

By **Daphne Howland** *Wednesday, Sep 3 2014*

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The Benedictine Monks in The Rule Show How Far Compassion Can Go



Hard to believe that The Rule, a set of monastic precepts established by St. Benedict in the sixth century, could apply to educating inner-city youth beset by modern problems of poverty, violence, substance abuse, fragmented families, and low expectations.

Yet, as *The Rule*, a documentary by Marylou and [Jerome Bongiorno](#), convincingly shows, an enclave of Benedictine monks in the heart of [Newark, New Jersey](#), is finding startling success applying its code to teaching young men whom too many consider unreachable.

After the riots of the late 1960s, the brethren refused to abandon their preparatory school, once the last bastion of hope for the city's white Catholic working class. As whites fled Newark, the monks fought to keep the school open for the non-Catholic black kids left behind. All these years later, trust in schools, in big-city institutions, and in the Catholic clergy is fairly low.

Trust, though, is exactly what these monks have — they're old guys now, funny and forceful, many with thick urban accents of their own, and the doc's directors keep their story moving along, dressing up Newark's history and all sorts of demoralizing statistics with music and animation.

The Rule, no surprise, is actually a lot of rules: about humility, order, hard work, study, spirituality. But Benedict also believed that people should be connected to each other, that compassion, forgiveness, and

understanding were as important as those disciplines. *The Rule* illustrates just how far that can go.