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# PORTRAITS

## Teaching with the Rule: Ivan Lamourt '86

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When “Dr. Lamourt” talks with students who live in the dangerous neighborhoods of Newark, New Jersey, he understands them. He grew up in those streets.

“I work with kids just like me. I was raised in Newark and I lost friends to the streets,” says the dean of counseling at St. Benedict’s Prep School. He now occupies an office in his old school, providing academic and emotional counseling to inner-city boys trying to overcome the struggle of urban life.



In Newark, a third of the population lives in poverty. The murder rate is one of the highest in the nation. The city’s high school graduation rate is 32 percent—but the little prep school has a near 100 percent college acceptance rate.

The school attributes much of that success to applying the precepts of the Rule of Saint Benedict. Emphasizing values like community, justice, stability, and commitment to the common good, its teachers have been so successful that they attracted the attention of filmmakers at Bongiorno Productions. Their documentary aired on PBS last fall. ([www.TheRuleFilm.com](http://www.TheRuleFilm.com))

In “The Rule,” Lamourt describes the challenges students face: “It’s real hard to do your math homework when someone’s shooting outside your window. It’s real difficult to finish your history project when your mother’s shooting heroin in the next room. Now, this child is not performing at the level you want him to.”

He explains, “We’re not talking about cognitive learning disabilities. We’re talking about significant emotional issues that impact the ability to think. So, we had to design a program that could help deal with those issues.”

The school, founded by the monks of Newark Abbey (originally called St. Mary’s Abbey, the same abbey that founded Saint Anselm College), uses tools such as an 11-month school year and experiential learning hikes—and the extensive counseling provided by Lamourt.

“When I was growing up here, people would leave as soon as they could. But the Benedictine value of community means you stay and make things better,” says the counselor. Living downtown, he puts his money where his mouth is. When the school ran a residential program, he and his wife (a teacher at the school) moved into the dorm for a year. “By being here, I’m saying, ‘Not everyone leaves. I’m here. Not only was I able to achieve, but I came back.’ That carries a lot of weight.”

The school’s connection with Saint Anselm College, in addition to sharing a founding abbey, is significant. The Office of Campus Ministry has sponsored week-long urban immersion trips to St. Benedict’s Prep, and several students from the school have earned Saint Anselm degrees.

Lamourt’s dedication extends beyond St. Benedict’s: he has served on the advisory board for the Newark public school system. He considers his work not just a job, but a vocation and a blessing: “I feel I’m giving back some of what Saint A’s gave me.”

<http://blogs.anselm.edu/portraits/alumni-news/teaching-with-the-rule-ivan-lamourt-86/>