

The School of Theology, 2023

# Rule of Life

Formation and Peer Accountability

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## 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.

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## **Advisors**

To this end, at the beginning of their junior year, each student will be assigned to a faculty advisor. This faculty member will continue to be their advisor throughout the duration of their coursework. Each faculty member, therefore, will advise a group of students across SOT's programming, at all stages of their progress toward ordination, if applicable, and graduation. The faculty advisor will be one of the team assigned to write M.Div students' junior and middler evaluations.

Within the group, the advisor should act as a guide through the larger, holistic process of formation. The advisor should meet with their Rule of Life group regularly. There is a designated space in the calendar on Thursday afternoons between 4-5 PM CT, although the group may decide to meet for longer less often, for example, monthly for two hours, at a place decided on by the group. Attendance is mandatory, and advisors should notify both Dean Matis and Dean Jackson if students miss multiple meetings.

## **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 to live faithfully according to God's will.

## **The Focus**

At the beginning of the school year, students should draw up a draft Rule of Life, incorporating a balance of these elements. Students do not need to submit the entirety of their rule of life to their advisor, although they certainly may, and they should be prepared to discuss aspects of it. The focus of the Rule of Life groups should be whether each

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student is living according to their rule of life, if they need encouragement, or if they are finding that their rule of life is unrealistic and needs adjustment in accordance with circumstances. The Rule of Life groups are intended to provide a measure of peer accountability and support as all journey together in living into their Christian vocation.

Students should expect to keep discussions in Rule of Life confidential, and to protect one another as they would any pastoral relationship. Faculty advisors may find that a particular student's disclosures suggest the need for further support from the Office of Community Life: for example, if the student requires counseling, spiritual direction, or other forms of support. Faculty should refer these concerns immediately to Dean Jackson. Rule of Life groups in no way replace these services and are not intended to imitate them, nor should faculty advisors act as therapists or even as spiritual directors. They should help the student navigate their time in seminary and help the student keep in mind the wellbeing of the whole person as they head forward into ministry.

### **Further Resources**

A typical Rule of Life for a seminarian should include some, or all, of 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 time and money, and appropriate use of technology and social media. For many, it may include auricular confession, contemplative prayer and meditation, and retreats.

The Society of St. John the Evangelist (SSJE) offers a resource to help develop a rule of life: [\*Living Intentionally: A Workbook for Creating a Personal Rule of Life.\*](#)