

Franciscan Season of Giving

a word from Christine

Between the feast days of St Clare and St Francis (August 11 and October 4), we ask for your support in raising funds to meet our obligations and dream about the future.

In this season of prayer, discernment, and reflecting on the gifts of community, we share some of the voices of the Franciscan Spiritual Center. Our aim is to name what happens in this community and how we perceive its value. We hope it engages you and motivates you to support us. We hope it encourages you to pay attention to what is sacred in your life.



I think of it as a fringe benefit being in this community, having relationships with Sisters is gift. Their presence informs and influences who we, as lay people, are becoming.

A year ago I visited Pennsylvania where the Sisters of St Francis of Philadelphia are based. I already knew I loved the three Portland-based Sisters with whom I get to work, but I was surprised by the affection and respect that welled up in me as I engaged more of the Sisters.

Sisters Carmel and Carol Ann lived in the Pacific Northwest, so I sought them out first. The two talked (when encouraged) about the creative process of cultivating a new ministry. They were animated and passionate in the memories. In their telling, something was always beginning and something was always ending. I noticed the endings and they acknowledged that many times endings came under difficult circumstances and not what they desired.

“How did you determine when it was time to let go? And when it’s time to try something new?” I asked.

“Well, we pray. And we pray in community. And we try to pay attention to reality.” It was a straightforward discernment process. It resonated because I’ve learned making

friends with reality is important. In my experience, it is a way to avoid folly – getting too invested in false narratives or our own identification. I understood their insight.

But I wonder now if they meant more. Engaging reality is more than a safeguard against what is destructive. It can also free us to see what God is doing and learn to cooperate, kind of like the gospel teaching about new wineskins for new wine.

The Franciscan Spiritual Center (FSC) is in a transitional phase in its life span. Transitions require discernment, nimbleness, and a willingness to cooperate with what is not yet seen but is becoming. They also seem to heighten our sense of gratitude even as we feel losses. The new ways the Divine engages and offers life (the new wine) is not of our own making, but we can train our hearts to become new and willing containers.

I am seeing this generative instinct at play in one of the FSC's long-time programs. The Spiritual Direction Training Program (SDTP) has equipped others to listen deeply with open-hearted prayer for the benefit of others. The program's success is due to the work of many: students who came ready and primed to do the work, supervisors willing to support newbies, teachers and faculty who crafted a comprehensive curriculum, staff and volunteers who navigated a pandemic. Many offered their love and labor over the years, but Sr Mary Jo seemed to will it into existence. Her presence was a gathering force. And then, two years ago, she discerned transition on her horizon. She quietly announced she'd like to hand over the day-to-day administration of the program, preserving her energy for spiritual direction alone.

Our Sister did not shirk from a reality but recognized an opportunity for expansion and not contraction. It is now ours to take up that work.

Last Spring a group of us began planning what we called "SDTP 2.0." By late summer we secured core faculty conveners to carry it into the future. This winter we will gather others to join us. Our next cohort begins in February. Much remains the same (its Franciscan core, Mary Jo as guest teacher) and, as is appropriate and necessary, the wineskins also are changing for new realities and expressions of God's love in this world.

The next iteration of the training program includes asynchronous learning (to support remote learning for those in different time zones and work schedules), a fully online opportunity for community processing (to equalize the experience between remote and local students), and the involvement of mentors (because spiritual direction is an art form, not just academic, and it requires the human transmission of wisdom).

- Would you join us in holding this creative endeavor in prayer?
- If you are a director with a desire to guest teach or mentor, let us know.
- (info@francisspctr.com)
- If you know someone who is ready to be trained, let them know.
- (www.francisspctr.com)
- If you're able to support us financially, we will need \$34,000 for a start-up capital investment. We designed the program as self-sustaining once established, but we will record, tape, and edit teaching segments as a one time expense.
- We intend to share this training with non-U.S. students. Several African applicants are already submitted. Those students will require tuition support. Let us know if you'd consider sponsoring a student.
- If you are an alum and want to express gratitude for Sr Mary Jo, Eileen, your teachers, or supervisors, let them know.
- (info@francisspctr.com)

We are grateful for your companionship. May you be encouraged.

Christine

FSC Director & Spiritual Director

Click **HERE** to read the stories in the *Season of Franciscan Giving* series.
Email your own stories to cnaylor@francisspctr.com.

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