

PRESENCE UNDER PRESSURE

Benedictine Spirituality, Formation, and Chaplaincy Practice

Jane Mahon

Benedictine Oblate | Emergency Services Chaplain

CORE THESIS

Under pressure, we return to formation rather than technique.

What sustains presence in crisis is the slow formation of attention, discernment, and interior stability over time.

FOUNDATIONAL QUESTION

What are we being formed by?

- Prayer
- Rhythm
- Community
- Attentiveness
- Discernment

These are formative practices that shape the capacity for grounded presence in moments of pressure.

BENEDICTINE FORMATIVE PRINCIPLES

1. STABILITAS

Steadiness in Place and Presence

- Stability as a cultivated disposition, rather than temperament
- Remaining grounded amid instability and distress
- Non-reactivity in high-pressure environments
- Capacity to remain present without internal fragmentation

- Steadiness as the fruit of sustained formation
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2. ORA ET LABORA

Integrated Life of Prayer and Work

- The unity of contemplation and embodied service
 - Work as a site of spiritual attentiveness
 - Micro-rhythms of return:
 - silence
 - breath
 - reflective pause
 - Formation through repeated rhythm over time
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3. DISCRETIO

Practical Wisdom and Discernment

- Discernment as an acquired spiritual capacity
 - Awareness of limits: what to carry, what to release
 - Rest and recovery as essential to sustainability
 - Resistance to excess, over-functioning, and depletion
 - Sustainable compassion as a formed virtue
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LISTENING WITH THE EAR OF THE HEART

“Listen with the ear of your heart.”
— *Rule of St Benedict, Prologue*

Listening is a form of spiritual formation.

It involves:

- Receptive presence beneath speech and behaviour
 - Attentiveness without premature interpretation
 - Restraint from fixing or solving
 - Sustained openness in the face of suffering
 - Accompaniment as a contemplative stance
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FORMATION BEFORE FUNCTION

Resilience in high-stress environments emerges from sustained formation through:

- Prayer
- Rhythm
- Reflection
- Community
- Lived experience and integration

In moments of pressure, we return to formation.

A PRACTICE TO TAKE HOME

After a difficult conversation, incident, or season of pressure, pause with these questions:

1. What shaped the way I responded in that moment?
2. Where did I feel grounded, steady, or attentive?
3. What did I take on that belongs to someone else?
4. What do I need to release before I go home?
5. What simple daily practice could help me return to steadiness this week?

These questions are an invitation into presence, discernment, and sustainable compassion.

CONCLUDING SYNTHESIS

We do not rise to the level of technique; we return to the depth of formation.

What is formed within us over time becomes the quality of presence we offer to others.

Presence under pressure is the fruit of sustained formation in prayer, rhythm, and attentiveness.

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Email: jmahon@directsolutions.net.au