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'IGNATIAN CONVERSATION'

Nun will talk about talking

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Stop talking -- and start conversing, says Sister Elizabeth Liebert, SNJM.

St. Ignatius of Loyola saw conversation as more than just pleasant chatter; he viewed it as a crucial tool for ministry and an essential part of spiritual life, explained Sister Elizabeth, a professor of spiritual life at San Francisco Theological Seminary and the first Roman Catholic to be tenured there.

She will talk about talking at a July 14 lecture sponsored by St. Bernard's Institute of Theology and Ministry in Albany.

Relating to others

For St. Ignatius, conversation was a special way of relating to others, an integral part of his "Spiritual Exercises" and "a whole strategy for ministry that can be used by anybody in the Church," Sister Elizabeth told The Evangelist.

Although Ignatius -- who founded the Jesuit order -- lived and worked in the 15th century, his messages are "eminently practical" for modern-day ministry and daily life, she believes.

Ignatian conversation begins in familiar spots -- in church, at home, in line at the grocery store -- and utilizes such basic skills as talking and listening to reach out to others in a meaningful way, she explained.

Open to all

Ministering in this way is less about talk, she said, than it is about listening, understanding and accompaniment -- all of which can be done by "every Christian, not just those in paid Church ministry.

"It's a vision of how conversation is something we're all called to do. You can serve

God no matter what your state in life is."

For those in paid or volunteer pastoral ministry, she added, conversation the Ignatian way can assist their ability to help others grow in their faith, get through difficult periods in life, or deal with difficult situations.

God in all

Ignatian conversation, she continued, is based on the Christian belief that God can be seen in every human being.

"It is interacting with people in whom I see God," she said. "It is a natural outgrowth of the belief that God is impacting the other person. As you come alongside of them, you are honoring the person God created them to be.

"This is why I am interested in Ignatius of Loyola in this context. He's one of the better-kept secrets, in terms of laypeople. Many Catholics don't know what an interesting system he developed. It's accessible to everybody, and it can be done by anybody. We all talk; we're all in relationships. We move in and out of these kinds of conversations our whole lives."

(The lecture, "Ignatian Conversation for Pastoral Ministry," will be presented July 14, 7:30 p.m., at The College of Saint Rose's Hubbard Interfaith Sanctuary in Albany.)

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