# The Portrait So Far

*Updated after the full-circle gathering, October 13*

This is a working map of where the circle has arrived on who we are forming. One question runs under all of it, so carry it through: for each item, ask whether it is something we form over the two years, or something a person must already bring to be admitted at all. What we require at entry is often the seed of what we form.

## The convergent core

The capacities the circle has gathered as the heart of the portrait:

1. Being present to reality, accepting what is rather than what we wish it to be
2. A contemplative, discerning stance
3. Ongoing inner formation and the deepening of one's own life
4. Rootedness in the holy
5. Self-awareness
6. Foundational spiritual direction skills
7. Ethical practice of spiritual direction
8. A commitment to helping others explore and deepen their spiritual journey

This holds at the global, big-picture level. The concrete detail of what a student knows and can do lives in the competency list below, kept separate so the two altitudes do not tangle.

## Presence

Presence resists a single definition, and the circle chose to teach toward it rather than pin it. Two levels were named: a conscious attentiveness, staying in the room and monitoring self and other, that opens onto a deeper presence in which self-consciousness falls away and two people are simply joined. Lucy Abbott Tucker's formulation holds it well: loving acceptance of whatever is real in the directee's life right now.

***For your consideration:*** *Is this enough to carry the word "presence" in our portrait, or do we need to name its levels explicitly?*

## The art of spiritual direction

This is a compilation drawn from the teams' lists, gathered under item 6. It belongs on the detailed competency list rather than the global core, and it is by no means exhaustive:

- Recognizing transference and countertransference
- Recognizing and following the directee's energy
- Recognizing movements of spirit in the directee, and, separately, in oneself
- Working with a direction arc, for example awareness, naming, meaning, discernment, next steps, integration
- Offering evocative and guiding responses while avoiding steering or avoidant ones
- Making good use of silence, and limiting casual conversation in a session
- Knowing when a directee needs professional help, and being willing to refer
- Strong listening and responding

***For your consideration:*** *Which of these are truly formation, and which are training? What is missing?*

## The one still-thin place

Marilyn's flag, raised more than once: the core could still describe a holy hermit. Item 8 begins to answer it, the turn toward accompanying another person, but it stands as one item against seven that look inward. The portrait is not yet finished until the other-directedness at the heart of direction is as fully named as the interior life.

***For your consideration:*** *How do we strengthen the portrait's account of walking with another, so it clearly describes a director and not only a formed contemplative?*

## Two that sit apart

Two things came up that don't fit neatly with the items above. We have begun working them in small group, and the thinking so far is gathered here. They are still open.

**Knowledge across traditions.**

Two related questions sit here: broad religious literacy, and knowledge of the direction methods particular traditions have developed (Ignatian discernment, Benedictine receptivity, Quaker silence, Zen unknowing). Our small group's thinking:

- Denise's analogy: like someone who has never left their own country, we cannot see our own assumptions without exposure to something other than ourselves. If our graduates will sit with people of other traditions, they need some sense of what that means.
- And yet a full compendium would be a graduate degree, not a training program. Marilyn's caution: teaching too much is its own danger, since a little knowledge breeds false confidence. Basic familiarity with the major traditions is reasonable; beyond that, every person of a tradition presents differently.
- Our preferred approach: get to the heart of the lived experience, not the facts. Not "when was Mecca built" but "what does Mecca mean to you."

***For your consideration:*** *Is it the program's role to teach traditions, or to instill the curiosity and desire to keep learning?*

**Dispositions toward difference.**

One team named cultural competency with regard to people who have been marginalized, including people of color, people of certain religious traditions, and people who identify as LGBTQ. Our small group's thinking:

- "Competency" implies mastering a body of knowledge, and such knowledge dates quickly. We preferred cultural humility as the prerequisite for cultural curiosity: humility opens the door, where competency is a misleading endpoint.
- We must also be careful that a competency framing does not breed false confidence or stereotyped knowledge, the sense of having "learned" a group once and for all.
- Denise: people need some sense of what it is to be othered, since many directees carry that experience.
- Marilyn's three cautions: we cannot invent experiences we have not had, so at times the honest move is to refer out; over-identifying with a directee's experience carries its own risk; and directees are often clear about who they want, so we need not shoulder the whole burden ourselves.
- What we would foster is curiosity rather than mastery. One way in is learning about the lived experience of people from a marginalized group from the inside, asking not about the group in the abstract but "how was that for you," attending to each person's own experience and holding that while common threads appear, each person's is their own.
- A concrete practice we considered: assigning social media profiles or online videos that surface the range of experience within and across marginalized groups, as ongoing exposure rather than a single data point.

***For your consideration:*** *How does this translate into spiritual direction specifically? We are not therapists, so how does a person's marginalized identity show up in a direction context, and what does that ask of the director?*

*A working map, not a decision. Nothing here is settled. This is what we take into the October 23 session.*