

## II. THE WOODSTOCK PROCESS

The success of the WBC has been due, in large measure, to its ability to provide a vehicle to address the yearning for integration in our lives. It facilitates positive responses to our desire to make a difference in our firms and the wider society. People are not satisfied with the status quo. Business executives, managers, and professionals want to bridge the apparent gap between faith and work. The process used at WBC chapter meetings promotes practical wisdom with theological reflection on the salient issues and problems of the contemporary workplace.

### *A. Chapter Meetings*

What is this Woodstock process and how does it work? Local WBC chapter members gather each month to address issues arising out of their experience in the workplace. The approach is deceptively simple but each step is vital to support an atmosphere of trust and faith-inspired reflection. The meetings themselves are scheduled to mirror the time, place, and surroundings of a typical business meeting. They generally take place at the same place, date, and time each month. The meetings, lasting about one hour and a half, aim to begin on time and end on time so that busy people can count on and set aside the same time each month.

### *B. The WBC format:*

The WBC format evolved over time from the experience of business and professional people who began to engage in systematic theological reflection on their lives in the workplace. Over time, its elements and the order of proceeding emerged and were refined.

1. *Introductions.*
2. *Opening prayer*
3. *Reading of the Woodstock Business Conference Mission Statement with its three goals.*
4. *Scripture: A passage from Scripture related to the topic under consideration is read aloud, followed by a period of silent reflection (five minutes), and then sharing of insights (seven to ten minutes).*
5. *Topic: Material on the topic for the day has been previously mailed with the meeting notice and minutes of the last meeting's discussion.*
6. *Reflection: Evaluation on the meeting and the process (five to ten minutes before conclusion).*
7. *Closing prayer.*

### *C. Each feature of the WBC meeting format serves a critical role*

1. *Introductions.* The aim of this element is to build a sense of community. New people are often present. WBC chapters grow and thrive because members so value their own participation that they invite their friends and colleagues to join with them.

2. Opening prayer. Each session begins with a prayer, an acknowledgment that God holds us in existence and gives us the light to know and the strength to do the right thing. We must have God's grace, light, and support to hear His Word and learn what to do in the case or situation under consideration.

3. Mission Statement. After asking God's grace for the meeting, the next step is to recall the WBC Mission Statement. Reading the threefold mission statement at the beginning of each meeting helps keep discussions on track and avoids wasting valuable time. This element, reading the mission statement at the beginning of each meeting, was incorporated in direct response to frustrations experienced in earlier theological reflection groups where participants frequently sought to revisit the purposes for the meeting.

4. Scripture passage and reflection. One of the great strengths of the WBC process is that period marked by reading a pertinent Scripture passage aloud followed by a five minute interval of silent reflection. After the silence, participants share how the particular story or image struck them, how the passage applies in life today. The discipline of silence, so rare for many busy executives, opens new vistas. WBC members remark that their appreciation of this phase of the process grows over the course of a year. By entering into our discussions through the threshold of Scripture, we are introduced to the "mind and heart of Christ," with His sense of purpose and values. He is the touchstone or criterion for the accuracy of what we will decide. This contrasts with "popular" or "conventional wisdom." His is the "world" or the "context" within which we want to place and locate the issue or problem we will be considering. By entering in this manner, a whole new light shines on the subsequent discussion of marketplace issues.

The richness of this phase struck one WBC participant who said:

I found the few moments of reflection in response to the Scripture, to be very, very moving. It would probably be much more difficult to get some insight into the Scripture without the WBC structure. Reading Scripture this way allows barriers to come down. Scripture allows a common ground for our discussion of the topic that follows.

Another added:

Reading Scripture and reflecting on it helps us to look at our business lives in an entirely different context. The WBC meeting is the first time in years or perhaps ever in our lives to just sit down and read the Scripture. What we think about when we take on business issues is different because of the Scripture, whether or not we talk about it during our discussion. And, it often leads right into the topic we are to discuss at the meeting.

5. Topic. Next comes the topic for the day, i.e., the case, issue, problem, or opportunity. We focus on concrete details from our work experience stimulated by the case presented in the articles, exercises, and questions sent out by the coordinator. Here we also recall the feelings, drives, motivations, and concerns associated with the event.

While not explicit in the format itself, a series of orderly steps inevitably emerges from the back-and-forth of the discussion:

*(1) What is the data? What do I see? Necessary data includes not only the events themselves but all the surrounding circumstances: the people, relationships, and communities involved, as well as the underlying desires and motivations of the participants.*

*(2) What does it mean? We push to understand and explain what is going on. The discussion develops a range of explanations. Hearing different perspectives helps people to come to a fuller understanding of the situation.*

*(3) Judging: "This is it!" Eventually responsible business people are by training and inclination prompted to "make the call," to name the fact of the matter after due consideration of the explanations offered. And then, we judge, "Is this good?" "Is it worthwhile?" "Do I like this?"*

*(4) What shall I do about it? The final step is deliberation, discernment, and decision. Responsibility calls us to respond with some kind of action.*

These four steps follow the same pattern in any human activity where we are functioning well, where we are the best we can be. When we can see the pattern at work in ourselves and in the meeting process, it helps us to confirm that we are on the right track.

6. Reflection on the Meeting. Another important, and often unrecognized, step in the process takes place during the final five to ten minutes before the end of the meeting. Here, we stop to reflect back on the meeting to see how well or badly it went. We recall some important insights that arose and identify issues that warrant further exploration. It is here that chapter members might select the next topic and accept responsibility for its preparation and presentation.

7. Closing prayer. The meeting concludes with prayer, an expression of gratitude. Often it is The Lord's Prayer. We acknowledge that God has been with us, helping, guiding, even challenging. We hand it over to the Lord. "Thy will be done."

#### ***D. Between Chapter Meetings***

Over time, the WBC process helps to inform the members and promotes better, more thoughtful, and more effective action. However, achieving the three goals of the Woodstock Business Conference mission requires continuing, cumulative effort. This brief examination of the process of orderly steps outlined above helps to understand what is going on during the meetings themselves. It is also useful for individual members between the meetings as we reflect on our daily work and make practical decisions, particularly in situations involving ethical implications.

### **1. Minutes of the meeting.**

Minutes or notes of the discussions at each chapter meeting serve a crucial function. They help to recall the insights reached and decisions made as a result of the meetings. Fortunately, one or more members in a group are usually able to take good notes for the group. These notes or minutes are also helpful for those who were out of town or otherwise had to miss a meeting. It enables them to stay in touch. A sample of the minutes distributed by the coordinator of the Washington, D.C. chapter can be found in the Appendix. Minutes need not be so extensive. However brief, minutes are a real help to sustain and nurture the WBC process.

### **2. Preparation for each meeting.**

Each month, chapter coordinators circulate a package of materials with an agenda, notes of the past meeting, articles, exercises, Scripture, and focus questions. This package enables WBC members to reflect upon the Scripture passage and the upcoming topic in preparation for the next meeting. Experience has shown that progress in personal and group growth occurs more rapidly and surely when members prepare in advance for chapter meetings.

When individuals come prepared, the meeting moves quickly as each shares the fruit of previous reflection and prayer, rather than simply offering spontaneous reactions at the meeting itself. This kind of preparation makes the sharing qualitatively different—much deeper, more provocative, and mature.

### **3. Beyond the Chapter Meetings**

Any movement toward personal integration cannot rest on a one and a half hour conversation once a month. Many members, challenged by the monthly conversations, pursue intellectual, moral, and spiritual growth outside the meeting. They explore and share articles, books, tapes, programs, and spiritual reading.

St. Ignatius of Loyola, in his *Spiritual Exercises*, has excellent advice about doing reflection well. He insists that the only way to learn is by doing, reflecting on our success or failure, and doing again. A Daily Examen or focused review on the events of the day is one invaluable exercise. (See the articles on the Daily Examen in the Appendix: "The Ignatian Examen" by James L. Connor, S.J., "Rummaging for God" by Dennis Hamm, S.J., and "Welcoming the Spirit — Every Day" by William J. Byron, S.J.).

## **III. CHAPTER FORMATION**

Woodstock Business Conference meetings are occasions for interaction among peers. They are organized, led, and sponsored by the business executives and professionals. Local chapters can look to the national WBC office for curriculum materials, leadership training, research, and other on-going assistance. The Woodstock Theological Center

continues to support the work of the Conference by offering guidance in the process of theological reflection, the preparation of materials, the newsletter, retreats, and conferences.

### ***A. How is a chapter formed?***

Chapter formation begins with the identification of a core group of several leaders who want to integrate their lives and carry out their responsibilities at work in a manner consistent with their Judeo-Christian values. The following steps have proven helpful in WBC chapter formation:

#### **1. Membership characteristics**

It is important to have a clear view of the target audience for WBC membership. Since WBC aims to involve business leaders, the list of potential candidates should include leaders like business owners, entrepreneurs, top executives, managing partners, and other high-level individuals. A profile for potential members of a new WBC chapter include the following characteristics:

- \* Persons with ability to influence the culture of corporate/business organizations
- \* Persons with leadership positions in their organizations (Usually with senior management titles such as president or vice president)
- \* Lawyers, accountants, consultants that provide substantial advice and have a material impact on corporate/business culture
- \* Persons with the Woodstock vision.
- \* Persons with the ability to build trust in each other and do not see Woodstock as an opportunity for networking. Networking may grow out of the natural development of relationships, and this is appropriate. However, it is unacceptable to use the Woodstock contact to "sell" one's skill.

#### **2. Personal Invitation**

A suggested process to attract membership for a new chapter starts first with two or three well-known business leaders. The program is explained to them and their commitment to participate is obtained. They in turn identify people they would recommend.

Only after people have agreed to take on the necessary roles for a chapter to function and the required administrative assistance is secured is the group ready to offer invitations to those on the list. Individuals need to be personally invited to participate as members of a new chapter. Personal contact might be preceded by a letter with stationery which, in the left hand margin, lists the names of the first two or three business leaders and the initiator as the "Steering Committee" of the chapter. The names will tell others the level and the seriousness of the enterprise. Steering Committee members then follow up with phone calls to people they know five or six days after the initial invitation letter

goes out. They tell the recipient that he or she is involved in this program and that participation is well worth considering. "Come join us and give it a try." People will join with people they respect.

### **3. Necessary roles**

Nothing will happen unless individuals take responsibility to see that the necessary tasks are done. The WBC chapter meeting functions like any business meeting. The key roles for a successful chapter include (1) Steering Committee or Core Group, (2) Coordinator, and (3) Chaplain. Administrative help essential to handle the mailing of materials, phone calls, and arrangements.

a. After kicking off a chapter, the Steering Committee continues to function. It serves to support the coordinator and meets periodically to assess the chapter's present and future directions, to discern extending invitations to persons suggested for membership, to support and give guidance to the coordinator, and to initiate projects in response to needs or opportunities.

b. The Coordinator may chair the meeting or assign the task to others who will lead the group through each step in the outlined agenda. He or she also oversees the administrative matters, such as getting notices out, seeing that reminder phone calls are made before each meeting, organizing physical arrangements, and recording and transcribing the notes of the meeting. Little things like timely notices and reminder phone calls are the hallmarks of a successful chapter.

c. The main role of the Chaplain is to be available as a resource person and when appropriate read the Scripture and facilitate the sharing on it. He or she should not become the religious or ethical "answer person!"

### **4. Meeting Notices**

Notices should include: 1) details of the meeting, 2) the topic, 3) exercises and focus questions, 4) the Woodstock Business Conference mission statement, 5) Scripture reading on the topic, and 6) any minutes or meeting notes from the previous session. (A sample meeting Notice with Topic, Scripture, Questions, a sample Meeting Agenda, and an example of a Summary of previous meeting are set out in the Appendix.)

### **5. Fixed Date, Time, and Place**

The meetings ideally have a fixed date, time, and place. The actual time and place will depend on the situation in a particular business community. Some chapters meet early in the morning, others at midday or later in the afternoon; but, always on the same day each month.

## **IV. WHAT UNDERLIES THE WOODSTOCK PROCESS?**

There are two aspects to the Process. The first is the method, an approach that the people appropriate over time. The second aspect concerns the topics or cases for the discussion. We talk about the topics later. What underlies the Woodstock process or approach is a conviction about who we humans are, how we are loved into being, how we work, and what we are called to do and be. The way of proceeding moves as follows:

### ***A. Start with experience***

We start and continually stay with the concrete experience of actual everyday issues or dilemmas, situations we have faced and resolved (or failed to resolve). Staying with the concrete and the tangible, avoids head trips or flights of fancy. The starting point is not instruction or lecturing about leadership, ethics, or moral decision making in the abstract. This is not a top-down approach.

The reason for starting with experience is the belief that doing the right thing is not a subject to be memorized or understood intellectually, but a way of actually doing things. This way of doing stems from some very basic feelings and beliefs: one's beliefs about life, its meaning and purpose; one's image and hopes for oneself; one's relations to and regard of others; and, the role of business and the economy in promoting the good of human beings and society. It involves much more than numbers, ideas, or purely intellectual conjecture. Therefore, the Woodstock approach is concerned with the person who decides more than with ethical principles per se, important as they are. Good business men and women, individuals who are attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible, will invariably make better business decisions.

### ***B. Find the pattern in good decisions and actions***

Often in the process participants will focus on what happened when the job was done well, when good decisions were made and carried into action. The initial task is to describe the facts of the situation, to describe the experience and all its relevant details.

The next step is to find the pattern. Specifically, as we walk through the process and name what we were doing, we come to see how each step relates with the others. Drawing out the patterns from sound decisions and good action helps us to see what was at stake, what was considered or taken into account, what was ultimately decided, how it was carried out, and what was learned as a result. By reflecting on the pattern, we find in our own life experience and behavior a pattern of steps whereby we behave well and ethically. We all do this spontaneously when acting well. In Genesis, God said his creation and creatures were good — even though we mar it with our sinfulness, inattention, bias, and timidity. Therefore, if we honestly strive to do as well as possible in the struggle to make good business decisions, we will find a pattern that is written into us by God Himself as he created and redeemed us.

Finding the pattern helps us to be faithful to our basic vocation or calling in life. Finding the pattern for coming to do the right thing is the self-correcting process that enhances our ability to decide and act ethically and morally. Moreover, since this pattern of sound decision making is the way by which people grow to maturity, responsibility, and full human freedom, we are all called to follow this way. It is who we are as humans and how we operate when we are at our best.

### ***C. Name the values***

What values are we trying to preserve or promote in the particular decision or action? Were some values in tension or conflict with others (e.g., corporate competitiveness and compassion for employees)? How were values prioritized in the actual decision reached? Most business decisions are not about good and bad, but about good and better. The challenge is to determine which is better. In concrete cases this judgment call depends on all the circumstances, the question of motivations, and how the decisions are implemented.

### ***D. Identify the blockages***

Woodstock Business Conference members learn to assess what might block their efforts to make good ethical decisions. It may be inattention, untested assumptions, biases, and forces inside us or our businesses. Or, it may be factors external to the organization (e.g., government regulations, corruption, the unethical behavior of competitors, disregard of the health and well-being of individuals, or systems that sabotage the possibility of ethical business efforts). We look to see what can be done to promote a more ethical climate, not only within our firms, but in the larger social environment within which the firms operate.

Thus, over time attention may shift, moving from one's particular organization to noticing the impact of the broader social environment on our business decisions. WBC members try to understand the relationship and interaction between the political and social order and the firm's decisions. From such inquiries comes better understanding of our responsibility to contribute to the health of the social order within which we live and work.

### ***E. The relevance of the Gospel***

The step of reading and reflecting on Scripture at the beginning of each meeting surfaces the crucial question of the relevance of the Gospel and the tradition in analyzing and knowing the right thing to do. More concretely, we explore how the Gospel motivates us to choose and do what is ethical and moral. How it helps us to see and understand our role in the world as a business leader or professional. How it enables us to evaluate specific business action plans, as well as social policies.

Remember, the WBC process is not an answer book. This process leads to deeper understanding which, of necessity, aids us to make more informed, appropriate decisions. In this way of proceeding we keep using all we have learned in each new situation. By reflecting on how we have handled ourselves in making past decisions, we see how we can improve both the process of decision making and concrete business determinations themselves. Our lives grow in a spiral of cumulative behavior. Business life is no exception. This cumulative dynamic has the potential for improvement as well as decline. We progress to the extent that we make the effort necessary to pay attention to all the relevant data and ask the necessary questions. We progress if, on the basis of our questioning, we make the commitments to judge what is true and do what is good. What we are doing is who we are patterned and called to be. We are simply fulfilling our vocation by responding to the calling which is built right into us.