Abstract

The Examen is a form of daily reflection created by St. Ignatius of Loyola. It is often structured as a series of 3-7 questions that causes one to reflect on their day, relationship with God, how they feel they benefitted themselves and others, and how they feel they might have made mistakes that impacted themselves or others. New versions of the Examen are created to help our world spiritually confront issues of discrimination, injustices, and stress. Ecology-centered Examens can provide a space for everyone to grow in environmental awareness and action. This poster presents a water-based Examen. The Examen reflections are guided by pieces of visual art, literature, and music to allow participants to engage with different mediums that express the beauty of human interactions with water. In doing so, I hope that participants are inspired to find their own way of feeling connected to the water around us and build awareness of their environmental impact on our shared resource.

Introduction

Water is a unifying, marvelous part of our lives. However, water may also be the cause of death and destruction. Access to clean water restricts the health of millions and can be a source of great anxiety. The goal of this Examen is to provide a context for individuals to develop their own relationship with water, to appreciate its role in our daily lives and seek out nearby sources of water to help us navigate our environmental anxiety (fear regarding the earth’s future). Combating this ecological crisis begins with personal reflections, with the offering of compassion to ourselves and appreciation for the nature surrounding us, then community-building based on those reflections. As Rebecca W. Shoaf writes in The Examen Life-Giving Grace: An Analysis, “Relationships are sometimes neglected in a world filled with constant stimulation, living in a culture that believes the myth that one should only care for self and their immediate family. The benefits of the examen prayer may help counteract selfish behavior”[1]. A water-based Examen helps to immediately narrow and give thanks to an entity so close to our hearts and incentivize action for water’s protection.

Methods

Art provides a way to engage with water as it demonstrates different themes symbolized by water and provides context for how those before us related to this precious resource. The art facilitating this Examen is Smetana’s “Moldau” orchestral piece, Edward Hopper’s “The Long Leg” painting, and Wendell Berry’s “Water” poem. “Moldau” is a piece created in 1874 that portrays the actual Moldau river in the Czech Republic; the music resembles the geographic features of the river (springs joining together) and human interactions with the water (wedding of the farmer’s daughter section). After listening to the programmatic resemblances of the movement and influence of water, participants will reflect on personal, similar experiences to develop appreciation for water’s daily use. Hopper’s “The Long Leg” resembles a fleeting moment in time: a boat teetering on its side in a lake.

Discussion

Finding time for intentional reflection is difficult in our current state of constant overstimulation. The Examen can be grounding and useful for people of any age and location in the world. A Water Examen, in particular, allows us to expand our appreciation to all neighbors across the earth, humans and animals alike. Approaching this form of reflection with various mediums of art may help one to distinguish how water influences their life and how they express gratitude for water. Additionally, placing water at the center of this Examen instead of the traditional emphasis on God may provide an easier transition into the daily practicing of Examens for some, or may aid in correlating divine sacredness with water for those already familiar with the Examen. Taking time to grow in awareness of our water consumption, water appreciation, and systemically unequal water distribution is necessary for confronting the larger ecological crisis.

Additional Examens

Ecological Examen:

Daily Examen:

Cannonball Examen:

Citations


5. Poor, unregulated industrial practices cause water pollution and limit access to clean water for many communities. What are ways that people have dismantled water injustices?

6. How can you find rejuvenation, peace, and excitement from the water that presently surrounds you, in ecological and spiritual ways?