

WELCOME TO THE IMMANUEL CHURCH-ON-THE-HILL BENEDICTINE COMMUNITY

“LISTEN CAREFULLY, MY CHILD, TO THE MASTER’S INSTRUCTIONS, AND ATTEND TO THEM WITH THE EAR OF YOUR HEART. THIS IS ADVICE FROM A FATHER WHO LOVES YOU, WELCOME IT AND FAITHFULLY PUT IT INTO PRACTICE” -- The Rule of St. Benedict

Welcome to the Benedictine Community.

We welcome you to the Immanuel Church-on-the-Hill Benedictine Community. We are honored to be companions on the journey with you. Just as food is essential for human life, so are companions. The word “companions” comes from two Latin words: *com*, meaning “with”, and *panis*, meaning “bread.” Companions nourish our heart, mind, soul and body. We welcome you to gather with us as Companions on the journey while drawing wisdom from selected reading material in the Benedictine tradition.

This booklet provides you with an introduction and overview of the Immanuel Church-on-the-Hill Benedictine Community and the life of St. Benedict and his Rule. It explains how you can connect, participate and grow with other companions on the journey. Together, St. Benedict will be our guide and our companion on our spiritual journey to live into our Baptismal Covenant, follow Jesus’ Great Commandment and meet the challenge of living as Christians in today’s world.

Who We Are

The Immanuel Church-on-the-Hill Benedictine Community emerged over a decade ago out of conversations amongst seekers of a balanced Benedictine life and participants in Benedictine courses offered in Fall 2009 and Spring 2010 School of the Spirit sessions. The vision created a lay, ecumenical, contemplative and inclusive group of seekers that brings the kind of balance and harmony that is usually experienced in a cloistered community to our own local gathering place in Northern Virginia and beyond.

Why We Use the Rule of St. Benedict

The life and practice of the Immanuel Church-on-the-Hill Benedictine Community is rooted in the teaching and model of St. Benedict, a sixth century Christian saint who established a monastic community in the hills of the Italian countryside. Those who lived in this tiny monastery ordered their lives around a guiding document known as The Rule. The document offered a framework for living that addressed both the spiritual and physical realities of daily living. The Rule embraced principles of stability, obedience, and increasing harmony with self, God, and others. Individuals who chose this way of living partnered intention with action. They chose to be faithful in prayer and honor community. They chose to faithfully listen and wholeheartedly follow the call of God as they understood it. And they chose to continually allow their own spiritual transformation to bring reconciliation to the world. These same choices ground the intention and action of the Immanuel Church-on-the-Hill Benedictine Community. For more than 1500 years, monastic communities have understood and followed the wisdom and balance St. Benedict modeled. And his model continues to shape the lives of spiritual seekers both inside and outside the monastery walls. Benedictine author Joan Chittister writes that the Rule of Benedict is not “...concerned with a single time and place, a single view of church, a single set of devotions, or a single ministry.” She suggests that the Rule “...is concerned with life: what it’s about, what it demands, how to live it. And it has not failed a single generation.” (Excerpt from a Guide for the Community of Reconciliation at Washington National Cathedral.)

Gathering in Community and How We Gather

“All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ, for He himself will say: I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” - Rule of St. Benedict 53:1

The Immanuel Church-on-the-Hill Benedictine Community will be anchored by a twice monthly gathering that consists of small groups of 10-12 people to reflect on the Rule of St. Benedict. These gatherings shape and inform our lives and acknowledge the importance of each person's voice, as we share our personal experience of specific aspects of the Rule and strive to live more deeply into Christ. Benedict's model teaches that creating an atmosphere of welcoming and growth is fostered by our welcome of guests and a structured approach to our gatherings. For guests, we will have copies of the text that we are reflecting on and the text for next time available at our gatherings. This practice enables guests to participate and discern their continued involvement without purchasing the book immediately. We also introduce ourselves whenever guests are present. Lastly, we orient guests to our structured gathering discipline by the facilitator reading our opening statement at each meeting, which includes a description of our gathering structure. The Immanuel Church-on-the-Hill Benedictine Community also facilitates learning about Benedictine gatherings, events, communities and resources that encourages us to integrate Benedictine spiritual practices into our everyday living, both as an individual and as a community.

Reading

The assigned reading for each gathering is a brief passage from the Rule and/or selected material from our current Benedictine-inspired book. For guests, Benedictine leaders will provide our current reading material when they welcome you.

Reflecting

The structure of the gatherings is as follows. The facilitator reads the opening statement and the closing prayer at each gathering. A predetermined leader prepares a “lead” for the gathering, based upon the assigned text. That leader starts with material he or she has prepared, to help us listen with the ear of our hearts to that aspect of the Rule which we have been studying, and speaks for up to 10 minutes. Then we go around the circle for each person to give his or her reflection on the text as they feel comfortable or they may pass at their turn. To encourage free sharing, we remind ourselves in the opening statement that we are there to give our own reflections and to learn from the experience of others. We do not comment directly on another person's reflection and we do not give advice. We go around the circle as many times as time allows. We meet for one hour twice each month, and we are careful to start on time and end on time.

Reading List

Recommended reading to help you more fully enter into Benedictine Spirituality, here are some books that can give you more information:

Rule of St. Benedict

St. Benedict's Toolbox: The Nuts and Bolts of Everyday Benedictine Living by Jane Tomaine (Morehouse 2005)

Living with Contradiction: An Introduction to Benedictine Spirituality by Esther de Waal (Morehouse 1998)

The Rule of Benedict: Insight for the Ages by Joan Chittister, OSB (Crossroads, 1992)

Always We Begin Again: The Benedictine Way of Living by John McQuiston II (Morehouse, 1996)

Who to Contact

If you are accepting our invitation to be a part of these gatherings, please contact us prior to the gathering, so that we can extend our warmest hospitality to you and answer any questions you might have regarding the Immanuel Church-on-the-Hill Benedictine Community. Although you are not committed to a set number of gatherings, we ask that you honor Benedictine stability which is practiced first and foremost by setting an intention to a place and group of people in the belief that it is this place and these people who will help you find God.

Contact us for more information: at the Parish, call 703-370-6055 or, reach out to David Atwood, Barbara Fornoff, or Dana Hengst.