

The following explains how the Personal Rule of Life is used in one's life.

A FELLOWSHIP OF MISSIONARIES OF CHRIST

Every human being is born in this world with no idea where she came from, where she is going, or why she is here.

When we are illumined by the divine Light, Who is Jesus Christ, we begin a journey of increasing understanding of the origin, meaning, and destiny of our existence.

We came into the world from God at our creation. We are passing through time on earth. We will leave this world and enter the glory of Jesus with the Father in Eternity.

Our journey through time on earth seems chaotic. It is chaotic. Yet the chaos of our lives has been planned by God before the world was made. There is divine meaning in this human madness.

We are not resistant impenetrable beings like billiard balls that collide and bounce off each other. We all abide in Jesus and He abides in all of us. We are all one in Christ, without ceasing to be unique individual persons.

As the Father sent Jesus, so Jesus sends each one of us into the world on a personal mission. Our mission from Christ is the purpose and the meaning of our passage through time on earth.

The mission of each person is this: to initiate and bring to increasing perfection relationships of faith and love with the persons to whom we are sent and who are sent to us.

The most effective way we preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ is by the incontestable evidence of our transformed lives. The most effective way we draw to Christ the people to people to whom we are sent is by the powerful attraction of the love we give to them.

The existential conditions and practical details of our mission are revealed to us moment by moment. From each present moment we move forward to meet the unknown future in peace and confidence because we believe our future moments will express the infinite love of God for us. We know in faith that, as in the present moment, so also in every future moment, Christ Jesus lives in us with all divine power to do and to suffer everything necessary to fulfill our mission of faith in love in the lives of those to whom we are sent. Our complete victory over the world was decreed by God before we even began to engage in the struggle to love fully in the world.

The Holy Spirit of Jesus that we have received from the Father is our life, our strength, our courage, our creative power, and our wisdom.

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Our journey through time as missionaries has an inner dimension and an outward dimension.

The inner journey consists in the progressive assimilation of our whole person into a transformation mystical union with Jesus. Inwardly, we are to become more and more like Jesus in all aspects of our spirit: our thoughts, consciousness, understanding, values, desires, judgments, hopes, sorrows and joys. These are the well-springs of all of our words, actions, and reactions to what we experience in the world. The more the grace of the Holy Spirit increasingly prevails in us, the Risen Jesus lives in us.

In the outward dimension, we increasingly produce the fruit of faith and love in the lives of the people we are sent to. Our inner transformation makes us increasingly easily moved, inspired, and empowered by the Spirit of Jesus in our interactions with others.

Our mission from Christ, in both the inner and outward dimension, is made up of what we do in the world and what is done to us in the world. We act and we are acted upon. In our action, we will be supplied by the Spirit with power to do. In our passion, we will be supplied by the Spirit with the power to suffer.

All our good actions are gifts of God. They are expressions of God's love to us. They are also expressions of our love for God and for the people to whom we are sent.

Sufferings are intrinsically evil and worthy of hate. But, in the use God makes of them to purify and glorify us, they become instrumentally good and worthy of love. Christ and Christians embrace the Cross with love. As instruments God uses to bring us to eternal glory, our sufferings express God's love for us. When we humbly submit to suffering in faith, they express our love for God. When we offer our sufferings as prayers for the salvation of the world, they become expressions of our love all human beings. God so loved that He sent His only Son. The Son of God so loved the world that He sent us into the world to do and to suffer for the salvation of the world.

Sisters and brothers who belong to the Fellowship of Jesus agree about these things. They believe in their personal mission and in the mission of each other.

We write a testimony of our mission from Christ in the form of a Personal Rule of Life. This Rule is temporary and provisional. Changes in our circumstances of life reveal to us changes in the mission Christ is sending us to accomplish. Our Personal Rule changes with these revelations.

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The greatest spiritual value in the composition of a Personal Rule of Life is that it expresses our absolute faith in the mission we have from Jesus and our most profound commitment to accomplish the work He has sent us to do.

All Christians are trying to carry out their mission. Members of the Fellowship of Jesus do not do anything more or better than any other committed Christian. However, in composing and presenting to the Fellowship our Personal Rule of Life, we are dedicating ourselves to the mission we have from Christ with conscious intention and public profession. In the Fellowship, we give each other faith, prayer, encouragement, accountability, companionship, and fraternal love on our missionary journey through the world to the eternal glory of our blessed Lord Jesus in the presence of the Father.

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ORIGIN OF THE VISION FOR THE FELLOWSHIP OF JESUS

The first two decades of my life were spent in the culture of inner-city poverty. Levels of income and religious values were very low. Levels of sexual immorality, violence, and alcoholism were very high.

Then I spent twenty-five years totally dedicated to the monastic life of asceticism and mysticism.

After that, God led me to mission work: Seven years in the Bolivian Andes among the poor Quechua people followed by three years of mission-promotion work in the United States.

About 1990, I began seriously to ask if I could bring anything of value from the monastic tradition to benefit Christians living in families in the contemporary world. It is now 2009. I have been married for twenty years. My children are eleven and thirteen. Based on my education and experience and also based on critical reflection on Christian history and on my own life, I am offering an answer to the question: What does monastic tradition have to offer Christians in the world today?

I proceed to answer with two criteria in mind. One: to remove the mistaken ideals and the unhelpful monastic practices that are not relevant to Christian life today. Two: to identify, and where necessary modify for contemporary use, the monastic ideals and practices that remain perennially essential for the spiritual life of Christians.

THE BENEFIT OF COMMUNITY

St Benedict compared those who lived in monastic community the "stronger kind" of monks compared to solitaries who are left to fight the spiritual battle alone in hand to hand combat with the demons. This practical observation is verified in all aspects of human life. People of like mind, values, or goals form themselves in some kind of community: professional associations, clubs, political parties, and so on.

One of the greatest gifts of the monastic tradition to contemporary Christians is the community life. Now the age of monastic communities as normative is past. With minimal exceptions, Christians do not live together physically, nor are they called to do so. The Christians in the church of Philippi lived in their homes. Paul did not tell them to move into one place and live together physically. Rather, he urged them passionately, "to think the same, have

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the same love, and be of one soul and one mind" (Phil 2:2). Paul here establishes that sharing of mind, intention, values, and goals in holy conduct is the heart of Christian community. It is not necessary to live physically together.

Therefore, the Fellowship of Jesus will bring people together in an intentional community. They will be united in mutual love and in sharing the same of spiritual goals and holy spiritual disciplines.

SEXUAL RENUNCIATION vs. MARRIAGE AND PARENTING

One of the assumptions of early Christians, after the Apostolic Age, was that renunciation of all sexual life is a higher religious state. This Hellenistic prejudice, propounded by Popes and Church Fathers, held sway until the sixteenth century Reformers began to oppose it.

In order to seek God with total dedication of mind and heart, early monks renounced material things, social involvements, and all competing activities. This is a witness of enduring worth. However, in so far as the monastic ideal of renunciation of sexual life was based on the erroneous belief in the moral superiority of celibacy it must be abandoned.

Early monks never did actually leave the world. They simply avoided women, marriage, and family because they thought these things would hinder their union with God. The Spirit has gradually taught us to seek perfect union with God in the midst of a busy life of work and in a noisy household. After all, loving attention given to a spouse and to children are not greater distractions from the love of God than the incessant attacks of the evil spirits in solitude. And if love is the greatest value of all, perhaps the effort to love in marriage and in parenting is not less holy than renouncing sexuality for the love of God.

Inextricably connected to belief in the ideal of abstinence from sexual activity is the lowering of the spiritual value of women—whose attraction tends to lead men into sexual activity. This made women the enemy of (male) sanctity. Women, too, were thought to be morally better if they were virgins. These notions led to the Christian social phenomenon of gender-segregated monasteries where men and women could avoid each other by living in community with their own sex. This social arrangement does not seem to be what Our Lord Jesus had in mind for Christian men and women.

Marriage and family were valued considerably less than total sexual abstinence. The converted Manichean, St. Augustine of Hippo, reputed to be the "Father of Western Theology", taught that sexual intercourse, even in marriage, is always a venial sin because of the intensity of the pleasure. It is disappointing, but not surprising, that these many centuries of Christians were prevented by

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their sexual prejudices from developing any significant theology and spirituality of the holiness of Christian sexual life in marriage and family.

All of that is changing now. We are coming to understand that the Creator who made them male and female and gave them to each other in marriage at the beginning continues to send each man and each woman into the lives of their eternally predestined marriage partner. Marriage and family is the ordinary and most effective manner in which the eternally elect are brought into the world and into redeeming grace. The advance of the Kingdom of God depends more on Christian parenting than it does on the work of evangelists in the mission field.

The personal mission from Christ to marry and have children calls for death to ego-centrism and it requires an incessant, generous, and even heroic, asceticism of self-denying sacrificial love.

Spouses sanctify each other and children sanctify both. A man and women receive Jesus Christ when they receive each other from God in marriage. In receiving children from God in Christ's Name, they receive the Lord Jesus Himself.

From these considerations, we see that an intentional community of religious purpose in our day must address the needs of all Christians in their personal mission but with special attention to the Personal Rule of Life of spouses and parents. The Holy Spirit is doing no greater work in the world than leading spouses into greater love for each other and for their children.

PERSONAL MISSION FROM CHRIST

The Christians of the second century onward had not thought out a theology of personal mission. The monastic men and women practiced renunciation of social involvement. They chose a life of radical refusal to live as other Christians lived. They wanted to separate themselves from the world as completely as possible. The voluminous writings of the monks of the late third, fourth, and fifth centuries give no evidence of a belief that they were sent by Christ to engage the world, but rather only to flee the world.

We do well to imitate these spiritual fathers and mothers in separating ourselves from the vices, values, and morals of the unbelieving world. But today we believe we are sent, each Christian, on a mission from Jesus Christ into the world.

"As the sent me so I send you," says the Lord Jesus to every baptized Christian. Believing this absolutely, we need a form of religious community that focuses upon the *personal mission of each Christian*.

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The earliest ascetics in the Egyptian desert toward the end of the third century were solitaries. Each one lived a personal regime of life as enabled and inspired by the Holy Spirit. Within fifty years, especially under the impetus of St. Pachomius, large numbers of monks began to live together a common life in large encampments—the first monasteries. These larger numbers housed in more complex structures needed regulation. Rules for these groups began to be composed. The most famous and successful of Rules for Monasteries is that of Saint Benedict in the sixth century.

Until our time, intentional religious communities were regulated on the premise that individual sanctification comes from observing the common rule. Now we are in position to form an intentional community of devotion in which the Personal Mission of each member, codified in a Personal Rule of Life, can become the essential norm and source of sanctification.

VOWS vs. VALUES

I have seen that the medieval practice of making vows causes far more harm to the spiritual life than any benefit it is reputed to confer. We would not be wise to carry this late monastic tradition forward. Members of the Fellowship of Jesus simply say “Yes” they will embrace the values expressed in the Spiritual Disciplines of the Fellowship as long as they believe that is the grace of God for them. To swear more than that would be from the Evil One, according the Lord Jesus in the Gospel.

SUMMARY

The Fellowship of Jesus is an intentional community of Christians who believe in their personal mission from Christ in the world. They share a commitment to help each other fulfill their personal mission by fidelity to their Personal Rule of Life. The composition of the Personal Rule of Life is a written statement of ones faith and ones effort to complete the mission Christ is sending each person to accomplish in life. The Spiritual Disciplines of the Fellowship of Jesus are a code of the moral duties of all Christians to which is added the essential disciplines of the inner life bequeathed to by the ancient monastic tradition.

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GUIDE BOOK FOR THE FELLOWSHIP OF JESUS

THE COMMUNITY

Christians form one universal community that spans all time until the end of the world: The Body of Christ, the universal church. This community is invisible. Whenever two or more of us gather together in His Name to share our life and worship, we create a visible assembly in the world. This visible community of the church is a manifestation, a true sacrament, of the one whole invisible community of the universal church.

All of the members of the Fellowship of Jesus are members of the invisible Body of Christ, the church spread throughout the all the world and all time. We all gather visibly at least once a year. During the year, small groups of the Fellowship meet in different places. Whenever two or more members meet locally (even by phone or letter) to share their lives in Christ, there is the Lord Jesus in their midst. There, too, is a manifestation, a sacrament, of the whole community of the Fellowship of Jesus, and of the whole Body of Christ.

Our community is not formed by living in the same place. We are an intentional community: we have common spiritual values, desires, aspirations, and spiritual activities.

We are formed into a community by sharing the same spiritual goal, by using the same means to reach the goal, and by helping each other on the journey.

Our common goal is: *the transformation of our body, soul, and spirit through personal union with the Lord Jesus and the complete fulfillment of our personal mission from Christ in the world.*

Our common means is: *the practice of the same Spiritual Disciplines.*

Our mutual help consists in: *friendship, prayer, encouragement, and sharing of our journey with each other.*

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THE FELLOWSHIP OF JESUS

IDENTITY

The Fellowship of Jesus is an intentional community of Christians of orthodox faith from all denominations. They join together to help each other fulfill their divine mission in the world. The obligations of membership are rewarded with the blessings of encouragement, affection, prayers, and community spirit in mutual accountability.

GOAL

The goal of each member of our Fellowship is to pursue, and to help the other members pursue, the fullness of our personal spiritual transformation and the completion of our mission from God in the world.

THE MEANS OF ATTAINING OUR GOAL

The specific means used by our members consists in the practice of the common Spiritual Disciplines of the Fellowship of Jesus and living by a Personal Rule of Life.

MISSION STATEMENT AND PERSONAL RULE OF LIFE

Leaders of the Fellowship offer help to aspiring members in the discernment and composition of a Mission Statement and a Personal Rule of Life

In a Mission Statement members write down the purposes for which they believe Christ has sent them into the world. A Personal Rule of Life consists in a set of concrete actions that a Christian takes in order to fulfill her or his mission in life. The Mission Statement is the goal. The Personal Rule is the means of reaching the goal.

ADMISSION TO THE FELLOWSHIP OF JESUS

An applicant must send to the Spiritual Father a signed copy of the application form accompanied by a recommendation from the applicant's pastor and from a member of the Fellowship of Jesus who knows the applicant well enough to make a recommendation. Application forms can be requested by contacting the Spiritual Father.

After the application is accepted, the applicant will be asked to compose and submit his or her Personal Rule of Life. The Fellowship will provide assistance if requested by the applicant in preparing the Personal Rule of Life. The applicant presents his or her Personal Rule of Life for approval from the Fellowship of Jesus.

After approval of the Personal rule of Life, the candidate will be presented with a formal document in duplicate called the Fellowship Statement. The Fellowship Statement declares the intention of the candidate to belong to the community and the intention of the community to receive the candidate. Both identical documents are signed by the candidate and by the Spiritual Father who represents the entire Fellowship. Once these documents are signed by both parties, the candidate becomes a member of the Fellowship of Jesus with all rights and duties of membership.

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All the members of the Fellowship of Jesus, gathered together at the Annual Chapter Meeting, celebrate a Rite of Reception for new members who have entered since the preceding Annual Meeting.

LEAVING THE FELLOWSHIP OF JESUS

Christians join the Fellowship because they desire to belong. Their membership lasts as long as they continue to want to belong. The Holy Spirit leads people to join. The same Holy Spirit may lead people to a situation in life that impedes active participation in the life of the Fellowship of Jesus.

A member may want to leave for reasons of personal hurt, misunderstanding, or infidelity to grace. If these undesirable motives cannot be removed for whatever reasons, a person may cease to desire to belong to the Fellowship of Jesus.

A person leaves the Fellowship of Jesus by the simple decision to end his or her membership. To be removed from the roles of the community, the person who departs should inform the Spiritual Father of this decision.

A person who leaves the Fellowship of Jesus leaves with the love and prayers of the members. Love never ends.

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THE PURPOSE OF THE FELLOWSHIP OF JESUS

This organization is a pastoral initiative intended to awaken dormant Christians to a vibrant life of personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The purpose of this Fellowship is to help each other attain to personal sanctification and to complete the mission each one has been sent by Christ to accomplish in the world. It is a modern reformed successor to the monastic orders of antiquity. In this non-residential religious community, there are no vows. Members simply practice the common Spiritual Disciplines proposed by the Fellowship.

The individual members are guided in their spiritual walk by a Personal Rule of Life. Each person's Rule of Life is accepted, believed in, and confirmed by the Fellowship of Jesus in the name of the whole universal church.

Here follows the Spiritual Disciplines of the Fellowship of Jesus practiced by members of the community. Appendices A and B explain how to compose a Personal Rule of Life and to carry it out in the liberty of the Spirit.

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SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES OF THE FELLOWSHIP OF JESUS

Life is already formidably challenging. Membership in our religious community is meant to lighten the burden and give strength in carrying it. Therefore the Fellowship adds only those minimal obligations that will help the members fulfill their mission from Christ in the world. The first five are universal practices obligatory for all Christians. The rest are the specific devotional Disciplines practiced by members of the Fellowship of Jesus.

Disciplines of the Christian Life

(1) PERSONAL RULE OF LIFE

Members live by the dictates of their conscience expressed in their Personal Rule of Life.

(2) SUFFERING WITH JESUS

Every member's Personal Mission and Rule of Life should contain an expressed decision to accept patiently in faith the inevitable sufferings they must experience as their personal participation in the cross of Christ.

(3) CONFESSION OF SIN

All Christians sin. Humble confession of sins to God in their hearts should be a regular practice of members. When we confess our sins we are forgiven and the sin loses power over us. Confession must be made to God; it may also be made to a mature fellow believer. Confession gives assurance of forgiveness, obtains compassion, and liberates us from the power of sin. Confession should be included in every Personal Rule of Life.

(4) THE LORD'S SUPPER

In the spiritual life of the Fellowship of Jesus, in conformity with the most ancient and universal faith and practice of Christians, the Sacred Mystery of the Body and Blood of the Lord is the center and apex of Christian worship. Members of the Fellowship of Jesus partake of these mysteries as often as their devotion meets with the opportunity. At least, they celebrate the Lord's Supper as frequently as is customary in their churches.

(5) CARE FOR THE POOR

Care for the poor is an integral part of Christian life. In their Personal Rule of Life, each member includes concrete acts of serving Christ's poor.

Disciplines of the Fellowship of Jesus

(6) DAILY DEVOTION

They must understand, and strive to practice at least thirty minutes daily, the chief spiritual disciplines of Lectio Divina and the Jesus Prayer as part of their Personal Rule of Life.

(7) SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

Our members are taught to understand and to practice spiritual transparency. In ancient Christian tradition the elder is called spiritual father or mother. Today we use the terms,

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spiritual guide, companion, mentor, or just friend. By whatever name, this person must be a trustworthy, wise, mature in love, and well experienced in the spiritual life. Meetings with a spiritual director/mentor must be included in every Personal Rule of Life

(8) CONTINUOUS STUDY OF THE DOCTRINE OF FAITH

Members of the Fellowship of Jesus expand and deepen their knowledge of God's revelation as long as they live. To this end, they plan and carry out a course of personal reading, study, and/or courses in the bible, spirituality, and theology. This discipline should be included in the Personal Rule of Life.

(9) INTERCESSION FOR THE COMMUNITY

Members intercede for all of the members of the Fellowship of Jesus in their daily prayers.

(10) MONTHLY VISIT WITH A COMPANION IN THE FELLOWSHIP

Members understand their life as mission. We follow the model of companionship that the Lord Jesus gave us by sending out His missionaries two by two. Therefore, we ask members to visit monthly with a brother or sister 'companion' in the Fellowship of Jesus. If a personal visit is impossible, at least they can visit by phone or email. These meetings are times for conversation about life in the Fellowship and their personal spiritual life. Members may choose their own companion or they may request that a companion be assigned to them.

(11) ANNUAL CHAPTER MEETING AND RETREAT

Members are asked to attend a three day Annual Chapter Meeting of all the members of the Fellowship. The Annual Meeting includes a spiritual retreat.

(12) EXTRAORDINARY CHAPTER MEETINGS

If special circumstances of urgent importance to the Fellowship arise between Annual Chapter Meetings, the members may be requested to attend an Extraordinary Chapter Meeting.

(13) TWO ANNUAL RETREATS

In addition to the spiritual retreat during the Annual Chapter Meeting, members make at least one other spiritual retreat of at least three days each year.

(14) CHANGES TO THE PERSONAL RULE OF LIFE

The Personal Rule of Life of each member must be continually adjusted to the changing circumstances of life. Ordinary modifications are made by the members at their own discretion. For the sake of accountability and encouragement, members are encouraged to seek the confirmation of their Companion or the Spiritual Father of the Fellowship for major changes in their Personal Rule of Life.

(15) SUPPORT FOR THE ORDER

The Spiritual Father and all of the officers of the Fellowship will give their services to the religious community as volunteers without receiving any financial remuneration. The organization of the Fellowship of Jesus will incur administrative expenses. In proportion to

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their means and the directives of the Spiritual Father, members should be willing to share the costs of maintaining the Fellowship of Jesus.

(16) FELLOWSHIP WITH THE SPIRITUAL FATHER

Members may meet and/or communicate with the Spiritual Father by phone or email as often as may be useful for their spiritual growth, but they are asked to have at least one visit with him each year, at least by phone or email.

(17) FELLOWSHIP WITH THE CHURCH AUTHORITY

Members should report to their pastors in their local churches on their experience in the Fellowship of Jesus from time to time. Clergy who join the Fellowship of Jesus remain under their original ecclesiastical authority. Members make themselves responsible to the authority of the Fellowship of Jesus only in regard to the Spiritual Disciplines of the community.

(18) THE TRIUNE CROSS OF THE FELLOWSHIP OF JESUS

Members of the Fellowship have the privilege of wearing the "Triune Cross", unique to our religious community. Wearing this religious symbol in a visible manner is a public profession of faith in Christ and of membership in the Fellowship of Jesus. The cross is always worn at meetings of the Fellowship. At other times it is worn at the discretion of the member.

(19) THE HABIT

Members have the privilege of wearing the habit of the Fellowship of Jesus. The form of the habit is a grey hooded, hip-length, robe drawn in by a cord at the waist. It may be worn at the discretion of the member when attending church functions. It should be worn when gathered with other members of the Fellowship. The habit may also be worn as a prayer garment when the member is privately engaged in prayer or spiritual exercises.

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THE TRIUNE CROSS OF THE FELLOWSHIP OF JESUS

The cross worn by the members of the Fellowship of Jesus has a unique design. It is "triune" in remembrance of the Holy Trinity. There are three crosses within the one cross.

The base is a radiant cross. The four projections from the center are in the form of a widening angle. This symbolizes that the mystery of the holy cross of Christ extends and increases in all directions through all of time and space.

The Blessed Lord Jesus told us in the Gospel of John that when He is lifted up on the cross into glory, He would draw all men to Himself. This attraction of all human beings, indeed of all creation, to Jesus is symbolized by the cross formed of four triangles pointing to the circle of eternity enclosing the third cross.

There is a circle at the center of the Triune Cross. This circle represents the Eternity of God. Jesus is the Eternal God incarnate, crucified, and glorified for eternity. To convey the truth that Jesus is Risen and Glorified in the Eternity of God, there is no figure of the crucified Body on the Triune Cross. The empty cross is the eternal sign of the Victory of Christ achieved on the Cross. He is no longer impaled upon the Cross. He is Risen. He is Glorified. He is not here.

In the center of the central circle of the Cross of the Fellowship of Jesus is the engraved third cross. This centermost image of the cross is meant simply to represent the Lord Jesus. Jesus is the center of time and eternity. He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the End.

The trinity of the Cross signifies that by the eternal will of God the Father, through the working of the Holy Spirit, all things proceed from Jesus and all things move toward Him and in Him all things hold together in unity. From forever past to forever future, all creation has its being, origin, and eternal destiny in Jesus. He is the Center of Time and the Center of Eternity.

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AUTHORITY AND OBEDIENCE IN THE FELLOWSHIP OF JESUS

All legitimate authority on earth comes from God. All authority in heaven and earth has been given to Jesus Christ the Risen Son of God, the only Head of the Church. He has granted the whole church to share in His authority *to serve the world for its salvation*.

According to the teaching of the Lord Jesus, no Christian should claim authority over anyone. Christians are called to strive to be obedient servants of one another.

Authority in any group of Christians is conferred by the members upon the persons they choose to serve them. Members of a Christian assembly choose their servant-leaders on the basis of the gifts of the Spirit they discern in the individuals they appoint to duties in the community. Leaders serve in obedience and in accountability to the members of the community that authorizes them. The authority of these leaders is strictly limited to the service to which they are appointed. The members may

Authority in the Fellowship of Jesus: Under God and His Christ, each member of the community confers authority upon those they choose to lead them. The members have the duty to exercise oversight of the performance of the leaders. The same members have the power and the right to take away the authority of the leader for just cause at any time.

Submission of the members to the authority of the leaders of the Fellowship is the free choice of each person. No obligations are imposed on members by the authorities of the community. All obligations are personal choices of each member.

There are no laws, vows, traditions, promises, group expectations, or any other influence upon the freedom of a sister or brother of the Fellowship of Jesus. We join freely because we want to. We invest authority in the leaders because we trust them and we want them to serve us in their office. Were they to fail in their responsibility we would strip them of their authority. We observe the Spiritual Disciplines because we choose them for ourselves. We continue in the Fellowship only as long as seems best to us. We are free to leave the Fellowship whenever we desire, for whatever reason.

The internal authority of the Fellowship of Jesus is given to the Spiritual Father elected by the members. Derivative subordinate authority is conferred upon the Council of Advisors to the Father Superior.

All officers of the Fellowship are elected each year for a one year term at the Annual Chapter Meeting. Members who cannot attend this Chapter Meeting must send their vote in writing. Members are urged to vote but individuals are allowed to abstain from voting for good reason. A person is considered elected when he or she receives the number of votes equal to half the total number of all the members of the Fellowship plus one.

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Four members serve on the Council of Advisors. Two of these advisors are appointed by the Spiritual Father and two are elected by the members of the community. The normal regulation of the internal life of the Fellowship of Jesus is intrinsically complete and functions autonomously according to its own ordinances free from intrusion from outside.

The Fellowship of Jesus is a religious community within the larger church. Transparent and submissive to the larger church, the Fellowship needs and enjoys the benefit of external supervision by the authorities of the larger church outside the community. At this time, the External Authority of the Fellowship of Jesus is bishop of the diocese of XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX in which we are incorporated as a lay and clerical religious community.

The role of the External Authority is to receive reports from members of failures and abuses of authority that may arise within the Fellowship and, after verification of the charges, to call the offenders to account. In addition, the authorities of the Fellowship may call upon the External Authority to intervene when a grave internal division within the community threatens to destroy the unity of the Fellowship of Jesus. The purpose of such intervention by the External Authority is to suggest solutions. If it is necessary for the preservation of the unity of the Fellowship, the External Authority may mandate a resolution of the conflict.

Members of the Fellowship and the External Authority have complete freedom of communication at all times.

The Spiritual Father reports to the External Authority on the state of the Fellowship at least once a year.

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POVERTY, CHASTITY, AND OBEDIENCE

In Christian monastic tradition, a number of spiritual values became the object of solemn promises called vows. In the Fellowship of Jesus, we do not make any vows. Our simple "Yes" to our commitments and values completely fulfills the teaching of the Lord Jesus in the Gospel.

THE VALUE OF DETACHMENT REPLACES THE VOW OF POVERTY

Those who went before us in the medieval form of religious community took a vow of poverty. By that vow they promised to renounce ownership of personal property. In our community, we encourage our members to embrace the value of evangelical detachment. Detachment means that we choose to be fully content with our material circumstances in life.

Detachment does not mean we do not try to improve our material condition. We may pursue a better material life for ourselves, our families, and others, aggressively with dedication to honest hard work. We believe such efforts give glory to God. However, by embracing the spiritual value of detachment from material wealth, we commit ourselves to be content, satisfied, and grateful for God's provision (much or little) as it comes to us at each moment of our lives. We continue to labor reasonably to improve our material condition as offering a holy service to God and for the people who depend on us.

THE VALUE OF BODILY HOLINESS REPLACES THE VOW OF CHASTITY

Celibate monastics and clergy renounce all active intentional sexual activity by taking the vow of chastity. In place of this, members of the Fellowship of Jesus embrace the Christian value of sexual holiness. This means they consider their sexual bodies as holy to the Lord. Therefore, they consecrate their sexual activity exclusively to the sacred marriage bed. They prayerfully strive not to engage in any intentional sexual actions, physical or mental, except in relation to the spouse given by God. No one is perfect in this matter. In our failings, we humbly repent and turn to the forgiveness we have in the Precious Blood of Jesus.

OBEDIENCE TO THE SPIRIT REPLACES OBEDIENCE TO THE VOW

In religious communities of the traditional form, members oblige themselves by the vow of obedience to obey the rules and canonical superiors of their institution. In the Fellowship of Jesus, we ask our members to pray for the grace to strive always to follow the continuous inspirations of the Holy Spirit. Each member's Personal Rule of Life goes far in the direction of revealing those divine inspirations. However, the freedom of the Spirit to lead us in a surprising manner at any moment always takes precedence over our previously written Rule of Life.

The following explains how the Personal Rule of Life is used in one's life.

A PERSONAL RULE OF LIFE

Prefatory Note:

Unlike other religious organizations, the Fellowship of Jesus does not present a common Rule of the Order for everyone to follow. There are some common agreements in the Spiritual Disciplines, but this Fellowship is unique in that it exists only to assist members in carrying out their own Personal Rule of Life.

The Fellowship of Jesus is founded on the biblical principle that every Christian is sent into the world to accomplish the personal mission entrusted to her or him by Jesus Christ. Our religious community confers the approval, oversight, and blessing of the church upon the Personal Rule of life of each of its members. Sisters and brothers in the Fellowship give each other the comfort of friendship, the support of prayers, and the encouragement of companionship on their missionary journey through life.

It is of utmost importance that members understand from the beginning the correct manner of composing and living out a Personal Rule of Life. They must understand the spiritual journey from Rule to Spirit. For this purpose, the two following Appendices A and B are presented below.

The following explains how the Personal Rule of Life is used in one's life.

APPENDIX A

COMPOSING A PERSONAL RULE OF LIFE

A personal "Rule" consists in a code of defined the actions we will take and the prohibitions of defined actions we will abstain from, in order to achieve our discerned mission from God in the world. Therefore it is first necessary to compose a statement of our mission, or goal, or purpose in life, as we believe God has given it to us. In writing our religious mission statement, we should be completing the thought in the sentence of Jesus for our own lives: "For this I was born and for this I have come into the world". Your mission statement is the answer of your faith discernment to the questions: "Why have you been born? For what purpose are you alive on the earth?" What does God want you to accomplish before you die? The Father sent Jesus and Christ sent you into the world. At this time in your life, what have you been sent to do?

THE PERSONAL MISSION STATEMENT

"As the Father sent me, so I send you". We believe this statement of the Lord Jesus is meant personally for every Christian. In composing your mission statement, answer the question: "*What is the mission the Lord Jesus is sending me to accomplish at this moment of my journey through the world.*"

We know that our "given circumstances" are His choice for us, things like...the time and place of our lives, the ethnic, cultural, the financial and medical conditions of our lives, our psychological and intellectual gifts and limitations, and so on. These must be embraced in our mission statement.

We know that our mission is a mission to enter into love relationships with the people God places in our lives from conception to death. Therefore our Personal Rule will identify these relationships and discern what is required of us to engage in them in the most faithful and loving way possible.

Our mission statement should not be too long. Mention only the most important people and circumstances that Christ is sending us to embrace in faith and love.

Our mission statement may be compared to the destination of a road trip. The Personal Rule, then, is comparable to the details of the directions leading to the destination.

The Rule of Life enumerates the actions (and abstentions) that we believe will bring us to the destination: fulfillment of our mission from Christ in the world.

Your mission statement will refer to (1) your call to personal sanctification (2) your primary personal relationships, (3) your chief responsibilities (4) your special

The following explains how the Personal Rule of Life is used in one's life.

personal gifts, and (5) your most heartfelt desires. It will also take into account (6) your personal limitations, life circumstances, and your sufferings.

EXAMPLE:

- (1) Your call to personal sanctification. God wants me to be a disciple of Jesus Christ: faithful, prayerful, centered, contemplative, loving.
- (2) Your primary personal relationships. God called me to be wife/husband, (or allowed me to suffer widowhood or divorce). God called me to be parent to (name the child) or close friend of (name the persons).
- (3) Your chief responsibilities. God called me to serve as (specify your main responsibilities in life).
- (4) Your special personal gifts. God has given me the gift(s) to... Name your gifts...speaking, art, administration, love of the poor, care for the elderly etc.
- (5) Your most heartfelt desires. Listen to and discern the deepest longings and aspirations of your heart and spell them out. Then ask God in prayer if He wants you to pursue any of these desires as part of your mission in life. When you have discernment, your Mission Statement should say: God has sent me into the world to become a nurse...to be a missionary...to marry, etc.
- (6) Your personal limitations, sufferings, and life circumstances. God wills only our consummate happiness. But in the world disordered by human sin, God allows evil things to come upon us that He uses to serve our greater blessing and glory. These "accidents" of life include some of the important determinants of our life in this world: our genetic and material inheritance, the place on earth and time in history of our birth, the defects of our mind and body, the social conditions of war or peace, the accidental circumstances of life that limit or damage our human body and mind. Hateful in themselves, these evil things are the cup our Father is giving us to drink in this world for our ineffable glory in His Presence in the world to come. Therefore, while we use every possible means to overcome these evils, we accept what remains for us to bear as our Cross that will bring us to glory. Our Personal Mission Statement must include our acceptance of the Cross. "God has allowed me to be born poor in a broken family without love...God has allowed me to be born with poor sight...or with this congenital illness...or God permitted me to lose my wealth...etc. AND I ACCEPT THIS SUFFERING AS MY PARTICIPATION IN THE PASSION OF CHRIST MY LORD. We fulfill our mission from God in the world more by the evil things we suffer in loving faith than by the good things we do. For so it was with the Son of God who completed His mission from the Father on the Cross.

On any journey, you need a destination before you can have directions to arrive there. Your Mission Statement is your destination in this world. Now you need specific directions telling you what roads and turns you need to make to arrive at your destination.

The following explains how the Personal Rule of Life is used in one's life.

Aiming at your Mission Statement as your target, you will now determine concrete actions that you will take to fulfill your Mission. You may also proscribe particular actions that you know will hinder you from fulfilling your Mission.

THE PERSONAL RULE OF LIFE

Go back to each item of your Mission Statement in succession and write down for each one a few of the main things you feel called and empowered by God to do in order to accomplish that part of your Mission in life. Include the prohibitions you feel God wants you to make of any actions that hinder you from completing the work God is sending you into the world to accomplish. For example, look at Mission Statement (1) above, concerning personal sanctification. What actions will you take to seek sanctification? You might put in your Rule things like: A routine of daily prayers, a period of meditation, a time for Lectio Divina, and a time for the Jesus Prayer. On the ascetic side, to make time for your devotions, you might add a proscription against watching TV more than 30 or 60 minutes a day.

The ensemble of these directives will be the body of your Personal Rule of Life. Remember that the details of your Rule must always be held tentatively because the ever changing circumstances of life call upon us to modify our Rule accordingly. In the Fellowship of Jesus, we make simple changes in our Rule on our personal discretion, but significant changes should be confirmed by our spiritual director and then by the Servant.

THE PRINCIPLE OF EMERGENCY

It is a very common experience that something comes up in our lives unexpectedly that seriously threatens our spiritual life. At such times, we need to shift our conscious focus of attention to the emergency. Examples would be: loss of health, a death in the family, a serious legal problem, a deep moral fall, a crisis in marriage, etc.

At these times, we must give primary attention to the crisis at hand. The principle of emergency means that our number one rule of life suddenly becomes the need to address the emergency in faith, trust, and love.

The following explains how the Personal Rule of Life is used in one's life.

APPENDIX B

RULE TO SPIRIT

A Personal Rule of Life leads to Spirit-ruled Life of Contemplative Love

CONTEMPLATIVE LOVE

Here is a brief statement of the ascetic and mystical goal of Christian life that we seek in the Fellowship of Jesus: *To live and act in the world from a state of consciousness illumined by the revelation of Jesus and inspired by the Indwelling Spirit.* The Truth of Jesus will fill our mind and Love from His Spirit will fill our hearts. Contemplative love will express itself in our thoughts and behavior. To attain this state of contemplative love, the mind and heart must be renewed through long practice of dwelling in, and living by, the mind of Christ. In the measure that we come into this Life, we will act spontaneously and creatively under the inspiration of the Spirit of God. This life in the Spirit requires a high degree of freedom from domination by selfish emotional impulses and object-driven motivation. Our ascetic life consists chiefly in putting these selfish impulses to death.

A Personal Rule of Life has a place in our spiritual journey, but it is not our goal. Our goal is to be inspired by the Spirit in contemplative love.

PERSONAL RULE OF LIFE

THE INFORMAL PERSONAL RULE OF LIFE

Every human being follows an informal rule of life even without knowing it. It is called conscience. Personal moral conscience is the unwritten universal and obligatory "rule of life" for every woman and man. A being without conscience is not a human person.

It is important to become consciously aware of how we are being led, or misled, by the dictates of our natural conscience. Conscience is simply consciousness of the moral quality of our behavior. Once we become aware of the internal imperatives that guide us, we can evaluate, accept, discard, and modify them in the light of our faith. If we fail to subject our conscience to the discernment of our faith we are liable to become driven, even tyrannized, by our natural, and often erroneous, conscience. God's loving forgiveness is greater than our condemning conscience. God's upward call is beyond any moral ideal our conscience can conceive. The wisdom and maturity of our conscience develops over time as we gain more knowledge, experience, and above all as we become more open and receptive to influence of divine grace upon our conscience. Our conscience is our natural personal rule of life. It must be transformed by the renewal our mind in the mind of Christ.

The following explains how the Personal Rule of Life is used in one's life.

THE FORMAL PERSONAL RULE OF LIFE

In the Fellowship of Jesus, we place no hope, no confidence, in our Personal Rule of Life as a way of sanctification. Neither do we embrace a Personal Rule of Life as a final guide to our daily living. Only the Spirit of Jesus sanctifies us and guides us.

In the Fellowship of Jesus, we compose a Personal Mission Statement and Rule of Life so that we can consciously embrace in heart and mind the life and mission we have from Christ in the world. Our mission from Christ and the good works He has prepared for us to walk in are God's gifts to us. Now we have the Spirit of God and by the Spirit we can know the gifts God has given to us. And we can write them down as our Personal Rule of Life.

Sadly, many Christians do not recognize their holy vocation. They often think that their state in life, married or single, parents or childless, etc. is an accident or a mistake. They sometimes think that some other way of life or some other circumstances of life would be a holy mission in the world. These deceived Christians look to external models of holy life. Perhaps they think that renowned Christians like Mother Teresa or Billy Graham or the Pope—these famous people have holy vocations while the rest of us are insignificant. The wealthy may imagine that they would be holier if they were poor. The married may think they would be better Christians if they were celibates. There are many more erroneous dictates of conscience that alienate a Christian from their true mission in the world. A Personal Rule of Life delivers us from these errors.

Composing a Personal Rule of Life is a conscious intentional work of sculpting our moral consciousness in the light of revelation. Our Rule identifies the particular gifts, sufferings, circumstances, vocational activities, and above all, the personal relationships that are given to us by Providence. This is our real mission in life. It is better than anything else that could be thought or imagined,

Each Christian's mission from God in the world is unique. Every person's mission is as valuable as the mission of any other Christian. We should consider others better than ourselves, but we must not bow down before any hierarchical pyramid of "saints". We are all brothers and sisters, equals—including the famous personalities of Christian history. Jesus alone is the Exalted One. The canonized saints themselves would be the first to agree with these statements.

In composing our Rule we should be transparent to our spiritual director and receptive of his/her counsel, but final responsibility belongs to each person. Our Rule should be born of prayer, reflection, and *tentative* discernment. We keep our Rule *tentative* because our discernment is imperfect and God can always reveal new things to us about our mission in the world.

A Rule is not a list of ideals. It is not a set of commandments and prohibitions. A *Personal Rule of Life is a written account of the gifts you have received from God.* Our Mission Statement and Rule identify the essential elements of our mission from God in

The following explains how the Personal Rule of Life is used in one's life.

this world and our personal responsibilities toward God, ourselves, and others. We look with confident prayer to God for grace to carry out the mission He gave us.

Early Christian monks discerned a foundational principle of the spiritual life in Christ and it can help us to understand the place of a Rule in our lives. They said that we increase in our contemplative knowledge of God (*Theoria*) by practicing the deeds of agape-love (*Praxis*). Our Personal Rule of Life is the *Praxis* that will lead us to *Theoria*, that is, to the higher knowledge of God in contemplative love.

RULE TO SPIRIT

The paradoxical goal of our conscious practice of a Personal Rule of Life is to become increasingly unconscious of practicing it. None of us keeps the Ten Commandments in mind all day, but the Spirit keeps us obedient to them. We practice a Personal Rule of Life, that is, a spiritual discipline, in order to come to the fullness of union with God in the Spirit of Jesus. Life in this Spirit has no rules, no disciplines. The more completely and constantly the Holy Spirit rules our lives, the less we will be directed by a written Rule of Life.

Conscious intentional practice of our Personal Rule never disappears entirely in this life. But as our life of agape-love increases, our living by rules decreases. If we consciously decided to abandon the disciplines of our Rule entirely, we would fall into the heresy of Quietism. At the other extreme, if we consciously practice Rules in excess, we will become obsessed by them and they will leave no place for the impulse of the Spirit. This legalistic fidelity to our Personal Rule of Life would replace our spontaneous Life in the Spirit.

Our intended goal in composing and living by a Personal Mission Statement and Rule of Life is to become spontaneously led by the Holy Spirit at each moment of life. The critical issue in using a Personal Rule is to avoid making it an end in itself. Rules and disciplines are only *means*; they are meant to lead us to a spiritual maturity in which *all of the experiences of our daily life become occasions for, and expression of, our consummate union with God.*

In the beginning of our spiritual journey we focus much of our attention on special religious objects (such as the church, the Bible, and the sacraments) and on particular time-limited religious disciplines (such as solitary prayer, worship, and meditation). As we proceed on the spiritual path, these sacred objects and activities progressively share their "sacredness" with all the other things and actions that make up our lives. With the unique exception of sin, every being and every action and every event in daily life progressively reveals its hidden treasure: the Gift of God, His Presence, and His Love. At this point, the Rules which foster union with God do not cease; they soften and blend into the whole fabric of our life--all of which is now experienced as sacred union with God.

A Rule of Life gives discernment and focus to our conscious efforts. Practice of a Rule for the love of God increases our receptivity to the subtle guidance of the Holy

The following explains how the Personal Rule of Life is used in one's life.

Spirit in our hearts at every moment. Finally, our Rule should yield and blend into the spontaneous flow of our life...a life that Jesus is giving to us and living in us in ever more abundance.

The following explains how the Personal Rule of Life is used in one's life.

PERSONAL RULE IN THE PERSONAL LIFE

In the Fellowship of Jesus, the Personal Rule of Life serves two purposes. The first is the purpose of the original composition. The second is the on-going use of the Personal Rule. Explanation of each follows.

PURPOSE OF COMPOSING A PERSONAL RULE OF LIFE

We compose a Rule of Life in order to take full conscious and intentional possession of the mission we have received from Christ Who sends us into the world. In our religious community, we are committed to the faith that the Lord Jesus sent us at birth and sends us continuously into the world to accomplish the work He sends us to do. This is our spiritual food: To do the Will of Him Who sent us.

Our personal mission from Christ is the gift of God that includes within itself all of the gifts of good works that God prepared from the foundation of the world that we should walk in them. We have the Spirit of God. By the enlightenment of the Spirit, we can know the gifts that God has given us. We have, therefore, the light and grace of God to know what is our mission from Jesus in the world. We were born for this and for this we have come into the world: to fulfill the mission for which we were sent.

When we compose our Personal Rule of Life for the first time, we are carrying out a spiritual act of discernment. We are recognizing our gifts. We are owning our calling and taking possession of our divine empowerment for our lives in this world.

Keep in mind that all Christians, indeed, all human beings, are directing their daily choices in life by an implicit personal rule of life that is often unexamined in conscious reflection. The universal rule that guides the conduct of every person is their conscience.

To compose a Personal Rule of Life is for a Christian to reflect in the light of divine revelation upon the mission God sends him or her to accomplish on earth. Every mission is always composed of the deeds of love and the sufferings of love given to us by the Spirit for the people to whom Christ sends us.

Those who do not reflect in faith upon their mission in life are in danger of being led by ignorance, prejudice, and mistaken values. When Christians subject their motives and goals to reflective and prayerful spiritual discernment, they can strip away the well-meant but erroneous moral values that lead them away from their mission from Christ in the world.

In composing the Personal Rule of Life we make a written statement of our faith in our mission from the Lord Jesus. As we write it, we can have the

The following explains how the Personal Rule of Life is used in one's life.

confidential help of mature men and women of faith. They will pray with us as we discern. They will offer gentle counsel for our consideration. When we complete our Personal Rule of Life, our spiritual family in the Fellowship of Jesus will confirm our discernment of our mission. They will join us in faith in our mission and strengthen us by prayer and encouragement.

All Christians are accountable to God for the completion of their mission in life. In the Fellowship of Jesus, we also make ourselves accountable to one another for our fidelity to our mission expressed in our Personal Rule of Life. We engage in mutual accountability, not to create guilt and shame, but to exchange the blessings of confirmation, prayers, and companionship of friends in our mission in life.

ON-GOING USE OF THE PERSONAL RULE OF LIFE

We do not use the document of our Personal Rule of Life to guide our lives on a daily basis. We depend in trust upon the guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit moment by moment each day.

The Personal Rule of Life, once composed, serves the way the Constitution of the United States was meant to serve in our daily civic life: a governing foundation for life, but not the object of continual attention.

The better example of the way we are to use our Personal Rule in our daily life is to recall the way we use the Ten Commandments. We are living by the directives of the Ten Commandments all day every day. But we rarely bring them into conscious attention.

Like the Ten Commandments, our Personal Rule of Life should not be the object of our attention on a daily basis—until we transgress it!

Let us continue considering the parallelism between the Commandments and our Personal Rule in our daily lives. The sixth commandment tells us that “thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife”. We are implicitly guided by this holy law of God at all times, without giving it our conscious attention. However, when we (men!) are surfing the Web and we stumble upon an item that invites us to a page that will show us images of beautiful women...suddenly, the sixth commandment is urgently at stake! The purpose of the Law, the purpose of our Personal Rule of Life in our daily life is to serve as perimeter that we should not transgress. The Law and our Personal Rule will accuse us and call us to repentance. When that happens we should immediately seek an elder and make our confession.

The Personal Rule of Life is meant to protect our faithfulness to our mission from Christ in the world. It is our “fail safe” system that catches us if—may God forbid—we begin to fall away. The real source of our inspiration and power is the Holy Spirit Who works in all our thoughts, words, and actions. The inspiration of the Spirit never transgresses the Commandments or the directives of our Personal

The following explains how the Personal Rule of Life is used in one's life.

Rule of Life. On the contrary, the leading of the Spirit enables us to fulfill the requirements of the Law of God (expressed in all biblical commandments) and the higher calling of our mission from Christ in the world (expressed in our Personal Rule of Life).

We write our Personal Rule of Life as an act of explicit faith in our mission from Christ in the world. We entrust ourselves to the leading of the Holy Spirit on a moment by moment basis to carry out our mission. The Law of God, our own conscience, and the directives of our Personal Rule of life are fulfilled as we become women and men who allow the Risen Lord Jesus to live us in all we think and say and do...and suffer for love of the people to whom Christ sends us. This we ask and in this we trust, through Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen.