Franciscan Season of Giving

a word from Tom

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.

At the Franciscan Spiritual Center, we place great emphasis on hospitality as part of our mission of “Peace. Presence. Community.” You experience that Franciscan hospitality when you enter the door and are greeted by Katie at the front desk or one of the other staff members or volunteers. Whether you come in to meet with a spiritual director, attend a program, are one of the walkers around Marylhurst Commons who stops in for a drink of water or to get a treat for your dog, you are welcomed and welcome.

Recently I was challenged to look beyond “welcome” to examine the notion of “belonging.” At the beginning of August, I attended a conference in Washington, DC, where a college student shared about her research into belonging. The conference at Georgetown University was *Outreach 2024: Building Community for LGBTQ Catholics*. It was sponsored by America Media, a Jesuit ministry.

The student was working on her senior capstone project at the University of Notre Dame and was exploring the notion of belonging in and to a church community. She argued that such communities can be good at showing hospitality and welcome but feeling welcomed did not necessarily equal a sense of belonging.

Belonging goes beyond an invitation or a welcoming. It involves building caring and respectful relationships, showing genuine interest in one another, seeing each other as equals, and accepting each other in the fullness of who we are.

For me, to belong means I am no better or worse than you, so I have no reason to judge or exclude you, nor you me. We are connected. I and many others have experienced belonging at FSC, which is what makes FSC so special. So, for the Franciscan Spiritual Center a question we must continue to ask ourselves is: “Do the people who come to FSC feel as if they belong here?” I would answer that question with “yes and not yet.”

What do I mean by that cryptic answer? I mean fostering a sense of belonging is an ongoing process in which both staff and patrons alike have roles to play. It might take many visits with a trusted spiritual director to develop a sense of belonging. It may take time for someone to feel safe enough—and “enough enough”—to relax into belonging. While others have observed they felt a sense of belonging after attending just one Contemplative First Friday, walking the labyrinth with others, sharing a simple meal, and participating in the beautiful Taizé service.

I don’t know when I began to feel that I belonged at the Franciscan Center. I started my relationship with FSC in 2005 when I began receiving spiritual direction at the recommendation of a Master of Arts in pastoral ministry program. Over subsequent years I continued in spiritual direction, attended programs and retreats, completed the Spiritual Direction Training Program, and in 2017 was given the gift of being offered a position as a spiritual director, as an employee of the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia. As I have come to know those who come to me for spiritual direction, directors whom I supervise, and other patrons and visitors, my sense of belonging continues to grow.

During this Franciscan Season of Giving, I encourage you to reflect on your relationship with FSC. Do you feel you belong here? If not, why not? What can we do to help you realize that you do indeed belong? What might you give of yourself to help foster the feeling of belonging in others? It might be as simple as offering a cup of cool water to a passing walker or a doggie treat to a playful pup.

And, of course, giving of your resources helps support the work of the Franciscan Spiritual Center in being a place of Peace. Presence. Community. — and Belonging.

With gratitude,

Tom Welch
Spiritual Director and Supervisor of Directees

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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