



The Tool of Presence

Being present is far different than having presence. There is a lot of truth to the statement "never underestimate the power of showing up." There will be some days where that is as good as it gets for us. However, "presence" in the pastoral sense is a cultivated quality.

Most of us know how it feels to be "in the presence" of someone who *has presence*. It *feels* differently around them. *Change* and *insight* happens when we are *in presence*. There is a sense of comfort, trust, spaciousness, and calm.

Presence can be built like a muscle, but for most of us mere mortals, it takes some journeying inward and doing some serious soul searching and responsibility towards the areas of our psyche that need love and healing. This inward journey reveals our own innate wisdom and allows for deep connection with ourselves, our community and our world.

This is what we do in seminary and in CPE. We journey inward together, recognizing all of who we are and what we bring into the room. As you learn to analyze your responses to pastoral cases, what gets reflected back, usually points to un-tended or unknown parts of our identity. Healing can happen when these places within us are brought to light and understanding. As that happens, one's presence and alignment with their own inherent wisdom strengthens. This journey inward leads to a greater capacity for resilience, spontaneity, and finding meaning in our own and our patient's lives.

This is also about trust. How do we trust that we are capable and worthy of being a vessel for Spirit, the Divine, God to work through us? Authenticity isn't parodied. It cannot be. True authenticity spontaneously occurs in the present moment. Chaplains are asked to be authentic and respond spontaneously in real time according to their client's perspectives, not theirs.

As we explore the qualities, projections, transference, and counter-transference inherent in each encounter, the learner becomes more attuned to what real presence feels like. This is a huge paradigm shift from being the agent versus the vessel but allows for an appropriate blend of both.

-Rev. Susan Shannon, M.Div., BCC