formation

Formation

The School of Theology is an educational institution, but it is also a place of formation. "Formation" involves academic, spiritual, and professional development, so that a student may be equipped to be "devout, learned, and useful," whether as clergy or laity in service to the church. Most of the School of Theology's policies and procedures necessarily focus on academic formation, because we are a graduate school of the University. At the same time, as a seminary of the church, we take seriously the broader work of formation, with its attention to spiritual and professional development.

Spiritual Formation

Anglican spirituality presumes participation in the eucharist, the daily office, and personal prayer. To that end, we expect that students in residence will worship daily in the Chapel of the Apostles, participating in a minimum of one service of public worship each day, to include the principal eucharist of the community on Wednesdays at 11:00 a.m. Students in low-residence programs, such as the Advanced Degrees Program, are encouraged to participate in daily worship in the chapel when they are in Sewanee.

Far from a burden, participation in corporate worship and common prayer is part of what it means to be a baptized Christian: "to continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers," as the prayer book puts it. On a spiritual level, it knits us in the body of Christ, the *ekklesia*, the assembly. On a practical level, it fosters liturgical competence in those who are called to lead worship as clergy, and its language and imagery shapes the theological imagination of students and faculty alike. Personal prayer undergirds and sustains our relationship with God.

To foster their spiritual formation, Anglicans have traditionally used a variety of resources, such as spiritual directors/companions, retreats/quiet days, auricular confession, and peer groups. The School makes these resources available to students.

Students in the residential programs are expected to develop a rule of life with their advisors. Over the course of their time, they will participate in small group conversations with their advisors and fellow advisees, to support each other in the effort to live into one's rule. We expect that students will also meet regularly with a spiritual director/spiritual companion.

Professional Formation

As persons being formed as clergy and lay leaders for the Episcopal Church, students in the M.A., M.Div., D.A.S., and S.T.M. (Anglicans Studies) programs are acquiring the skills, dispositions, and competencies of a new profession. Important elements of professionalism, such as personal integrity, maturity, work ethic, self-restraint, resilience, and adaptability, are qualities in all persons that grow and deepen in seminary. Other elements, more peculiar to an ecclesiastical vocation, may be newly demanded, e.g., appropriate relationship to authority, the keeping of confidentiality, the capacity to equip and lead others. Finally, one must learn to work with discretion within the culture of the church, understanding the stated and implied expectations of clergy and lay leaders.

Students acquire these habits both in and out of the classroom. In particular, contextual education and Clinical Pastoral Education each provide a venue in which students can operate in the role of religious leader, applying classroom learning in a field setting, practicing the skills and habits of a professional, and then reflecting on their experience in colloquies. Through this process, students become curious and collaborative professionals.

The advisor

The advisor is a critical resource for students in their academic, professional, and spiritual formation. Advisors are concerned with the development of the whole person.

It is the advisor who helps the student navigate degree requirements and devise a course of study. Although each student has the ultimate responsibility for becoming familiar with and meeting graduation requirements, each student is assigned an advisor from the faculty whose responsibility it is to help plan and supervise the student's academic program and to be available for consultation on other matters. An academic advisor approves the student's schedule of courses at registration and should be consulted with regard to any subsequent changes. The advisor will be the normal channel of communication between the faculty, when acting as a body, and the student.

In addition, the advisor is a valuable resource in assisting students to develop or deepen the professionalism required by their callings. As a guide in the formation process, the advisor helps the student reflect on their learning and identify areas for further growth. The nature of the advisor's involvement varies: a new M.Div. student preparing for ordination will have different concerns than an M.A. student nearing graduation or a D.Min. student already serving in a parish.

In addition, the advisor assists students in residential programs in devising a rule of life. The student should consult with the advisor concerning the rule at least at the start of each academic year, though the rule may be revised at any time. The advisor is neither a spiritual director nor a counselor, but a mentor through the process of formation. The advisor helps the student frame a rule that addresses spiritual, physical, and mental health, maintaining an appropriate balance in obligations. The student then meets with the

advisor and fellow advisees on a regular basis, typically twice a month, for mutual support in keeping the rule. The rule need not be shared with the group in all its detail; the point is to share how one is faring in one's attempt to live up to a rule of one's own devising, and to be supported in the discipline of following a rule.

The rule of life

A rule of life is a pattern that is consciously adopted to support one's commitment to live as God calls us. Rather than a burdensome obligation, it is a means of creating balance and harmony in one's life, establishing practices that nurture one's life in Christ. It takes as a starting point the Baptismal Covenant, with its articulation of Christian living, and expands on it in practical ways. It is an important element in formation for those in the School's residential programs.

An individual rule of life should be both simple and realistic. It must be sustainable, recognizing the many demands of seminary and taking account of one's obligations to others. It addresses spiritual, relational, physical, and emotional elements, and it is a means to an end, helping one live faithfully according to God's will. A typical rule for a seminarian should include the following:

- participation in the Eucharist
- recitation of the Daily Office
- daily personal prayer
- spiritual direction
- quiet days
- study
- physical exercise
- adequate sleep and nutrition
- time with loved ones
- stewardship of resources (time and money)

For many, it will also include:

- auricular confession
- contemplative prayer/ meditation
- retreats

The Society of St. John the Evangelist offers a resource to help develop a rule: *Living Intentionally: A Workbook for Creating a Personal Rule of Life*, (https://www.ssje.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Living-Intentionally.pdf).

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