

A RULE OF LIFE

A flexible framework....

Late last year Bishop Tim invited people across the Diocese to consider following a 'Rule of Life'. Many clergy will be familiar with the idea but others, particularly lay people, may be a little puzzled if not daunted by the idea.

A Rule of Life is something to offer us "freedom and fruitfulness" says Diocesan Spirituality Adviser Rev'd Sally Dakin. "It's not about legalism, or rules and regulations." She was speaking following a workshop to help people discover more about what a Rule of Life might involve and how they might form their own one. The initial workshops were held in Advent and there will be more taking place from the end of February. "Workshops provide time and space for people to explore what a rule of life might mean for them," says Sally.

The workshops start with drinks and then the leader talks through what a Rule of Life involves. "It is the amazing idea that God invites us to be part of his life," says Sally. "It is a sharing in God's life, sharing God's life together and then sharing God's life with those around us. It matches with the three Ps (Passionate Personal Spirituality, Pioneering Faith Communities, and Prophetic Global Citizenship) but my particular twist is the **five Fs**: A Rule of Life is a **f**lexible **f**ramework to support us in our discipleship which is **f**ocused on where I need support, leading to **f**reedom and **f**ruitfulness."

She encourages us to read John, chapter 15: 'I am the vine. You are the branches'. "The Rule of Life is a framework rather like the frames that grapes grow on in a vineyard. It supports us in our growth. Then John 15 talks about pruning and I always thought that was about dead bits which seemed violent. But I now understand that it is a way of focusing on what is important for our lives as we cannot do everything."

For each person that focus will be unique. Again Sally uses an organic metaphor. "I grew up on a fruit farm and my father would spend all of October to April pruning. He loved his trees and he would look at each unique tree and think how to support the fruitfulness of each tree."

Workshop participants are encouraged to spend an hour or more silently meditating on their Rule of Life and then come back together to share anything they wish and pray together. There are props for those who like a kinesthetic approach; there is space and peace.

Participants are not expected to have finalised their Rule by the end, but a workshop can form a useful stepping stone. "In my experience when people carve out time for God, God

honours that and they really seem to get somewhere,” says Sally.

For guidance on creating a Rule of Life and for details of workshops, visit www.winchester.anglican.org/about-us/strategic-priorities/rule-of-life/

Bishop Jonathan writes:

“I am delighted to commend the Rule of Life workshops as I know from personal experience how helpful developing a Rule of Life can be in following Jesus. Forming a Rule of Life is an ongoing conversation with God about how our lives are shaped before him. I've wrestled with the pattern of discipleship for 30 years – and, as you will all know, I am very much a work in progress! So get along to the workshop. Enjoy it. Pray about what you find there, and draw in anything you find useful. For in the end, it's all about following Jesus and a Rule of Life is a tool, a gift even, to take discipleship forward.”

In their words...

Here is what two participants in a Rule of Life workshop said:

Nick: *“Going on a Rule of Life workshop can help you to focus and brings up things you may have neglected as well as new ideas. We had solitary time which helped us relax and centre ourselves. We have to write a plan and set time aside in the future to review it.”*

Anna: *“I sat before God and thoughts came to my mind. I do a lot of things so it was nice to have time to think. I want more discipline in my life so that I know more what I am doing rather than just doing things without thinking about it.”*