



Doing Nothing/Holding Steady is Action During Spiritual Trials

With the pressures of the work environment, seeking to walk with Christ and let the Holy Spirit guide all one's work decisions can often be challenging. How can one seek to be a Business Executive Leading with Integrity, Entrusted Values, and Expectancy (BELIEVES) in the work environment?

How do we continuously invite God into _____ and find real joy – even if it's messy?"

The 2024 BELIEVES season maintained its focus on this overarching question on Tuesday, June 11th, with a discussion focused on "Doing Nothing/Holding Steady is Action During Spiritual Trials," prompted by reflections and thoughts from Lisa Hiles, Co-Founder of The Sandwich Project, and Brother Robert Perez, capuchin, San Damiano Ministries.



Brother Perez, who is originally from the Dominican Republic, and moved to the United States around the time of high school, said that his Order of Capuchin Friars first had a house in Florida, and then expanded to other states.

"We opened a house in Atlanta in the pandemic," he said. "First we were in a house by the airport, and then we moved to a house in Tucker where we are now."

The friars began with the intent to help support parishes and live out a mission of helping the homeless.

"We began providing a meal on Tuesdays, but this then led to feeding more people."

Ultimately, he and the other Capuchin Friars in Atlanta decided to obtain a food truck, which now goes out two times each week at The Shrine.

"Our brothers also run food trucks in California and Colorado, and in Massachusetts they run a coffee van."

Hiles' journey in serving the homeless and hungry in Atlanta came about in a different way.

"I was a part of some Marist moms on mission trips in Jamaica," she opened by saying. "Then a friend from Marist one day said that she was making sandwiches to go to The Shrine."

Shortly thereafter during the pandemic, Hiles said she and her husband, Andy, were watching Mass at The Shrine via zoom and the pastor said, "We need more sandwiches."

So, she began collecting sandwiches – collecting 300 in her neighborhood in the first week.

We kept collecting, ultimately with two garages for collection – mine and the garage of my partner, Marcy Louza,” Hiles told the audience.

Now there are 31 drop-off sites throughout the city for The Sandwich Project and 400 volunteers involved. Over 1.4 million sandwiches have been collected to date, with The Shrine and CHRIS180 being the largest users of sandwiches.

We keep things to word of mouth and one email per week,” Hiles mentioned, emphasizing how this ties to the clarity the approach provides in her faith journey to know and trust when God is having things evolve.

Amidst the service to others, what has been a spiritual trial that each has faced?

We wanted to have houses like we d done in the past,” Brother Perez responded by saying. This gave us the freedom to work with the poor, with no attachments to a parish.”

For several years, the brothers talked about starting a house in the United States. Amidst this, every three years, all the brothers in the order would meet to make decisions.

In 2018, finally it was decided that whatever happens must be done in the next three years,” Brother Perez stated. So, the first house was started in Miami, and then Atlanta.”

Brother Perez said that to start the house in Atlanta, he first had to ask permission to contact the bishop.

I contacted the bishop after asking permission to do so,” he recalled. The bishop was in Rome but said, Yes.’ The pandemic was a gift to know the city and see the need first. It s key to make decisions through prayer and then staying steady with it.”

Hiles shared about a different spiritual trial.

I had originally thought it would be small,” she said, also indicating that if she knew at the beginning what all it would be, she didn t think she would have done it.

She further shared, My partner, Marcy, and I are different. She is Jewish, which is great to pull on people from different groups. As this evolved, Andy, my husband, told me, I don t know how long this can go on, and Marcy would also say, Don t you trust me?”

After a while, Hiles said Marcy realized she did trust her.

I told her, If you want to take this bigger, I ll be there for you,” Hiles said. We each play different roles. I am the heart, and spiritual voice of The Sandwich Project. I feel like Marcy is more centered than she was before. Her calling was food insecurity.”

With the impetus for making sandwiches first coming from hearing the pastor at The Shrine say there was a need for sandwiches, Hiles made sure to mention that she was able to share with the pastor, Father Henry, about what all had evolved before he passed.

I was able to tell Father Henry at The Shrine that what s come about is ecumenical,” she recalled.

Having spoken about the examples of spiritual trials they each faced, did Hiles or Brother Perez have any other thoughts to share stemming from thinking about the session s theme – whether from their service to others or from other times in their lives?

Brother Perez answered first.

I wanted to go to medical school growing up. I pushed through it. At some point though, a lady told me, Not every desire you have is from God.”

Brother Perez went ahead and did it (went to medical school), but it didn't pan out.

The Lord took it away,” he said in reflection.

Then he added, When I was ordained, I didn't have an assignment, so of course, I thought that meant the door was open to medical school. One day in the three days after, I was cutting grass, and I got a call to go to North Carolina. It was the most beautiful assignment I've had.”

While in North Carolina, Brother Perez said a homeless man once told him, You know, God brought you here.”

What was the impact of this on Brother Perez?

If there's peace, I am OK.”

Hiles then spoke of another moment in life that the session's theme brought to mind, prefacing what she was going to say by first emphasizing that through prayer is when eye opening things happen.

In the past, I'd sit at Ignatius House some days,” she commented. I was there on August 15, 2018, on the day of the Assumption.”

When she arrived at Ignatius House, Hiles went to check in at the office and asked, Can I go to Mass today?”

The person I spoke with told me, No, we don't allow visitors.”

As a result, Hiles went down to the river via the trails on Ignatius House's grounds.

When at the river, she heard a mom crying out for help.

Her son had fallen into the river and was further downstream,” Hiles said. Right where I was there was a huge cross next to me.”

Hiles then heard the mom ask, Can you call 911?”

I told her Yes, called, and stayed online with the cops to get help.”

Choking up from recalling the moment Hiles said amidst tears, If I had been in Mass, I wouldn't have been there to save them. They got rescued. The next day, the mom reached out. She had seen the cross, and she had gone to Ignatius House to see that I had signed in, so she got my information to reach out.”

The mom wanted to say thanks, so she invited her to lunch.

She took me to lunch – at Canoe. Her name was Lisa. She had three kids. She was just like me. She was so faithful.”

Hiles closed by saying, He (God) needs us to seek Him. God wants us to humble ourselves and help others.”