

Embodying Learning/Leading and Caring for Self

Conversation Starters

In thinking about the quality of our living it is helpful to reflect on at least five different arenas of our being. While these overlap and are interconnected, they should not be collapsed into one another. Attending to our whole being requires critical and intentional engagement, a task made easier with conversation among family members, friends, colleagues, therapists/counselors and others.

Begin by reflecting on these five arenas. The questions are meant only to start your thinking or conversation, not to be a boundary to it. Be honest with yourself and, as much as possible, find someone else with whom you can be honest. Remember that it is all right both to ask questions and not to answer questions asked by others when you feel they are invasive. Respect the right for persons to be honest with you, as much as you respect the right for persons to disclose appropriately.

Note the arena in which you feel good about the quality of your living. This does not mean you are perfect; only that you have appreciation for the way in which you live your life in that arena. Make sure you can note at least one arena where you are doing all right.

In a similar way, take note of the arena where you feel the most challenged to grow. What do you need to take the next step in this area of your living? Who can assist you in the process? Who can keep you honest about the steps you are taking?

1) Physical caring and fun

What are you doing for fun?

What are your hobbies or ways that you stay physically healthy?

What do you do that energizes your physical life?

How do you make time for listening to the rhythm of your body?

What aches and pains does your body use to tell you that something is not right?

2) Professional growth and feeding our minds

What is the best book or film or piece of art or music that you have encountered in the last month?

What creative piece would you recommend your friends to engage?

What journals are the most helpful for you and when do you read them?

Who do you talk with on a regular basis about the latest conversations in your discipline?

Who do you talk with about issues in your own leading and learning?

3) Emotional balance

What are the signs you have come to know for telling you when you are the most balanced in terms of your emotions?

With whom do you process the feelings that arise out of the context of your work and your learning?

How do you recognize your anger, hurt, despair, loneliness, hopelessness?

What do you do with your disappointments about your institution, your service, your scholarship, your teaching, your relationship to religious bodies, or your life? With whom do you share the moments of joy, excitement, or exhilaration about your living?

4) Relational life – community

What groups of people do you gather with to enjoy life?

With whom do you worship?

What community offers you opportunities to reflect upon your living and your commitments?

Relational life – friends

Who are the friends who are most comforting to you?

Who are the friends who challenge you the most about your life?

Who are the friends with whom you can talk about your work, but also can talk about things other than your work?

Relational life – intimacy

When do you take time to be with those persons you identify as ‘family’ in ways that are whole and fulfilling?

How do you give as much quality in terms of time and energy to the most important persons in your life as you do to your job, position, or to others who call your name?

How do you know when you are bringing all of yourself to intimate relationships or when you are pre-occupied with other things?

How do you nurture and care for the physical, sexual and intimate relationships in your life?

5) Nurturing discipleship

Who are your worship and prayer partners?

How comfortable are you with the One who calls you by name?

When is God most present to you?

How do you nurture your vocation on a daily or weekly basis?

With whom do you talk about your spiritual life and who keeps you honest in this arena of your life?

What should have been asked about the quality of your living that does not appear in any of the above arenas?

What would you like to ask from others as you consider the quality of your living?

Adapted from “The Quality of Our Living” by Joretta Marshall, Iliff School of Theology