THE SCHOOL
FOR CHRISTIAN FAITH & LEADERSHIP
Episcopal Diocese of Washington

Leader's Guide for Christ Before Us: Federal Workers

This was designed as a 90-minute session. The guide listed below assumes a 7pm start time and an online format with multiple small groups. A group of up to 12 plus two hosts can just stay together without splitting up.

HOST 1:
Welcome and brief intro to the flow of the evening.

- Format: welcome, wonderings, story, response
- What is shared is sacred and should not be shared outside this space
- Can't promise absolute confidentiality, please share with that in mind
- Please reach out to me afterwards if you have any concerns about the way the evening unfolded.
- We each share from our own experience. The gift of this format is the deep listening that occurs. Your host will thank each person for their contribution, and will remind you not to add your advice, sympathy, responses, and so on. Trust the format! We find that it is often easier to speak what's on our hearts if we don't have to worry about the response we might get.
- We will now move into groups. Each group will have a host. Please be patient and kind as it takes a minute to get everyone into the right place. Your host will start the small group time.

7:10-7:55
BREAKOUT GROUPS

WELCOME: "What has been the heart of your week?"

HOST: We'll start with the heart of our weeks. We ask everyone to share a few words about one thing from your week during this time. A few things to keep in mind: This is meant to be brief, a sentence or a few words. The host will thank each person who shares. Please share your own thoughts and reflections, rather than commenting on what others have shared. Listening deeply is our gift to each other today. The Spirit will do the work of weaving the pieces together. Finally, silence is good. It gives us a chance to gather our thoughts and to reflect privately on things we might not be ready to share with the group yet or even ever.

WONDERINGS

HOST: We're going to dive into our wonderings now. I will pose the wonderings one at a time, repeating them a couple of times. No one is required to share here, and we probably won't have time for everyone to share a response to every question. Just share as you feel moved. It's also okay if there's some silence, even quite a bit of silence. Many of us need time to consider before we share, and the Holy Spirit moves just as comfortably in silence as in words. I'll add a new wondering from time to time, but it's always okay to go back to a previous one if you have something to share.

As our focus tonight is on supporting our siblings who are most impacted by the cuts in the federal workforce, I ask us all to prioritize the voices of those who are directly impacted. If you are here in support, please listen more than you speak! And even if it is difficult, please leave it to me as your host to respond to each person with a simple thank you and resist the urge to jump in with words of comfort, advice, strategy, sympathy or any other well-meaning response to someone else's sharing. The greatest gift you give will be to receive what others have chosen to share in a spirit of prayer and openness.

Wonderings:

- ***We sometimes call government workers "civil servants." I wonder what that term means to you.***

- ***I wonder if there is something you are really good at or something people you have worked with would identify as your particular gift.***

- ***I wonder what helps you to remember who you are when a crisis hits.***

- ***Tell about a time when you have found strength you didn't know you had.***

7:55PM
EXIT SMALL GROUPS

TALK

HOST 2/STORYTELLER: I invite you to listen to the talk as it comes to you. Don't worry about catching all the content. Let the words wash over you and trust that you will hear the pieces that are important for you today.

Adapt Bishop Mariann's talk (at the end of this document) as appropriate, and read it here, or use another 8-10 minute reflection about vocation, hope, and strength in difficult times.

RESPONSE

HOST 1: Lets take a moment of silence to reflect on what has been shared:
'I wonder what was happening in your head and heart during that time?'
Please share anything you'd like with the group in the chat (or share out loud if the group is small enough).

HOST 1: Thank you to our small group hosts. I'd invite any of you who would like to share the themes that you heard reflected in the sharing to do that briefly now.

HOST 1: Thank you, a reminder to treat what has been shared as sacred.
Thank you for your vulnerability and participation. These are hard times. We are not alone.

8:20PM
COMPLINE (Book of Common Prayer, p. 127 or 140)

8:30pm Thank you all and good night!

Being With Federal Works Reflection
March 7, 2025
The Rt. Rev. Mariann Edgar Budde

I am grateful for the opportunity to be with you.
I offer these brief reflections, mindful of the sadness and uncertainty of this time and confident of God's desire to be with you, and to see you through the wilderness.

Watching what is happening to so many in the federal workforce, and how you are being treated, the word that comes to mind is *betrayal.* While there are no guarantees in life or work, the violation of trust and the disregard of your dignity have been egregious. This is moral injury on a massive scale.

I'm so sorry that this is happening to you.

There is a particular vulnerability we feel when our ability to provide for ourselves and our loved ones is destabilized, and it runs deep, touching some of our deep fears.

And because work is such a defining aspect of our identities and relationships, the shock of losing our work, or the fear of losing it, touches upon nearly everything about us.

But there is so much more to say about who you are and what is true about you.

So let me to teach you the refrain of a folk song that I love, which goes like this:

Our life is more than our work
And our work is more than our job.

Sing along with me.

Our life is more than our work
And our work is more than our job.

Let's think about work in broad terms, and about life that is more than our work. I don't mean to minimize the pain of job loss and the worry you feel. The intention is to surround the loss with spiritual and relational resources, so that it's easier to bear. .

My mother, the physical therapist, used to tell her patients (and her daughters) that one way to treat a vulnerability in one's body is to surround it with strength. She was talking

about joints and muscles, but it's an insight with broad application. Whenever we're dealing with a vulnerability, or whatever it is that we can't fix and may not get better anytime soon, one path forward is to surround the vulnerability with strength.

That is our aim tonight.
Surely that is God's desire for us all–that we experience grace and love, mercy and divine guidance in the places where we feel most vulnerable.

So I invite you to close your eyes or soften your gaze and take several deep breaths.

Breathe in. And out.
In. And out.
In. And out.

With your mind's eye, imagine God's loving gaze upon you and those dear to you. However you see or sense God, consider the amazing possibility that God sees you, knows you, and loves you.

Hear for yourself the words that Jesus heard when he rose from the waters of baptism and again when he stood on a mountaintop seeking clarity at one of the most decisive moments of his life:

You are my beloved. You are my beloved.
Say your name aloud. Then say: I am God's beloved.

I wonder what God would like to say to you about the value of your work.

I imagine that the first thing God would say is *thank you.* Thank you for your good work. Thank you for showing up each day, doing the hard things, and being there for your co-workers.

God knows your life's work is not defined by your employment. Those who love you know how hard you work–at your job, yes, but throughout your life and relationships. And it isn't just what you do, but who you are, and how you care for others.

The Rev. Anna Olson says it this way:

The value of our presence is not just in completing tasks, or contributing to profit or success, but also the way we treat others as we go about our work – coworkers, customers, people we serve. We really have only one job description: love. We are

called to love God and one another. Our day jobs are just one of the places in our lives where we are called to do our true work.

The second thing that I believe that God wants to say to you is that you are so much more to God, and to those who love you, than your work. Hard as it may be to do right now, this is a good time to remember all the things that you love about your life that have nothing to do with work, or at least not about your employment.

The poet Emily Dickinson once wrote that the only biblical commandment she ever obeyed was "Consider the lilies." This is a good time for you to consider the lilies, look at the birds, get outside, or to bury your nose in a book or do whatever it is that gives you joy. Amid the many practicalities and urgencies to tend to–and there are many–one way to surround vulnerability with strength is to tap into your joy.

One last thing that I imagine God wanting to say is a reminder that you are endowed with resilience–the amazing inner capacity that enables you to grow stronger through adversity and thrive in new circumstances. Resilience is what enables us to recover from a traumatic experience and go on to live joyful lives–not by denying the trauma, but by surrounding it with healing and strength, so that it remains a part of our life story, but never what defines us.

Resilience is in us at a cellular level, and it's contagious. We gain resilience from one another–in friendship, community, and from the inspired examples of those who have made it through the traumas of their lives with love in their hearts.

Now is a good time to gather in our families, circle of friends, or in church, and talk of our life experiences and the people who inspire you. Each time we do, we tap into our God-given resilience, enabling us not only to persevere, but live each day with grace.

At my mothers' memorial service last month, we sang *Amazing Grace.* Consider waking up each morning and singing to yourself its final verse:

Through many dangers, toils and snares
We have already come.
'Tis grace has brought us safe thus far,
And grace will lead us home.

May the grace that has brought you through in the past, be with you, and sustain you in the days ahead.

Amen.