

## Ignatian Spiritual Practices and Patient Religiosity

The Examen, Rules of Discernment, and Critical Engagement described below, are variations of reflective spiritual practices developed by Ignatius of Loyola in his *Spiritual Exercises* and designed to stimulate conversion or spiritual development. They emphasize self-reflection, awareness of the Other, and an increasing responsibility for one's thoughts and actions.

The adaptations below draw on Ignatian spirituality. While these adaptations are useful spiritual practices for everyone, they are specifically designed for use in interpreting psychiatric patient religiosity as other than pathology and determining the need for spiritual care by creating space for positive interactions that accept and affirm another's humanity. The terms *life-giving* and *life-denying* replace explicit Ignatian terms referencing openness to God or separation from God.

Although these practices come out of a Renaissance Spanish Christian tradition, they have multicultural and multidisciplinary applicability because they incorporate:

- imaginative and rational reasoning: listening, relating, looking for consistency of thought and patterns;
- the elements of human experience: evaluation (feeling, imagination, rational thinking, deliberation), decision (belief or action), tendency or habitus (predicts future evaluative responses and action.); and,
- approaches familiar to a range of human science disciplines: affective, cognitive, and behavioral.

Moreover, in keeping with many cultures, these practices come from a tradition which integrates spirituality and accountability of an interpretation by bringing it into dialogue with communal understandings of reality and truth.

### The Examen – an Ignatian practice for daily use by staff or patients

- The Examen identifies patterns of what is life-giving or life-denying to a person through journaling and/or sharing with another person and if change may be needed.
- After a moment of quiet or centering prayer, the practitioner reflects on what in the last day, or given period of time, has brought joy, energy, thankfulness or closeness to others and God.
- After another moment of quiet or prayer, the practitioner reflects on what in the day has brought anxiety, negativity, fatigue or distance from others.
- Through the Examen and sharing, a person gains clarity on which perspectives, situations, or objectives may lead to more meaningful and life-giving thoughts, actions and habits.

### Preliminary Rules of Discernment: Life-Giving or Life-Denying

Ignatius created these rules for those directing others in going through the *Spiritual Exercises*. They are known as Rules for Discernment of Movements on the Soul or Discernment of Spirits. This practice applies rules of analysis to religious or spiritual experiences that are based on the use of pattern identification with expressed thoughts, emotions and actions. It incorporates both spiritual and cognitive behavioral approaches.

- Movements may be interior to a person or caused by exterior circumstances or forces.
- A movement is life-giving if it carries with it joy, concern for the Other, a prick of the conscience, an awareness of human suffering, a recognition of sacredness, or peace of mind.
- A life-denying movement may seem pleasurable at first, yet it carries with it consequences that separate one from a sense of wholeness, usually through loss of self-esteem, arrogance or other destructive attitude.
- Once a movement has been recognized and identified, it can be rejected or accepted.

Critical Engagement - based on the “Principle and Foundation” and “Presupposition” in *Spiritual Exercises*. Patient expression of religiosity interprets an initial embodied experience. A relational interpretive framework provides space for staff to understand or interpret that experience without invalidating that it occurred.

- Identify the social/cultural/religious/historical background of the person to be engaged.

- Identify the social/cultural/religious/historical/ideological background of the interpreter.

- Locate the difference or ‘otherness’ of the expression or situation that is being interpreted since different personal situations and perspectives can generate different meanings. By locating difference, the interpreter guards against imposing negative or positive stereotypes on to a person’s expressions and incorrectly interpreting it.

- Determine the predominant significance of what is being interpreted for the engaged person *and* for the interpreter - what kind of meaning an expression or situation signifies or points to: historical, spiritual, biomedical, concern over relationship with God or others, etc.

- Evaluate the expression or situation in light of this information *with an awareness of the interpretive lens being used* – if the significance of the expression is a spiritual one, use an Ignatian lens of discernment, above. The use of a biomedical lens found in DSM-IV-TR criteria indicates the predominant significance of the expression relates to physical or mental health.

- Appropriate the meaning - decide how the meaning given to an expression or a situation influences future behavior or communication for the interpreter towards the engaged person in recognition of their mutual humanity. This explicitly acknowledges the functionality of their interdependence since the interpretation a person with greater power gives to a situation or expression can greatly impact the consequences for the person engaged.

### Application – Illustrations of Possible Uses of the Practices

The Examen: This practice helps bring clarity to thoughts and actions that nurture the growth and development of an individual or community. Initially for some, life-giving thoughts may be intimidating and considered only in what nurtures others. The Examen may also be helpful in making connections to consequences of thoughts and actions related to religiosity as well as in developing tailored treatment plans and goals that can include spiritual care, e.g., an individual states that focusing on their relationship with God is as life-giving, or more than, finding housing.

Rules of Discernment: Life-giving and life-denying movements often tangle which is why movements must be followed from beginning to middle to end. A desire to be responsible leads to gambling to pay bills however continued gambling leads to chaos. In a desire to be faithful, one listens to a voice attributed to God stating all will be well. This movement differs from a voice stating God requires risky behavior as proof of faith. Ignatius cautions to reject the latter movement: “Beware of the lying spirit clothed as an angel of light.” Discernment can also affirm a patient’s life-giving behavior which may be unfamiliar or seem unconventional to staff.

Critical Engagement: Distress, or the lack of it, over a particular religious or spiritual experience (e.g., voices or visions, difficulty praying, etc.) may point to issues of trust or abandonment with what is held sacred. Evaluating the experience in life-giving and life-denying terms and acknowledging difference can lead to staff empathy for a patient despite cultural unfamiliarity with various forms of religiosity. It may also lead to increased provision of spiritual care and integration into treatment.

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