

Meeting Summaries and Questions for **Faith in the Workplace**

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1. Faith in the Workplace – If God is everywhere, then he must be at work as well. Yet when many people go to work, they leave their faith at the door – and with good reason. With deadlines and company lines, there is often not much room for God below the bottom line. The country of India actually provides an alternative model for how to celebrate faith in the workplace. There, once a year, many offices will host a Hindu prayer, or puja, to bless the workings of the group. Muslim workers are encouraged to pray in special areas or even a free office at designated times during work. And all religious holidays—Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, and Sikh—are at least acknowledged if not openly celebrated. It is a policy that does not shrink from the diversity of faith, but rather values God above all else. What can we learn from this approach? Perhaps it is simply that faith is something to be celebrated and shared in all walks of life, including work. The challenge is to seek out others in faith and to share our beliefs in ways that are respectful and welcoming. Our job, if you will, is to find the Holy Spirit in our colleagues and even in our customers so that we might live out God's glory in others as well as in ourselves.

Questions – We spend (or spent if retired) many if not most of our waking hours involved with work. As we begin to look at faith in the workplace, describe your workplace to the others in the group. Do you experience or perceive any tension or conflict between your faith and your work? If so, how is this manifested? Are you able to integrate your faith and work? If so, how do you do this? If not, why not? Share your thoughts and lessons learned with others.

2. Defining Mission – Christ is clear about our mission. At the last supper with his disciples he says, "I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another" (Jn 13:34). Paul, who is big on missions, is also clear. "Serve one another in love" (Gal 5:13). Meanwhile, in our typical workday, we are presented with many, often less inspiring, missions. To serve the customer, to meet quota, to find a parking space. How do we balance the lofty missions from heaven with the more mundane ones on earth? It is important to remember that God has given us life and our unique gifts for a very good

reason: to use them! In these meetings, take time to write your own mission statement, one that integrates the calls of discipleship with the life and the gifts we are given. An honest, meaningful mission statement can serve as a touchstone for using our gifts, as a regular reminder to live out God's vision for us in the world.

Questions – What constitutes a meaningful mission statement? What separates a lasting statement from one that is empty? Discuss what elements you would expect in a meaningful personal mission statement. What role should God, and family, and your personal aspirations play in your definition? Discuss how a personal mission statement should both reflect and reinforce what is truly important to you. Now take time to draft a short personal/life mission statement. It need not be perfect, or even complete, because our missions will naturally evolve over time just as our understanding of God will evolve and mature over time. When you have finished, or at least scratched out some ideas, share with a partner or with the group. Be sure to return to and discuss your mission statement in subsequent sessions.

3. Finding Purpose at Work – Scripture has many references to the value of good works. The well-ploughed field and fruits of a good harvest are heavenly rewards for earthly labor. Even in the Garden of Eden, God expected good works: "The Lord God then took the man and settled him in the Garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it" (Gn 2:15). Throughout the Bible is a common, unspoken theme we would do well to acknowledge: the value of having pride in our work. God expects us to do our best in whatever situation we find ourselves in, whether we are living in a garden or laboring outside the walls. While we may not be rewarded as we might like or achieve all we had planned, God assuredly delights in our use of the gifts we have been given. "For the Son of Man will come with his angels in his Father's glory, and then he will repay everyone according to his conduct" (Mt 16:27).

Questions – Share the story of a biblical or historical figure whose work you admire. Discuss what qualities you admire most in that person. What makes this person's work of lasting significance? Discuss the underlying purpose of your own work. Look beyond typical organizational objectives. Does the quality of

your work, or your demeanor, have an impact on colleagues and customers and, ultimately, on your own sense of self-worth? How do these affect your sense of purpose at work? Read the Parable of the Talents (Mt 25:14–30) Discuss the underlying message about the role of work in our lives. How are we to use what has been entrusted to us?

4. Spiritual Leadership- As we progress in our career and in the world, most of us will assume greater leadership positions. Retirement then provides the gift of time, which we can use to share our leadership skills and wisdom with others. In each case, we have an opportunity to influence people in how they live and work. As men of God, we have an additional role to play. We serve as models to others for how God’s presence can and should be manifested here on earth. To draw a lesson from the business world, we can think of ourselves as marketing executives for God. Living our faith as leaders at work and in the community is true spiritual leadership. As St. Francis of Assisi is often quoted, “Preach the gospel at all times. Use words if necessary.”

Questions – Identify current or past leaders you admire. What are the leadership qualities you admire most? Why are/were they effective? Was Christ a traditional leader? How would he fare in the workplace today? What aspects of his leadership style can we adapt to our work place? To our attempts at being spiritual leaders at home and in the community?

5. Taking Stock – Whereas women may think of life as seasonal, with events and relationships recurring in cycles over time, men tend to think more linearly. To us, life may be more like a river. It begins as a small stream, builds in size as we grow, and twists and turns toward eventual union with God. Along the way, we experience love and loss, triumph and tragedy. From time to time, we look backward and forward at the river of our lives and hope that we feel a sense of peace and satisfaction in what we see. Yet many men struggle to reconcile changes in personal priorities with the realities of daily life. This is appropriate. What some people call a personal crisis is simply God’s inner call to take stock of life. We ignore this call at our own risk. So, for the next session or two, we will reflect on where we’ve come from and where we’d like to go.

Questions – Consider the major events and decisions of your life, and how one change will determine subsequent events; like a pebble dropped into a pool.

Try to see the patterns of these ripple effects—a meeting at school that leads to a marriage, a job that leads to a move, or a chance encounter with someone that shapes an important decision. What role do you believe God plays in these changes? Do you typically pray before a big decision? Now consider some important choices that lie in the future. Share these with the group and pray for discernment.

6. Spiritual Legacy Building - We are the product of many generations. Whether we know of them or not, our ancestors bequeathed to us their legacy. We may have inherited our great uncle’s tenacity or the gleam in a distant cousin’s eye. We were born to a place that resulted from their individual choices, a hundred decisions made across a dozen generations. And now, the decisions we make will have an impact on generations to come. We will not know these people, but they are our legacy. Decisions like how we treat our children, how we conduct ourselves at work, and where we will retire are the seeds of our unfolding legacy. God plays a role, of course, in whether these seeds bear lasting fruit. Only God can know the full impact of our decisions. Still, we do make choices every day concerning the company we keep and how we treat them, or the work we do and the pride we take in doing it. Ultimately, we determine the condition of the seeds of our legacies – for as Christ says, “By their fruits you will know them.” (Mt 7:16) The good news is that we can begin sowing the seeds of our legacy today.

Questions – Share your family history. Where did your ancestors come from and how did they arrive in America? What did they do after they arrived? Do you think they would consider their lives ‘successful’? What was their true legacy? What legacy do you hope to leave? Without getting too morbid, imagine what you’d like people to say about you after you’re gone. Imagine the impact, however subtle or silent, you’d like to have on the next generation. Discuss the steps you might take today to begin shaping that legacy.

For complete meeting guides – including group exercises, prayer and scripture references, humor and food for thought, see our book “Fuel” available at www.faithbalance.com and at www.avemariapress.com