

## Staying True to Faith in the Workplace

If you at times go through the day at work and find yourself asking, "What's True? What's not?" or "Can I even stop to think through this?" This is ultimately our struggle in the workplace – any workplace. Slowing down enough to recognize Truth, God, in our lives at home or at work.

This is the discussion Maria Cressler, Director of Ignatius House Retreat Center, led at BELIEVES on Tuesday, March 13<sup>th</sup> on "Staying True to Faith in the Workplace."



"When I first got asked to speak on this topic, I reflected on my early career and the difficulty I found trying to be authentic and having integrity," Cressler stated.

She added, "In the end, the key is not what I say or what I profess, but **how** I am. We have outward signs, but what about me – on the inside?"

Cressler shared she had some tough years in her early career when her dad worked for GE and she and her family lived in Connecticut.

"My first job was with Butler Telecommunications. It went out of business."

Cressler had seen some things going on, but struggled with who to tell because of who was involved – her boss.

"My dad had said, 'You've got to wait a year for your resume. So when my one year anniversary arrived, I left. I struggled with this until that point.'"

Cressler then asked those in attendance how they felt, and if they see their work and faith life different.

One BELIEVES attendee responded, "'I used to, but I am trying to be different.'" Then others shared their thoughts.

"So the question is – do I bring Jesus to work with me?" Cressler stated as she focused on the core of the remarks given.

She indicated that little ways can be seen, and asked everyone to ponder if they are "present" when with others.

"Do you not check your cell phone when visiting with people?" she asked as an example.

According to Cressler, St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit order of priests, for whom Ignatius House Retreat Center is named after, was going through the gospels to follow Jesus' life to find himself, and draw closer to Jesus.

"This starts with the *First Principle and Foundation*," she explained. "It is not so much being Catholic but Christian because Jesus is where it is at and starts. My husband and I start our daily prayer time with this everyday as a reminder to be grounded."

She then commented, "So everything we have is a gift, as long as we remember He is the Giver, and it's not about the gifts (which can become idols) or about us."

## First Principle and Foundation

*The Goal of our life is to live with God forever.  
God, who loves us, gave us life.  
Our own response of love allows God's life  
to flow into us without limit.*

*All the things in this world are gifts of God,  
Presented to us so that we can know God  
more easily and make a return of love more readily.*

*As a result, we appreciate and use all these gifts of God insofar as they help us develop as loving persons.  
But if any of these gifts become the center of our lives, they displace God  
and so hinder our growth toward our goal.*

*In everyday life, then, we must hold ourselves in balance  
before all of these created gifts insofar as we have a choice  
and are not bound by some obligation.*

*We should not fix our desires on health or sickness,  
Wealth or poverty, success or failure, a long life or a short one. For everything has the potential of calling  
forth in us a deeper response to our life in God.*

*Our only desire and our one choice should be this:  
I want and I choose what better leads to God's  
deepening his life in me.*

*St. Ignatius of Loyola as paraphrased by David L. Fleming, SJ*

Cressler went on to explain that what is at the root of this is what's termed 'Ignatian Indifference,' which means in anything going on, God is in it.

"The last sentence of the *First Principle and Foundation* says it all – 'Our only desire and our one choice should be this: I want and I choose what better leads to God's deepening his life in me.'"

The next question she asked everyone in attendance centered on how we maintain this in the workplace.

"The Examen is the examination of our consciousness," she said. "It takes us through our day to see how we are conscious of God in our day. It is not an examination of our conscience."

The Examen has five key steps – Give thanksgiving, Ask for the Spirit, Review and recognize failures, Ask for forgiveness and healing, and Pray about the next day – but Cressler said she likes to go through it with three:

- "Father, where are you?"
- "Jesus, how was I not like you?" (and then contrition)
- "Holy Spirit, here is my day ahead, would you show and lead me?"

"So in the end, I am walking with the Holy Trinity and saying, 'Thank you, I am here,'" she summarized.

## Examen

### *Give thanksgiving.*

I begin by giving God thanks for all the things I'm grateful for today. I allow my mind to wander as I reflect on the ways God has blessed me on this particular day. I allow big things and small things to arise—everything from the gift of my faith, to the gift of my marriage, to the easy commute to work today.

### *Ask for the Spirit.*

Next, I want to look at the moments in my day when I did not act so well. However, before doing so, I ask God to fill me with his Spirit so that the Spirit can lead me through this difficult soul-searching. Otherwise, I'm liable to hide in denial, wallow in self-pity, or seethe in self-loathing.

### *Review and recognize failures.*

I look back at my day and ask the Lord to point out to me the moments when I have failed in big ways or small. I take a sobering look at the mistakes I've made this day.

### *Ask for forgiveness and healing.*

If I have sinned, I ask God to forgive me and set me straight again. If I have not sinned but simply made a mistake, I ask for healing of any harm that might have been done. I ask for help to get over it and move on. I also ask for wisdom to discern how I might better handle such tricky moments in the future.

### *Pray about the next day.*

I ask God to show me how tomorrow might go. I imagine the things I'll be doing, the people I'll see, and the decisions I'll be mulling over. I ask for help with any moments I foresee that might be difficult. I especially ask for help in moments when I might be tempted to fail in the way I did today.

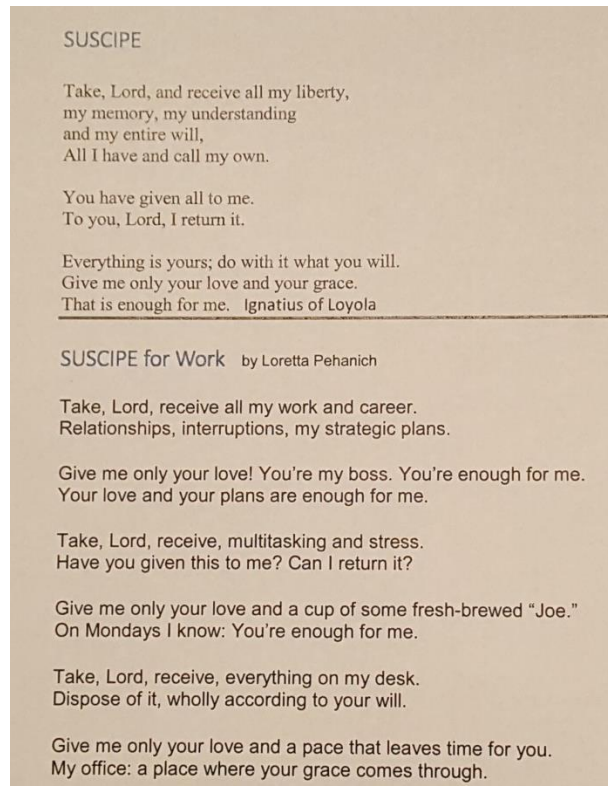
To help me remember the five steps, I like to use a 5-Rs mnemonic:

- Relish the moments that went well and all of the gifts I have today.
- Request the Spirit to lead me through my review of the day.
- Review the day.
- Repent of any mistakes or failures.
- Resolve, in concrete ways, to live tomorrow well.

Ignatius reportedly would say to do the Examen at the middle, and end of the day. Ironically, Cressler shared that even some Jesuits say this can be the hardest thing to do well.

“Ignatius said, ‘If you’re so busy that you have to give up Mass or the Examen each day, give up Mass because the Examen is staying in touch with God,’” Cressler remarked. “He would say this is what’s most important and what he believed keeps us closest to God.”

The Spiritual Exercises concludes with the Suscipe.



“The hardest thing for any of us is ‘how we accept and receive God’s love for me,’” Cressler commented. “Hell is not receiving Christ’s forgiveness – it is saying ‘No, I cannot receive this.’ That is the hell.”

The conversation then shifted from the Examen back to faith in the workplace.

“In the workplace there are times when we have to make a choice. We may lose our job if we go against the grain, but this is where we need to stay close to the truth. What we’re lacking in the world today is integrity.” Envisioning the internal dialogue with God that takes place with God in these moments where we have to make a choice. Cressler shared her own reflection on being in those moments.

“The closer you get to silence, the scarier it is because it leads us to the moment where we ask, ‘Lord, what are You going to ask of me?’” she said.

After reflecting on this a bit, a BELIEVES attendee later asked what is prayer, and how would Ignatius define prayer?



“Listening,” responded Cressler. “The words SILENT and LISTEN have the same letters. In the end, I think it’s listening – simply being in the presence of God, and listening.”

She added, "God is always present. It is our 'awareness' of God's presence that we seek. I'm with God right now. This is God between us as we engage now."

As the time together amongst everyone focused on staying true to faith in the workplace began coming to a close, Cressler chose to draw everyone's attention to the Suspice song.

"I was a 15-year-old playing my guitar and singing this song in the '70s," she mentioned with a laugh.

Cressler said the Suspice left her with the question – "Why would God give me stuff and then take it away?" That was an immature faith and a misunderstanding of the words of the prayer. What I learned is that the Suspice was an offering of self – a surrender. The surrender and the end of the Spiritual Exercises that – 'Nothing that I have is without You, Jesus. Only Your Love and grace.'"

"I often hope and pray that at the end of my life I will be able to say 'Everything is Yours,'" stated Cressler. "That is freedom – the freedom that Jesus came to give us."

### **Questions for Reflection Each Day to Help Find God in All Things in the Workplace**

- *When did I see Christ walk through my office door?*
- *When during the workday did I feel closest to Christ?*
- *How did I listen to the invitations to kindness, honesty, and integrity in work relationships and tasks?*
- *Did I pause to ask God's opinion before barreling ahead with an email, a decision, or a comment to a co-worker?*
- *Did I live my desire to work for God, or was success my bottom line?*
- *Was I forgetful of God? Did I check my faith at the door?*