

## Anglicanism and St Benedict

[T]he monastic tradition, specifically the Benedictine tradition, looms large in shaping ... the life of the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion worldwide. Within the Episcopal Church we are sometimes unaware of the profound influence exerted by Benedictine monastics on our tradition. The pattern of our worship, the Book of Common Prayer, is built on what St Benedict calls *Opus Dei* – the work of God. There is a dose of the monastery in every BCP. It is the very foundation of our Anglican identity.

Our Benedictine tradition also has a more subtle relevance to the way our parishes within the Episcopal Church ... relate to [secular church hierarchy] and provide context for conversion of life. Our Benedictine vow [*conversatio morum*] calls for conversion of our lives to the monastic way of life. Beyond the monastery this could reasonably be understood as conversion to the Baptised way of life. In both contexts it is a life-long process....

St Benedict sees the monastery as the context in which my way of life is converted. I believe for those not called into the monastery, parish and family are the context for conversion of life.

It is certainly part of the genius of the *Rule of St Benedict* that it provides guidance for forming and maintaining a monastic community that allows for conversion. The *Rule* is not rigid in this guidance. St Benedict leaves the [details of] interpretation of the *Rule* to the community and does not contemplate a hierarchy beyond the monastery. Each monastic community will have to work out for itself, and within its context, [the application of] what it means to be faithful to the *Rule of St Benedict* – what it means to have conversion of life. ... There was no central authority or structure that created a relationship from one monastery to another. That relationship was created by a shared love of God, a shared way of praying, and by the love that binds Christians one to another.

I find this wisdom from St Benedict particularly hopeful. ... Tip O'Neill famously observed that "all politics is local." I think St Benedict may have anticipated him somewhat, for although Benedict doesn't say it in so many words, he clearly finds that all community is local.

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*St Paul's intentionally claims fully and works to live into and grow in its Benedictine heritage.*

## Benedictine Parish Paradigm

Using the paradigm of Benedictine values and culture is the best way to understand what one experiences in the life, practice, and policies of St Paul's Parish.

- *Hospitality*: everyone is always welcome at St Paul's with the only condition being that their behavior does not interfere with the rights of others nor with the life, values, and culture of St Paul's parish family. An attempt to change the community culture by an *individual* is not acceptable at St Paul's.
- *Conversatio morum* [*conversion of life*]: while all persons are always accepted unconditionally as visitors, guests, or associates, Canonical membership in the parish community (thus the ability to participate in Canonical leadership positions and final decision-making in the life of the community) requires formation and *conversatio morum* in the values of the community. Successful completion of the Adult Theology Class program (which functions as St Paul's novitiate formation program) and the determination by the Rector (community abbot) that the candidate understands, accepts, and will live out the values of the community is required before the Rector will request and receive a Canonical Letter of Transfer to St Paul's.
- *Stability*: this is the Benedictine vow of permanence in the community that the candidate makes and is the Benedictine value that life is centered in an ongoing stable community rooted in (orthodox) Catholic theology and Benedictine values and culture, not subject to passing whims or the current popular culture. The fact that St Paul's will have an endowed financial "safety net" under the vital elements of its life (like all Benedictine abbeys) means that (like all endowed institutions) it is not, nor will be in the future, subject to the manipulative blackmail of the explicit or implicit promise of support "...but only if you will do/be ..." or the withdrawal of support "if you don't do/be..." Benedictine spirituality and culture is a non-negotiable part of the life of St Paul's.