

RULE OF LIFE



Teams of Our Lady

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INTRODUCTION

Teams offers concrete guidance to help us progress in our human and spiritual lives. This guidance draws particularly on the endeavors. Some of those endeavors relate to the couple and are shared by all the team members. However, as each team member is unique, the Movement requires everyone to set him/herself a personal endeavor, that is, a **rule of life**.

Throughout the history of Teams, the rule of life has had a **number of different definitions**. It is therefore important to clarify the concept of the rule of life, so that it can be better understood and practiced.

Father Caffarel drew his inspiration from religious orders when he put forward to the members, the idea of adopting rules. One of these rules is the 'rule of life.' This rule **respects everyone's freedom to respond in their own way to God's call**. It consists of choosing one or more points on which each of us can concentrate our efforts in order to progress.

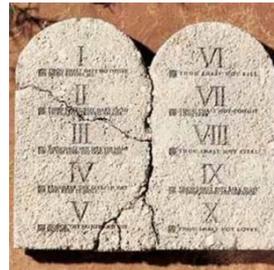
Far from being a "little" endeavor, the rule of life enables us to grow, in our desire to love, more fully

I. Where does the rule of life come from?

1 – Roots in the Bible

A - The Old Testament

In the Old Testament, the 10 commandments are the first rules of life given by God to humanity. (*the Decalogue*, Deut 5: 7-21)



B - The New Testament

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus proclaims *“it is not enough to say Lord, Lord, to enter into the Kingdom; we must do the will of my Father in Heaven.”* Matthew 7,21 & 24 - 27

The word “do” is a key-word in the Gospel. For example, scripture says we must *“do what is true”* (Jn 3: 21). In another text, Jesus says: *“Do this and you will live”*. He was affirming the answer given by a scholar of the law about the

commandment to love God and your neighbor. (Lk 10: 28).

St John explains: *“As the Father loves me so I also love you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete. This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you.”* (Jn15:9-12).

The Beatitudes (Mt 5: 3-12)

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth, (...)

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God (...)”

St Paul gives us practical suggestions in
Chapter 12 of the Letter to the Romans

“Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect. For by the grace given to me I tell everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has apportioned.” (Rom 12: 2-3)

“Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.” (Rom 12: 14-15)

“Let love be sincere; hate what is evil, hold on to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not grow slack in zeal, be fervent in spirit; serve the Lord.” (Rom 12: 9-11)

“Do not repay evil with evil; be concerned for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, for your part, live at peace with all.” (Rom 12: 17-19)

When he writes to the Corinthians too, **St Paul** gives us a rule of life

“Therefore, my beloved brothers, be firm, steadfast, always fully devoted to the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” (1 Cor 15: 58)

Moreover, in much of his writing, St Paul urges us to “*put on the new self*”.



2 – A rule of life for the monks: St Benedict’s rule

The rule of life for Benedictine monks helps us to better understand what a rule

of life can bring to our spiritual development.



Dom Patrick, abbot of a Benedictine monastery, gave a lecture to Teams in September 1996:

“... St Benedict’s Rule is aimed at circumstances very different from yours, at least at a material level, but in other respects, it is quite relevant. It is aimed

at those who plan to be together, to live together, to form a community... A rule is not made to be lived to the letter, so to speak, it is designed to serve as a benchmark.

... The Rule teaches us to live a love, **a personal love of Christ, following the Gospel**. Then the Rule teaches us that this love unfolds **gradually** in a **practical** and **tangible** way.”

The teaching of the Rule of St Benedict shows us how to follow gradually a path of obedience. It is successful because it is about the whole person; their intellect, emotions, physicality and spirituality. The rule is demanding without being impossible; it invites us to follow the path of faithfulness.

3 – The Saints

Saint Faustina says that “God’s will is itself love and mercy”. In choosing a rule of life, we learn how to respond to God’s love and mercy for each one of us.

She gives an example of the rule of life:



“I remind you, my child, that each time you hear the clock strike the third hour, you will have to immerse yourself in my mercy, adoring and glorifying it”.

Saint John XXI-

II writes: “Like all couples, you know life’s temptations. It is precisely to protect yourselves from them, and to support your efforts that you are in Teams. With the assistance of a priest, you find in



Teams, an invaluable help in discovering **the demands of spiritual life** and in facing, through the light of faith, the difficulties you will have to confront as couples and as parents, in the different stages of your life.”

4 – Father Caffarel

“If the mysticism of Teams aims to be real and lasting, there has to be a rule. Mysticism and rule, just like body and mind, cannot be separated. Mysticism has to inspire the rule; the rule has to protect and strengthen the mysticism. The rule has to be broad enough that it doesn’t restrict the personality or the mission of the couple, but at the same time it should be sufficiently demanding so that couples do not become apathetic.”



Fr Caffarel also said that: “from time to time we must examine our life in the light of God’s will. We must ask ourselves honestly and generously if we are faithful to God’s will, and if we should consider making changes that will help us respond more generously.”

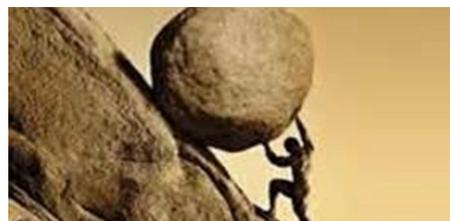
4 - Evolution of the Rule of Life in the Charter

It is interesting to see the stages that have led to defining the rule of life within the Movement.

In the early years, a few important endeavors framed the spiritual life of the couples in Teams. It was about faithfulness to the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist, personal and family prayer, and a meeting of the couple which was later to become the Sit-Down.



In 1947,
the Charter put forward a set of “obligations” to guide and support the couple’s efforts; the first of these being to choose a rule of life.



“Without a rule of life, there can be a lack of direction in the religious life of the spouses. The rule of life is nothing more than deciding which challenges each person intends to set for themselves, so that they can better respond to God’s call. It does not mean multiplying the ‘obligations’

(Les Equipes Notre-Dame Essor et mission des couples chrétiens)

In 1970,

the rule of life was redefined in a broader way, incorporating also the human aspects of the couple’s life. It appealed more to **personal conscience**. It was requested that **Christian asceticism** become a part of each team member’s life. Asceticism should not be seen in the narrow sense of self-denial, but as a *“direction for human and spiritual growth that each one follows under the guidance of the Holy Spirit”*.

(“Les Equipes Notre-Dame ESSOR et mission des couples chrétiens”)



Prayer and regular reading of the **Word** were no longer part of the rule of life but became separate **endeavors**.

In 1976,



the rule of life was defined as an **endeavor to be examined every month**.

In 1988,

In the **“Second Wind”** the **“rule of life”** is defined as *“an invitation to work towards personal wholeness and to find the truth about who we are.”*

This endeavor, just like the others, must be gradual, personal and show real effort.

II. Why have a rule of life

To gradually remove obstacles which hinder our ability to love God and our neighbor.

1 – To improve our relationship with God

To gradually discover the **will of God** for each one of us.

with the demands of Christian life, which Father Caffarel spoke about so often.

To focus on our **spiritual growth** with the aim of doing what pleases God rather than what pleases us.

To develop a real capacity to listen and **to dialogue with the Lord**; to let ourselves be loved by Him and to respond to His immense love.

To encourage us to find **nourishment in the Word and in the Eucharist**.

The rule of life is a powerful **means of conversion**. It always challenges us



2 – To improve ourselves

To examine our strengths and weaknesses, asking the Lord's help **to perfect a talent or correct** a fault.

To commit ourselves to life choices. To commit ourselves is very different from forcing or being forced. We each **commit ourselves freely** in order to progress both humanly and spiritually.

To develop our ability to discern and

our willingness to follow the goals we have set.

To make us, for example, less impulsive, less selfish and more attentive to the needs of those around us, or even to help us improve the way we express ourselves.

Because the rule of life leads us to discover ourselves, **our vocation**.

3 – To improve our relationships with others

To reflect on the **quality of our relationship** with our spouse and to discern what we can improve.



To be more **receptive to the needs** of those around us, particularly our spouse.

Similarly, for the relationships with our children and our extended family.



To reflect on our social and professional roles and on how we need to improve in these areas, so that we are **joyful witnesses of our faith**.

III. How to fulfil the rule of life?

1 - The “10 rules” of the Rule of life

- 1) The rule of life is a **personal choice**
- 2) It helps us **seek God’s will** for us
- 3) It should be **gradual** according to the principle of “small steps”
The Lord meets us where we are and leads us forward.
- 4) With our feet firmly on the ground, we can set **ambitious** but **realistic goals**
- 5) The rule of life is based on the “3P rule”: **petite, precise** and **practical**
- 6) It should be **challenging** but **flexible**
- 7) It can be **temporary**, or sometimes it may become a **rule for life**
- 8) It asks us for **perseverance** and commitment.
- 9) The **type of rule** we choose needs to be adapted according to the development of each individual and each couple.
- 10) The rule of life must be **reviewed** regularly to assess whether it is helping us to improve.



2 – Before choosing the rule of life

*PRAY

Silence and prayer are essential for discernment.

When we invoke the Holy Spirit, He advises and enlightens us.



We have to be attentive, and open ourselves with humility to the loving will of God, through reading the Word and daily prayer.

God speaks to us and tells us what He expects of us.

We gradually understand how much we are loved: the discovery of **Christ’s love** prompts us to transform our lives

*KNOW OURSELVES

It is necessary to regularly **examine our conscience**, with honesty and sometimes with courage: recognize our weaknesses and areas for improvement.

Two methods can be suggested, one as valuable as the other:



Detect the shortcomings

I need to correct; in my relationship with God, my spouse, my children, and the rest of my family.

1. Those I am easily aware of

- I don't take enough interest in my children's progress at school
- I don't play with them enough
- I get angry too often
- I too often neglect prayer or reading the Word of God
- - I only use my free time for myself...



2. Those I will only become aware of when I truly allow myself to be challenged by my spouse, by my Team, by the Word of God, by events.

- I don't take enough interest in my spouse's activities
- I drink too much

Recognize the gift of life God has given to me and how I have to develop it:

TESTIMONY: 1- *"I feel that I have to live the call to be joyful that the Lord constantly throws at me in the Bible: "Rejoice in the Lord, I shall say it again, rejoice!" (Phil 4, 4). Every time I pray or I read the Word of God, these calls to be joyful resound deeply in my heart. It is clear that the Holy Spirit asks me to put even more joy in my life. Even if others tell me I am a joyful person, my rule of life has to be to become even more joyful in all circumstances."*

2- *"I feel called to listen deeply to others. I already practice this, but I feel that I could do a lot better in that area."*

*ASK FOR HELP

Ask humbly for advice. We can be poor judges for ourselves. Sometimes we need to see through the eyes of others.

Nobody else can choose our rule of life, but those that the Lord has placed on our path can point out to us those tendencies we should avoid, and talents we should develop.



We can be guided by the **help** provided by our spouse (especially during the Sit-Down), our spiritual counsellor or an- another team member.

This mutual help has to be sensitive, full of love and patience.

But it is mainly our own conscience, and our own free will, that determines our rule.

3 – How to choose one’s rule of life?

* WHEN?

The end of the Sit-Down is a great time to choose one’s rule of life.

TESTIMONY: “At the end of our sit-down, we choose our rule of life, according to what has been highlighted during the dialogue. Depending on the month, this rule of life can be chosen by each person for themselves, for each other or even as a couple.”

The annual retreat can be an opportunity to undertake a review of our lives and take stock of our progress.

*IN WHICH DIRECTION?

To live as Christians, through God’s grace, we need to steer our rule of life following **three directions**:



- **God:** Does it allow me to respond to the call of God?
- **Me:** Does it free me from my weaknesses, from my useless attachments, from certain routines.
- **My neighbor:** Does it push me to act for *the good of my neighbor* according to God’s call? I can hear that call through the events that touch me or through my neighbor.

* EXAMPLES OF DIRECTION

The rule of life cannot be the same for all of us, because we are different. God has a plan for each one of us.

“Serve God first”

Spiritual life: difficulty in finding time to pray.

- Get up 15 minutes earlier each day to pray. Or don't read the papers or watch television before I have prayed. Read the Gospel every day. Go to Mass during the week.

Spiritual formation: difficulty understanding the Bible texts.

- Read commentaries on the Gospels. Communicate the riches discovered to my spouse and children. Pay more attention to God's Word in our life.

“Myself”

Balance in life: Are we so busy with work or with our own concerns that we neglect our spouse, our children?

Give them our time freely. Plan days with less strict schedules so that we can cope with the unforeseen, and we can avoid the temptation to look for efficiency above all.

Commitment: not to be involved in a number of activities, but to concentrate more fully on what I am doing



Personal life: Identify a shortcoming and concentrate on its improvement. For example, be more punctual, go to bed

earlier, respect the Highway Code, stop smoking...

“My neighbor”

Couple and family life: pay attention to others when coming home from work.

Set aside genuine time to meet and listen even if you are tired. Regularly organize an outing as a family or as a couple.

Team life: Pay attention to each team member.

Keep in contact with other teams. Take part in regional, national and international gatherings. Read the newsletters and talk about them



Professional life: Seek to deepen relationships with work colleagues.

Meet others as “people”. Practice compassion. Talk to them about important things in our lives. Don't speak badly of others.

Community life: Love the Church and its teachings and be good witnesses. Be more welcoming towards priests and religious. Take part in the life of the Church and its activities. Avoid destructive criticism of the Church and its priests, have a positive attitude towards them.

* THE RULE OF LIFE AS A COUPLE

The rule of life is personal but sometimes it can be **common** to spouses, if they have similar flaws to correct. They can then encourage each other. The bond between them will support them.

The rule of life must not aim only at individual progress, but look at **improving the couple's life**, as well as the family life and life in society.

For example, a father who decided to

spend his Sundays reading about the 'early Fathers of the Church,' would probably be at fault, as would a mother who spent all her evenings reading the Gospel.



4 – How to put it into practice?

It is useful to **write down one's rule of life** and to re-read it the following month

Choosing a tangible rule. Saying "I will love my wife (or husband) better", is an excellent objective but not a rule of life. Saying "I love you" every day, is a rule of life.

Making a daily examination of conscience: Have I observed my rule of life today? For my rule of life to become truly embedded in my life, it is important to

want to live it day after day and to commit to upholding it.



5 – Reviewing it every month

Every month, it is good to assess our progress, and ask ourselves about the obstacles to our success.

The rule of life can be changed when the improvement is achieved or when a new requirement emerges. This helps us to make the most of

opportunities to grow.

In the words of Alvaro and Mercedes Gomez-Ferrer, (former Responsible Couple of the ERI): "We must understand that a spiritual path does not always progress smoothly. Sometimes we have to start again and again. That is why we have to review the rule regularly."

6 – How to share the Rule of Life in the team?

We have to be wary of just relying on our own efforts. Sharing our endeavors during our monthly meetings is essential for ourselves, as well as for the other members of the Team. It gives us the opportunity to take stock of our situation, **to encourage each other** in the pursuit of our efforts, and to support each other in prayer.

There is **no obligation to reveal our rule of life** to other team members, but it

is important to know if each member has a rule of life and tries to follow it.

When a member shares his or her rule of life with other team members, the team needs to show **kindness and compassion**.

It is very important to respect the development of each person on their spiritual journey.



IV. Difficulties

1 – Choice of rule of life

The difficulty is to **discern** which rule of life will best make us grow to reach our potential.

Initially, we have to make an **effort to know ourselves**

2 – Lack of perseverance and personal discipline



Getting into a good habit requires time, possibly several weeks or even months.

A frequent pitfall is to **forget about it**.

It is therefore necessary to **persevere** even if we are under the impression that we are not getting anywhere.

3 – Taking the rule of life as an end in itself

The rule of life is not an end in itself but **a tool to make headway**.

We have to **separate the personal satisfaction** of achieving our goal, from the joy of **responding better to God's love and calling**.

4 – Attitudes to avoid

1– Losing heart

Sometimes we keep trying to achieve our rule of life each month but we don't seem to make any progress. We can lose heart and be tempted to give up on it.

Let us remind ourselves that we can do nothing on our own, **but that with God everything is possible**.

The solution is to entrust our rule of life to the Lord in prayer.

2- Dwelling on the word 'rule' rather than the word 'life'

If we focus on observing the discipline of the rule of life, rather than living a full life, we forget its primary aim. That is, to be open to the love of God and to blossom in that love.

The "Guide to Teams of Our Lady" invites us to "**respond with joy to God's call to love**".

3- Being stubborn

Another risk is to keep that same rule which we continue to fail at.

Maybe it would be better then, to

choose another rule of life, even if we were to go back to the earlier one at a later stage.

4- Collecting rules of life

If we feel like adding on a rule of life when the previous one is not yet achieved, **we have to make a choice** and not accumulate too many at the same time. This can create a risk of not being able to achieve any of them.

5 - Forgetting the previous rule of life

If we change our rule of life because we have achieved it, we must **continue** to build on that **achievement**.

V. The fruits

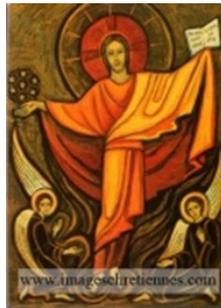
1 - Fruits of our union with God

11 – To grow in the love and the knowledge of God

Our knowledge of God is limited by our human understanding. While we are growing in our love for God, we are deepening our awareness of His infinite love for us.

2 – To better listen to God's calling

The rule of life helps us to discern the obstacles to our relationship with God. It allows us to listen more attentively to God. This listening is improved by practicing each of the other endeavors.



2 - Fruits for our personal development

1 – Shaping our character and our will

The rule of life helps us to **develop a talent** and to **correct a fault**

2 – Overcoming our bad habits, our selfishness

God has a plan for each one of us and the rule of life helps us to advance on the way to holiness.



3– Fruits in our way of life

1 – To keep ourselves on the path of growth

Climbers who want to reach the summit cannot allow themselves to wander on the mountain without purpose. **They have to be clear about their goals** and the path they must follow. They have to stop regularly to find their bearings.

It is in exactly the same way that the rule of life can help us on our human and spiritual path.

2- To find more peace

Be it by a deepening of our prayer life or by the correction of our faults,

progressing in our rule of life can bring us peace and serenity.

This will have a positive impact on our spouse, our family and even our Team.

3- To grow in love for others

In drawing from the enormous love God has for us, **our love for Him increases and overflows**, while making our love for others grow.

Saint Theresa of Avila also tells us that: “loving those we see around us is a sign of our love for the God we cannot see”.



CONCLUSION

The rule of life allows for a personal revision of those aspects of our lives which need to be changed or improved. It helps us see what is really essential in life. It calls us to live in truth and augments our capacity for relationships, for communion, for compassion and for joy. It encourages us to nourish our spirituality and to discern the will of God. It opens us to God's love and mercy.

The Rule of life is specific to each team member but it can sometimes be shared by the spouses. It has to be **practical, clear and regularly re-evaluated**. It defines our progress like landmarks. It helps us **to live our lives according to the Gospel**, and to respond to our vocation.

For those who believe that **holiness** is hard to achieve, the rule of life is a way of accomplishing reasonable, simple, and practical improvements. For those who feel themselves strongly called to holiness, it allows them to respond to this call with joy.

KEY WORDS

Effort

Goals

Progress

Humility

Precise

Practical

Concise

Perseverance

Commitment

Will

Holiness

Vocation

Simplicity

Flexibility

