HERITAGE, TRADITION, AND IDENTITY

A Collection of Resources and References Related to the Mission of Benedictine University

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"Benedictine Heritage"

Benedictine University
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THE MISSION, CHARACTER, AND COMMITMENT
OF BENEDICTINE UNIVERSITY

THE MISSION

Benedictine University dedicates itself to the education of undergraduate and graduate students from diverse ethnic, racial, and religious backgrounds. As an academic community committed to liberal arts and professional education, distinguished and guided by its Roman Catholic tradition and Benedictine Heritage, the university prepares its students for a lifetime as active, informed, and responsible citizens and leaders in the world community.

THE CHARACTER

The Education Program

Benedictine University fulfills its commitment to the liberal arts, teacher education, and professional programs through excellence in teaching and interaction between students and faculty members. A liberal arts core prepares all undergraduate students to participate fully in a diverse and dynamic society, balancing their rights and duties as individuals with the demands of the common good. Professional education at the undergraduate and graduate levels builds on the liberal arts background of students, is multidisciplinary in nature, and prepares graduates for roles of leadership and social responsibility.

The Benedictine Heritage

Benedictine University is grounded in the spirit of the founders who based their lives and work on St. Benedict's Rule for Monks, written in the early sixth century. Benedictine University builds its educational life and efforts on the same values which Benedictine men and women espouse:

* a search for God by oneself and with others,
* a tradition of hospitality,
* an appreciation for living and working in community,
* a concern for the development of each person,
* an emphasis on a life lived in balance,
* and a dedication to responsible stewardship of the earth.

Central to the Benedictine tradition is the celebration of community as a gathering of people who share a commitment to a common mission. The
university strives to develop an academic community that supports each person in the pursuit of knowledge and personal development. This undertaking will be achieved through a life enriched by the collegiate community in which the individual’s interest is tempered by a concern for the common good.

The Catholic Tradition

Benedictine University is guided by the Roman Catholic tradition which fosters a dialogue between religious and secular cultures, while promoting ecumenical and multicultural understanding. This type of education is designed to broaden and deepen a person’s vision of reality, to help all understand the dignity and uniqueness of each human person, and, at the same time, to place an emphasis upon the demands of freedom and social responsibility. In this environment religious faith and science are both directed toward the pursuit of truth, and both are strengthened through research and study. Central to the university’s educational tradition is the rigorous investigation of questions that deal with the ultimate purpose of life.

THE COMMITMENT

The university community assists students in becoming responsible persons who will make positive contributions to society. The Benedictine University community provides instruction, counsel, and life experiences that facilitate the acquisition of knowledge and the cultivation of skills to:

• communicate effectively, within and across cultural boundaries;
• reason and make informed judgments;
• identify and solve problems independently and cooperatively;
• develop a sense of intellectual curiosity and a desire for lifelong learning;
• understand the content, methodologies, and interrelationships of specific areas of study;
• pursue and communicate the truth;
• confront and resolve ethical issues and contribute to the work of social justice;
• benefit from diversity of opinion, abilities, and cultures;
• value the interdependence of cultures and nations;
• exhibit stewardship toward self and the environment;
• strive for a life lived in balance;
• and foster appreciation and individual development of creative expression.
Members of the Benedictine University community are encouraged to achieve a balance in their social and professional lives. They come to understand the self as an integrated physical, intellectual, and spiritual being. While the university values the dignity of work, it recognizes that balance with leisure and prayer are equally important. The commitment of the university to its mission and goals provides the university community with a sense of continuity with the past and a direction for the future.

A DIGEST OF THE VALUES REFLECTED IN THE RULE OF ST. BENEDICT

AWARENESS OF GOD ("Search for God")
To search for God not in the abstract but in the ordinary events of every day.
"We believe that the divine presence is everywhere." (RB 19:1)

LIVING IN COMMUNITY
To become fully who we are by our relationships with others.
"All things should be the common possession of all." (RB 33:6)

THE DIGNITY OF WORK
To appreciate the dignity of work in God’s world.
"When they live by the labor of their hands..." (RB 48:8)

HOSPITALITY
To offer warmth, acceptance, and joy in welcoming others.
"Let all guests be received as Christ." (RB 53:1)

JUSTICE
To work toward a just order in our immediate environment and in the larger society.
"So that in all things God may be glorified." (RB 57:9)

LISTENING
To hear keenly and sensitively the voices of persons and all created beings.
"Listen...with the ear of your heart." (RB Prologue:1)

MODERATION ("Life lived in balance")
To be content with living simply and finding balance in work, prayer, study, and leisure.
"All things are to be done with moderation." (RB 48:9)
PEACE
To strive for peace on all levels: with self, with others, and with God.
“Let peace be your quest and aim.” (RB Prologue:17)

RESPECT FOR PERSONS
To respect each person regardless of class, background, educational level, or professional skill.
“No one is to pursue what he judges better for himself, but instead what he judges better for someone else.” (RB 72:7)

STABILITY
To cultivate rootedness and a shared sense of mission.
“If he promises perseverance in his stability...” (RB 58:11)

STEWARDSHIP
To appreciate and to care lovingly for all the goods of both the place and the earth.
“He will regard all utensils and goods of the monastery as sacred vessels of the altar.” (RB 31:10)

BENEDICTINE PEDAGOGY / A DISTINCTIVE SPIRIT

• The BALANCE that has to be discovered between the principle of authority and the respect of the liberty of the individual.

• The SYNTHESIS between the reality of the community and the personal life of the individual. St. Benedict’s Rule recommends a “community personalism.”

• There must also be a BALANCE developed among the various elements of living. Today we might hear this referred to as a “wellness model of living;” intellectual, emotional, physical, spiritual, recreational.

• For St. Benedict, there is a refusal to let oneself be locked into the classical opposition between things profane and things sacred. For him everything is sacred and conveys a message of symbols and meaning.

A BENEDICTINE UNIVERSITY

• The importance given to a person-to-person relationship of teacher and
student in a climate of realistic trust.

- The care of improving the whole human person according to differing individual potentialities.

- A sensibility to these values: discretion, wisdom, balance, peace, beauty, joy.

- The respect of nature and the environment. This harmonizes with the respect of “time” which implies the virtue of patience.

- Openness to the Absolute, to God, to the sense of what is essential.

“BENEDICTINE VALUES AND BUILDING CAMPUS COMMUNITY”

The original article from which this material is taken was written by Dr. Carney Strange, professor of Higher Education and Student Affairs at Bowling Green State University in Ohio, with the collaboration of Father Harry Hagan, O.S.B., and appeared in The Cresset: A Review of Literature, Arts, and Public Affairs, published by the Valparaiso University Press, Valparaiso, Indiana, in the June/July 1998 edition. Dr. Strange conducted a workshop for the Student Affairs Division at Benedictine University in the spring of 1999. In this article, Dr. Strange maintains that

the concern with models of developmental structures today is not an exclusively modern idea. Basil the Great, a fourth century theologian, critiqued the hermit life suggesting that only community living can provide the feedback needed to know one’s defects and to move from self-centered pride to the generosity of love; therein may lie a compelling justification for a common residential base to learning, the seeds of what is called on many campuses today a “living-learning community.” All of these examples remind us that many of the foundational concepts and ideas in education today surely have been considered before in the history of humankind, including how to build and sustain community life.

Dr. Strange summarizes “the essence of Benedictine community” by focusing on “six foundational values embedded in such communities, and identified here in their original Latin nomenclature:”

- *Traditio et Regula* (Tradition and Rule) = the importance of both the lived (tradition) and the documented (rule) experience of community members.
• *Stabilitas* (stability) = underscores the importance of commitment to a specific community of people in a particular place.

• *Conversatio* = the importance of a commitment to change and growth, becoming more and more what we are called to be.

• *Ora et Labora* (Pray and Work) = the importance of the interior and the exterior life, their integration and balance.

• *Obedientia* (Obedience) = the importance of listening carefully and giving over of self to others in trust.

• *Hospitalitas* (Hospitality) = being open to others who come from beyond the community.

Dr. Strange asks the question, "What meaning do these ideas have for the goal of building community on college campuses?" He provides a model as follows (remember he is writing from a state university for professional student development colleagues!), and he suggests that "there are points where certain aspects of community building can be used to define and focus the primary mission of these functions, services, and programs."

**ENTERING:** The primary mission of these services, functions, programs, and places is to introduce and to facilitate newcomers (students, faculty, staff, visitors) to the institution (e.g., admissions, enrollment management, orientation, financial aid, student union, bookstore, grounds keeping, physical plant, staff development, information office, freshman seminar program).

- *Hospitalitas*
- *Traditio et Regula*
- *Stabilitas*

**ENCULTURATING:** The primary mission of these services, functions, programs, and places is to engage students in the process and work of living and learning within the institution (e.g., residence life, student activities and organizations, counseling, career planning, discipline, campus ministry, cooperative learning, academic advising, health and wellness center, athletics and recreation, multicultural affairs, learning services, special services.)

- *Conversatio*
- *Ora et Labora*
- *Obedientia*

**EXITING:** The primary mission of these services, functions, programs, and
places is to culminate the students’ experiences toward their next step beyond the institution (e.g., placement, alumni/ae and development, commencement, continuing education).

- *Conversatio*
- *Stabilitas*
- *Hospitalitas*

“We challenge educators to reexperience this Benedictine tradition, nurturing the wisdom of its Rule, as the Rule has nurtured and sustained countless generations before. After all, Benedictine spirituality ‘deals with the issues facing us now—stewardship, relationships, authority, community, balance, work, simplicity, prayer, and spiritual and psychological development’ (Chittister, J. The Rule of St. Benedict: Insight for the Ages. New York: Crossroads, 1992). This is an agenda for building campus learning communities.

**THE BENEDICTINE WAY AS A COUNTER-CULTURAL PATH**

A summary is provided here of the Benedictine values identified in a talk given by The Rev. Brian C. Taylor at Benedictine University, Lisle, Illinois, on March 22, 1995. Fr. Taylor is a priest of the Episcopal Church, married, and the father of two sons. A copy of the complete talk may be obtained on request from Fr. David Turner, O.S.B., in the University Ministry Center.

- **Ordinariness**: The Rule of St. Benedict and the Benedictine tradition through the centuries have modeled a way of doing life, doing spirituality, that values the ordinary. There is actually an emphasis placed upon ordinary life as something to be honored and respected. This is completely counter-cultural. Basil Hume said, “The Rule of St. Benedict makes it possible for ordinary folk to live lives of quite extraordinary value.” When you look at other religious orders through history often you see spiritual heroes, real “stars” (such as St. Francis or John of the Cross) that stand out because they are quite unusual in their practice and individuality. But there is something about the Benedictine life that makes the Benedictine monk anonymous. How many famous Benedictine monks can anyone name?

  Benedict felt that holiness was to be found in the everyday, broad path. Benedictine life is expressed through such mundane activities as systematic prayer with scripture, study, work, community, and he says "here is the place where we meet God:" not by going off into some cave and looking for twinkling lights. Benedict offers a kind of plain honesty. There is a simple trust in God, who made the world the way it is, in seeing our ordinariness as natural and