

# *Footnotes*

"Life is half-spent before we know what it is." Irish  
Proverb

"The Rule" - the Story of Benedictine  
Monks in Newark



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by Barbara Backus

Last night I attended the world premiere of a documentary called "The Rule" at the [Montclair Film Festival](#). The film tells the story of St. Benedict's Prep, a school in the heart

of Newark run by the Benedictine monks of Newark Abbey. It shows how the monks and the school staff strive every day to improve the lives of inner-city African-American and Latino teenage boys.

The film doesn't flinch when it shows how the demographics changed Newark over the years, how the riots decimated neighborhoods, how poverty, drugs and the seventh highest murder rate in the country make it difficult to raise children. The core of the film shows how the school confronts the lack of trust, neglect, deprivation, and violence that can result from the absence of a father.

At St. Benedict's boys learn the tools of trust, of responsibility, of the dignity of work. The school provides boarding for some of its most vulnerable boys but most of the boys have to return to their own crime-ridden neighborhoods when the school day ends.

A Q&A followed with the film's directors, the school's headmaster, a teacher, and one of the students. When asked what he deemed the school's greatest success - besides the near 100% college acceptance rate of the boys - Father Leahy replied he is most gratified when a former student comes back for a visit and brings his own children.

The film's title derives from The Rule of St. Benedict, a book of precepts written by St. Benedict of Nursia which revolves around five practices: prayer, work, study, hospitality and renewal.

I enjoyed the film also as a sharp contrast to recent news reports of bigotry by a couple of other men who showed not only a lack of understanding but an uneducated view of a large part of our population.

This is the Montclair Film Festival's third year. Its lineup includes dramas, comedies, documentaries, shorts, family films, panels and special guests.