

Human Relationships



The following principles is derived from the ancient Rule of Benedict of Nursia who lived in the fifth century and left behind a great deal of wisdom.

Families or communities lead to individual growth and development but are also risky places. They are the environment where we learn to give and receive love. However, love costs – it demands that we share ourselves with others. Community is an antidote to unhealthy individualism which has become prevalent in the West. The Benedictine spirituality of community promotes mutual support, empowerment, teaching, and learning. It is based on love that doesn't use or exploit the other, that doesn't require equal payment in return, that is not emphasizing gratification of the self. To practise this love of living for others requires a total commitment to God.

True community or family is only formed when there is sharing of purpose, values, and commitment. The mutual love needs to emanate from the same Source. The purpose of a Christian community is to witness of Christ within and without the group, to grow so that each person can become something greater than themselves, to transcend one's individual life so that the community becomes the sacrament of human fulfilment. In community one has the opportunity to work out their connectedness to God, others, and themselves. It is in the interaction with others that our shortcomings – our ego – manifest. It is also here that we learn to control selfishness and practise love – where we are sanctified or made holy. Here too, we can afford to search, stumble, and fall, with the assurance that we'll be helped on our way by those with more wisdom and experience.

A well-adjusted family or community will balance bondedness with individual uniqueness and freedom. It will encourage personal expression of God-given gifts for the benefit of all. Equality and respect will be promoted towards all irrespective of age or status. Each person will have the right to be listened to and to get help as needed. All will serve and be served. This is a model for all of us in a world that has become excessively individual.

The Vietnamese contrast hell and heaven as follows: In hell, the people have chopsticks that are one metre long so that they cannot reach their mouths. In heaven, the chopsticks are the same, but the people feed one another.

Reference:

Joan Chittister, **Wisdom Distilled from the Daily: Living the Rule of St. Benedict Today** (HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), chapter 4.

Photo: Intellimon

Australian readers may find good values at [Fishpond](#) which sells discounted books and delivers them postage-free.