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Of Faith & LAW Part Three

A glance into six men who chose law as a career then took another step to become a minister, rabbi or priest

Hospital call changes lawyer's role to priest

Attorney John Henry Rule becomes Father Rule

BY RALPH SCHAEFER
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One day John Henry Rule received an urgent call that he was needed at the hospital.

Attorney Rule immediately left his lawyer desk at GableGotwals and hurried to St. John hospital where he became Father John Henry Rule to attend to the bedside of a dying man and minister to the family who had gathered.

"It was a very holy time," he continued, "and even though the man was not conscious, I was able to spend three and one half hours with his wife and daughter. It was very rewarding to be in that space with those people."

Coincidentally, Rule, whether Episcopal Priest or attorney, found himself hurrying to another part of the hospital that same day to be present for the birth of his grandson. In a few hours he experienced both a new birth and a death.

Being an attorney and priest is part of Rule's daily life.

He admits that he is busy because he also maintains a schedule with his wife Paula and daughter Gracie who will be a sophomore at Cascia Hall in September.

Rule is serving as interim vicar at Holy Cross Episcopal Church in Owasso and that assignment is expected to be over by the end of July. He has been the interim vicar since September 2012.

When that assignment is completed he will return to his position as priest associate at St. John's Episcopal Church, 4200 South Atlanta Pl. in Tulsa.

Clerical and legal duties are taken in stride as Rule does his commercial litigation work at GableGotwals.

The dual roles are complimentary.

Three things attracted Rule to a legal career.

First, he wanted to help people.

Second, he wanted a job that was intellectually challenging.

Third, he wanted a job that used words.

Rule graduated from Oklahoma City University in 1972 and after working a year or two, attended the University of

Texas — Austin. He earned his law degree in 1977.

Rule has been involved in solving business disputes since he joined GableGotwals in 1977, straight out of law school.

"I came to the firm with the idea that I would be doing First Amendment work," he said. At that time GableGotwals represented the Tulsa Tribune and other media outlets. I did a fair amount of work for the Tribune until the newspaper closed in 1992.

Rule also found he was part of the GableGotwals team representing the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation when Penn Square Bank failed in 1982, a failure that launched a national banking crisis.

"We represented the FDIC with a lot of bank failure actions," he added.

"My entire legal career has been with GableGotwals except for the 18 months I spent in the full-time ministry," he said.

By the 1990s Rule had accomplished his goals and began to feel that he was helping institutions rather than people.

"We represented big companies and agencies and maybe I hungered a little bit for the more personal helping types of professions," he said. That was the beginning of a call to the ministry.

"I always had been fairly religious," he said. "I had been through a divorce, remarried and my new wife wanted to put down roots in a church. She was a Baptist and I a Presbyterian. We visited the Episcopal Church and fell in love with the liturgy and form of worship. Paula became active in the church and I got pretty active."

Still, something was out of sync for the active attorney and family man.

Rule wanted to be a judge for a long time, but that call didn't come and he felt sort of "liberated" and he should look elsewhere.

He couldn't imagine what he was going to be doing the rest of his life and then he felt the nudge towards the ministry.

Paula was supportive of her husband's calling.

It was a long journey from when he felt the call in the late 1990s because he went through the discernment process required by the Episcopal Church.

Rule left GableGotwals in 2002 to attend the seminary at Alexandria, Va.

Paula and Gracie stayed in Tulsa as their husband and father immersed himself in a three-year training program.

He was ordained as a deacon in 2005 and priest in 2006.

Rule served in a church until he returned to GableGotwals in 2009.

He said he couldn't practice law with the same intensity and the firm was OK with that request.

"I now have a full-time practice and you know about the law, that it can be pretty demanding," he said.

The connection to the role of being an Episcopal Priest and a lawyer came together in a dream during Rule's last month in the seminary.

"It was early in the morning and I had a dream that I was asked to sum up everything I learned in seminary," he said. "The answer came immediately. It was 'pay attention, pay attention.'"

Lawyers and priests both have to listen very carefully to the people they serve, Rule continued. That definitely is one place where the two work together. It is really trying to pay deep attention to what people are saying and hear about their deepest aspirations.

People come to a lawyer because they are in some type of dispute and they want a resolution. The law provides a way for that to happen.

Very frequently these days most issues are resolved by settlement because people on both sides listen to one another and their counselors.

A priest hears of people's deepest dreams, desires, fears and tries to help them adjust their stance to the universe to one that lets them be fruitful, worship and serve other people.

Rule feels that most people have a real desire to serve others.

The role for lawyers and priests is in the realm of listening carefully and hear about what people are suffering and enduring and then help them move ahead



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Father John Henry Rule, Priest Associate at St. John's Episcopal Church, Tulsa, also GableGotwals Attorney at Law.

with their lives.

On the clerical side, they deal with the cycle of life from birth to death.

"We all live that cycle," Rule said. "It's a question of walking with your neighbor. Priests do that within a spiritual realm. Lawyers do it within the legal or business system. Essentially, what you are doing is being a good companion with people with whom you live and you help them live better lives."

Both roles overlap because lawyers talk a lot — to clients, in court and to juries, he said. Priests talk in counseling sessions and from the pulpit.

Those experiences helped Rule in his law practice because he feels more loose and relaxed when discussing legal issues.

The Rev. Rule likes preaching and has learned to relax in his sermons by getting away from a prepared manuscript. The exception is when he preaches at a funeral or very special event.

Despite what might seem like a hectic schedule, Rule says that both roles are rewarding.

"I think I am doing what I am supposed to do in two respects," he said. "First, I think God wanted me to help people worship and on the priest side I am doing that."

"On the legal side, I think I am reasonably good at helping people solve problems. I also am making a living to take care of my family."

Rule wasn't the only attorney in his seminary class.

"There were quite a few second career people and several were attorneys," he said.

"I made the lawyer joke that you needed to become a priest to gain redemption from being a lawyer," Rule added. "I think people just figured that it was a career that a person had before seminary. I told them my goals and how they carried over to being a priest."

The professional mix is very satisfying to Rule, but there are days he feels he would like to spend more time on the clergy side.

Still, he enjoys practicing law at GableGotwals because "staff and lawyers are top notch" and they have a very collegial practice.

Law practice schedules are controlled and planned except for when preparations are being made for a court hearing or trial.

Rule recently had the opportunity to sit on an Eagle Scout Board of Review at Holy Cross Episcopal Church in Owasso, something that might not have happened if he had not been a priest.

Rule sees more people taking up more bi-vocational roles in the future to help fill clergy roles.

The disadvantage, he said, is that if a full-time priest is not available it's harder to provide the pastoral care that is necessary. It will be harder to visit people in the hospital, the rest home and have adequate time for counseling sessions. Perhaps Christian education will suffer because there will be less time to develop and teach classes.

Rule doesn't envision retiring as a lawyer and feels he is in two careers for a long time.

"One makes more money practicing law than being in the ministry full time," he said. "That's a fact."

"It's like being a tentmaker," Rule said. "The Apostle Paul was a tentmaker and my tent making is practicing law."«