



**Life/Work Direction**  
32 Halifax Street  
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Dear friends,

We like to use these occasional letters to share stories. We do this for your encouragement, to help you take heart and live from the heart in every season of life (*coeur*, French for *heart*, lies at the root of *courage* and *encouragement*). In sharing stories like these, we hope to keep learning with you about how to sustain wholeheartedness in life and work.

We also share these stories to help you understand the nature of our mission and where we find encouragement in this work. As you will see from the reflections shared here, we find it in the **breadth** and **depth** of God's ways as we discover and cultivate these in our approach to guidance.

- **Breadth.** We take heart when we see this work spill over and flow beyond our walls. We are small and in view of our limitations, delighted when those we serve for a time, reach out to others with the enrichment they find here. Susan Stuart and Alice Nelson share such a story. We value the breadth of God's reach in them and look for ways to support new initiatives like theirs that extend beyond us.
- **Depth.** For all our joy in seeing the work leave our doors and proliferate, we are just as glad to welcome people back into conversation and reflection. Our approach to guidance is not aimed at quick fixes that are for one season only and lose their relevance over time. Instead we pose questions that invite deeper reflection and model ways of listening for God's presence and direction in every season of life. Our vocational process often begins a conversation that continues for decades. Susannah Ketchum Glass first came to Life/Work Direction 20 years ago. Her musings on the value of returning for a recent alumni retreat speak to a depth of conversation we seek to facilitate and a quality of support we are committed to offering our alumni over time.

So here's to our mutual encouragement. We send this with a prayer from the Apostle Paul, "*that you being rooted and established in love, may have power together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long, and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge . . .*" (Ephesians 3:17-19).

In this love,

*Scott & Louise   Eunice & Don*

## A Story of Breadth

We are like a pool of water into which participants dip for a time and then go on refreshed. We are keenly aware that we cannot respond to every request for being that pool for individual or group experience of growth, so we are heartened when a participant feels a calling to share with others what they have learned in their own time with us. The water in the pool overflows and becomes a living stream touching others.



Such was the case with Susan Stuart. She writes:

*I was a public school educator when I began at Life/Work. I discovered there that my gifts for facilitating and listening for the inner movements and stirrings already present within individuals in an informal group setting enlivened a deep calling and passion I did not feel as a teacher.*

*Eunice recognized this calling and instantly saw the fit with a number of Life/Work participants ready for such a group. It was easy and effortless to begin, having a common language and experience giving us a cohesiveness that has remained for the past three years. Our hope and vision was to explore how we see God made visible in our daily lives, especially through the lens of being women, wives and mothers.*

*What emerged in time was our sense that the process was not something we own or keep to ourselves, but rather something that should be shared and spread. This became manifest in Alice's inner calling to form a new group in her local community. God has no borders or boundaries. Alice's enthusiasm and excitement for her new venture feels like something we are all participating in spiritually by our prayers and support for this new group of women. It feels as if our original group has flowered and God is spreading our seeds in new places.*

Alice Nelson, describes her experience beginning with Susan's group:

*Within a few weeks I was knocking on a door in Cambridge behind which 6 women from various backgrounds were gathering for the first time. What did they have in common? A similar nudge from Life/Work Direction. What was this going to be like? What was I getting into? I wasn't sure, but I trusted the prompt to companion with others in thirsting for "streams of living water".*



*Fast-forward 3 years later: I have had the privilege of spending an evening a month gathering with these 6 women. I mark these nights on my calendar as "My Listening Group", because that is what we do. We share the gift of stillness and in various ways we reach into our hearts bringing out small pieces, hesitant fragile treasures of our life journey into the light of companioning souls. The treasures resonate and in the midst God shows up and we somehow hear in the receptive stillness the unseen, unexpected soul notes previously unnoticed. We are each touched below the surface.*

Over those years, Alice was coping with life-altering physical changes (removal of one lung due to cancer) and the group's support and caring were important. It is characteristic of her that in the midst of these challenges, she began thinking about other women she knew who might also thirst for this kind of time together. She came back to Life/Work Direction querying the idea of starting a new group based on the "listening" model. She was both eager and full of questions.

*I was feeling very hesitant to "lead" such a gathering. Eunice suggested I ask a few women, which I did, and to my surprise they were very receptive. In the process I found myself wrestling with fear: What if this group gathered and God didn't show up?*



*At this point of hesitation about moving forward, a picture pregnant with divine assurance came to me as we sat together in the Poustinia at Life/Work Direction. I envisioned a group of people sitting around a circle. Water was flowing from each person gently winding around into the center of the circle; these lovely sparkling rivers began to flow together intertwining and moving in all directions from person to person. I knew with a sureness then, that there was no reason to doubt the presence and efficacy of the “streams of living water” God pours*

*into each of us which then naturally flows out to one another.*

Alice was not alone in this venture. She turned to Susan for guidance, and to the Listening Group for prayer support as she stepped out into this new frontier. One by one God drew 6 women together in Dorchester, among them a recent graduate of the Threshold program that we referred to Alice.

Alice came back to see us after the first gathering of her new group, radiant with joy and awe. “*Do you know what? God showed up,*” she said, and then briefly described some of the surprising ways in which this was evident. “You threw me a lifeline,” one entrant told Alice. Others expressed their relief and joy at finding the particular quality of listening present. The streams of living water blessed us all in the overflow.



## A Story of Depth

Susannah Ketchum Glass engaged in the vocational process at Life/Work Direction in her Twenties before she married. She has kept in conversation with us over the years and recently attended a Life/Work Direction alumni retreat in May. Her words about sitting on a panel as a “Type Seven” is a reference to the Enneagram, a tool we use within our vocational process to examine the shadow side of our giftedness where we get stuck in habitual ways of pursuing contentment and security. During the retreat we used alumni panels sharing the same Enneagram type to explore opportunities and challenges for growth in our current lives.

Susannah writes: *When I found out, early this year, that I was unexpectedly 8 weeks pregnant, I wasn’t overjoyed. With 12 and 9 years old girls, and a 44<sup>th</sup> birthday looming on the very near horizon, I felt far away from the world of babies, and was loving the head space I could more readily find with independent children. But I expressed these emotions to my husband in oddly vehement rants about my relationships: “I enjoy my friends in their 40s and 50s; I can’t go back to an early-30s self and hang out with young moms!” I was rattled by this shake-up of the presumed path forward for my ‘self,’ and was having trouble seeing a later-in-life pregnancy as a welcome opportunity.*



*And then in March I received an invitation to attend an LWD retreat in late May. As my pregnancy developed, so did my sense that I needed to be on this weekend. Life had become just a daily process of responding to the immediate, the not-often-meaningful-but-seemingly-always-urgent tasks of helping to manage a family. Preparing for my occasional chats with Eunice were the few calm moments of reflection, and I longed for some protected space and dedicated time for deeper contemplation.*

*But Scott's simple request to bring "a symbol of the current state of your soul" posed a daunting challenge to me; when could I check in with my soul, in my daily 'keep-fit-while-pregnant-at-a mature age' swims at the YMCA, now being squeezed in at 5 a.m. in the busy last weeks of school? I tossed one of my flippers into my bag, ignored all the obstacles that popped up in my quest to disappear for the weekend, and hightailed it to the ocean for the retreat.*

*Thankfully, the Spirit's presence can inform us even in our jumbled, often frantic, sometimes even irritated requests for God's guidance. And lucky for me, I love symbolism. I shared with the group why I thought a piece of exercise equipment—my flippers—reflected where I was at:*



Isobel, Theadora, Susannah and Simon

*I was a runner until I found myself pregnant again. I love running, and the space it affords me to vent to the wind and the Spirit, and to breathe. The past few years have brought with them much sadness—my beloved Dad's disappearance into the fog of Alzheimer's, the sudden death of my favorite brother-in-law and the challenge that brought of learning to dwell in the deep spaces of my sister and her four children's pain, and the disintegration of relationships within my family of origin—and so I have cried my way through many a long run. While I try hard not to weep in the pool (!), my pregnancy-enforced switch from running to swimming might be God's practical way of reminding me of his presence in this fluid stage. When I put on my flippers for a few lengths and push through the leg cramps they often provoke, I allow myself to be propelled. I'm not moving my body through space, at least not like I do when running, but my body is being carried through the water.*

*I sat on a panel at the retreat, sharing with others what being an Enneagram Type Seven was like. We laughed about the similar ways in which we approach life, how we are (and are seen to be) the adventure-seekers, the project-instigators, the party-makers. But I have wondered about how tightly I hold onto that part of myself. I have assumed it is vital to my being accepted by others, to my ability to make others happy, and thereby be fulfilled. And yet, during small group times on this retreat, I wasn't sharing stories of reveling in the exotic adventure of life, but stories of loss and saying good-bye. I do believe I'm able to inspire others with a zest for 'sucking the marrow out of life,' but I don't want to be captive to the self of my own creation, the self I thought myself to be. As Scott told us on retreat, quoting David Benner: "This is the self that dies on the journey. The self that arrives is the self that was loved into existence by Divine Love. This is the person we were destined from eternity to become—the 'I' that is hidden in the 'I Am'.*

*Perhaps this new life God is surprising me with – and the necessity it brings with it to die a little bit more to my own ideas of what comes next, to embrace the fluidity of change, to celebrate another being that demands a renewed commitment to the long haul—is a reminder of the Creator's plan for my self, too, to be loved into existence.*



## **Staying Connected**

We were encouraged to learn that the Threshold group of 2014 held its second retreat since finishing the program last spring. Save for one member finishing graduate work abroad, all were able to make it. They are pictured here at a retreat center in southern New Hampshire where they met over the July 4th weekend for fun and supportive reflection. It's a treat for us to receive invitations to gatherings like these where we had nothing to do with the planning or leading!

