

“The Benjamins” or “In God We Trust”

We all face it every day anytime we look at a dollar bill.

What is it?

“The Benjamins” or “In God We Trust.”

On Tuesday, Sept. 10th BELIEVES was pleased to welcome Steve Siler, President of the Mercy Care Foundation, and Camille Naughton, VP of Advancement and Corporate Partnerships at Cristo Rey Atlanta, as they shared their insights on how they discern the way through “‘The Benjamins’ or ‘In God We Trust’” daily in their roles, and invited discussion on the topic.



“The journey to be in the role I am in today is a long story,” Siler opened with. “I won’t go all the way back to Adam and Eve, but I’ve been in non-profits for 25 years.”

Siler, who was trained as an auditor for Arthur Anderson to start his career, spent 1.5 years in that role but soon realized it wouldn’t be the path for him.

“I had actually thought of being a priest, so I went to seminary, but then decided to leave that and landed at St. Pius High School, where I started off teaching before landing in a Development role with the school for 9 years,” Siler shared.

Following his time at St. Pius High School, Siler continued his career in the Development space with the Archdiocese of Atlanta and then with Coxe Curry & Associates.

While Siler was with Coxe Curry, one of their clients was Mercy Care. When he saw that Mercy Care had an opening for a Foundation Director, he pursued and was chosen for the role.

“I don’t know if you’ve ever done a look back for a spiritual path in your life, but it’s a really great exercise,” Siler then said. “Mercy Care was originally a ministry of St. Joseph’s Hospital serving those with low-income – rather than being an entity of its own. In my role now, I’m in this odd place where I pivot between engaging with the wealthy to fund our work, and the poorest of the poor in Atlanta that we serve. It’s a curious position to be in, filled with conflicting emotions.”

Naughton then stated, “I love the pivot perspective.”

Naughton, who worked in DC to begin her career and then moved to Florida after marrying her husband who is in the military, found herself in Development – and Atlanta – without necessarily intentionally seeking out either.

“When my husband got hired by Delta, we moved to Atlanta, and I got hired at the Cathedral of Christ the King,” Naughton shared. “The idea of Development work there was new, so I learned the trade of Development there.”

Then when Cristo Rey Jesuit High School was being formed in Atlanta, Naughton had a conversation with someone.

“I saw Bill Garrett was named to lead Cristo Rey, knowing he had been at the St. Joseph Hospital Foundation before,” said Naughton. “At the time I wanted to do Community Affairs work – as opposed to Government Affairs or Development. Then Bill Garrett called and we met at Ignatius House Jesuit Retreat Center for two hours.”

Before long, Naughton, who recently was named Cristo Rey’s 2nd president, became Cristo Rey Atlanta’s first employee.

“The first meeting Bill and I had once I was hired was at the McDonald’s near Marist because it had free Wi-Fi,” Naughton recalled with a smile.

Siler then jumped back in as the conversation continued.



“It’s the mission of Mercy Care that I am drawn to,” Siler mentioned.

“I do like fundraising,” Naughton said in contrast. “I couldn’t sell you a copier, but I can sell you the hope of a child. What I love is when a student stops by my office at the end of the day and just starts opening up to talk. We’re plucking them from a system that’s failing them – and changing the trajectory of their lives.”

So how does prayer exist for Naughton and Siler during the work day?

“First, in my work, it’s not my money, so you have to give them a reason to give,” Naughton said. “I’ve started a Master’s at the University of Notre Dame now. There’s a class on Integrated Leadership throughout the experience, and it’s all about prayer and this.”

She added, “We can end up having some very contentious conversations in our work – often with parents – so prayer is huge to focus on to ensure it’s all about ‘What’s best for this child?’”

Siler then commented.

“I have to start with my view of prayer,” he said. “I tend look at prayer as an encounter, rather than a performance. So I turn more to contemplative prayer, where I’m not asking for anything, I’m just seeking to encounter God.”

How does this tie to the meaning of the session’s topic – “The Benjamins’ or ‘In God We Trust?’”

Before Naughton and Siler shared their thoughts on this, a few of the attendees reflected and shared theirs.

“For me it’s about priorities, and reflecting on it,” said CTK Parishioner Tim Porter. “It’s a hard thing in the professional world, and a hard thing to be a dad paying tuition. As long as you have them in the right order, then I believe it’s OK.”

Porter added that he once heard someone share about the 5F’s: Faith, Family, Fun, Friends, and Finances.

“The person who came up with this said, ‘Show me someone with an ‘F’ out of order and I’ll show you what problems they’ll have,’” recalled Porter.

After another CTK parishioner shared his thoughts, Siler jumped in with a few reflections and insights on the question.

“I have had, and always had, an uneasy relationship with money,” Siler stated. “I grew up not wanting for anything. We certainly weren’t rich, but we had regular vacations and things like that.”

Siler went on to comment, “I have a friend who is a Dominican priest who has said, ‘America’s root sin is comfort-seeking.’ I’ve thought about this a lot. Much of what we’re oriented toward in our culture is seeking comfort. Yet I’m not sure that is what the Gospel calls us to. Money and chasing after money plays a key role in this.”

“Actually, I have wondered about this with respect to the church,” he added. “Money is one of the most pervasive, powerful things in our lives. Yet, when have you heard a sermon about money and how it relates to our lives, our spiritual lives? Is my god my 403b (the non-profit world’s equivalent of a 401k)? I often wonder about this.”

Naughton then chimed in.

“As a Development professional, you have to wrestle with this almost daily. What happens is you get a big donor and then you can have access. At Cristo Rey, I love my parents because with them I don’t have this struggle.”

She added, “I have to wrestle with this when getting big checks. There’s a lot of gray that happens in the development world. We have to have the focus on ‘In God We Trust’ and it has to be about the organization’s mission, not a person’s individual mission.

Naughton said she believes at Cristo Rey and Mercy Care, people are giving not out of ego but for the mission – and that they’re fortunate in that way because it’s about social justice.

So have either Naughton or Siler ever given money back or said “No” to a donor?



“There might have been some small ones in the past, but I tend to block them out,” replied Siler. “How it happens is you get the gift, and then later you realize there’s something wanted in return. That’s when we say, ‘Oooh, we don’t do that.’”

Adding to Siler’s remarks, Naughton then said, “There are plenty of good people out there. You don’t need to take money from bad people.”

Siler and Naughton then both took a moment to share about a few of those good people that they were touched by.

“Just recently we received a bequest from a widow. She had made just 5 or so gifts to Mercy Care during her lifetime, and none more than \$500,” Siler recalled. “We learned that she and her husband had left us half of their estate, a gift of \$2.6 million. She was committed to ensuring that the poor were offered healthcare.”

Naughton then spoke of one of the good people she had the chance to deal with.

“There’s a woman whose husband had been a science and math teacher at Marist for many, many years,” Naughton told everyone. “One day at Cristo Rey, I got a call from her telling me she was trying to give a gift online and needed help. When I asked her how much she was trying to give she said, ‘\$100,000.’ I had to help her because what she wanted to give exceeded the amount we could get in online gifts in a day.”

With all the care that happens for those Cristo Rey and Mercy Care serve through their mission, how does that translate into how they care internally for their employees?

“At Cristo Rey, we offer a 6% match for everyone’s 401k, provide \$5,250 in educational support for all employees up front, serve meals to all employees while at work, and offer free retreats at Ignatius House,” answered Naughton.

Siler then said at Mercy Care they elevated pay to \$16/hour to ensure it was above minimum wage.

“The more money you pay for non-patient stuff, the less you have for patients, so you have to balance and wrestle with that,” added Siler.

With the time coming to a close after having provided so many insights on “‘The Benjamins’ or ‘In God We Trust’”, Siler and Naughton were asked one more question that was of a more personal nature.



“If you were only able to verbally communicate three phrases throughout your life, what would they be, and why?”

Siler answered first.

“The founder of Confucianism said, ‘He who knows he has enough is rich.’”

He added, “Richard Rohr, a Franciscan guru, said, ‘You’re life is not about you.’”

And finally, he spoke of Jesus.

“Christ said, ‘Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me.’”

Then it was Naughton’s turn to respond with her top phrases.

“Cristo Rey’s quote for the summer is ‘Lead with zeal,’” she said. “No one follow people who don’t have zeal. So, ‘lead with zeal’ is my first one.”

Naughton’s second phrase – ‘We’re all made in the image and likeness of God.’

“It’s the prayer we need to have in all difficult situations,” she added.

And her final phrase?

“At Notre Dame there’s a theme around ‘Excellence happens on purpose,’” she said. “It happens when it’s a priority.”