

Give some thought to what is behind the rules

AT the University of New Haven, where I teach, students have returned to campus and begun classes for the fall semester. So have area students not yet in college.

The very wet and rainy beginning to this summer probably has students and teachers both wishing that the school break might go on for another week or two. But the rules of the calendar call us back to another year of learning and discovery. The first few days of school, quite likely, will be given over to rules: making it clear how classes will be conducted, when assignments are due and when exams are scheduled.

Rules are an essential element of the exhilarating enterprise of education.

Rules are essential in virtually every human endeavor. Whether it's the political and legal systems, behavior on the job, the rules of the road or social behavior, sports or simply



MARTIN J.
O'CONNOR
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rules we establish in our homes to keep the peace and promote order, rules are everywhere. Every culture, every society, every organization, every family has rules of some sort. Rules help us get things done.

There is an unfortunate tendency to think of the life of faith exclusively in terms of rules. As important as rules are, it is important for people of faith to consider the reasons for the rules. Sometimes, even the best-intentioned people get lost in the details.

Through the ages, great religious figures such as Buddha, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad showed they were individuals who probed the underlying purpose of the rules of religious practice, and often challenged the religious conventions of their time and place. Their example provides people of faith with much to think about.

This certainly doesn't mean we are all free to break rules whenever we want or that we

decide what the rules ought to be. We all know better than that.

Sacred scriptures and precious religious traditions provide many with a rule and a way of life. Through the ages, faith traditions have been there to instruct and guide us so that we might live more purposeful and meaningful lives.

But, regrettably, sometimes we lose sight of the reason for the rules. Sometimes our worship and our observance can simply be going through the motions. Sometimes our hearts are not where they should be.

The life of faith calls us to so much more. All of our worship and all of our lives are meant to be a reflection of the rule that underlies all rules: the rule of love, compassion and justice.

Martin J. O'Connor is the campus minister at the University of New Haven and the deacon at St. Bernadette Church. Write to him at the University of New Haven, 300 Boston Post Road, West Haven 06516. E-mail: moconnor@newhaven.edu.

