



SAINT JOHN'S CATHEDRAL

OPEN DOOR

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Presence: a clay icon, Charles LaFond, potter, reduction cone 10, stoneware, 2011

“PRESENCE” AS CORE COMPETENCY

PARTICIPATIVE LEADERSHIP AS SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

by Charles LaFond, Canon Steward with
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“Presence” is the theme of these winter seasons of the church year. In Advent, we anticipate God’s presence. At Christmas, we celebrate God present among us. In Epiphany, the Three Kings journey to be present to the Christ Child so that they are changed. They are sent home “a different way.” And now we move into a deeper presence, into the silences of Lent, joining Jesus on the way to the Cross.

The icon of the Crucifixion (left) represents a scene from John’s Gospel. In it, Mary and John stand with Jesus at the moment of the story’s deepest unfolding. In John’s telling, Mary and John make no speeches. They demand no justice. We do not know that they spoke at all. We know only that they stood at the foot of the Cross.

Being present to others, listening for God’s still, small voice, is the holy work of discernment. It requires patience, faith, and the courage to stay in the hardest places. We invite you to consider training for this work in early March. The Participative Leadership Training will convene March 5–7. Register at sjcathedral.org/PLT.

Together, we will go deeper into our story, into that narrative arc that holds the future. We will learn and practice skills and perspectives—chief among them presence and shared decision-making. These core competencies can be used at the Cathedral on committees and task forces, but also with our families, at our jobs working on teams, and on boards of directors.

“Core competency” is a term typically used in business settings. But most of us know it means an essential, or core, skill that is central to accomplishing a stated purpose. Kneading dough is a core competency in the great enterprise of bread-baking. Core competencies help us get things done.



Here at the Cathedral, at this time, presence is a core competency in our spiritual lives, in the Eucharist, in community. Presence is a gift we bring to our friendships and our work. We aspire to be present in our congregational life. We sit together. We walk together. We have coffee together.

Presence shifts us from watch-glancing, frantic beings to a commitment that says "I-see-you-and-have-all-the-time-in-the-world-for-this-conversation." Presence is essential not only in moments with friends and close colleagues, but also in our daily solitary spiritual practice as we prepare, in the moment, for the future.

We have an additional premise: despite our best intentions, we humans get stuck. We get stuck in our thoughts. We get stuck in our confining and limiting beliefs. We dial things back, reflexively, with the "Yeah, but this" and "Yeah, but that," default responses. "This is a good dream," we concede. Then we kill a good dream with "But it can never happen here."

This resistance to a mere idea represents more than reflexive opposition. Default resistance is withdrawal from engagement. It is the end of presence. The Participative Leadership Training has solutions as we move deeper into the practice of presence.

Engagement and exchange matter, with old friends and new. With strangers. Everyone can contribute to a half-articulated dream or to a dream that needs to be revisited.

The leadership we teach is spiritual practice. It is conversational and inquiring. It involves storytelling. Christians tell stories, particularly during times of reform. Sometimes we share stories about the known. Sometimes we describe the edges of the

known because we know it somehow connects us to our future. But we have to show up. And, once there, we must be present. Only then can God can speak to us and through us.

We will learn, laugh, and say "Aha!" Ideas and experiments will build on our identity. This is the work of our faith community, in the city of Denver, now.

But our presence underpins the entire endeavor. We join Jesus on his way to the Cross. We are present at the foot of the Cross. Through our presence we will discern what we long for as individual believers and

what we might accomplish collectively—what God would have us do together. More than events, or flavors of the month, these practices will carry us forward to that deliberately dreamed and desirable future we can only glimpse today.

The Art of Hosting trains us to hold space for ourselves as we figure life out. People at church. People at home. People in city hall. Everyone.

When Mary and John stand with Jesus they are heartbroken, together. They could go home. But they stay in the hardest places for the work of salvation. They do not know that God will raise Jesus three days later. Mary and John would have to wait for that startling news. As we engage in Art of Hosting this year, we too will wait, not knowing how things will turn out. But if the Cross and Resurrection are about anything, they are about our being faithful. They are about our letting God do God's work as we pray, trust, wait, and stand together, waiting for God's love to unfold into our lives.

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