

NOTICING - THE 5 MINUTE EXERCISE

THE 5-FINGER EXAMEN

1. Why

The Examen is a technical name for one of the Spiritual Exercises developed by St Ignatius of Loyola. It is premised on noticing these apparently small and insignificant details of life but realising that actually they are incredibly powerful signifiers of personal, spiritual and community truth.

The Examen can take different forms, but generally speaking it invites us to notice times of **consolation**, when we feel energised, alive, and full of life and possibility. It also invites us to notice times of **desolation** when we feel empty, drained, hopeless, and lacking in energy and vitality. If Jesus invites us to live life in all its fullness, then this would be consolation, and its opposite would be desolation.

The Examen allows us **to attend** quietly, reflectively, and prayerfully on noticing these dynamics of consolation and desolation in our lives. This practice is a central tenet of Ignatian spirituality (on which much of the Contemplative Toolkit is built). Ignatius, when asked which of the many spiritual exercises he thought was of greatest value, answered without hesitation “the Examen!”.

2. Leader Instructions

Pay attention to space and gather the group so they are sitting comfortably and attentively. We will be using our fingers to symbolize each stage in doing the examen carefully and thoughtfully.

3. Script

**Smile, breathe and make eye contact with each person in the group
hold stillness for a few seconds**

- a) Could I invite everyone to make the thumbs up sign. **The thumb** denotes the good things and **gratitude**.

Ask yourself: “What do I have to be grateful for today? Where do I feel I have been blessed today? What has added joy or hope, inspiration or fulfilment, meaning or peace to my life? Who or what have I taken for granted? What might I have overlooked? What, if taken away from me, would make life poorer?”

Silence 1 minute

We respond with the prayer or acknowledgment, ‘Thank you’.

- b) Could I invite everyone to point with their **index finger**. The pointing asks the question **“where?”**.

Withdraw a little from the busyness of the day. Take time to step into stillness.

Ask yourself: “Where have I seen God and profound Goodness in my day today?”

Silence 1 minute

Point to your **middle finger**. We are using this tallest finger to think about **things that stand out**, things to really notice.

Rewind the day, calling to mind the people you have met, the situations encountered, the things you have seen or heard. There may have been moments which felt important at the time, but which recede now. Other things might have seemed insignificant at the time but have grown in importance now. Ask yourself: "If I were to write the Headline for my life today, what would it actually be for me and my life?"

Silence 1 minute

- c) Look at your **fourth finger**, known as the 'Ring finger'. This is in many ways **the weakest** finger.

Ask yourself: "Where have I been at my least or weakest today, what might I liked to have done differently today? Where was I not at my best? If I could rewrite the script for today, what might I rewrite? Is there something I have not done, which I should have done, are there things I have done which I shouldn't, or are there things I have done which hurt others which I might not have noticed during the day?"

Silence 1 minute

We say or pray simply "sorry!".

- d) Take hold of your **Little Finger** – the smallest finger. What **small changes** could I make?

The little finger provides balance as well when writing, typing, playing the violin, or even holding a cup! Ask yourself: "Is there anything in my life which is out of balance and needs adjusting? (pause) Is there anything to be put right that it is in my power to do? (pause) What do I need to do, or think, or say, which will make the changes big and small, to help me grow into being the person I am called to be?"

Silence 1 minute

Amen

Smile, breathe and make eye contact with each person in the group (or invite the group to do this).

4. To be aware of

Take a moment to feel how the practice has affected you?

Reflect back to the group any changes in the group you perceive. Sharing and talking around what we are grateful for may be a good way of developing conversation out of this practice.