



Life/Work Direction

32 Halifax St., Jamaica Plain, MA 02130

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Dear friends,

Space is a word often used in describing what people appreciate about their experience here. They comment on the feel of the *physical space* itself, a welcoming place in the city to come apart, settle down and reflect. They find the space inviting.

The rooms and chairs are a framework for another kind of space though, a *state of soul* and *quality of time*. In the words of Michael Godfried whose story is featured in this newsletter, *"I found a growing sense of space where I had room to breathe."*

One author we are enjoying writes of the significance of this kind of space in her musings about learning to type:

Long ago when I was learning to type, I used to delight in typing letters to my friends without pressing the space bar. Now when you don't press the space bar, you've got a real mess, and there is much de-coding to be done. It is the spaces in between that enable us to understand the message. Life is very much the same. It is the spaces in between that help us to understand life. But, you see, some of us keep forgetting to press the space bar.

Macrina Wiederkehr, *The Song of the Seed*



We provide people these *spaces in between*: a weekend away where the compelling themes of a life story are brought into view; a regular hour shared across a table over many weeks where there is room to breathe—room to step out of a mold to consider life options from a different angle; a way to share with co-workers and friends that can strengthen community anywhere in the world. Without spaces like these the value and purpose of our lives—God's collaborative invitations to each of us—are hard to discern.

With summer here, we wish you this kind of *space*—the capacity to press the space bar in order to rest, to play, to explore and in other ways re-awaken to God's good invitations and possibilities for your life. Thank you for the ways that many of you have contributed to the quality of space that we are knowing and offering others here.

FAITH IN THE JOURNEY

Michael Godfried



Just before I entered the vocational process at Life/Work Direction, I had reached a place of real despair. There had been a rapid and rocky expansion at the architectural firm where I worked and I felt I no longer fit in. At the same time there was tremendous change going on in my family. At base, I felt the growing dissonance between my daily work and a persistent sense of calling. It was a perfect storm. The Walkers at Life/Work Direction were like a lighthouse for a ship in hurricane-tossed waters.

I went into architecture, following the footsteps of my grandfather and great grandfather. Although it seemed a reasonable path, I sometimes felt I had been slotted into a career by the force of heritage, not my own choice. When I moved onto graduate school in architecture, I felt a divide opening up within me. I increasingly sought opportunities outside the walls of the university. My energies and passions were engaged by civic activism and I became a co-founder in a group proposing an alternate mass transit system that elegantly fit within the cityscape while making use of existing right-of-ways.

The divide continued through some bumpy internship years. I did not “gel” with the profession, despite my sincere efforts. Meanwhile, I founded a civic group that successfully saved a historic church from demolition. I thrived in the role of being a communicator, a strategist and an advocate for a richer vision of the built environment. Yet my work life and my advocacy work remained bracketed despite my great desire to unite them.

I settled into a long-term job in architecture and moved into the role of project manager and completed many innovative buildings. The recession hit architecture hard and work hours were reduced. During the recession I wrote articles on infrastructure and planning issues for an online magazine and began once again to think about how to bring consonance to my vocational pathway.



The firm came out of the recession riding a rapid arc of growth and changed from a small firm into a more corporate entity. Given everything that was going on in my life, I felt overwhelmed and stretched too thin. I was terribly frustrated that I had not been able to achieve a blend between my passions and my work life. Despite the struggles I had felt throughout over a decade at work, I had not given up hope. Yet now it felt like the light had been snuffed out.

Discovering Life Work Direction at this bleak juncture was crucial to my journey. Through working with the Walkers—we met weekly using Skype—I reconnected with my core abilities and learned to trust the vision of my heart. With each session, I found a growing sense of space

where I had room to breathe. I have learned to challenge false notions of self-sufficiency while opening up to the Divine guidance that has always been present in my life.

Recently, I was laid-off from the firm I worked at for seven years. I am currently engaged in a new job search and I am enrolled in a certificate course for infrastructure planning. Although I don't know yet where I will land, I feel full of energy. Thanks to a multi-faceted pathway of vocational exploration at Life/Work Direction, I have a renewed and more deeply rooted faith in my journey.

Alumni Gather to “Listen Again”

Over the first weekend of June eight alumni joined the Walkers and board chair and alumna,



Kim Messenger for what has become an intimate annual retreat for veterans of Life/Work Direction programs. In a cottage overlooking Plymouth Bay we shared symbols of our current “state of soul,” experimented with silence, and told new stories of fulfillment as we reflected on the challenge of living wholeheartedly over time.

One creative experiment became a hilarious venture that gave many of us vocational pause. Artist and aspiring childrens' author and illustrator Dan Moynihan (Threshold '13) led us in a collaborative story writing activity where each launched a tale with characters only to have to “let it go” and receive and further develop and illustrate someone else's story. Storybooks circled around the table until they returned to their original authors having taken twists and turns that none of us would have predicted. The experience led one alumna to write:

The creative collaboration surprised me with much more than I anticipated. I can't let go of that idea of story, and that mine is unfolding, and that if I am not satisfied with it I can be proactive about making it a better one. I now find myself watching movies looking for the 'inciting incident' and pondering what resistance I have to push through to overcome the conflict in my own life. I want to be open to all the adventure and beauty my story can hold.

Perhaps the best-kept secret of these gatherings is the culinary artistry of Kim Messenger who has served as retreat chef over the past three springs. Under her influence meals typically become visual as well as gastronomic delights, offered with an organized ease and a view to health that welcomes all to relax and enjoy. To sit at her table is to digest the meaning of living out one's giftedness. Indeed, we have begun to receive requests for a separate kitchen apprenticeship program just to be able to learn from her!



Sowing Seeds of Community: Story Telling Among International Aid Workers



If there is anything that people remember vividly about their experience at Life/Work Direction, it is our deeply ingrained practice of listening to people's stories. In particular, it is the exercise where we ask for stories of "moments of deep fulfillment" that always generate immediate feedback from us about the person's core traits and potential. People love it, and so it is part of all our work—not just individual work, or Threshold group, but in our retreats and our Discovery Weekends at churches.

Imagine our delight to find that this is a practice that can "travel" when we heard from Tracy Bindel, a recent Discovery Weekend participant. She is working with an international aid group in an Asian country in crisis and used this sort of story telling to create a deepened sense of community with co-workers.

After being a part of a weekly Bible study for several months, I thought it would be cool to integrate the rhythm of story telling that I learned at Discovery Weekend to further develop community and affirm each other in our strengths as we lived and worked together in a very intense environment. We had two people volunteer each week to share a story about a fulfilling time of their life, a time when they felt most alive.

As they told their stories, we actively listened and wrote down on notecards in first person the things we heard them say. Then as a group we read those affirmations back to the person.

The group was incredibly diverse, from six of the seven continents, ranging in ages from 23 to 50 years old. The stories were much more varied than I would have imagined, from river canoeing in Thailand with old men from Australia, to birthday party planning in Cambodia to reach out to those who don't know Jesus, to tutoring neighborhood girls in Afghanistan, to researching violence against indigenous people in Guatemala.

Our group integrated this habit into our weekly schedule. After praise and worship, we would share stories and then move in to that week's study. After only a few weeks, the entire group was talking about feeling much closer to each other because of hearing glimpses of each other's lives in a framework that they would not normally use.