Renewal Circle — Full Group Meeting Notes

Monday, October 13

Defining “Presence”

- Key tension: is presence a skill or a character trait?
  - Marilyn: presence is more like compassion or empathy, developed over time, not a discrete skill
  - Denise distinguished two levels: conscious attentiveness (staying in the room, monitoring self and other) and deeper presence (self-consciousness falls away, two people simply joined)
  - Andree: the conscious layer is the doorway to the deeper layer; supervisees recognize it as a “moment of grace”
  - Oscar: likely a somatic/body component when fully in the zone
- Marilyn offered Lucy Abbott Tucker’s definition: “loving acceptance of whatever is real in the directee’s life right now”; praised as short, nonjudgmental, and encompassing
- Consensus: presence is ineffable, like beauty or falling in love; better to describe its many faces and levels than to nail a single definition
  - Teach toward it, name it when it’s happening, invite students to compare experiences

Applicant Prerequisite: Prior Spiritual Direction Experience

- Strong lean toward requiring applicants to have been in spiritual direction before applying (analogy: wanting to be a personal trainer without ever going to the gym)
  - Exceptions can be made; group companioning also counts as meaningful preparation
- Annie’s caution: applicants may conflate pastoral counseling with spiritual direction; she listed her pastor as her director on the application and learned later that was not the case
- Andree’s suggestion: website should prominently invite prospective students to contact SLC now if considering the program in 1-2 years, so SLC can connect them with a director
- Interview insight: presence can be assessed during the interview itself, regardless of vocabulary

Convergent Core Objectives

The core now holds eight items:

- Being present to reality, accepting what is rather than what we wish it to be
- A contemplative, discerning stance
- Ongoing inner formation and the deepening of one’s own life
- Rootedness in the holy
- Self-awareness
- Foundational spiritual direction skills
- Ethical practice of spiritual direction
- A commitment to helping others explore and deepen their spiritual journey
- Self-regulation was discussed and placed under self-awareness, not as a separate item
- Marilyn’s flag: the list could still describe a holy hermit; nothing yet about walking with another person
- Oscar’s framing: two lists may emerge, a global convergent core and a detailed curriculum competency list of what students know and can do

“Spiritual Direction” vs. “Spiritual Companioning”

- No consensus on preferring one term; strong preference for using both interchangeably (SDI uses both and nearly split over the debate; the SLC community holds both)
- Key clarifications needed regardless of term: companioning does not mean coaching; direction does not mean telling someone what to do
  - Oscar: “I am very direct but I am not directing”
- Agreed approach: explain both terms are used; “it’s the same work”

Assessment and Student Progress

- Exit interview: used in Courtney’s cohort, dropped for the last class as too stressful; group agrees assessment is needed, framed as identifying who needs extra support, not pass/fail
- Formative assessment should happen throughout, not just at the end
  - Andree: end of Year 1 is a natural checkpoint; written self-reflection plus faculty feedback before the last class; input from individual supervisor and peer group facilitator should feed in
- Oscar: usually one or two students per cohort raise serious concerns; catching this early is an ethical responsibility

All-Day Planning Session: Friday, October 23

- 10am to 4pm at Sherman Street, in the new Anam Kara room
- Goal: formalize the convergent core objectives and add “meat” to them; preliminary program standards in place by end of day, with flexibility to refine
  - If time allows: begin discussing how to measure and assess objectives in students
- Lunch: everyone brings their own (note: Courtney has a severe peanut allergy)
- Prep: someone to write up the current core items cleanly before Friday so the group can react to something concrete (Denise)
- Nancy’s suggestion: individually compare past curriculum to the convergent core items ahead of Friday

Curriculum Materials and Repository

- Andree’s detailed curriculum (2020-21, all four semesters, week by week) is the most thorough on hand
- Less documentation exists for more recent cohorts; most was not written down
- Marilyn has a syllabus from her cohort and will send it to Courtney
- Agnes and Nancy will check for semester-by-semester materials sent by Justin during the last cohort
- Brian may have the most complete records as a former program partner; Courtney will ask him
- Denise compiled a list of other training programs around the country; Courtney adding to it and will post to the private website