

Professor's book helps others learn from stress

Catholic physician and author Walker Percy once posed the question, "What if you missed your life like a person misses a train?"

"Unfortunately, in today's world, with so much multi-tasking and stress," it's easy to do, said Dr. Robert Wicks, Psy.D., an author and professor of pastoral counseling at Loyola University Maryland.

In his newest book, "Bounce: Living the Resilient Life," Wicks talks about healthy ways to handle stress in today's society and how to transform that stress into "an opportunity live a more meaningful, self-aware and compassionate life."

Wicks describes chronic, everyday stress as insidious, like carbon monoxide. Signs include becoming more cynical, helpless, isolated and bored, said Wicks, who, in his book, focuses on improving one's resiliency range by learning from stress.

"It's not the amount of darkness in the world that matters," he said. "It's how we stand in that darkness that makes a difference."

A person's resiliency range is formed by heredity, early life experiences, current knowledge and motivation, Wicks explained. For almost 30 years, the professor has worked with those in the healing and helping professions who have experienced secondary stress.

"Even among the most resilient in these groups, how they experience the most difficult situations in life is very telling," he said.

He cited the societal benefits of resilience saying that if individuals develop a healing presence, others "can take a sense of confidence and peace from it."

One way to do this is to take time daily to debrief. Wicks has a ritual of rising at 5 a.m. and propping himself up in bed to have morning coffee with God.

"I try to avoid three sins," he said. "The sin of arrogance, where we project the

blame on everybody else; the sin of ignorance, where we condemn ourselves; and the sin of discouragement, where we want immediate results.”

Instead, he lets the information pass through him so he feels clear and centered for the day.

He then chats with his wife for a half hour and does the Scripture reading of the day with her.

Other elements in leading a resilient life include having the right circle of friends and self-care protocol, which means partaking in relaxing activities such as reading, gardening, going to the movies or walking.

“When we live as a person of prayer and self-care and seek to know ourselves, then we’re set to be compassionate, and that’s crucial,” said Wicks.

The book, published by Oxford University Press, is available through Barnes and Noble and Amazon.com, among other locations.