

March 1, 2023



We foster awareness and analysis.

We facilitate individual and collective responses to injustice.

We discover on the streets our common humanity where celebration, community, and healing occur.

Dear Friends & Fools,

These words from our bylaws and from our mission statement are humming with life these days. The world around us, and the world within us, is humming with discord and action, with joy and concern. The pandemic didn't end with a whoosh or a ticker tape parade. We can't say exactly when things changed, but we can tell you that while many people are still suffering with long-COVID and many more still getting sick, something is fundamentally different from a year ago.

How do we know that? Because we had a week not long ago that would have been unthinkable a year ago. On Thursday that week, a group of nursing students arrived for a street retreat. They will each spend 180 hours learning with Faithful Fools and Fools' style of accompaniment. The following day, a group of doctors in training, residents in primary care, spent the morning walking in the neighborhood and reflecting with Tenderloin residents, each learning more about how systems of care shape them and their wellbeing, as patients and as doctors. But the week didn't end with Friday. It continued on Saturday when 30 African-American scholars from the University of San Francisco opened their semester with a full-day Street Retreat. It's just impossible to describe the richness of the reflection. But we can say that each gathering was a visible expression of community where the authenticity of each person's presence brought us back to the opening words of our mission statement: We are called to a life of presence that acknowledges each human's incredible worth.

Our reflection must be as deep as our action. Our actions must be guided by deep reflection. But our work doesn't stop there. Deep social change goes hand in hand with deep personal change. These are the guiding principles that Kay Jorgensen and Carmen Barsody walked into being in their first days on streets of the Tenderloin in 1998.

Groups of medical students, scholars of all ages, and neighbors come to Faithful Fools to learn from one another. Yes, this is a place where direct engagement fosters awareness and shatters myths. "Go out into the streets, into the neighborhood," we say to our guests, "ask yourself what do you see, what connects you to this community and to the people you meet, what separates you?" These are the important questions that open our minds and hearts and make way for deep personal and social change.

We facilitate, through building communities among people near and far, the ability to accompany and advocate with greater understanding and compassion. By rooting our work in direct relationship, we discover together what actions are required of us in a given moment. As we walk together as neighbors and students, we learn more and more about what is needed to find connection and mutuality. From there we find our individual and collective responses to the social injustice around us. When we do that, community and healing take root.

And celebration too! Celebration is vitally important in the midst of such serious things! Yes, we must celebrate! And so we will! April 1st marks 25 years since Kay and Carmen (and sometimes Kay's clown, Osgard) stepped into the streets of the Tenderloin as Faithful Fools! They didn't walk alone then and since then countless people—Fools and friends alike—have done the work with us, supported the work with donations, and keep us thriving with generosity.

Generosity fuels the work of the Fools and so does Celebration—so come join us on April 1st. Sign up for a ticket or two, but remember no one is ever turned away for lack of funds, so if you can afford to donate a ticket or two for guests of the Fools, your generosity will go twice as far. Any donation you make will support the work of the Fools and celebrate this community that's been growing for 25 years in the Tenderloin and around the world.

Faithfully yours,

Linda *Jilan*
SKM *Leah* *Carmen*

<https://www.faithfulfools.org/donate>