

Some private employers choose to express their own religious beliefs or practices in the workplace, and they are entitled to do so. However, employers and supervisors should avoid expression that might – due to their supervisory authority – reasonably be perceived by subordinates as coercive, even when not so intended. Also, employers who hold religious services or programs or include prayer in business meetings, Title VII requires that the employer accommodate an employee who asks to be excused for religious reasons, absent a showing of undue hardship.

Some troubling court decisions: A state court found that it was religious harassment for an employer to put religious articles in its employee newsletter and Christian-themed verses on its paychecks. A federal district court held that a pattern of religiously themed comments, which mostly consisted of statements that the target was a sinner and had to repent, could be religious harassment.

B. “The Faith Filled Actions You Take:” A book review of and excerpts from Gregory Pierce’s book “Spirituality at Work;” Loyola Press 2001.

A lot of religious professionals think that the spirituality of work is about what they call “evangelization.” They think that the purpose of spiritual practices in the workplace is to get yourself noticed and then to convert others or proselytize them to join your particular sect or denomination.

The spirituality at work IS about evangelization, BUT NOT by means of proselytizing or in the fundamentalist understanding of the term. For Catholic Christians, spirituality is about getting in tune with God as revealed by Jesus and then working to bring about God’s kingdom “on earth as it is in heaven.”

This kind of evangelization is more about actions than about words. It does not need to clothe itself in religious language or religious objects. The spirituality of work can be practiced without pushing our religious beliefs on anyone. In fact, they can be done without any references to religion at all. By our Fruits, they will know us, Jesus promised.

This is the type of approach you will find in Mr. Pierce’s “Spirituality at Work” and its 10 ways to balance your life on the job. **“You will not find here a pious approach to the spirituality of work.** I . . . admit that I am not comfortable with displays of religiosity, especially in the workplace. The spirituality of work that interests me is one that comes out of the work itself, one that allows us to get in touch with the God who is always present in our workplaces, whether ‘bidden or not bidden’.” This kind of spirituality has little to do with piety and much more to do with our becoming aware of the intrinsically spiritual nature of the work we are doing and then acting on that awareness.”

“Yet the workplace is a difficult place in which to ‘be spiritual’. It is noisy, crowded, complex, competitive, materialistic, tiring, frustrating, dangerous, busy, secular. To find God there, we have to work at it, and most of our traditional spiritual disciplines are not well

designed to help us do that. That is why I have tried to outline this idea of developing a new set of disciplines that might help me and others practice the spirituality of work.”

Mr. Pierce’s new set of disciplines for workplace spirituality, include:

1. Surrounding Yourself with Sacred Objects. These need not be pious or religious in the traditional sense, they may be completely secular; they just need to carry for us a spiritual meaning. Their presence is to make us aware of the deeper spiritual meaning of our work.
2. Living with Imperfection. Is to make a positive out of a negative. All we need to do to practice this discipline is build into the work day ways of accepting that we and our workers are not perfect. Even God leaves it to us to develop, however imperfectly, the potential in our work and in ourselves.
3. Assuring Quality. Living with imperfection can never be an excuse for doing less than our best work.
4. Giving Thanks and Congratulations. Makes the workplace much more the way God would have it. Don’t have the Ebenezer Scrooge attitude, “Your thanks are in the pay check.”
5. Building Support and Community. One main thing people feel today they have lost in the contemporary workplace is a sense of loyalty. Companies are not loyal to their workers; employees are not loyal to their employers; and workers are not loyal to each other. But we can take small steps to restore it through encouraging everyone to feel part of the team, allowing no one to become isolated and discouraging or subverting cliques; stop gossiping and backbiting; show compassion; and have fun.
6. Dealing with Others As You Would Have Them Deal with You. The practice of this discipline in the workplace on a regular and comprehensive basis would effect the most radical, challenging, and difference making change in how we go about our work. This discipline is probably the most difficult to imagine practicing on a regular basis; especially in negotiations, with competitors, with customers, and in compensation. But doesn’t someone have to go first? After all, Jesus didn’t say, love others to the extent that they love you. He said, “Love others as you love yourself.”
7. Deciding What Is “Enough” –and Sticking to It. It seems that in the workplace enough is never enough. Whether it is time, money, energy, or attention, we do not have the ability to say no. We must build into our workday ways of reminding ourselves of what is enough and strategies for sticking to our decisions.
8. Balancing Work, Personal, Family, Church, and Community Responsibilities. This discipline is all about flexibility. Being flexible is a matter of being able to give a

little in one area of our life so that we can fulfill our responsibilities in another. It involves not only being prepared to say no, but also once we commit to keep our promises.

9. Working to Make “The System” Work. This discipline is the toughest, most frustrating and often the least successful. Can we reform capitalism, clean up politics, end poverty, save the environment, bring about a peaceful world, and do everything else that is necessary to bring about the reign of God? Nope. Can we work on any or all of the problems we have and help make the world little better place? Yep, but only if we learn to break them down into issues that we can do something about. If we believe that God works through us to make the workplace and the world a better place, then we might have to take whatever baby steps we can, relying on God to keep us moving toward the perfect society, in which every problem will be solved.
10. Engaging in Ongoing Personal and Professional Development. This discipline includes anything that prepares us for work, including—but certainly not limited to—prayer and contemplation.

Mr. Pierce’s book is an action guide to developing and practicing these disciplines in the workplace. It is also a challenge? He asks: “Are the disciplines I have named the right ones? Are they too secular or mundane? Are there other, better disciplines of the spirituality of work? I don’t know the answers to those questions, but I am mightily interested in them, . . . and am committed to continuing this discussion with like-minded people of all occupations and faiths. I invite any of the readers of this book to contact me, either through the publisher or directly by e-mail at spiritualitywork@aol.com.”

The Society of Apostolic Executives recommends you read this one hundred fifty-one page book and commence the dialogue. Mr. Pierce is co-publisher of ACTA Publications, a former president of the National Center for the Laity, and a founder of Business Executives for Economic Justice. He has also written “The Mass Is Never Ended, Rediscovering Our Mission to Transform the World.”