

# What Our Leaders Could Learn from the Benedictines

by Eric Schubert '92

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Before the last two regular Minnesota legislative sessions, policymakers gathered at the Humphrey Institute to discuss overcoming gridlock. Yet each time they return to the people's house, they seize opportunities to squander opportunity.

Before they and the governor meet again on Minnesotans' behalf, they'd benefit from insights of humble leaders whose adherence to centuries-old rules help them stay tethered to what is beneficial about the past while stepping boldly forward to shape tomorrow.

In 1856, five Benedictine monks left Pennsylvania for Minnesota. The men built Saint John's Abbey and Saint John's University. All are celebrating their sesquicentennial.

They carried *The Rule of St. Benedict*, a 73-chapter sixth-century guide for bringing individuals together to build vital, permanent monastic communities. Within its medieval prose are intentional acts such as listening, moderation, hospitality, humility, service, stewardship, empowerment, embracing change, respecting people, personal responsibility, learning, prayer and work.



Called "the little rule for beginners," it fuels collaborative leadership to take "what could be" to make "what is better." Among other things, Benedictines brought health care and schools, innovated in natural-resource management, preserved ancient global texts, built timeless architectural works and made Minnesota Public Radio possible. Ignoring merger mania, they maintain single-sex colleges and traditions within a unique coeducational experience.

*The Rule* worked yesterday; it works today, and tomorrow policymakers could borrow from it to seize opportunity instead of squandering it.

• **Listening:** Benedictines listen to all members of their community when making decisions. Rather than leading to weak groupthink, disciplined listening expands

possibilities and spurs decisiveness. St. Benedict says "listen with the ear of your heart."

• **Trust:** Benedictines fundamentally trust and extend hospitality. When individuals egregiously break trust, community members join to bolster what's broken.

• **Empowerment:** St. Benedict says "keep death daily before your eyes." In doing so, Benedictines empower individuals to take initiative for their community's common good.

• **Stewardship:** Benedictines protect and expand entrusted resources to make things better. Policymakers must realize that stewardship isn't simply about saving or saying no. It also means investing new dollars to innovate.

Br. Dietrich Reinhart, OSB, president of Saint John's University, says that Benedictines have built strong communities in Minnesota for 150 years because courageous people saw needs in the broader world, often anticipated them, endured opposition, and pulled together to make new things happen. That tradition of transformation to meet the deepest needs of others drives the Benedictines' story. And it's not over.

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