Global Faculty Initiative

The Faculty Initiative

seeks to promote the integration

of Christian faith and academic disciplines

by bringing theologians into conversation with scholars

across the spectrum of faculties

in research universities

worldwide.

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Preview Response

WHAT DOES FLOURISH MEAN FOR A SURGEON SCIENTIST?

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I am a pediatric surgeon and a researcher. As a surgeon-scientist, I have not been thinking so much about “flourishing” as we live in our new pandemic reality. I am mostly focused on the treatment of and research into congenital disorders that impair breathing in newborns. In the process, I provide support to parents facing the stress and uncertainty of their babies’ health. Not all of these critically ill infants survive despite our best efforts. There is heartbreak. The days and nights spent in the ICU with a sick or dying newborn is anything but a flourishing experience- for us and for the families. Lives are shattered. The pain we witness meshes into our own sense of loss and failure as care-givers. On top of this, the challenges of academia, funding prospects and increasingly scarce “protected time” do little to ease the burdens of the academic surgeon.

What does it mean to “flourish” in academic surgery? In much of the recent literature published on “physician burn out”, the term “resilience” has been used in lieu of “flourish” as a response to the endless demands of academic surgery. “Resilience” is used perhaps to recognize that resistance to occupational exhaustion and injury, moral or otherwise, is the key to longevity in a surgical career, especially for women. In emphasizing “resilience”, there is an admission that patient gratitude, accolades and financial reward are not enough to attract talented medical school graduates to a “grinding” career in academic surgery, nor retain the frazzled, over-worked middle-career university surgeons from leaving their posts to assume administrative positions. In promoting “resilience”, there is a further admission that much of what we do in academic medicine is soul-draining.

“Resilience” infers the presence of resources to withstand the negative “circumstances” or “emotions” one encounters– you can bend but you won’t break. To “flourish”, on the other hand, is to be more than that- it infers life, growth and vibrancy, not just endurance. It is a fullness of heart that inspires and is hopeful. These are not “summoned” from within but are given- the call to use the gifts of the Holy Spirit to the fullest extent from a right relationship with God.

For more information

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