

# A SACRED PAUSE—2016

*Another time to consider where we are and where we are going*

## *Where We are at the End of 2016*

The three-year “general operations grant from Imago Dei has provided a framework for looking at Life/Work Direction from a more long-term perspective. Tracy and Eunice have each written about the rationale pertinent in developing Part Two of our Three-Year IDF grant for “General Operational Expense”. Here is an edited summary:

Over the past three years critical developments have taken place within Life Work Direction. These gains have come as a result of a deliberate slowing—taking a “sacred pause” both as board and staff members—helping us to prioritize the important over the urgent.

Rather than feel laborious, this “pause” has brought a new energy and focus. These are the significant milestones achieved, and their relevance to planning for 2017:

*We clarified the existing **vocational process as central**, reconceptualizing the function of two other programs (Threshold and Discovery Weekend) as introductory, and retreats and small group events as “post-process”. Our number of Vocational Process participants has markedly increased in 2016. Our retreats now occupy a more central place in yearly planning. We are gradually expanding our capacity to offer small group events “post-process” for selected participants.*

In adopting a new logo making use of the “roots and branches” analogy, we reinforced our commitment *to joining the inner and outer spiritual journey in an integrated way, not compartmentalized*. The picture of a deeply rooted tree is not new, but the use of this image has led to a deeper understanding of two distinct areas of work in LWD: roots (the internal, the spiritual) and branches (the external, the vocational). We continue to pay attention to ways our “soul’s deep gladness” addresses the “world’s deep hungers.” Contacts with past participants on the July West Coast trip underlined this focus of our mission.

*At the same time, we expanded the number and “substantive weight” of post-vocational process programs conceived as part of a “lifelong pilgrimage.” We found that our past participants are a ripe audience for additional services. Years go by, new challenges arise and seasons of life change. But our hopes go beyond “drumming up more business.” The pilot program launched as a retreat for individuals in mid-life points to a development that may continue as need arises. At the same time, our concern not to lose the Millennial generation has led us to focus the new retreat-oriented Threshold program to the 28-35 year old age group.*

*We learned that **Life/Work Direction’s function is not to grow through replication of its services, but rather to equip others**. We are finding that for some participants, increased connection and trainings (like retreats, spiritual companionship or small groups) may create the impetus to go out and provide some level of soul care to those in their sphere of influence.*

*We created an online presence in a website and quarterly “news” e-mailings as ways of more **effectively communicating with participants and friends**. Though reluctant to go online for some time, the organization was able to create a quiet internet presence that gives people a taste of who we are and facilitates regular pledged financial support. The quarterly e-mail updates reinforce our connections*

with past participants who engage in post-process programs, and who also may become regular financial supporters. Our end-of-the year appeal was our first effort to address financial needs directly—indicating the 45% of our budget which we know, privately, depends on a fairly small donor group. Don Schatz’s “gift” of establishing the Leadership Development Fund was timely, helping in covering expenses of new support personnel.

**Heather Sheldon** came on as Program Assistant who—among other duties—is managing the new quarterly e-mail updates. A first mailing was prepared in late October, and a second one is coming out before Christmas. We have hired a tech support person upon several occasions, but do not yet have a regular tech support person to count on. **Michelle Desharnais** has taken on bookkeeping duties, using the new Quick Books Online version. An accountant who lives nearby, **Elba Marcillo**, has volunteered to help us in ordering our financial matters properly, and is willing to help us clarify organizational issues surrounding the roles and responsibilities of staff and board.

### *Where We are Going in 2017*

#### **Building on the Strengths of 2016 in the Texture of Program Offerings**

Life/Work Direction’s strength continues to be in our conduct and conceptualization of who we are and what we do best—i.e., our program. One area where there is energy for strengthening has to do with our concept of “work as a pilgrimage of identity” (using Whyte’s terms) or “vocation as a lifelong process.” This became evident in Walkers’ trip to visit past participants, in the stories told in our June newsletter, and in contacts we are making with organizations “meeting the world’s deep hungers” that need the attention of persons who have thoughtfully identified “their soul’s deep gladness” and are looking for a way to serve from that place.

Therefore, in 2017, we plan to focus intentionally on this element in all of the programs being planned, making sure that the inner journey has an easy connection to outer service in the world. There are a number of ways in which we can do this: respond to requests for another midlife retreat, highlighting stories in our quarterly newsletter that demonstrate this inner-outer connection, continuing contact with past participants in person through another planned trip, emphasize this element in small groups that are being spawned for participants wanting to deepen their sense of their calling and its implications in the world, and reaching out to local ministries in Boston that would welcome the involvement of our participants—either in full-time work or part-time volunteering.

#### **Developing an Organic and Sustainable Support System for the Program**

The area needing attention now has to do with organizational development, something that was brought to our attention by the accountant who came to help us with our financial record-keeping, but whose skills and expertise extend to the more basic issues of how we handle the “support system” undergirding your well-developed skills in working creatively with people through programs.

Elba Marcillo suggested that Life/Work Direction is at the “mature” stage of development in one arena (and I would designate that as our program content and philosophy and the functioning of our staff as a cohesive team) but that this is a good time to identify **the collaborative model** we have used in

working together, and for the sake of sustainability clarify the roles and responsibilities of both staff and board—so that no one is overworked and that everyone’s gifts are used maximally.

Let me digress here briefly: My reading of Peter Senge, well-known in the field of organizational development and someone who introduced me to the idea that **we are “a learning organization”**—which is the opposite of an authoritative model with a hierarchy. An authoritarian model is one that thinks in terms of managing, organizing, and control. A learning organization is concerned with vision, with values, and with something he calls “mental models”—which are habits of thinking that we may have adopted unthinkingly and may need constant revision and refreshing.

We always begin with the individual persons (and this is not just our schtick; this is what forward thinking organizational thinkers like Senge are realizing is essential in corporate structures) and at this point in our history, we need to address a felt need to free our key program staff members to pursue program and personnel matters which are the essential core of the work and are their unique gift. The support functions needed (such as administrative, funding, public relations) can be delegated to team members better equipped to care for these matters responsibly.

*The importance of giving attention to this matter is amplified by three things:*

- (1) Defining the Leadership Team in ways that clarify roles and responsibilities of Board members who serve as volunteers, as well as staff and consultants who are paid.
- (2) As founder, Eunice has exerted influence over the direction of the work in the past, and continues to contribute her insights and gifts to the maintenance of the work. Her ability to continue in this role at a new level needs to be defined and integrated into the entire forward movement required.
- (3) Bringing new persons onto our team—on board level, and on staff. We need persons who are qualified not just by their expertise but also their harmony with the vision and values of Life/Work Direction.

*We might proceed practically on two tracks:*

- (1) Entering into a process of discerning what would be a desirable board structure and development and fruitful use of members’ resources. We would use the help of consultants, and include a 40-48 hour Board retreat as being part of that process. Adding a new person to the Board might be an important piece of this track.
- (2) Identify Eunice’s role in administrative and fiscal matters she presently carries and decide how these tasks can be carried by her or others in a way that is woven into the fabric of Life/Work Direction and can be sustained over time. Identify what gifts Eunice and/or others should employ in a more defined way, and thus making them “transferable” as necessary.