

Franciscan Season of Giving

a word from Eileen...

Together, we are entering a season of prayer and thanksgiving.

We share with you the voices of our Franciscan community as an invitation to recognize what is sacred in your life.

We also invite your partnership through financial support.

With your gifts, we can reach our \$30,000 goal and continue this work into the year ahead.



Wait!

What has it been like to reinvent the Franciscan Spiritual Center's successful spiritual directors training program? The best analogy I can think of comes from taking puppy obedience training with my dog.

The first thing we learned is that there's a difference between "Wait" and "Leave it." To "Leave it" means, "put this out of your mind and don't come

back.” Usually deployed in the face of danger or emergency—the toddler is chomping on a tasty treat at dog-nose level—this command should get instant, unquestioning obedience.

“Wait” means, “You’ll be able to get back to this later.” The food bowl is being set down, but you want your fingers out of the way before dog dinner begins. The real importance of “wait” is in the trust that builds between the human and the dog, and that trust is the basis of teaching new commands as it builds hope, attentiveness, and anticipation.

Co-convenor of the training program, Randy Miller, and I have come to appreciate the distinction between the two commands. The command to “Leave it!” regarding what has been a successful training program would have had us abandoning everything and starting over. And we felt that the curriculum designed by Sister Mary Jo Chaves was really good. As a college lit major, I see things, even a curriculum, in terms of a narrative arc, that is, the action (learning) is aimed toward a plot resolution (trained Franciscan spiritual directors), and the characters (teachers and mentors) support that plot. The narrative arc of Sr Mary Jo’s curriculum was elegant and comprehensive.

The Spirit’s leading we thought we heard was not “Leave it!” but “Wait!” We were being invited to trust, both in the Divine relationship and in the development of a collaborative team. This trust nurtured a hopeful anticipation that this new iteration of an existing ministry could be a living legacy of Sr Mary Jo’s leadership.

The team had a deadline to meet. We had research to do in finding, learning, and populating an online learning platform. This involved discerning which pieces of the curriculum would be most effective as asynchronous video presentations, which were best in print format, and which in real time teaching. And then the details: how best to develop a hybrid learning community that reflected the Franciscan emphasis on relationship, how to recruit and equip mentors, how to budget and track expenses.

It took a good-sized village to raise this particular “child.” A part-time program manager helped budget, keep track of administrative details, and monitor adjunct contracts. An experienced volunteer designed and continues to load the online platform. A tech wizard handles Zoom meetings. A lot of brainstorming happens between the co-convenors and our executive director. And most of the rest of the Franciscan Center’s staff share their expertise as mentors and special presenters in the asynchronous videos.

An epigraph or quotation at the beginning of a book gives readers a hint

as to what is coming next. Randy and I adopted what we thought of as a functional epigraph for our curriculum development. We found the quotation from St Bonaventure in the book, *Franciscan Lectio*. It is both prayer and affirmation as we lived into Spirit's command to "Wait!"

"But if you wish to know how these things come about, ask grace not instruction, desire not understanding, the groaning of prayer not diligent reading, the Spouse not the teacher, God not man, darkness not clarity, not light but the fire that totally inflames and carries us into God."

That quotation inspired us with a sense of hope and anticipation as we set out to re-invent a training program that anticipated a future we didn't yet know.

Nor do we yet know that future! Since Covid in 2020, students have attended Franciscan Center programs both online and in person. Since that time, our training program cohorts have been globally located and multi-cultural. Some students have had Masters- and PhD-level educations in theological education, some have entered the program with little exposure to formal theology. Vocationally, the students range from vowed-religious (priests, brothers, nuns) to pastors, counselors, lay volunteers, and spiritual seekers.

This wide range of perspectives reflects the diverse range of future clients our directees will be meeting. If Spirit is saying "Wait!" to us, our response must necessarily be one of attentive anticipation as we move ahead. We've been known to resist the "Wait," but as experienced spiritual directors, we have learned as we anticipate Spirit's invitation, that we can count on hope. As we move into designing Year Two, we turn again to that trust in Spirit's "Wait!" and attend with hope and anticipation of what the future might hold.

With gratitude,

Eileen Parfrey

Spiritual Director

Co-convenor and teacher in the Franciscan Spiritual Direction Training Program

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