**CONVERSATIO/CONVERSION OF LIFE**

**Rule of Benedict**

RB 4:20-21 Your way of acting should be different from the world’s way; the love of Christ must come before all else.

Prol 49; 1.3; 1.12; 21.1; 22.2; 58.1; 58.17; 63.1; 73.1; 73.2

* 1. Benedict uses *conversatio* at the beginning, Prol. 49, and end of the Rule, 73.1-2, implying that *conversatio* is a process. Prol. 49 – As we progress on this *way of life*….
  2. Look at how *conversatio* is used in other places in the Rule
  3. *Conversatio* often means “following the monastic way of life”

RB 72:11-12 Let them prefer nothing whatever to Christ, and may he bring us all together to everlasting life.

**Beliefs**

* Conversio is a life-long process.
* The aim of conversion of life is purity of heart and service in the Reign of God.
* Conversio is both individual and communal.
* Conversio is God’s work in us with our cooperation.
* Conversio is a journey into one’s heart.
* Conversio involves us in the dying and rising of the Paschal Mystery.
* Conversio is a slow transformation of the whole person: body, mind, spirit, soul.
* Conversio happens as we faithfully live monastic life.

**Practices**

* Nightly examen
* Receiving feedback and considering how it might apply to oneself
* Managing change
* Managing conflict
* Journaling
* Sharing both joys and struggles with formation director/spiritual director and community members
* Humility
* Taking one’s whole self to God in prayer
* Confronting one’s false self/ego; living more and more from one’s true self
* Self-forgiveness and compassion
* Reflecting on one’s daily experiences
* Self-discipline
* Faithfulness to community life
* Welcoming prayer
* Centering prayer
* Emotional Freedom Technique
* The Tools for Good Works
* Practicing the Presence of God
* Keeping death daily before your eyes

**Resources**

Becker, Jane. “Reflection on Mutual Obedience.” January 17, 2015. Monastery Immaculate

Conception, Ferdinand, IN.

Branigan, Renee. “First Fervor Revisited,” *Benedictines* (Vol. No. Year?)

Casey, OCSO, Michael. “Conversatio and Reform: An Address to the St. Ottilien Benedictines,

Damme Priory, 4 October 2012,” in *Tjurunga* 82 (May 2012): 27-41.

Casey, OCSO, Michael. “The Benedictine Promises.” In *An Unexciting Life: Reflections on*

*Benedictine Spirituality*, 205-233. Petersham, MA: St. Bede’s Publications, 2005.

* After an initial overview, Casey has a section on each of the promises: conversion of life, obedience and stability

Casey, OCSO, Michael. *The Art of Winning Souls: Pastoral Care of Novices*. Collegeville, MN:

Liturgical Press, 2010.

* This is a helpful book for the formator. Not to be given to the novice.
* See especially the chapter on the formative conversation.

Chittister, Joan. “Monastic Practices: the Way of Conversion.” In *Wisdom Distilled from the*

*Daily: Living the Rule of Benedict Today,*160-180. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990.

Consiglio, Cyprian. “Bede Griffiths’ New Vision of Reality: Toward an Integral Christian

Spirituality,” *Benedictines* (Fall 2014): 6-21.

* The author speaks about the integration of body, soul and spirit in the spiritual journey.
* He brings in modern science and Ken Wilber’s understanding that there are many areas of development that a person needs to go through. It is important to attend to all the areas of development.

De Waal, Esther “Change,” in *Seeking God,* 69-84*.* Collegeville, MN, Liturgical Press, 1981.

Joseph, Karen, OSB. “To Be a Benedictine…To Be a Blessing: Seven Monastic Instincts.”

Kodell, OSB, Jerome. “Retrieving Conversatio,” *Benedictines* 67:1 (Spring/Summer 2014): 40-

43.

Nowell, Irene, OSB, “The Scriptural Call to Conversatio.” *Benedictines*  (see notes from 2003).

Tomaine, Jane. “Conversion of Life: Openness and Transformation.” In *St. Benedict’s Toolbox:*

*The Nuts and Bolts of Everyday Benedictine Living*, 83-103*.* Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2005.

* The authorgives four practices that support conversion of life: Practicing the presence of God, keeping death daily before your eyes, the tools for good works and centering prayer and gives some guidance for each.

Dammertz, Victor. “The Promise of *Conversatio Morum Suorum*,” *Benedictines* (Summer,

1994): 26-35.

Nowell, Irene, OSB. “Turning and Being Turned,” *Benedictines* 36:2 (1981): 16-21, 29.

Ward, Daniel J. “Monastic Profession/Taking Vows,” *American Monastic Newsletter* 21:2 (June

1991).

* Read Dammertz, Nowell and Ward:

What is your understanding of *conversatio morum*? How is it related to “conversion”?

How do you experience *conversatio* as a process?

What do you find consoling in Dan Ward’s column?

How is making religious profession different from that of making a vow?

Do you think Benedict wanted to describe obedience, stability and *conversatio morum* as distinctly different commitments?

What has *conversatio* to do with “on-going formation of the perpetually professed?”

Veilleux, O.C.S.O., Armand “The Monastic Way of Conversion,” *American Benedictine Review*.

37:1 (March 1986): 34-45.

Wemhoff, Gertrude. “Conversatio Morum,” Monastic Institute, St John’s University, 1990.

* Read the following articles and be prepared to discuss the questions.

Klassen, John; Emmanuel Renner and Mary Reuter, Essay on “Catholic Benedictine Values in an Educational Environment,” St John’s University/College of St. Benedict, May 1, 2001.

Wemhoff, Gertrude. “Conversatio Morum,” Monastic Institute, St. John’s University, 1990.

Internet (Google or Goodsearch) – Check the web for “Fidelity to the Monastic Way of Life.”

Questions:

1. How have you experienced the need for changing the way you act because your actions didn’t reflect your values?
2. Robert Quinn uses the phrase “integrity gap” to talk about the distance between the values we profess and the values we actually live. When do you experience the largest gap between our stated values and our practice in this community?
3. What did you learn from Gertrude Wemhoff about the rite of profession?
4. Is *conversatio* a vow among three vows? Is it a vow at all?
5. What does your *conversatio* contribute to society?
6. What interesting things did you see/learn on the Internet?

**Skills/Personal Growth Plan**

Embraces *conversatio* as a life-giving process by:

* Continuing the process of growth and formation in the Benedictine way of life in this community
* Integrating growthful changes within herself and within the community
* Developing a sense of her own identity
* Fostering a sense of inner freedom
* Growing toward understanding her own heart
* Exhibiting an openness and willingness to be formed
* Listening attentively and responding to others

**Activities**

* Tools for Good Works – (Tomaine, 95-97) “In prayer, choose one or two tools to intentionally focus on and practice for the coming week.”