Toil gives work a bad name. Our work—our ability to use our mental and physical abilities to produce a good result—is God’s great gift to us. The first thing he did after creating Adam was put him in charge of his garden and give him work to do.

However, the sweat of work, along with its thorns and thistles, can choke the good of work. Toil is the result of sin. This toil can be relentless and exhausting, taking a physical and emotional toll on us. It can wear us down. Mechanical things don’t always work well; people aren’t always cooperative or supportive.

We want to accomplish more than we are able, both because we lack the ability and because of resistance from the environment around us. Work includes pain, conflict, envy, and fatigue. Not all our goals are met. We become discouraged. The toil of work causes jobs to seem pointless, fruitless, and boring.

God still wants his creation to fulfill his purpose. God created all so that all might flourish. A fallen and broken world just makes the job harder.

As a result, most experience work not as a gift to be enjoyed, but as a hard, depressing, grinding toil to be endured. That’s a tough way to spend sixty percent of our waking hours. God has something better in mind.

In a very demanding job, Ed Karbowski found a way to keep the toil of work from suffocating the good of work.

“When I view my work as only a necessary means of survival instead of a glorious calling from my Father, I see only the challenges present. It leads me down a bad path. I struggle with the toil factor, particularly frustrating technical issues, impatient clients, lack of support, and more.

“Work is something I should cherish, not despise. New gifts begin growing in me when adversity surfaces at work. In these struggles, he transforms me into his image, while also impacting my workplace and influencing others,” Ed emphasized.

In our time, toil can’t be separated from work, but they are distinct from each other. Focusing on working for our Father is a key to enabling the good of work in order to minimize the toil of work. As Ed found, it makes a difference in our lives and the lives of others.

Steve Becker is the longest-standing member of the Christians in Commerce Board of Directors. His involvement began in 1984. Retired after forty-seven years in advertising and communications, he is actively involved in ongoing projects for the ministry. Steve can be reached at stevan.becker@gmail.com.

President’s Corner

Labor Day is an annual commemoration of workers who have contributed to our country’s strength, prosperity, well-being, freedom, and leadership. It is appropriate, however, that we pay tribute foremost to our nation’s creator and the source of all these good things. And so, on Labor Day we honor both - God first and then the American worker.

I came across a short stanza one day that read like this:

“How do you serve Christ?”

“I drive a truck and stock the shelves with bread each day.”

“No, I mean what do you do to serve the King of Kings, Jesus Christ?”

“I believe that a man selling bread, and doing so faithfully, with integrity and excellence, is serving the King.”

“No, I mean what do you do for Christ each day? Are you witnessing and praying with people?”

“Yes. Work is my best witness and selling bread is like a prayer in Jesus’ name.”

God calls us to carry out his redemptive work no matter what job we do. Have a wonderful Labor Day weekend!

cassell@cicintl.org
(703) 205-5600

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**WEEK 1 • LIFE PLEASING TO GOD**

**REFLECTIONS**

**Life Pleasing to God**

By Brenda Fox

“...set your hope on the grace to be brought to you...” (1 Peter 1:13)

Last October I left a very toxic job and stepped out in faith to become self-employed. Since then, the Lord has brought into my life many opportunities to experience his grace in new ways.

For twenty years I served as a board-certified art therapist and life coach. I arrived at a place in my career where I was feeling burned out. The working environment had become very demanding and unhealthy for me. I could see the impact it was having on my compassion for the recovering addicts I worked with. Through prayer, scripture, discernment, and a series of confirmations, I took the leap and began working hard on becoming a full-time artist and entrepreneur.

I have had the privilege of guiding many people into new places of prayer, silence, and growing closer to themselves and to the Lord through iconography retreats. Icons are the ancient Byzantine images of Christ, his disciples, the saints, and other Biblical stories or figures. With every brush stroke we pray in silence as we paint the image. It is meditative, relaxing, and requires no previous art experience. Even so, it’s amazing what the Lord brings up in your heart while painting in silence. There have been many beautiful testimonies of answered prayers and healing while people attend these retreats.

My journey has taken me to Texas, Arizona, and Louisiana. Most recently, I spent two weeks in Louisiana teaching at two different locations. Father Joey from the Houma-Thibodaux Diocese of Louisiana continues to bring me back to his parish to teach these iconography retreats. He recently sent me encouragement on how God is using these retreats to bring the Gospel to his people through art and icons.

He wrote, “Thanks again, Brenda! Your presence in my parish is a tremendous blessing on many levels! With the diocese, for the people, you keep a connection with the ‘other lung’ of the church in a way that makes Eastern spirituality alive, a ‘touch of mysticism’ that the Holy Spirit can use to help our people grow in daily prayer and holiness. Eastern icon spirituality has found a home in this humble little Cajun diocese thanks to you!”

Then he shared with me that one of his deacons, who bought an icon from me, is bringing the icon to the sick and the homebound. This icon is known for its stories of comfort and healing as people pray with it.

Little did I know when I said “yes” to the Lord in stepping out in faith to quit my job that he would use my talent as an artist, iconographer, and art therapist; that grace would be brought to so many people. Never could I have imagined being able to share the Gospel and the healing power of Jesus through paint and prayer!

I am humbled and fortunate that our Lord has allowed me to use my art and experience as a life coach to begin a new work where I can serve others. These retreats provide them a new environment where retreatants can rest and be renewed in their call to serve him in their workplaces.

**PRAY:**

Lord, open my eyes and help me see new ways that you want to use me to minister grace to others. Direct me to step out in faith to use skills and gifts that have lain dormant.

**REFLECT:**

What are the special gifts, talents, and skills God has given to you in order to be used like a paintbrush in his hand to bring him glory?

**DISCUSS:**

When has God surprised you with his grace when you least expected it? How has the Lord used you and your gifts to bring grace to others?

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Brenda Fox lives in Tempe, AZ, and has been a member of the Phoenix Women’s Chapter since its conception. She is self-employed as an iconographer and life coach and is also building a travel club. Brenda gives iconography retreats all over the country. She can be reached at brendajfox7@gmail.com.
**WEEK 2 • MEN’S REFLECTIONS**

**Personal Sacrifice**  
By Dan Kuplic

*The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding. (Proverbs 4:7)*

When I first met Tom, he was approaching retirement after a very successful career as a radiologist and wanted some investment advice and help with retirement planning. One of his goals was to visit Israel to see and experience the ancient cities, to travel on the roads that Jesus walked, and to visit the historical sites of Judaism.

After he returned from this pilgrimage, I asked him how he and his wife, Ann, enjoyed their trip. He was enthusiastic about how the trip helped him better understand the Christian and Jewish traditions and how he understood the Scriptures in a whole new way. I could tell they were both deeply moved by this experience.

Then Tom told me that his only regret was that he had not taken the trip ten years earlier; if he had, he could have used the wisdom he obtained for a longer period of his life. At the time, Tom was in his mid-sixties. He instructed me to tell all my clients who are considering a trip or pilgrimage not to delay, but to go immediately.

Tom’s advice struck me. I have frequently gone on important visits, conferences, and retreats that have had a positive impact in my faith journey because of his words of encouragement. As I reflect on my own mortality and the impact of my work, family, Christian community, and Christians in Commerce, I am challenged to consider that in all my “getting,” I need to get wisdom. Wisdom is the one thing that will help me keep things in an eternal perspective.

**PRAY:**

Father, give me ears to hear, and grant me wisdom and understanding that I may live my life and do good work that brings your kingdom to this world.

**DISCUSS:**

How have you been working your employees or yourself too hard, without room for a proper rest? How do you pursue excellence and meeting objectives while still maintaining a good work/life balance?

**REFLECT:**

Have you been working your employees or yourself too hard, without room for a proper rest? How do you pursue excellence and meeting objectives while still maintaining a good work/life balance?

**WEEK 3 • MEN’S REFLECTIONS**

**Making a Difference in the Workplace**  
By Dan Kuplic

*By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. (Genesis 2:2)*

As my financial planning practice was starting to grow, I had the opportunity to hire a paraplanner who would assist me with the running of the practice. I was fortunate to hire Nikki. She was highly skilled, and all my clients really enjoyed working with her. During the next fourteen years the practice experienced strong growth. Over those years Nikki got married, had children, and wanted to work from home two days a week, which we were able to accommodate.

A year ago Nikki left my practice and started to work with one of my colleagues. His practice was much larger and focused on very sophisticated clientele, including professional athletes and high-profile business executives. It was an exciting opportunity she felt she needed to pursue. I knew the demands of the other firm were much more intense, but we parted on good terms. I was fortunate to find some new employees to take over her duties.

We stayed in touch, and after about eight months we met up at a party before a Garth Brooks concert. We caught up for a while, and while I was visiting with her husband, my wife was chatting with Nikki. On the way home, I turned to my wife and commented that it was good to see Nikki and that she seemed to be doing well. To my surprise, my wife, Theresa, responded, “No, she isn’t. She thinks the job is too demanding and wants to come back to work with you.” Nikki and I talked again the next week, and we were able to make room for her back in our group.

This incident helped me realize that our work environment has a big impact not only on the good work we produce but on the lives of our employees. I know that the Lord has given me the values to help find a good balance between work and family. This has a real impact in people’s lives. Sometimes we don’t realize how important a good work environment is until we leave.

**PRAY:**

Show me, Father, how to find the balance to work and rest. May all the work of my hands be fruitful.

**DISCUSS:**

In what ways are you enhancing your work environment to reflect the excellence, goodness, and balance that the Father is looking for?

**REFLECT:**

Have you been working your employees or yourself too hard, without room for a proper rest? How do you pursue excellence and meeting objectives while still maintaining a good work/life balance?
Holding Each Other Accountable

It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of everyone; the living should take this to heart. (Ecclesiastes 7:2)

Over the years, I have had some wonderful clients, foremost among them Tom and Ann, a delightful couple. In my first meeting with Tom, I knew he was a man of substance and faith. His wonderful wife, Ann, was a charming and caring person. I served his family over the past twenty years, and I have grown to care for them both professionally and personally.

A few months ago, I got a call from Tom’s daughter that his health was fading and that he wanted to discuss some final wishes with me.

I met with Tom the day that he was transferred to hospice care in the home. The family was arriving from out of town for the final farewell. One of Tom’s college roommates had just stopped by for a final visit. Then came my time to visit with Tom.

I knew I needed to conduct some business, but what was really important was preparing my client and friend for a final goodbye and a visit with our Father. After we covered the business at hand, I asked him if we could pray. He said yes, he would like that. None of my business training prepared me for that moment. It was something I just had to do.

I led him in a prayer of thanksgiving for his wonderful life, family, and how well he had prepared for this. Now I wanted to be sure he was prepared to the next big meeting with the Father. As we were praying, his daughter came in and asked Tom a question, interrupting our prayer. After that, I said I should go, but Tom asked me to finish my prayer. We prayed that Tom would receive his final reward and be welcomed into heaven. It was a deeply moving and wonderful gift to pray with a client and friend as he prepared for his final days.

Tom died a few days later, and the wake and funeral were great celebrations of a man who was prepared to meet his maker.

PRAY:
Teach me, Lord, how to pray with people in all ways. Give me insight, wisdom, and a heart ready to care for people at all times and in all circumstances.

REFLECT:
How have you walked with people in times of trial and grief? Are there times you’ve represented the Lord well? Are there times when you could have been a better witness?

DISCUSS:
How are you helping people prepare for the biggest meeting of their life? Are you ready to pray with people in whatever situation you find yourself?

2016 CHRISTIANS IN COMMERCE ANNUAL CONFERENCE WEBSITE: WWW.CICCONF.COM

We are pleased to announce the launch of our brand-new website to support our Annual Conference!

On the new website, you can find:
- General Sessions and Workshops content
- Speakers
- Schedule
- Conference hotel venue, including local attractions
- Past Annual Conference videos
- Christians in Commerce resources
- Photo gallery from past Annual Conferences
- Integrated social media buttons for Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn

We will be constantly updating our content with helpful Annual Conference information pre-, during, and post-conference.

For any questions, suggestions, feedback, or comments, please contact Jon Cassady (cassady@cicintl.org, 703.205.5600) at our CIC home office.
Personal Sacrifice

“Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do … and if I perish, I perish.” (Esther 4:16)

Like Esther, I needed guidance on a family matter that could have possibly ended disastrously. Against my mom’s wishes, I felt it was time for my sister to move out of my home. However, this was not a decision that I wanted to make alone. I needed to hear God’s directions clearly; so I fasted for 3 days.

When people asked if it was difficult to cook or watch other people eat, I said no, because it would have been more devastating to let God down by breaking my fast. It would have meant that I didn’t trust him. Esther trusted God even if death was part of the solution (“If I perish, I perish”).

At the end of my fast, the Lord spoke to my heart during my prayer/quiet time. He let me know that it was time to shift my focus away from my sister and onto other things he wanted to do in my life. Since then, I have had the opportunity to participate in special projects with CIC, such as composing these newsletter reflections, participating on the service council, and drafting proposals with a vision team for future university campus clubs. The Lord has also blessed me to see my sister in purposeful roles at home, such as helping my mother with her recently diagnosed syncope.

All along God knew the big picture. If I had chosen to follow my own will instead of fasting and praying, my life would have been in shambles. It would not have been physically or logistically possible to take on such enormous responsibilities while also holding two jobs. The Lord also knew how much of a blessing my sister would actually be in the future for me and my mother. This situation reminded me why it is so important to “trust in the LORD … and lean not on your own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5). Amen!

Father, give me ears to hear your calling. Speak to my heart. Let me know if or when you’d want me to conduct a fast, for your honor and glory.

Reflector

When was the last time you sacrificed something for the Lord? How did this sacrifice change your life?

Discuss:

What sort of nourishment do you get from fasting and praying? What do you learn about yourself through this sacrifice?

Redeeming Our Father’s Creation

“First go and be reconciled … Settle matters quickly with your adversary …” (Matthew 5:24-25)

Oh, there’s nothing worse than having tension in the workplace, especially when you find yourself at the center of the situation. I work with a few teachers as co-advisors for a campus club. A few weeks ago, one of the advisors spontaneously decided to make a video ad for our club. She emailed us a clip, and needless to say, we were less than impressed.

The other team members did not respond, but I thoughtlessly tossed “quick to listen, slow to speak” (James 1:19) by the wayside. I told her the video would have been more powerful if the team had first discussed its vision.

From then on, it was downhill. My colleague began to withdraw. She stopped participating in email chats and became MIA at subsequent events. And I must confess, my initial reaction to her behavior was a bit wooden; I allowed my pride to block my ability to see the forest for the trees. “I didn’t do anything wrong!” I thought. But the team was on the verge of collapse.

One weekend the Holy Spirit wrestled with my conscience. The Lord told my heart during prayer and meditation that it wasn’t about me and that I needed to be humble and reach out to my colleague. I obeyed the Lord and phoned my colleague. It turned out to be a powerful conversation because other layers of grievances were peeled back, and the Lord placed a mirror in my face. He unveiled areas where I could be a brighter light in the workplace by showing more sensitivity and compassion and by offering encouragement on a regular basis. No one is perfect; therefore, we must resolve issues as a team with love and respect.

I now wish I had settled the matter quickly. Not only did this experience strengthen our team of advisors, but it also strengthened our mission to create a positive environment for learning and build strong relationships in our community.

Father, forgive me for allowing my pride to prevent me from settling matters quickly. Give me the strength to reach out to my colleagues, whether I believe I am right or wrong.

Reflector

In what ways have you made efforts at reconciling or building relationships at work? Is there anyone in particular the Lord is asking you to reach out to?

Discuss:

How do you have a loving relationship with an adversary? What are the potential consequences for waiting for the “right” time to have a difficult conversation?
The Fruits of Our Relationships as Sisters  
By Sophia L. Norman

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ... It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. (1 Corinthians 13:4-8)

I am so blessed to be surrounded by my sisters in CIC, who encourage me to stand on God’s word. As an educator, I am often challenged by the confines of what is considered politically correct. But lately, I have found myself being challenged in a much larger arena—my own community!

I am referring to adult, working-class believers who have philosophical passions that may or may not be entirely aligned with God’s word. I had a few occasions to be involved in a local outreach with a CIC sister to witness, share CIC’s mission, and extend an invitation to attend the weekly meetings. We hoped to increase discipleship within the Millennial generation.

But abruptly, the tone of a few conversations was shifted by contention, where some argued that too many Christian organizations are not challenging the secular world with enough aggression. A few individuals we spoke with wanted to jump into the political arena with petitions, protest demonstrations, and rallies.

One side of me wanted to jump in the ring and go for a verbal knockout; but my wise sister consistently chose to respond with love. She respectfully acknowledged the stance of each individual but also reminded them that in spite of some differences, we ultimately want the same thing, which is to share God’s love and win souls for Christ.

By the end of each occasion, the individuals who were once antagonistic drew together and closed each conference with a unified prayer. Their temperaments had turned mild as we were reminded that we are on the same side. My CIC sister put this week’s Scripture to the test and proved that love never fails, because God never fails. God IS love!

### Pray:

Father, help me to defend your word with love. Remind me to cling to the Holy Spirit whenever the enemy attempts to strike me with intimidation.

### Reflect:

Share a time when you have shown love in a difficult, antagonistic situation. How did the other person respond?

### Discuss:

Is it possible to be angry in a loving way? Why is it important to respond to all circumstances with love?

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**SIGNET NAMED AS CIC 2016 ANNUAL CONFERENCE APPAREL SPONSOR**

One of Christians in Commerce’s goals is to equip Christian men and women to live the life of Christ through various means. In order to further increase our visibility and affect a larger surface area, we are providing you with the opportunity to purchase items of clothing that display our CIC logo. The items you can select include shirts, jackets, and hats and are provided by Signet Screen Printing & Embroidery, owned by longtime Winchester Men’s Chapter member, Dick Kent. The prices they are offering are at a discounted rate.

Please click the pictures on this page to view a larger image and our CIC logo. To view these products, and for additional details, please visit: www.cicintl.org/cicwearables.
God is good, for sure! At the invitation of William Judd and Lifepointe Church in Prescott Valley, AZ, the Scottsdale Men's Chapter hosted a Commuter Challenge Weekend this past April 29-May 1. Of the thirty-three total attendees, twenty-four were attending their first CIC activity. These twenty-four new attendees were a testament of the impact William is having on these men’s lives. William is a mortgage broker and the Men’s Ministry Director at Lifepointe Church. At the invitation of Jon Denny, William attended his first Challenge Weekend about three years ago. When asked about the weekend, William responded that he “fell in love with Jesus and all mankind, no matter how much my flesh or mind wanted to dislike or ignore someone.” During William’s second Challenge Weekend last year, we discussed doing a weekend for his church, which is located over 100 miles outside the Scottsdale area. Several months later William discussed the idea with his pastor and received his permission, and the weekend was borne. Music was provided by both the Lifepointe band and our Scottsdale brothers. Lives were changed, including one man accepting Jesus Christ for the first time in his life and another man rediscovering love in his marriage. Sunday we reconvened on the second floor of an RV shop, and we were joined by the proprietor, Danny. Danny participated in Talk 7, and a couple of us then discussed it with him in a small group.

We left with an invitation from Danny to return. On Monday we decided to hold the first Prescott Valley Chapter meeting on Wednesday at 6:30 A.M. at Danny’s. We had to send invitations out before we even had confirmation from Danny. When we finally connected with Danny, he not only said yes, he offered us our own set of keys to make it easy for us to get in for our meetings. Praise God!

The Prescott Valley Challenge Group is off to a strong start, with nine men attending the first meeting and ten attending the second.

When we say God opens doors, he surely does.

CIC ANNUAL CONFERENCE WORKSHOPS

As you begin planning your trip to this year’s CIC Annual Conference, here’s a brief summary of each workshop. You will have an opportunity to attend each one.

- **Personal Mission: Fulfilling My Call and Vocation in the Workplace**
  Each of us is called to live out our own story - with friends and family, and in the workplace. How can we best serve God through our labor and embrace the vocation he has given to each of us?

- **Being a Difference-Maker: Equipping the Laborers**
  Learn about some practical tools that can help you make an impact on your workplace and the world around you. These insights will help prepare you to embrace the opportunities God presents to you in all areas of life.

- **Commerce and Culture: Dealing with the Workplace Culture**
  Fifty percent of our waking hours are spent in the workplace; yet, it is where we are most likely to leave our faith at the door. As a result, faith tends to be a minimal influence in our business decisions and working relationships. How can we change this and impact our work culture?

- **Exercising Religious Freedom in the Workplace and Everyday Gatherings**
  Religion in the American workplace is among the most contentious and difficult areas for employees and employers to navigate. This workshop, conducted by two lawyers, will focus on what we are and aren’t allowed to say as a Christian in the workplace.
CHRISTIANS IN COMMERCE PRAYER

Father,
You are my Lord and Creator.
You entrust me with a place of stewardship in your creation.
Fill me with your Holy Spirit:
That he may teach me to pray and live in Christ and as Christ;
That he may teach me love for family, friends and all people.
   A love that is selfless, humble, and wise;
That he may teach me stewardship of the talents, time, money and possessions you have given me.
   A stewardship that serves is generous and brings honor to your name;
That he may teach me faithfulness to your call to Christians in Commerce.
   A call that unites us and builds your Kingdom in the marketplace.
Through Jesus Christ who is Lord.
Amen

VISION:  Being Christ in the workplace
MISSION:  To encourage and equip Christians to be God’s presence in the workplace by the power of the Holy Spirit, exercising faith, integrity, and excellence
VALUES:  Christians in Commerce is an ecumenical organization committed to:
   • Growing and being transformed in Jesus Christ
   • Manifesting the gifts of the Holy Spirit
   • Building strong brotherhood and sisterhood
   • Serving God and expanding his Kingdom in all aspects of our lives

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.”
Galatians 2:20