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# Journeys of purpose : an ontology of spirituality through work in memory, imagination, and authenticity

Therese M. Madden

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**UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO**

**JOURNEYS OF PURPOSE**

**AN ONTOLOGY OF SPIRITUALITY THROUGH WORK  
IN MEMORY, IMAGINATION, AND AUTHENTICITY**

**A Dissertation Presented to  
The Faculty of the School of Education  
Department of Leadership Studies  
Organization and Leadership Program**

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education

**THERESE M. MADDEN**

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA  
May 2008

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

Therese Michele Madden

Candidate

April 9, 2008

Date

Dissertation Committee

Ellen A. Herda

Chairperson

April 9, 2008

Virginia Shimabukuro

April 9, 2008

Dan McPherson

April 9, 2008

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## CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

### Introduction

*“God is love, and anyone who lives in love is living with God and God is living in that person.”*

1 John 4:16 (In Benedict 2005: 1)

Stories inspire, ignite imagination, and inform. They do so by being rooted in reality and yet bounded by infinite possibilities. They resonate with the experiences of others and at the same time go beyond the limits of any one person’s experiences so that what can be imagined merges with that which can be achieved. In this investigation, I explore the stories of ten individuals who have sought spiritual meaning in their own work. These research participants understand themselves as created by God with a unique purpose and believe that they are charged with discerning that purpose in order to manifest it. They have used that belief to inform a journey of discovery in which elements of that purpose have been revealed even as their discernment processes continue.

This investigation is about the stories of these individuals; however, it incorporates far more than the lives of ten people, for each in this group touch infinitely more people through their work. These participants understand their work as an element of their identity, which is inherently part of their relationships with others, those with whom they work and those for whom they work. This text therefore tells a story not only of ten individual journeys of purpose to find spiritual meaning in work, but of innumerable others who join in and benefit from those who see their authentic being revealed in work that manifests the very purpose of their lives.

Knowing that we each have a purpose and living our lives in fulfillment of that purpose provides us with a sense of confidence, of satisfaction, and of direction that guides the development of our values, the decisions that we make about our lives and the way that we conduct our relationships with others. Often, people struggle with the process of discerning life's meaning and many make great ongoing efforts throughout their lives both to unravel the depths of that purpose and to align their actions so that their values, their decisions, and their work represent a consistent manifestation of their authentic being. This research gathers wisdom from the stories of those who have engaged this search, seeking inspiration from their satisfaction and joy, insight from their challenges, and understanding about the nature of a journey of purpose to spirituality through work from the uniqueness of their individual experiences. The implications include valuable insight for individuals who seek greater purpose in their work. They also contain critical recommendations for changes to organizations and institutions in order to better orient the discourse about this issue so that genuine value is placed on supporting each individual in his or her call to express that purpose holistically in the activities that comprise an individual life.

In the remainder of Chapter One, I present an outline of my research topic, offer a brief contextual background for the investigation, and provide a statement of significance to frame the issue. In doing so, I introduce an investigation that engages conversation to elicit stories of meaning from individuals who have experienced success in their journeys to find purpose in their work. These stories inspire, inform, and provide the foundation for future action by creating new worlds full of joy and satisfaction both for this life and in an ongoing and ever deepening relationship with God.

## **Research Issue Statement**

*“The world is thirsting for a greater sense of spiritual meaning”*  
(Herda 2006: no page)

This investigation explores the journeys of some of those who seek and have found spiritual purpose in what they do. More specifically, I investigate how my research participants see their journeys, how their memories of the route taken thus far inform their present understanding of their purpose, and how they integrate that purpose and their actions as manifested through work. Additionally, I investigate the role that imagination plays both in the stories that they tell about their journeys of purpose and in their understanding of future legs on this journey. Through an analysis of these stories, both past experiences and in their imagined futures, I direct this research project toward unveiling the purpose that individuals find as they seek authenticity in their work. I take this approach to the topic because of my interest in learning more about how people use their work to live authentic lives. In addition, I am interested in creating a text that provides an opportunity for others to imagine themselves on journeys in which their work is fully integrated with the unique reason for their creation.

My premise is that to find spiritual purpose in work, individuals must have an orientation toward engaging in reflection about their own lives, that is, the choices, attitudes, and behaviors that relate to their very being. Because such an ontological approach is closely tied to authenticity, change, and meaning, I emphasize these elements as I explore the stories that individuals share about the challenges and successes associated with their own journeys. In approaching the topic from the perspective of understanding life ontologically, my aim is to inform success and to disclose new possibilities of meaning.

## **Research Issue Background**

Work is activity that constitutes a large portion of energy throughout most people's lives and therefore "is a very serious matter in almost all respects, whether it is work in the shelter of our home or work in the big, wide, dangerous world" (Whyte 2001: 3). Individuals engage in work out of necessity, that is, in order to reap the material rewards of salary and other benefits that are necessary for continued survival at any level. However, individuals also work to "make a difficult world habitable, and with imagination, create some meaning from what they do and how they do it" (Whyte 2001: 3). Work takes different forms and philosophers, researchers, and social scientists have expressed widely different opinions on the value of work based on their individual reflections of these various iterations and experiences. In reality,

the human approach to work can be naïve, fatalistic, power-mad, money-grubbing, unenthusiastic, cynical, detached, and obsessive. It can also be selflessly mature, revelatory and life giving; mature in its long-reaching effects, and life giving in the way it gives back to an individual or society as much as it has taken. Almost always it is both, a sky full of light and dark, with all the varied weather of an individual life blowing through it (Whyte 2001: 3).

The variety of experiences that occur as part of the human activities that are referred to with the term "work" make the very concept of work one worth exploring, to understand both the various concepts associated with what work is to the ideals associated with what work can be.

Like the neutral concept of work, there are a variety of opinions about the definitions of and implications of finding spiritual meaning in work. Reports show that people do seek spiritual meaning through their work (Laabs 1995: 60-69); however, that search is complicated by the many factors that have contributed to an ingrained public consciousness that views spirituality as something that should be divorced from the

public space and left manifest in private, perhaps for an hour on Sundays or within quiet communities that are isolated from everyday living. “Too often, we compartmentalize faith and work, thinking that God has no relevance in the very place where we spend the majority of our waking hours... [by erecting artificial barriers, we] isolate the very essence of who we are from what we do... integration is the key...” (Miller Undated: 1). Further, although much is written and studied about how individuals can match their talents and interests to specific jobs in order to find rewarding and lucrative careers, less attention is given to finding purpose through work, that is, to aligning action with the very unique and specific reason behind individual creation. Finally, there exists in popular understanding an emphasis on finding the single “right job” or “right move” or “right purpose” so that everything else will fall into place. Less has been written about the possibility that finding life’s purpose is not a single destination but an ongoing journey that incorporates many facets of life, a journey that may evolve over time as we mature, gain new understandings, and recognize the need for different responses to the changing needs of others. This sense of being on a journey is important both for those who feel that they have found their life’s purpose and for those who continue to seek, for it affirms a needed orientation toward continuous growth.

This study creates a text about spirituality and work from which new understanding can occur for my conversation participants, for myself as a researcher, and for potential future readers who seek to live more purposeful lives. Hans Georg Gadamer (1976: xix) uses the term “fusion of horizons” to describe this new understanding and explains that

the concept of understanding as a ‘fusion of horizons’ provides a more accurate picture of what happens in every transmission of meaning... a text speaks

differently as its meaning finds concretization in a new hermeneutical situation and the interpreter for his part finds his own horizons altered by his appropriation of what the text says.

My own understanding of this topic has deepened and changed as I have conducted my research and considered the data and literature related to this topic. Much of what has been revealed through my research emphasizes the symbol of a journey, for the research process itself has provided understandings that I had not expected or predicted, creating a text that provides new insights on the elements of such journeys. Paul Ricoeur (1985: 100) provides strong confirmation of the value of such reinterpretation of understandings, stating that “only the confrontation between the world of the text and the life world of the reader will make the problematic of narrative configuration tip over into that of the refiguration of time by narrative.” As a result, this text creates the opportunity for people who thirst for more spiritual meaning in their lives to learn from the journeys of others, meeting in text, imagining and then configuring new futures in which their work reflects both their purpose and their connectedness with others. Ellen Herda (1999: 75) explains that this occurs because “what is to be interpreted in the text is a proposed world which I could inhabit and in which I could project my own possibilities.”

In order to use the research and the resulting text to project future understandings, this study explores the stories that individuals tell about their spiritual journeys through work through the research categories of authenticity, oneself as another, and imagination. I selected authenticity as the first analysis category because it goes to the heart of a search for spiritual meaning in work; that is, discovering our authentic self and manifesting that authenticity in an integrated way in the decisions that we make, the way we invest our time, and the work that we do. I chose oneself as another as a second category because

both much of the related literature and the consistent reflections of the research participants affirmed that an authentic manifestation of purpose most often comes through service to others, which is often how identity is formed and genuinely understood. Finally, I use imagination as a final analysis category because it informs many elements of a successful journey toward finding spiritual meaning in work. Not only does the capacity to understand oneself as a spiritual being and to seek spiritual connections require an ability to see different possibilities of being, but the ability to orient oneself toward continuous growth requires an imagination that allows us to see beyond what is to what could be.

Spirituality is itself a term that can be used very differently, depending on intent or context. Although the Encarta dictionary defines spirituality in very neutral terms as “relating to the soul or spirit,” a review of some literature related to spirituality and work provides more elaborate definitions. One study of spirituality in corporate America provides a definition based on interviews and surveys and its authors (Mitroff and Denton 1999: xv) conclude that “there was nearly unanimous agreement on the definition of spirituality... spirituality is the basic desire to find ultimate meaning and purpose in one’s life and to live an integrated life.” Another definition reinforces the joint themes of connectedness and meaning, suggesting that “spirituality is the experience of connection to something that transcends our ordinary lives. We may envision this connection to something larger than ourselves or deeper within ourselves, but we know that it is beyond the material” (Bloch and Richmond 1998: vii). Mitroff and Denton (1999: xvi) echo this element of the definition, adding that spirituality is “the basic feeling of being connected with one’s complete self, others, and the entire universe. If one word best captures the

meaning of spirituality and the vital role it plays in people's lives, it is *interconnectedness*." Ricoeur (1992: 3) reinforces this value, stating that "*oneself as another* suggests from the outset that the selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other, that instead one passes into the other." Further, Shahideh (2004: 3) suggests that "individuals cannot understand each other, nor can they belong to a larger community, unless they come to an understanding of themselves and their interconnectedness with one another," which provides emphasis for the idea that concern for the other as individuals and as communities finds expression in the concepts expressed through connectedness and spirituality.

The journeys of those who seek and have found spiritual meaning in what they do therefore likely include strengthened connections between work and the effect that it has on others. Exploring this topic through an interpretive perspective provides a complementary viewpoint, for even as interpretive research is judged according to the extent to which it "provides the basis for ethical action" (Herda, forthcoming), so spiritual journeys may be judged according to the extent to which they change the individual who is on that journey. This has enormous implications, for when one individual changes, "the rest of the world changes" (Herda 1999: 7) and the very act of engaging with conversation partners on this subject creates the possibility of a fusion of horizons that creates new understandings for each individual involved either as contributor, researcher, or reader.

It is important to study spirituality and work from the perspective of a journey rather than as a destination, a particular career objective to be achieved, or a finite level



of knowledge to be accomplished. Saint Thomas Aquinas stated that “wonder is the desire for knowledge” and it is my contention that such wonder helps drive spiritual journeys. This perspective of the spiritual journey brings memory into play, for “unless we reclaim, understand, and reinterpret our past, we can not create a new future” (Shahideh 2004: 55). This study therefore uses reflection and language to project understanding into reality and possibility (Shahideh 2004: 44), to explore participants’ memories of their own pasts, and to gain better insight about their journeys.

Although looking at the past informs understanding, looking forward requires imagination, which is therefore an important subsequent element to consider in looking at spiritual journeys and considering the ways in which imagination works to guide their ongoing progress. Richard Kearney (2002: 46) affirms the relationship between memory and imagination, noting that “the hermeneutic hypothesis... [is] the view that the retelling of the past is an interweaving of past events with present readings of those events in the light of our continuing existential story.” He explains the role of imagination in narrative, stating that “narrative imagination enables us to empathize with those characters in a story who act and suffer, it also provides us with a certain aesthetic distance from which to view the events unfolding, thereby discerning ‘the hidden cause of things’” (Kearney 2002: 13). Working with my research participants to examine their own search to find meaning through work is intended to reveal more about the nature of their own journeys, thus creating a text in which others can engage, find inspiration, and reappropriate their own meaning in order to better inform their unique journeys.

Finally, this work addresses authenticity as the very nature of our being and as the driving purpose of our lives. Martin Heidegger (1962: 53) grounds his discussion of

authenticity in “dasein” or “being in the world,” which he refers to as “a unitary phenomenon. This primary datum must be seen as a whole... [dasein] cannot be broken up into contents which may be pieced together.” This integration is expressed through the concept of authenticity, recognizing that “our choices must... perfect us in our own being. They must perfect us in our relation to other free beings. We must make the choices that enable us to fulfill the deepest capacities of our real selves” (Merton 1955: 24-25). Looking at being from a holistic perspective that considers both temporal issues of past, present and future comprises one element of this whole; in addition, this investigation uses Heidegger’s “unitary phenomenon” to look at work as integrated with each research participant’s values and other activities, not insisting on a separation between the secular and the spiritual, but incorporating each element of being. Further, authenticity is considered from the perspective of care and concern for others, which is one of the definitive elements of spirituality, for “Dasein, when understood ontologically, is care. Because Being-in-the-world belongs essentially to Dasein, its Being toward the world... is essentially concern” (Heidegger 1962: 84). Authenticity therefore includes both the concept of care and the understanding that such concern must be incorporated into every element of our lives.

### **Significance of Study**

“Few people actually receive big calls, in visions of flaming chariots and burning bushes. Most of the calls we receive and ignore are the proverbial still, small voices... the daily calls to pay attention to our intuitions, to be authentic, to live by our own codes of honor” (Levoy 1997: 5). Recognizing this, this text seeks to explore the journeys of those who consider themselves on journeys to find spiritual meaning through work in

order to inform the imaginations of others so that they can likewise find meaning and purpose in the work that they do. This project has value for all, especially those who educate and lead, because developing an orientation toward finding spiritual meaning through work and remaining committed to that ongoing journey provides meaning that informs all elements of life. Further, the organizational implications of this research go beyond individual journeys, for they address the way that work is commonly perceived and lend wisdom to various contemporary discussions, including topics such as the role of women in the workplace and the importance of valuing individuals in ways that demonstrate genuine solicitude as a means to function both ethically and efficiently.

### **Dissertation Overview**

In brief, this investigation considers the spiritual journeys of those who find meaning and purpose expressed in their work. Since work occupies so many of our waking hours, finding meaning through work that is consistent with our authentic being has important implications for individual satisfaction, organizational effectiveness, and improved outcomes for those who benefit from work that is fused with passion and purpose. Finding that purpose and remaining aligned with the evolving needs of the “other” requires both imagination and reflection; this investigation engages individuals who are so oriented in conversation with the intent of imagining new worlds in which this topic is further revealed.

To frame the issues I have introduced in Chapter One, I follow with a review of literature related to defining both the concept of work and the use of the term spirituality, understanding how change occurs, explaining how time, meaning and storytelling relate to life’s journeys, and identifying the concepts of “meaning” and “purpose” as they are

linked to both spirituality and work. I describe the research process in Chapter Three, followed by data presentation and a preliminary analysis in Chapter Four. Chapter Five presents a secondary analysis based on applicable theory. To conclude, Chapter Six presents a summary of the research findings and the implications that these findings have for practice.

## CHAPTER TWO – REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### Introduction

The previous chapter cited definitions of spirituality as “interconnectedness.” So too is the community of anthropologists, scholars, researchers, and writers who have contributed to our knowledge of the subjects related to finding spiritual meaning in work from the perspective of their particular cultures. This body of literature, created by those who have reflected upon this subject, allows me to connect the insights of the past to those of more contemporary writers, creating a “chain or a series arising out of the interlacing of the transmission of what is acquired and the opening of new possibilities” (Ricoeur 1984: 111). As I consider the literature related to spiritual journeys through work, I will engage with other texts on this subject so that their insights and perspectives can inform new possibilities of being.

This review considers several topics that relate to this research. I explain the concept of work to clarify what is included and excluded from this investigation. Scholars and philosophers have had different perspectives about how work is defined and these different opinions must be considered in order to accurately identify the particular orientation of this project. Likewise, I introduce literature related to spirituality, to establish a framework for understanding the use of that term. It is used differently both by those who have written on the subject and those who have participated in this research. I also consider literature related to storytelling, first in terms of what critical hermeneutic scholars say about time and memory as related to the metaphor of a journey and then in relation to how those journeys become infused with meaning, which provides context for finding spiritual meaning in work. Background about the way that stories are

told and understood provides a necessary framework for understanding how the stories that my research participants tell inform both their present and future activities as they pursue meaning in their work. Finally, I discuss literature related to change, for the ability to make adjustments in behavior and attitude is essential for continuous learning, which establishes the very foundation for enduring growth. Understanding the human capacity for change, the necessary orientation toward authentic action, and the process of change helps to provide context for the action relayed through the stories shared by the participants in this project.

### **The Concept of Work**

*“Work is love made visible. And if you cannot work with love but only with distaste, it is better than you should leave your work and sit at the gate of the temple and take alms of those who work with joy.”*

(Gibran 1970: 28)

Working is a noble act, worthy of great respect and serious consideration, both about how we engage work and how we choose the work that we do. “If we are serious about our work we tend to find ourselves apprenticed to something much larger than we expected, something that calls on more of our essence than we previously imagined, something seemingly raw and overpowering” (Whyte 2001: 39). This research project investigates journeys of those who have sought meaning through their work and this section of the literature review looks at the different concepts of work, some of which affirm my premise about work as a noble act and others that offer contrary perspectives.

My research is limited primarily to people who live in Northern California, in the United States (with the exception of one participant who is from Michigan), but is not limited to people in any particular workplace. The geographical limitation does not

imply a different understanding of spirituality and work within this region of the country; it simply recognizes the location and nationality of those who are part of these research conversations. Whether or not others from dissimilar backgrounds have different perspectives would be the topic of another investigation.

Concepts of work range from those in which work is seen as activity engaged in for meaning to those in which work is seen as activity engaged in for material gain, with variations that fall between each extreme. Philosophers have applied different terms to distinguish the meanings applied to each type of activity so that “work,” “labor” and other words that could be considered synonymous are used in different ways by different writers to distinguish between meaningful activity and laborious necessity. Hannah Arendt wrote about these differences, both in referencing her own opinions about “the burden of laboring and the bondage to necessity” (1958: 4-5) and in providing historical background on the concept of work. Arendt (1958: 13) refers to Aristotelian thought, indicating that in ancient Greece work was not “considered to possess sufficient dignity to constitute... an autonomous and authentically human way of life; since [those who worked] served and produced what was necessary and useful [and therefore] could not be free.” She explains (1958: 4-5) that the production of necessary goods was not valued, because laboring out of obligation was an activity no better than that engaged in by animals who sought food and shelter out of necessity. Therefore, such activity was seen as a subordinate task to the ability to produce “works and deeds and words” that “would deserve to be and, at least to a degree, are at home in everlastingness, so that through them mortals could find their place in a cosmos where everything is immortal except themselves” (Arendt 1958: 19). Such a perspective places value only upon activities that

are creative and not tied in any sense to necessity, which in fact eliminates those activities that occupy most of the contemporary workforce.

Arendt (1958: 4-5) compares this perspective critically to a more modern one that “has carried with it a theoretical glorification of labor and has resulted in a factual transformation of the whole of society into a laboring society.” She expresses criticism of this transformation because it undermines an important emphasis on “other higher and more meaningful activities,” echoing the ancient Greek perspective that she describes, and notes with disdain,

even presidents, kings, and prime ministers think of their offices in terms of a job necessary for the life of society, and among the intellectuals, only solitary individuals are left who consider what they are doing in terms of work and not in terms of making a living (Arendt 1958: 4-5).

Arendt’s concerns go beyond rulers and intellectuals, however, addressing what she perceives as a “universal unhappiness” in mass culture, related to an expectation of satisfaction that is misaligned in an environment in which the activity in which most people are engaged on a daily basis lacks inherent meaning. She rejects what “labor theorists” propose as “social substitutes for contentment and self-respect;” that is, the idea that “interest in work” can be replaced by “the respect workers earn from their fellow workers” (Arendt 1958: 149). In expressing these concerns, Arendt primarily uses factory workers as examples and expresses hope that automation will free workers from the necessity of performing such tasks. Half a century later, other forms of automation such as computers and the Internet extend her predictions beyond the factories in ways that she likely never anticipated. Yet the discussion about the importance of seeking meaningful work continues unabated, for “work centers so much on technology today... that it is easy to forget that the Dow Jones, the NASDAQ, the hardware, the software, and



the shareware are all meant to be good servants to the individual human soul's desire to belong to the world" (Whyte 2001: 23).

A related idea about work suggests that the "instrumental value" (Dunn 2007) of work is fueled entirely by a desire for physical possessions. This is encouraged by advertisers, who create a bombardment of messages suggesting that the acquisition of possessions will provide satisfaction, and perpetuated by popular literature that emphasizes different methods to achieve a definition of success that is primarily characterized according to material wealth. Yet studies have shown that the "instrumental" outcome of monetary compensation does not contribute to finding meaning or purpose and therefore does not contribute to "success" when defined in non-materialistic terms. The Gallup Organization concluded, based on research with over 80,000 managers over 25 years, that pay and benefits are "like tickets to the ballpark – they can get you into the game, but they can't help you win" (Buckingham and Koffman 1999: 29). This conclusion reinforces the importance of finding meaning through work that is deeper than material success and explains why the journey toward such purposeful work is one in which many people find themselves engaged. However, that journey is not always aligned with other definitions of success, for "many business people, even the most successful, often find little meaning or purpose in their work. Others feel they are not fully using their God-given talents at work" (Avodah Institute 2007: 1).

The distinction between work as necessary activity and work as meaningful action that ties the doer to "everlastingness" is reflected in the introduction to a 1973 anthology of articles about the future of work. Best (1973: 1) notes that "human motivations range far beyond the drive for satisfaction of essential and discretionary materialistic needs.

There are higher needs which must be satisfied in order to approach the fullest potentials of human existence.” By distinguishing between work motivated by the achievement of materialistic needs from that which addresses those higher needs, he concludes (1973: 1) that humans have a need to “seek fulfillment of our total capacities through the activity of work.” Although this perspective is consistent with the premise of this research, which approaches spirituality as essential and its integration with work as a necessary part of authentic being, it exists within an understanding that “there is... a conception of work as a necessary evil” (Trent 2007: 1), echoing both Arendt’s concepts and the reflections of many individuals contemplating their own experiences. Affirmation for this perspective is found in the suggestion (Dunn 2007) that

work is arguable the primary pursuit for a vast majority of us. Yet, when asked what gives purpose and meaning to our lives many of us tend to leave work off the list. Living within a culture in which many of us have lost control over our own work, work has become merely of instrumental value in the quest for other meaning-giving activities in our lives.

This suggestion expresses concern about the lack of meaning inherent in the specific activities in which individuals are engaged as part of their employment. However, others have offered hope through further distinguishing the definitions associated with such activity, noting that the necessary activities in which individuals engage in order to survive do not preclude the possibility of meaningful work from their lives. Fox (1995: 5) notes that

we must learn to speak of the difference between a job and work. We may be forced to take a job serving food at a fast-food place for [minimum wage] in order to pay our bills, but work is something else. Work comes from inside out; work is the expression of our soul, our inner being. It is unique to the individual; it is creative. Work is an expression of the Spirit at work in the world through us.

Although this perspective further distinguishes the terms that are used in different ways to describe different types of activity, it also affirms that “he who loves his work never labors” (Stovall 2001: 27). Both contemporary and earlier writers continue to distinguish between the words used to describe meaningful work and those that describe activities engaged in only for the necessities of salary, benefits, or other outcomes needed for survival. However, those who have reflected on the subject of work share an inherent understanding that action is a universal condition of human experience. Arendt (1958: 9) explains how action is inextricably linked to initiative, stating that

the human condition of natality [refers to] the new beginning inherent in birth, [which] can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting. In this sense of initiative, an element of action, and therefore of natality, is inherent in all human activities.

In this element of initiative lies the creative action that is at the heart of meaningful work; that is, activity in which individuals engage to fulfill the unique purpose underlying their creation.

Domenico Jervolino offers a hermeneutic perspective on the nature of work, which affirms the creative element of such human activity and further extends the definition to include ethical action. He defines work as “human experience and behavior” and notes that work is linguistic in nature because it focuses on “human speaking and action (and suffering) and [effort to] seek a new, more productive and dynamic equilibrium between word and deed” (Jervolino 1996: 63). Jervolino (1996: 71) also responds to the concerns of ancient Greek philosophers who express concerns about certain types of human activities when he distinguishes the action of humans from the instincts that are associated with animals, stating that “human practice is not limited to

adapting to the living conditions imposed by nature... human action goes beyond mere survival needs... human praxis is a behavior that conforms unwittingly to the common goals desired by all” (Jervolino 1996: 67). Further, he explains (1996: 67) that praxis “exerts a mediating and unifying function among the many branches of human activity,” providing understanding about why we “dwell and act in solidarity” (Jervolino 1996: 69). Although he does not reflect specifically on either Christianity or on other spiritual practices, this emphasis on praxis does echo Arendt’s concepts of Christ, for she states (1958: 74) that “the one activity taught by Jesus in word and deed is the activity of goodness.” In such a context, both “goodness” and praxis refer to an orientation in thought and action toward the common good, which is “the determining condition and basis of all social reason” (Jervolino 1996:68) and relates to ethical decision-making processes, which are an inherent part of the way that spirituality manifests itself in work.

In both anthropological and hermeneutic understanding, meaningful work is essential, forming the foundation of needed ethical action and reinforcing the very basis of the human condition. For this reason, the activities in which humans engage become a part of individual identity. “The moment we want to say *who* somebody is, our very vocabulary leads us astray into saying *what* he is” (Arendt 1958: 181). Arendt explains this further (1958: 175) by quoting the great Italian poet Dante Alighieri, who reflects upon human activity, or work, as a revelation of being.

For in every action what is primarily intended by the doer... is the disclosure of his own image. Hence it comes about that every doer... takes delight in doing... since in action the being of the doer is somehow intensified.... Thus, nothing acts unless [by acting] it makes patent its latent self.

The capacity to authentically reveal oneself through work is often referred to by contemporary writers as having a “calling” or a “vocation.” Engaging in activity in

which such a calling allows individuals to use their strengths to contribute to others in a meaningful way transforms activity from a burden into a source of satisfaction

(Seligman 2002: 173). However, contemporary literature is rich in complaints that echo the ancient Greek philosophers' concerns about the burdens associated with unfulfilling labor. A common theme explains that many people live

with a sense of permanent regret. ...they must sacrifice what they most deeply value to keep pace with the world of work. It's not that they would rather not work. Many people... find energy and opportunity for self-expression in what they do. They do not regret work; they regret what work costs them (Phillips 1997: 43).

This theme is expressed in two general concerns about work: one that addresses how individuals are treated in the workplace and the other that deals with organizational expectations of individual workers. The first describes a concern about how individual managers create work environments that are abusive or coercive, are concerned primarily about maintaining or achieving power, and otherwise lack respect for individual needs. Workplace values surveys have demonstrated this problem, showing "a significant gap between what employees value and want in the workplace – motivational techniques based on caring – and the way [that employers] choose to motivate their workforces – through fear" (Laabs 1995: 60). Further, "while it is politically correct to value a more open, more candid management style, industrial managers overwhelmingly say their companies are still secretive" (Laabs 1995: 60). Although individuals want to have some control over their own work environments, including "how to make their work better and more productive," they are often denied "true empowerment" (Laabs 1995: 60).

This theme is expressed even more subtly when situations arise that undermine even the limited expectations of empowerment that individuals have developed in

association with the effect of their work. One example of this occurred in 2007 at a Bay Area municipal water agency, where a key legal advisor quit when her sound advice was summarily ignored in favor of action that was clearly motivated by personal power and political opportunity. The San Jose Mercury News (Rogers 2007: 1) covered this story, emphasizing the improper hire of a former Board member to a highly paid advisory position within the very organization over which the Board member had presided. Although the rejection of legal counsel's advice was not the focus of this story of abuse of public trust, her decision to leave her position as a result is an unfortunate example of how employers can create situations that devastate individual job satisfaction. "If employees believe that they are learning and growing and their efforts are contributing to some higher vision, they will engage and remain engaged" (Kelley 2005: 3); however, failing to fulfill that belief has the opposite effect, whether through losing an employee, as in the municipal water agency example, or through creating employees who are disengaged and discouraged, present in body but absent in commitment and effort. To engage employees fully and meet their need for satisfying work, the work environment must "appeal to their highest need, the need for self actualization... employees must feel that by participating... they are part of something larger, something significant, a grand effort" (Kelley 2005: 5). Work must create a sense of purpose and must authentically engage each individual holistically.

The second theme related to the burden of unfulfilling labor reflects one that is less intentionally manipulative, but occurs when organizational or individual managerial expectations allow no expression of self outside of the workplace; that is, when an individual is confronted with the expectation that he or she should invest all of his or her

time, energy, and commitment within the workplace at the expense of other interests. “Despite the fact that fewer people are doing more work, managers still demand everything they used to demand, and more” (Laabs 1995: 60). This latter concern is one that affects both work that is filled with purpose and work that serves a more utilitarian end. There are few people who can create lasting commitments to any single task, however meaningful, that excludes all other expressions of self. In fact, a 2002 study showed results that surprised its researchers, concluding that employees who work for nonprofit employers actually have lower levels of commitment to their organization than do those who work in for-profit settings (Goulet and Frank 2002: 10). The implications of this defy familiar understanding, which idealizes work at its best as a passionate vocation in comparison to which all other interests pale. In reality, most individuals find increased satisfaction working in organizations that allow them to exercise a variety of their interests and talents, both within and outside the employment setting, through empowered work environments and employment that offers the opportunity for life balance. Understanding this has given rise to changed expectations of workplace rewards, for while for-profit employers have increased the financial rewards in response to greater difficulties with retaining valued contributors (Goulet and Frank 2002: 10), other studies have additionally shown that the financial “perks of the past have given over to such workplace offerings as flextime and longer vacations so that people can spend more time in activities away from work” (Laabs 1995: 60).

Still, even those organizations that exist to make money have a growing recognition that they need to reach deeper than this initial goal in order to motivate the employees who are integral to their success. David Packard of Hewlett-Packard reflects

on the reality that making money is essential to a company's continued existence, but adds that

we have to go deeper and find the real reasons for our being. As we investigate this, we inevitably come to the conclusion that a group of people get together and exist as an institution that we call a company so that they are able to accomplish something collectively that they could not accomplish separately – they make a contribution to society, a phrase which sounds trite but is fundamental (Novak 1996: 25).

Employees can feel motivated through the community created by their employment if they understand themselves as part of a team that is making a contribution to society, whether that employer is a non-profit or a corporation (Novak 1996: 25). “It is important to value the business you are in and to take satisfaction from providing its services or goods to others. At the end of the day, you want to respect what you do” (Novak 1996: 31), for “to feel that what we do is right for ourselves and good for the world at the exact same time... is one of the great triumphs of human existence” (Whyte 1991: 4). This “triumph” applies both to work that is meaningful in itself and also to work environments that allow for creativity and belonging, for each of these components are essential to affirming work as a reason for existence. Individuals need

a sense of belonging in their work, a conversation with someone larger than themselves, a felt participation, and a touch of spiritual fulfillment and the mysterious generative nature of that fulfillment... earning and providing [are] all very well, but once the basics [are] met, human beings naturally [turn] their inward and outward eyes to greater horizons (Whyte 1991: 5).

The value of work is therefore found not only in financial compensation, but in rewards that take the form of self-identity. Whyte (2001: 11) describes it as “difficulty and drama, a high-stakes game in which our identity, our esteem, and our ability to provide are mixed inside of us in volatile, sometimes explosive ways.” In order to align that identity with authentic being, it is important to find a line of work “that suits the kind



of person you are – the individual you are” (Novak 1996: 33). No amount of “meaning” will substitute for the appropriate alignment of the task with the authenticity of a call that is intended for a unique individual, a subject that is explored further in the Finding Meaning section of this literature review. Finding work that is a true expression of that unique call necessarily engages our identities

because we know [that]... we are our gift to others and the world. [Thus,] failure in truly creative work is not some mechanical breakdown but the prospect of a failure in our very essence, a kind of living death. Little wonder we often choose the less vulnerable, more familiar approach, that places work mostly in terms of provision. If I can reduce my image of work to just a job I have to do, then I keep myself safely away from the losses to be endured in putting my heart’s desires at stake (Whyte 2001: 13).

Explaining further how work is a significant reflection of identity, Whyte (2001: 48) uses leadership as an analogy, explaining that “one of the outer qualities of great captains, great leaders, great bosses is that they are unutterably themselves.” He goes on to explain that rather than reflecting a mild complacency with that state of being, such leaders are “living at a frontier, a cliff edge, in a kind of exhilaration that we want to touch in our own lives.” In doing so, they “stay true to a conversation that is the sum of their own strange natures and the world they inhabit, and do not attempt to mimic others in order to get on.” Whyte uses Rosa Parks as one example of a leader who stayed true to her nature, suggesting that she was “tired, not heroic, when she refused to move to the back of the bus. [However,] ... it was her own tiredness and she stood by it, as if she was reclaiming an edge of exhaustion she hadn’t allowed herself to feel until then.”

Similarly, whether operating in a formal leadership role or exercising self-leadership, finding identity in work requires remaining true to authentic nature, discovering the

unique purpose underlying creation, and doing so in a working environment that fully allows for self-actualization.

In summary, philosophers have questioned the nature of work for thousands of years, expressing doubt about the link between activity and necessity that continues in contemporary conversation. While the capacity to pay essential bills will continue to be linked to the use of the term work, such a connection does not eliminate the possibility of finding fulfillment in that same activity. However, such fulfillment requires that individuals find the right kind of work for their unique purpose and engage in that activity in an environment that allows for self-actualization and empowerment. When such work is found, “we tend to find ourselves apprenticed to something much larger than we expected, something that calls on more of our essence than we previously imagined, something seemingly raw and overpowering” (Whyte 2001: 39). Such a discovery emphasizes the importance of the journey and the relevance of approaching the topic with diligence and care.

### **Spirituality**

Understanding the importance of work and how it is defined leads to a similar inquiry about the framework within which spirituality through work is understood, for, as with the concept of work, seemingly interchangeable terms are often used to imply very different meanings. This section introduces the link between spirituality and work, explains how spirituality relates to finding meaning through work, explores the various definitions of spirituality in order to establish what is included in this investigation, and discusses the way that spirituality manifests in action as a context within which to understand the reflections of my research partners on this subject.

The workplace is comprised of individuals who have varying levels of spiritual beliefs, expressed through different spiritual practices. However, despite diversity in many of the details associated with spirituality, there are also similarities in key elements. According to opinion polls of those in the workforce in the United States conducted over 50 years by the Gallup Organization, “94% of us believe in God, 90% of us pray, 88% of us believe God loves us, and 33% of us report we have had a life-changing religious experience” (Bolles 1991: 6). These numbers appear at odds with anecdotal reports of common workplace experiences in which such topics are never revealed or discussed and they emphasize the importance of having increased and ongoing conversations about ways to align spiritual beliefs with work. In order to develop holistic integration of these two areas of life, to “*marry* our religious **beliefs** with our **work**, rather than leaving the two – our religion and our work – compartmentalized, as two areas of life which never talk to each other,” it is necessary for these two areas to “talk to each other and uplift each other” (Bolles 1991: 6).

For those who hold them, spiritual beliefs serve to interpret and apply meaning to issues confronting the world, which includes the issues that occur within the context of the workplace. Spiritual beliefs both sustain and inform individuals as they go about the activities that constitute their work; as such, many consider such beliefs essential, for they help to address what one author (Myss 2004: 1) describes as

a world gone mad, but not just in terms of war and chaos. There is a madness in this world that is the result of living too fast, forcing yourself to function without time to reflect upon the cause and effect of your choices and the quality of your relationships and the consequences of your actions.

While her comments are not specifically addressed to the workplace, her concerns apply.

Her additional comments (Myss 2004: 1) that “the more the outside world spins out of

control, the more your interior world must assume full control” can also be used specifically to understand the challenges of many workplaces, where a feeling of lack of control is common. She therefore suggests that a spiritual solution to the challenge of handling modern life is essential because

each person is born with a passion to connect to the sacred. We have a yearning for that. We have an absolute passion to be brought to our knees before the Divine, to witness a miracle, to see the waters part, to see the blind recover their eyesight, to see people healed from incurable diseases. We long to see the presence of God among us in these ways (Myss 2004: 1).

Philosopher Thomas Merton (1955: 118), writing several decades ago, also helps introduce the framework for understanding how spirituality relates to finding meaning in work. He goes beyond affirming the role that spirituality can play in helping us handle contemporary work challenges; instead, he suggests that work needs to be placed within a spiritual context in order to have any meaning whatsoever. He also affirms the value of action as discussed in the previous section as relevant to the observations of anthropologist Arendt, stating that “my soul does not find itself unless it acts.” However, at the same time he warns against allowing work to integrate fully with identity, saying that “I must not plunge my whole self into what I think and do, or seek always to find myself in the work I have done.” Rather than directly contradicting the perspective about work and identity offered in the previous section by Whyte, Merton (1955: 121) provides a reminder that, from a spiritual perspective, “in order to settle down in the quiet of our own being we must learn to be detached from the results of our own activity” and instead “be content with the good will and the work that are the quiet expression of our inner life.” He argues that in doing so, the activity of work becomes secondary in importance or relevance to a relationship with God; therefore, focus should be on the intent of such

activity rather than the results, which could be beyond our control. From this perspective, the intent and effort associated with work take priority over actual results. This allows identity to remain authentically aligned with the original purpose of the work, rather than vainly attempting to maintain ownership of a product that has moved beyond the control of its instigator. An analogy can be drawn between this approach and a critical hermeneutic approach to text, which recognizes that, once created, text enters into separate conversations with each reader. Thus engaged, it can be interpreted in ways beyond the original intent of the writer. Similarly, Merton writes of meaningful work as efforts that individuals must approach as an expression of their individual relationships with God. Individuals must subsequently understand that the results of such efforts may move beyond either their original intent or their ultimate control. Others echo this sentiment, suggesting that

we need to look in the mirror frequently and remind ourselves that our good intentions, even when supported by impressive skills and hard work, do not endow us with either the certainty of victory or any perfect sense of what those for whom we labor will consider victory (Bell 2002: 160).

This emphasizes both the difficulty of understanding work outside the context of a spirituality that includes some concept of faith and the importance of remembering that efforts to engage in meaningful labor must embrace service to others. This review addresses this concept in more detail in the Finding Meaning section.

A review of literature related to spirituality at work did not reveal any dissenting opinion; that is, no author or researcher advocated an approach to spirituality and work that was not holistic and integrated, though certainly both employment law and common sensitivities respect the rights of those who do not profess any spiritual or religious conviction to maintain that belief without challenge in the course of their employment.

However, there is significant disagreement within the literature about spirituality and work about whether the topic can be approached generally or whether the individual engaged in such a journey must embrace specific, if individual, beliefs. A description (Ray and Anderson 2000: 192) of a “new subculture” in the United States and Europe notes that those who compose this subculture feel that “a sense of the spiritual is central to them,” but specify that they reject many conventional religious beliefs and are instead “conducting their search for the sacred along innovative lines.”

However, others warn of the “temptation” to discuss the subject of spiritual meaning in work “in a secular fashion, without reference to God, as though it might be simply a purpose you choose for your own life, by identifying your enthusiasms and then using the clues you find from that exercise to get some purpose you can choose for your life” (Bolles 1991: 9). Still others pose the question in the context of understanding the search for “calling” by asking, “who, or what, is calling?” (Levoy 1997: 2) While many religious authors argue in favor of discernment of a specific set of beliefs, others suggest that

even an exhaustive list of every name for Soul or Destiny or God would be beside the point. It simply doesn't matter whether we call it God, the Patterning Intelligence, the Design Mind, the Unconscious, the Soul, the Force of Completion, the Center Court, or simply 'life's longing for itself,' as Kahil Gibran envisioned. It is clear, however, that 'living means being addressed,' as the theologian Martin Buber once said, and whatever or whoever is addressing us is a power like wind or fusion or faith: We can't see the force, but we can see what it does (Levoy 1997: 2).

This difference of opinion reflects what another author (O'Donohue 2007: 5-6) describes as a

fierce hunger for spirit at the heart of an American culture that has lost all belief in the old language about God. That language no longer resonates for most Americans, nor leads them to wells of nourishment. ...Attention to the living God, who incorporates the beauty of the senses and spirit and is the deepest source of the imagination and the highest calling of intellect, seems very scarce.

This “hunger” is reflected in both the literature about meaning and work, which is discussed in a later section of this project, and in the very search for spiritual meaning in work that the research participants who are part of this investigation enthusiastically describe.

While some terms have been used interchangeably above, reflecting the approach of much of the literature on these subjects, it is important to distinguish between the terms by establishing clarity about how each term relates to this investigation.

Spirituality is a broad concept, one that addresses the concept of the human being as “an in-between presence, belonging neither fully to the earth from which she has come, nor to the heavens toward which her mind and spirit aim” (O’Donohue 2007: 1). As referenced in the introduction to this text, spirituality is often defined in broad terms as a “connectedness” and is often used to define a vague desire to connect both to others and to another force that for many remains undefined. One individual interviewed as part of identifying the subculture described captures the vagueness of the search often defined as “spirituality,” saying, “I feel connected with something... I guess the word is divine. I would say this connection has become my life purpose – to seek that quality of being human, encounter it, and hopefully promote it” (Ray and Anderson 2000: 54). A more specific definition that ties belief to action and authenticity suggests that

to have a spiritual life is to have a life that is spiritual in all its wholeness – a life in which the actions of the body are holy because of the soul, and the soul is holy because of God dwelling and acting in it. When we live such a life, the actions of our body are directed to God by God Himself and give Him glory, and at the same time they help to sanctify the soul (Merton 1955: 98-99).

For the purposes of clarifying what is meant by spirituality, it is helpful to distinguish it from other words often used synonymously; however, a review of literature

in various genres, from business articles to religious works, shows the same terms being used to refer to different concepts. In fact, research methods provide quantitative understanding of this dilemma, for in one study that included 215 people from 40 different industries (Mitroff and Denton 1999: 197, 205, 211).

- 30% said that “religion and spirituality are synonymous and inseparable; a source of basic beliefs/universal values.”
- 2% said that “religion dominates spirituality. Religion is a source of basic beliefs/values.”
- 60% said that “spirituality dominates religion; spirituality is the source of basic beliefs/universal values”
- 8% said that “neither religion nor spirituality are primary. Universal values can be defined and attained independently of religion and spirituality”

(Mitroff and Denton 1999: 40).

As these numbers show, the vagueness of the term “spirituality” appears to appeal both to the 60% majority identified in this survey and to many of the writers who have offered reflections on related subjects, perhaps because it avoids either the specificity of belief that is implied in the use of the term “religion” or because it appears to encompass more than the human institutions that are referred to by the term “religion.” Earlier, anthropologist Paul Radin provides one perspective on the relationship between religion and spirituality by defining religion as consisting of two parts, which are “an easily definable, if not precisely specific feeling” and “certain specific acts, customs, beliefs, and conceptions associated with this feeling” (Radin 1937: 2). However, other perspectives show that some individuals hold beliefs that do not allow a separation



between their spirituality and their religion. Because of my religious beliefs, I count myself among those who are unable to discuss the relevance of a journey to find spirituality through work without including a discussion of religious beliefs. This occurs within different belief systems, but one example is provided through my own faith practices. Roman Catholics believe that the Church is both human and divine and see the Church's seven sacraments as ways in which human beings link themselves to the divine, believing that it is through the sacraments that "the weakness and poverty of fallen man are transfigured in the death and Resurrection of Jesus" (Merton 1955: 90). Further, Roman Catholics see baptism as a sacrament that specifically relates to purposeful work, for

all the sufferings of our life [help] us work out the pattern of our identity received in [baptism and] ...gives us our personally, incommunicable vocation to reproduce in our own lives the life and sufferings and charity of Christ in a way unknown to anyone else who has ever lived under the sun (Merton 1955: 81-82).

Others echo this inability within some belief systems to separate religion from spirituality; for example, one author refers broadly to religion as "the service of God out of grateful love for what God has done for us in Christ" (Bolles 1991: 28). While many do differentiate "strongly between religion and spirituality," (Mitroff and Denton 1999: xvi), others considering the issues related to finding meaning in work acknowledge that "religion plays a role in sustaining all great civilizations because it attempts to answer the ultimate questions: Why are we here? What is the purpose of life? .... Ultimately, most people will find these answers in religion" (Williams 2006: 31).

"Faith" is another term used in discussing these concepts, often used within the context of discussing the ideas of connectedness and authenticity. One writer opines that faith "provides me the emotional fuel, the kinetic connection to the other elements of my

character” (Bell 2002: 77). Faith is also used to refer to an element of spirituality that applies specifically to the concept of a journey to find purpose in work, for

to have faith is to see everything against an infinite horizon.... Faith is a way of seeing things. It is a means to change our eyesight, to take the reality of our lives and all that is in them – everyday work, relationships, family, love, sex, hurt, longing, fidelity, failure, sin, suffering, and death – and set these against the horizon of the eternal and the infinite. Whatever the phrase, there is in the lives of every one of us a conspiracy of accidents that might aptly be called divine providence. We have faith when we can see this, when we can read the events of our lives precisely against a divine backdrop (Rolheiser 2001: 9).

Others link faith even more specifically to work, noting that “God did not intend for faith to be locked away in weekend worship... but to be lived in all of daily life... even in our places of work. ... people are searching for meaning and purpose in their work, significance in their success, and dignity in their daily labors” (Miller undated: 1). Others cite surveys that affirm this, noting that findings “establish unequivocally the existence of the divided soul of corporate America. Current organizations allow most people to bring only a tiny part of their entire selves to work” (Mitroff and Denton 1999: xix).

This link to work that is expressed in the various terms used often ties the concept of meaningful work to Ricoeur’s concept of oneself as another by linking suffering and action through service to others. More than a general “connectedness,” Ricoeur (1992: 3) puts this value in strong context when he suggests that our very identities are intimately tied to each other. Other authors echo this in more specifically religious contexts, providing examples of empathy that is tied both to action and, for example, to the figure of Christ, who provides a theological basis for connecting to others through suffering. Another example is offered by Saint Therese of Lisieux, who said that “the entire foundation of her spirituality came from her contemplation of the face of the suffering Christ” (Rolheiser 2001: 134-135). A contemporary writer who discusses the influences

of another saint, Saint Teresa of Avila, notes that “we need to discover that more than needing to be healed, that we have the capacity to heal others and that our deepest calling in life is to move beyond needing to have more and more and more. We need to step beyond ourselves and discover what it means to be of service” (Myss 2004: 1). These influences occur within religious faiths and spiritual practices and serve to tie the search for spiritual meaning through work to service to others, a concept that has been heavily influenced in this investigation by Ricoeur’s reflections about how our very identities are tied to our relationships with others.

Identity is also inherently linked to action, which also acts as a manifestation of spirituality when considering the importance of spiritual practices, however defined in different traditions. Regardless of the tradition, there is emphasis in much of the literature on the importance of adopting some disciplined behavior that ties us in concrete ways to our spirituality (Merton 1955: 112). “The more we [do so], the more we are touched and fused with the limitless kindness and affection of the divine” (O’Donohue 2007: 1). While some advocate spiritual practices, such as prayer, as a method of empowerment, suggesting that “if people truly understood the power of prayer and the power of grace, they would pray as their first step in everything that they did...” (Myss 2004: 1), others acknowledge that many such disciplines are misunderstood, and therefore difficult to promote as a single answer to the needs of different individuals for meaningful spiritual practices.

The problem we have in sustaining prayer... is often grounded in the false notion that prayer needs to be interesting, exciting, intense, and full of energy all the time. But that is impossible, nothing is meant to be exciting all the time, including prayer and church services, and nobody has the energy to always be alert, attentive, intense, and actively engaged all the time (Rolheiser 2007: 1).

Again, different religious authors take positions justifying one or more forms of specific spiritual practices. However, what emerges as a common theme in the literature about spirituality is the importance of developing any discipline that is authentically tied to spiritual beliefs.

Any practice that strengthens our powers of observation and our ability to see subtleties within ourselves... these practices include anything that helps us pay attention to our lives... such as: a daily journal, meditation, therapy, art work, movement work, martial arts, dream interpretation, music, long walks, intimate conversation, retreats, fasting, rituals (Levoy 1997: 23).

Spiritual practices are an integral part of a rigorous commitment to connect the human to the divine. “Prayer takes you into another kind of space. It takes you into that oblique interim place where connections between things are born....” (O’Donohue 2007: 1). In making this journey and seeking that connection between human and divine, spiritual practices allow those engaged to supersede present selves, connecting through action both to others and to an imagined future. The insight gained “means that you are not identical to your biography, you are not just a psychological matrix. There is a place in you which is beyond psychology, and that is the eternal place within you” (O’Donohue 2007: 1).

In summary, definitions of spirituality vary greatly, may be intended to either include or exclude concepts such as religion and faith, and may reference either specific beliefs or very broad concepts. For the purposes of this inquiry, spirituality is defined as recognition of the divine and the practice of a discipline (or disciplines) that are geared toward developing a strong relationship with God with the intent of becoming grounded in something that is greater than the individual. Such a definition does not exclude religion or faith. Further, this discussion of spirituality also includes the practices that

help ground this term in relevant action. O'Donohue (2007: 1) lends eloquence to the emphasis that he places on the importance of adopting spiritual practices, saying that they help individuals to “learn to behold yourself with the same gentleness, pride, expectation, and compassion with which the divine presence beholds you at every moment” so that “compassion will flow naturally from us” (O'Donohue 2007: 1). This definition of spirituality in action thereby incorporates the meaning that human beings appropriate when we approach work as an opportunity for service to others.

### **Finding Meaning**

In conjunction with a definition of spirituality, understanding the relevance of journeying with purpose to find spirituality in work requires looking at the search for meaning, a concept that is also referred to in related literature as finding purpose, mission, vocation, calling, or passion. This section reviews the various ways that the relevant literature defines meaning, in order to provide context for the concept of finding meaning through work. It also considers techniques advocated in literature about the various ways to discern purpose through work. Finally, this section looks at the literature as it addresses the nature of the search, in order to better appreciate why the pursuit of meaning through work can be understood as a journey always in progress.

Nazi concentration camp survivor Viktor Frankl asserts that meaning is the primary motivational force of human beings. He states that everyone has a “uniqueness and singleness which distinguishes each individual and gives meaning to his existence” and that this specific purpose “has a bearing on creative work as much as it does on human love” (Frankl 1946:101). Frankl suggests that the “last of the human freedoms” is “to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way”

and that freedom defines what “makes life meaningful and purposeful” (Frankl: 1946: 100). Although Frankl used his concentration camp experiences as the basis of his assertions, and whereas drawing correlations to the lack of control that individuals can experience in a contemporary workplace seems dramatic in comparison with the extreme conditions of a concentration camp, he argues that the need for such freedom persists even in less extreme situations. This reflects the literature reviewed in the section of this investigation on the concept of work. Frankl (1946: 100) makes additional reflections that can be applied to the search for meaning in work, suggesting that those who had the strength “to choose an attitude” in the concentration camps were individuals who were sustained by an individual sense of purpose and expectation that “something in the future was expected from them.” Scottish philosopher Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) uses similar words, suggesting that an individual “without a purpose is like a ship without a rudder... have a purpose in life and, having it, throw such strength of mind and muscle into your work as God has given you” (Duncan 2002: 12) and German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) affirms that “he who has a why to live for can bear almost any how” (Duncan 2002: 28).

Other authors go further, tying meaning to spirituality, which deepens the importance of finding meaning as it relates to aligning life with the divine. In a blended quantitative and qualitative method study of spirituality in corporations within the United States, a majority of the participants said that “the soul is precisely the deepest essence of what it means to be human” (Mitroff and Denton 1999: 5). They defined the soul as “that which ties together and integrates all of the separate and various parts of a person; it is the base material, the underlying platform, that makes a person a human being” (Mitroff

and Denton 1999: 5). They further tie this definition of the soul to meaning by discussing the soul as “the immense energy or potential that ties at the core of each of us,” warning of the “burden” created when that potential is not acknowledged and when the meaning that people seek is not enabled. From this perspective, finding meaning in work is essential both for manifesting individual potential in this life and for aligning the soul with the eternal and divine.

Determining that life has a purpose is sustaining; however, determining the nature of that purpose often carries challenges. The volume of literature on the subject demonstrates the difficulty that many have in discerning the unique purpose of their creation and how that purpose should manifest itself through work. In fact, within the context of work, simply remaining true to personal integrity can be a challenge, one that is reflected both in literature about the workplace and in news reports about workplace scandals. “Simply relying on a generalized hope to do good in life is a poor shield against the forces insisting that integrity and ethical behavior are necessary sacrifices on the road to success” (Bell 2002: 18). Therefore, developing an individual sense of meaning by defining how “doing good” is essential to success, which demands “sacrifice, but not of virtue, not of our beliefs, not of our desires and moral goals, certainly not in the often futile and always empty pursuit of material success” (Bell 2002: 18). Still, acting with integrity is admirable, but insufficient in the search for meaning through work, for while doing so reflects a measure of virtue, it does nothing to ensure that the work reflects the unique purpose behind each individual’s creation.

Bell’s conclusion, that meaning is not defined by material success, reflects a theme previously revealed in this review, in the section on work. However, it also creates

a challenge in that if meaning through work is not to be defined in terms of material success, which can be quantified in relatively simple terms, the individual is left to search for meaning with a less tangible destination for the search. The literature emphasizes finding work that fulfills purpose, regardless of material compensation, for “those who develop a passion for their work gain pleasure from it and are rewarded with satisfactions that can’t be taken away” (Bell 2002: 25). The task of finding work that can fuel that passion, and thus infuse action with meaning, is the subject of much reflection in the literature, for discerning purpose can require a journey filled with both reflection and active exploration.

One consistent theme about finding meaning in work indicates that actions must align with authentic efforts to help others, for, as Catholic Worker founder Dorothy Day commented in 1955, “there is a call to us, a call of service – that we join with others to try to make things better in this world” (Coles 1993: xxiii). Other authors express agreement, affirming that “the chief satisfactions are those that involve reaching out to others, trying to make things better (Bell 2002: 25), that “the place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet” (Bolles 1991: 48), and, similarly, that “your purpose is... tied into the deepest hunger and the deepest call of the world” (O’Donohue 2002: 6). One author, who researched those who had assumed various volunteer opportunities in service organizations over many years, remarked that “I have heard [gratitude for the opportunity to serve] echoed many times – the enthusiasm and pleasure, the exhilaration that accompanies action taken, and the consequences of such action: deeds done, people very much touched...” (Coles 1993: 74). Lewin and Regine (2001: 7) support the idea that our purpose is tied to service to others and note



that “everything exists only in relationship to everything else... and so relationships that are based on “authenticity and care” (2001: 9) provide an “organizing principle” (2001: 7). Other authors also dismiss an independence that is often idealized, noting instead that “however self-sufficient we may fancy ourselves, we exist only *in relation* – to our friends, family, and life partners; to those we teach and mentor; to our co-workers, neighbors, strangers... in many ways, we *are* our relationships” (Bell 2002: 107).

Literature that affirms that meaning is found through service to others contains another common theme: the idea that each individual has a unique call, that each person was created with talents and passions that are intended to align with the needs of others to make the world a better place and to manifest individual purpose.

God has made each of us unique... we feel that... God caused us to... be put here for some unique reason: so that we might contribute to Life here on earth something no one else can contribute in quite the same way. At its very minimum, then, when we search for a sense of mission we are searching for reassurance that the world is at least a little bit richer for our being here and a little bit poorer after our going (Bolles 1991: 6-7).

Further, all individuals

have a particular set of gifts, opportunities, and other attributes – including weaknesses and strengths – that are uniquely our own. And each of us is obligated to examine that package to determine its potential for communicating God’s truth and love, confronting evil... and dealing rightly with it (Grisez and Shaw 2003: 99).

Many others echo this belief, phrasing it in various ways, but affirming that each individual arrives with his or her own “gifted form, with the shape of [their] own sacred soul” (Palmer 2000: 11). This belief bridges the spiritual with meaning found in work by tying meaning both to the divine and to service to others, for

one of the fascinating tasks in every human life is to engage and experience oneself as a unity. ...When you stand in front of another human being, you stand before the presence of an unknown and infinite world of love, belonging,

imagination, and ambivalence, negativity, darkness, and struggle. It is sad... that human presence is diminished, rendered vacant, and not acknowledged for the wild divinity that it is (O'Donohue 2002: 3).

This approach to purpose as aligned holistically with life has led some authors to suggest that “the deepest vocational question is not ‘What ought I to do with my life?’ It is the more elemental and demanding ‘Who am I? What is my nature?’” (Palmer 2000: 15), for “one of the greatest duties we have in the world is to become the individual we were called to be” (O'Donohue 2002: 5). This call incorporates work as part of individual purpose but also projects an expectation that work will integrate with other aspects of life.

Recognizing and discerning the specifics of each individual's unique call is a challenge and one that occupies many authors who have engaged this subject. Meeting this challenge requires consideration of the “great courage and grace [needed] to feel the call to awaken, and... [the] greater courage and more grace... to actually submit to the call, to risk yourself into these interior spaces...” (O'Donohue 2002: 4). It also requires active reflection on how success is defined, for many get distracted by ideas of material success and forget to include the fulfillment of meaning in that definition (Duncan 2002: 28). Even when the search authentically engages both the desire and the necessary risk, much difficulty occurs within the discernment process, for “our strongest gifts are usually those we are barely aware of possessing. They are part of our God-given nature, with us from the moment we drew first breath, [but] we are no more conscious of having them than we are of breathing” (Parker 2000: 52).

While the discovery that our very nature may contain the strengths that support our search for meaning in work may be affirming, the discernment process is extremely

challenging. Even great leaders find this a challenge; for example, Michael Aris introduces the writings of Aung San Suu Kyi (1995: xviii-xx) by noting that “it had never been her intention to strive for anything quite so momentous. . . . fate and history never seem to work in orderly ways.” Still, engaging this search in a thoughtful way is essential, for “true creative, critical thought cuts away the undergrowth, helps you to recognize being, and lets you realize how magical and strange and mysterious and full of potential life is” (O’Donohue 2007: 2). Joseph Campbell (1991: 113) offers oft-quoted advice about the mission of life to “live that potentiality” in order to “follow your bliss;” however, the methods for determining “bliss” are discussed by many writers, some of whom offer single individual pieces of advice while others detail multiple steps. This diversity of perspective reflects the fact that there is no single process of discerning meaning that works for all, affirming Kearney’s (2004: 1) description of Ricoeur’s argument that “the meaning of being is always mediated through an endless process of interpretations – cultural, religious, political, historical, and scientific.”

In general, the different recommendations require reflection and the techniques offered through the literature include various methods to enable that reflection, including a general expectation that an individual engaged in such a search for meaning will appropriate the discernment methods that prove most revealing, in accordance with that individual’s experience, personality, and preferences. The recommendations are distinguished in two core areas: those that are tied to spirituality and those that are not. Those in the former category argue that a search for meaning without attention to aligning that purpose with a higher being risks “the dark side of the delights of self discovery,” in that “kind people, very intelligent. . . all doing their own thing” (Grisez and

Shaw 2003: 26) hazard a journey toward self-discovery in which the search never goes deeper than personal fulfillment. This literature suggests that such an approach will prove to be inherently unfulfilling, because authentic being cannot be fully understood without focus on the elements of identity that are tied to others. Further, those who align understanding of the search for meaning in work to spirituality believe that

the purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfillment, your peace of mind, or even your happiness. It's far greater than your family, your career, or even your wildest dreams and ambitions. If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God. You were born by his purpose and for his purpose (Warren 2002: 17).

Literature that does not tie the search for meaning to spirituality does not overtly reject the existence of a deity or the importance of spirituality. Rather, it simply offers an entirely secular focus on personality, interests, and talents in the considered recommendations. Both categories provide valuable insights into different ways of discerning purpose in work.

The literature also creates differentiation between two separate, if complimentary concepts: the internal search for meaning within work and the more external search for specific forms of work that represents the purpose for creation. The first category includes work that allows for opportunities for spiritual growth; that is, work that allows the individual to serve others in meaningful ways and thus manifest purpose by finding God's presence in the other. The second category assumes a search for work that itself is comprised of activities for which the individual feels a specific calling. Both are important goals that can be mutually fulfilled; however, the various authors who contribute wisdom on this subject provide different insights about each search.

The literature that considers the ability to connect to God in work, regardless of whether that work itself affirms the unique basis for individual creation, has workplace implications. It also addresses the broader vocation “to live the truth of one’s faith” by taking action and making choices that demonstrate a love of God and of the other and by taking actions “to bring about the kingdom of God” (Grisez and Shaw 2003: 35). This category looks at how life is lived in everyday circumstances and suggests that meaning will follow if ethical choices are consistently made about routine decisions, thus building meaning through a set of steps. Those who emphasize the search for spirituality in work over the discovery of a particularly meaningful work activity found an inspiring spokesperson in a lecture given in September, 2007 in Pittsburgh by Professor Randy Pausch, as part of Carnegie Mellon’s “Last Lecture Series,” in which professors give their hypothetical last thoughts in a lecture format. Pausch is a young father, inspiring teacher, and active contributor within his academic community who is dying of pancreatic cancer. His taped lecture was shown on the Wall Street Journal’s online web site. In it, he notes that life is “not about how to achieve your dreams. It’s about how to live your life. If you live your life the right way... the dreams will come to you.” This reflection affirms the importance of everyday ethical choices without eliminating the achievement of ambitious dreams. His statement implies that the process of making ethical choices in everyday activities guides both the development and achievement of dreams, allowing success to be holistically rooted in a spirituality that is aligned with the divine.

This perspective also affirms the purpose behind Cursillo, which, according to its web site ([www.natlkursillo.org](http://www.natlkursillo.org)), is a Roman Catholic movement aimed at finding

meaning through work. Like other writers and movements who engage on this subject, Cursillo affirms the unique role for which each individual was created. However, Cursillo does not focus so much on discerning the specifics of that role as on approaching life with the intent of consciously modeling Jesus Christ. It reaches out specifically to Roman Catholics through newsletters and local networks of small support groups to maintain daily awareness of this journey to find meaning in all elements of life. Similarly, Opus Dei is described by its web site ([www.opusdei.com](http://www.opusdei.com)) as a Catholic institution whose mission involves spreading the message that work creates opportunities for growing closer to God, which includes serving others. Like Cursillo, it considers work an opportunity to imitate Jesus Christ and emphasizes the final destination in the journey toward purpose in work, suggesting that God judges work by the love its intent inspires, not necessarily by its temporal success.

While these movements are both aligned with a specific religion, they reflect a belief about finding meaning in everyday actions that is echoed in secular literature on the subject. For example, one author of business literature offers a perspective on the role that middle managers have in finding meaning through their relationships with subordinates, suggesting that they “are in the position to complement those who work under them every day” and, through this and other actions they become “the chief community builders” who “give (or fail to give) the firm its human character” (Novak 1996: 29). This specific example demonstrates how meaning can be found in many kinds of work, if the work is approached with a reflective attitude and care for the other.

A different category of literature about finding meaning looks more specifically at finding work activities that match individual calling. Literature associated with this

perspective offers a variety of techniques for discerning purposeful work in order to provide meaning. For example, one author suggests studying “our talents and skills and more particularly which ones (or one) we most rejoice to use... it is usually the [talent] which, when we use it, causes us to lose all sense of time” (Bolles 1991: 43). American short story writer and novelist Thomas Wolfe (1900-1938) affirms the importance of focusing on talents in order to ascertain purpose, suggesting that “if a man has talent and... learns somehow to use the whole of it, he has gloriously succeeded and won a satisfaction and triumph few men ever know” (Duncan 2002: 28). Similarly, others consider talents together with other attributes, noting the importance of fulfilling the “personalities, talents, or longings we were born with” in order to uncover “our personal destiny, a sense of having been able to contribute to something worthwhile to the common public life, something that would not have been there without us” (Novak 1996: 18). However, others warn of the dangers of relying solely upon this approach, opining that it is “largely true but not always” that “gifts and talents are the most likely places to find callings.” Instead,

sometimes we’re called toward areas in which we seem to have scant abilities and little experience or know-how. Sometimes we’re called to things to which we have distinct aversions, or to what we have always thought of as our weaknesses... a passion is not necessarily a talent (or vice versa) (Levoy 1997: 66).

The literature about meaning includes an array of different methods to help the individual discern purpose and to gain insights that help drive further reflection and action. Most authors recognize the individual nature of this journey, and so do not advocate a particular number or order to the techniques. Instead, they describe each technique and recommend that individuals consider which work best at the individual’s

particular stage of the journey and within his or her personality and preferences. The recommendations listed are general and detailed, dramatic and mundane, and include both internal reflection and examination of the needs of the exterior world. Specific techniques in referenced literature include:

1. Considering one's own death (hypothetically) in order to focus on what most matters, asking the question, "What do you love?" and thus releasing "passions and loves" (Levoy 1997: 31). This technique fuels the premise of the "Last Lecture" series referenced above and helps to focus on the values that are most essential to an individual considering life's meaning.
2. Looking to the past "for clues that can help us to discover our true selves" (Parker 2000: 15). Looking at those clues and "drawing lines between them, connecting the dots so that a form, a pattern, a rough road emerges," recognizing that "the truest calls" "...make their way to us through many different channels" and making a tally of signals received (Levoy 1997: 37). This consideration of memory and experience is compared favorably to the mistake of substituting other's experiences, however ideal, for one's own. One author indicates that in his own search for vocation he lined up "the loftiest ideals I could find for myself and [set] out to achieve them" (Parker 2000: 3) but concluded that he "had simply found a 'noble' way to live a life that was not my own, a life spent imitating heroes instead of listening to my heart." Through his experience he learned to return to an examination of his past, suggesting that "I must listen to my life and try to understand what it is truly about – quite apart from what I would like it to be about – or my life will never represent anything real in the world, no matter how earnest my intentions" (Parker 2000: 4).



3. Relying on memory and an examination of experience to pose provocative reflective questions such as “What are the seven thoughts that guide my being and frame what I call ‘meaning’ in my life?” and “what are some other ways in which I could think but I never do?” The subsequent reflection ensures that “soon you will be on an adventure at the heart of your being” (O’Donohue 2007: 2). Another reflective question includes, “If I didn’t do this, would I spend the rest of my life regretting not having done it?” (Levoy 1997: 75).
4. Considering “not... the grand sweeps but... the small gestures.” Breakthroughs often happen as a result of small steps. “We’re called to reach out to someone, to pick up an odd book on the library shelf, to sign up for a class even though we’re convinced we don’t have the time or money, to go to our desks each day, to turn left instead of right. These are the fire drills for our bigger calls” (Levoy 1997: 5).
5. Examining individual history in terms of successful discernment and unsuccessful discernment processes, honing the ability “to distinguish between the sound of integrity and the sound of its absence” (Levoy 1997: 37). This recognizes the existence of conflicting emotions even when discernment is entered into carefully and with reflective intent, and helps resolve any confusion (Levoy 1997: 53).
6. Developing a community of support to consider ideas with, both to clarify the appropriateness of the questions being asked and to consider with others the effect that a discernment decision would have upon a larger community (Levoy 1997: 40-41). This includes examining the external world for unmet needs, recognizing that there should be a match between individual interest and the world’s need to satisfy the concept of a call (Levoy 1997: 102).

7. Allowing time for and exercising patience with the discernment process, recognizing that “our own evolution ... by design and necessity luxuriates in an abundance of time and plot twists” (Levoy 1997: 42).
8. Taking action, recognizing that “the unconscious is always one step ahead of the conscious mind... if you are willing to sit with ambiguity, to accept uncertainties and contradictory meanings, then your unconscious will always be a step ahead of your conscious mind in the right direction [and] you’ll... do the right thing, although you won’t know it at the time” (Levoy 1997: 37). Action includes experimenting with possibilities, imagining “what our calls might mean, [playing] with their many possible meanings, [experimenting and trying] them on for size, [looking] to see if they fit, [following] those that do and [parting] with those that don’t” (Levoy 1997: 47). This allows for some action to substitute for an excess of reflection, recognizing that “faith begins... where knowledge leaves off” (Levoy 1997: 49). It also allows for conflicting tensions to emerge and to “coexist long enough to inform us, to teach us something” (Levoy 1997: 55).
9. Using art “to bring us in line with our callings, [for] ... through it we have access to timeless sources of wisdom in ourselves, deep drives, and memories of who we really are” (Levoy 1997: 122). Through such methods, exploration and play can stimulate the imagination and help the learning process.
10. Traveling or otherwise leaving the current pattern of life activities that may be distracting from necessary changes. “In making pilgrimage, we’re calling on God” and such “... questioning is at the heart of spiritual journeying, of leaving home for a time to go on a retreat, pilgrimage, or vision quest” (Levoy 1997: 145).

11. Methodically organizing thinking about meaning by making a list of values, aligning specific amounts of time to the manifestation of action associated with each value, developing vision statements for each value and assigning both short and long term goals associated with each value (Duncan 2002: 109). Alternatively, methodical approaches include considering the “four characteristics of a calling.” These include ensuring that desire is married with talent so that passion is aligned with ability; establishing the existence of love, both of the final product and “of the drudgery it involves;” assessing “the enjoyment and sense of renewed energies [the] practice [of the work] yields” and considering the difficulty of discovering the calling, for “many false paths are taken before the satisfying path is at last uncovered” (Novak 1996: 34-36).
12. Including a spiritual perspective in a similarly organized approach, first eliminating “all morally unacceptable possibilities,” which include betraying commitments already made and avoiding the process at all “unless you really want to know what God has in mind” (Grisez and Shaw 2003: 101). The next step includes making “a realistic inventory of the opportunities for service and the threats and challenges they face, along with their own particular gifts and limitations” and then matching “the opportunities, threats, and challenges against the gifts and limitations... [so that] the possibilities between or among which to discern are identified.” After praying, continuing the process by “comparing emotions and observing the harmony and discord among them” because “a sound resolution typically produces feelings of peace and confidence that one will be pleasing God by proceeding in this way” (Grisez and Shaw 2003: 102).

13. Engaging a movement that helps participants to find meaning in work. One that occurs within an overtly spiritual context is the Called and Gifted Program, offered by the Catherine of Siena Institute to Roman Catholic parishes. Through this program, participants discern their charisms, which are believed to be gifts of the Holy Spirit that Christians are given for the sake of others and which provide clues about the unique nature of individual purpose. The discernment process includes an inventory tool in which participants answer written questions to help judge which charisms they might possess, and opportunities to act by practicing use of possible charisms and discussing their effectiveness with others.
14. Utilizing another process that helps users to find meaning in work. For example, *The Purpose-Driven Life* is a highly popular book that provides a 40-day guide to reflection with the goal determining “God’s purpose for your life [and] ...how all of the pieces of your life fit together” (Warren 2002: 9). It advocates using “your *spiritual gifts and abilities* in the area of your *heart’s desire*, and in a way that best express your *personality and experiences*” (Warren 2002: 248) through a series of reflective questions and the development of a “life purpose statement” that “summarizes God’s purposes for your life,” “points the direction of your life,” defines ‘success,’ and clarifies roles (Warren 2002: 313).

In conclusion, while both spiritual and secular perspectives are included in the techniques advocated in the literature about discerning one’s meaning, they share a common understanding that the process of discerning meaning is as unique and individual as the calling itself. While many who seek meaning in work long for a simple, time-honored, and guaranteed process, the literature affirms that the journey must be

engaged with authentic reflection that allows meaning to emerge with time and understanding.

Further, while this investigation examines the literature as it addresses the uniqueness of individual calling, spirituality as fuel for meaning in work, and techniques for discerning calling, it is also important to note that that search in itself is not a foregone conclusion for all. While the concept of a journey can be used to describe the search, it also aptly applies to the decision about whether or not to begin the search, for it is a journey that not all choose to engage in. As Duffy notes (Hughes 2007: 43), “there is no inevitability about our response to God or to other people... the last word... belongs not with our freedom, but with God’s grace.” Many authors agree that grace, courage, or other affirming sustenance is required in order to begin, continue, and fully engage a journey toward finding purpose in work, recognizing that such a journey can be frightening, and describing it, once engaged, as being

right on the edge of yourself. At the cliff edge of life. ... Put yourself in conversation with that edge no matter how frightening it seems. Look down over that edge. It’s a bit terrifying to begin with but then you’ll recognize a bit of territory that you can work... it was there all the time for me...[a] too familiar window, out of which I had not been looking (Whyte 2001: 21).

The decision about whether to engage this journey is described within the context of “two essential questions: “What is right for me?” and “Where am I willing to be led?” (Levoy 1997: 7) which again acknowledge both the existence of a search and the free will associated with the continued journey. Further, the search itself is understood as an ongoing process; even a successful search requires ongoing commitment, both because “discerning one’s personal vocation amid changing circumstances is an ongoing task”

(Grisez and Shaw 2003: 143) and because “beyond accepting our vocations, we must be faithful to them” (Grisez and Shaw 2003: 112).

Further, while the prevalence of literature about how to search certainly implies that many individuals desire to embark on this journey, the literature also contains discussion about the challenges of adopting this perspective, tying the search for meaning back again to spirituality, for “the world... trivializes our restlessness, inviting us in a thousand ways to forget that God has called us to make an inward pilgrimage” (Rolheiser 2001: 25). Challenges are also inherent in the effort required to reflect on life as a journey, especially with regard to understanding the intentionality of choices made and the possibilities that are eliminated whenever one route is decided upon. This reality is emphasized in the recognition that “in order to become authentic, we’re going to have to give up something dear” and in the subsequent question about what each individual is “willing to give up to ensure your own unfolding and the unfolding of what is holy in your life” (Levoy 1997: 10-11). The perspectives about the nature of that pilgrimage also vary, with much of the focus on the journey itself, while others argue from a spiritual perspective that the ultimate destination of our souls is the only relevant question.

Understanding the search for meaning in work as a journey also requires understanding the inherent imperfection of all individuals. Children’s author Margery Williams poetically describes this imperfection in *The Velveteen Rabbit* when she gives a toy horse a voice in describing the process of becoming real. The horse notes that

generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don’t matter at all, because once you are Real you can’t be ugly, except to people who don’t understand (Rolheiser 2001: 143).

Adult literature also incorporates this understanding, acknowledging that the search to find meaning in work is a “slow and awkward process,” and yet “in the midst of a society with compartmentalized values, [many] are doing what they can to weave a coherent and integrated life... picking and choosing what matters most to them... to create a new synthesis of value and meaning” (Ray and Anderson 2000: 20). Accepting imperfection while pursuing coherence requires a maturity born of experience and reflection.

The metaphor of a journey also lends itself to understanding that meaning can reveal itself in unexpected ways, for meaning is understood as “alive and active, dynamic and distributed, constructed for local purposes of knowing and acting” (Turner 1996: 57). When mountain climber Greg Mortenson began his attempt to summit Pakistan’s K2, he did not anticipate that his journey would tie his future to the children of the region; he expected to only engage the physical challenges of the mountain. However, his journey ultimately put his very survival in the generous hands of the people of the region. “One evening, he went to bed by a yak dung fire, a mountaineer who’d lost his way, and one morning... he’d become a humanitarian who’d found a meaningful path to follow for the rest of his life” (Mortenson and Relin 2006: 2). In gratitude for the efforts that the people of the region made to save his life, he committed resources well beyond his individual and very modest means, but not exceeding the boundaries of his imagination. “‘I’m going to build you a school,’ he said, not yet realizing that with those words, the path of his life had just detoured down another trail, a route far more serpentine and arduous than the wrong turns he’d taken since retreating from K2” (Mortenson and Relin 2006: 33). Mortenson’s story illustrates why meaning is not “bounded in conceptual places but [is] rather [a] complex [operation] of projections, binding, linking, blending, and integrating

over multiple spaces” (Turner 1996: 57), for the original meaning that informed the inception of his journey was replaced by unexpected manifestations of meaning that richly informed his imagination.

In addition to taking unexpected forms, a journey can also take unfulfilling forms. One author describes what she considers to be a common theme for college graduates who are attempting to embark on a career, suggesting that “unless you’re straight out of an Ivy on a brilliant career path, you bounce around in a series of low-paying and unfulfilling jobs until you can’t take it anymore and something happens,” adding that you then “need to take a risk. You need to make something happen” by looking “inside yourself... to your passion” (Hodge 2007: B1). Re-routing life’s direction in such a case requires action, for whether expected or fulfilling, a journey toward meaning in work does not occur without some intentionality. Further, individuals do not discover meaning in work without ongoing action that takes the form both of reflection and of a series of discerning choices. Mere “wishful thinking” does not lead to discerned meaning, for the same reason that “we are warmed by fire, not by the smoke of the fire” and “we are carried over the sea by a ship, not by the wake of a ship” (Merton 1955:117).

Finally, while much literature about finding meaning in work uses words like “calling,” which implies a “caller” and includes more overt discussions of spiritual motivations for the journey, others acknowledge that for many, “well-educated elites especially, many people do think in nonreligious terms. As far as they can see, there is no one or nothing calling them” (Novak 1996: 37-38). Literature about finding purpose in work informs thinking about the topic, whether it is overtly spiritual or not, for even self-proclaimed atheists may find that the “background language of their self-awareness



springs from the originality and distinctive dramaturgy of the biblical version of cosmic history (Novak 1996: 37-38). In other words, since Jewish, Muslim, and Christian religions all teach that nothing is by chance, “in the sense of being beyond [God’s] knowing it,” the belief that each individual has a unique purpose influences even those who have rejected specific religious beliefs. As a result, “religious believers and secular believers might see the same realities but interpret their meaning differently” (Novak 1996: 37-38), with both groups believing that every individual has a unique purpose that should be discovered but attributing different root sources.

In summary, a simple definition of meaningful work can be understood as service to others. Though more elaborate definitions abound, all such definitions are encompassed by this simple concept. Within that understanding, however, lies the individual search, which ties each individual to an assessment of calling that is associated with identification of an authentic self as discerned through an assessment of how talents, interests, and passions can be best aligned with the world’s needs.

### **Storytelling**

The process for discerning meaning helps to put the journey toward purposeful work within a relevant context. In this investigation, research participants use their own stories to describe their individual experiences as they journey toward finding purpose in work, for meaning can be understood through storytelling and can manifest itself in relationships of care. Frankl (1946: 86) offers a dramatic example with a story that illustrates this:

We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken

from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.

This example provides an illustration of care and how manifesting concern for one another can provide sustaining meaning in even the most extreme of circumstances.

While this investigation does not engage such extraordinary examples of meaning that occur in situations where survival is at stake, one of its purposes considers the memory and imagination inherent in the stories that research participants have to tell about their journeys toward the process of finding meaning in work.

There is a depth of literature related to storytelling, both contemporary and ancient. Pink (2005: 99) writes that “stories are easier [than mere facts] to remember – because in many ways, stories are how we remember.” Turner (1996: 5) suggests that stories are “our chief way of looking into the future, of predicting, or planning, and of explaining.” This is both explained and emphasized through philosophic tradition, for, as Anselm Ramelow explains (personal conversation, 2006), Aristotle and Aquinas together look at language as a tripartite structure (word, mind, and object), showing that “experiences cannot be separated from language.” Further, Pope John Paul II (2005: 76) considered this process of recounting history through narratives and affirms that

the principle instrument of this process is language, with which man expresses the truth about the world and about himself, and he shares with others the fruits of his investigations in various fields of knowledge. In this way, communication takes place, leading to greater knowledge of the truth and thereby deepening and consolidating the identities of the respective interlocutors.

This is further affirmed through a biological consideration of human understanding, for “every reflection... invariably takes place in language, which is our distinctive way of being and being humanly active. For this reason, language is also our starting point, our cognitive instrument, and our sticking point” (Maturana and Varela 1987: 26).

Stories are designed to communicate and thus follow Jürgen Habermas' (1985: 137) model of communicative competence, which holds that in a successful act of communication the hearer agrees to five implicit claims: that the utterance is true, that the speaker is sincere or truthful, that the utterance responds to the appropriate values, that it is fitting to the relation between the speaker and listener and that it is comprehensible. Stories also contain power to entertain, to provide meaning, to incite imagination about future possibilities, and to "provide symbolic solutions to contradictions" (Kearney 2002: 6).

From the word go, stories were invented to fill the gaping hope within us, to assuage our fear and dread, to try to give answers to the great unanswerable questions of existence. ...Great tales and legends gave not only relief from everyday darkness but also pleasure and enchantment: the power to bring a hush to a room, a catch to the breath, a leap to the curious heart, with the simple words, 'Once upon a time' (Kearney 2002: 6-7).

Lewin and Regine (2001: 13) echo Kearney, stating that "narratives can contain the complexity of people's experience, can provide a vehicle for readers to connect with their passion, to their struggles." This connection is particularly important in this inquiry, which aims to create a text from which the readers can connect with the passion and struggles of others who feel engaged in spiritual journeys through work. Narrative also contains connections to authenticity: "by means of the plot, goals, causes, and chance are brought together within the temporal unity of a whole and complete action" (Ricoeur 1984: ix). This "synthesis of the heterogeneous... brings narrative close to metaphor," which provides "a new congruence in the organization of events" (Ricoeur 1984: ix). Reflection on spiritual journeys through work creates this 'new congruence,' which in turn ignites the imagination about new possible futures. Both narrative and metaphor relate to the productive imagination and "narrative imagining... appears... inseparable

from our evolutionary past and our necessary personal experience. It also appears to be a fundamental target value for the developing mind” (Turner 1996: 25), and is therefore essential to constructing a plot in which time, authenticity, and meaning are engaged in discourse about future possibilities.

Storytelling requires “(1) the *prefiguring* of our life-world as it seeks to be told; (2) the *configuring* of the text in the act of telling; and (3) the *refiguring* of our existence as we return from narrative text to action” (Kearney 2002: 133). Further, “narrative is key in that it links cosmic time to future possibilities” (Ricoeur 1992: 141). Each of these requirements address both time and memory, for in order for such a journey toward meaning through work to occur, the individual oriented toward this journey must invest time in discerning purpose and then in finding an individual manifestation of meaning that contributes to the lives of others. This requires reflection on previous elements of individual journeys, including memories of past experiences, frustrations, and hopes.

The philosophical concepts of time and memory inform the way that individuals reflect upon and learn from their own spiritual journeys. However, these concepts are not as intuitive to understand in philosophical terms as common understanding would suggest, for a review of the literature shows that philosophers have speculated about the very existence of time and “one of the great disciplines of any human life is the discipline of memory, of remembering what is essential in the midst of our business and busyness” (Whyte 2001: 23). Ricoeur (1984: 7) sums up the “skeptical argument” that Augustine and others explored with regard to time in his question, “How can time exist if the past is no longer, the future is not yet, and if the present is not always?” His response to this “ancient” question notes (Ricoeur 1984: 7) that a “guarded confidence in the everyday

use of language forces us to say that, in some way, which we do not yet know how to account for, time exists,” thus providing reassurance by bridging philosophical concerns with more typical understanding.

Clearly, the common understanding of time informs our comprehension of the way that journeys occur. Moreover, philosophical understanding of the role of memory and expectation inform not only this abstract concept of time, but the very way that individuals reflect upon and learn from their own spiritual journeys. Ricoeur (1984: 6) notes that “speculation on time is an inconclusive rumination to which narrative activity alone can respond” for it reflects “language... that holds firm in the face of the skeptic’s assault” (Ricoeur 1984: 9). Addressing narrative activity, which this investigation considers by reflecting on the stories that participants tell about their journeys, Ricoeur (1984: 10-11) describes how memory and temporality relate to the way in which those engaged on a spiritual journey toward meaning through work narrate the stories of those journeys, for

narration... implies memory and prediction implies expectation. Now, what is it to remember? It is to have an image of the past. How is this possible? Because this image is an impression left by events, an impression that remains in the mind. ...By entrusting to memory the fate of things past, and to expectation that of things to come, we can include memory and expectation in an extended and dialectical present.

This concept applies specifically to the journey toward finding spiritual meaning in work, as “in work we are constantly attempting to remember ourselves and reimagine ourselves at the same time” (Whyte 2001: 25). We change ourselves and our world every day by the way that we interact with others and the way that we identify with our work activities. “Wherever we work, we need courage both to remember what we are about and,

according to the tenor of our times, reimagine ourselves while we are doing it” (Whyte 2001: 25).

This research engages participants in reflection about their journeys to find meaning in their work, both past and in the projected future, for “we have no other resource, concerning our reference to the past, except memory itself” (Ricoeur 2004: 21). The research is relevant both to those who participate in this research and to others who journey similarly, for “we are not alone in this endeavor but secretly joined to all those who struggle out loud where we have not yet begun to speak [and] ... to those who labor painfully and secretly beside us. We are joined especially to those who have come before us” (Whyte 2001: 26). Memories carry much significance, as they inform both present understandings and future hopes, often coming still laden with the many emotions with which we originally received them. Ricoeur (2004: 23) offers a particularly poetic reflection on the nature of memories that applies to memories of past experiences with work, which reflects this emotion.

We say that we remember what we have done, experienced, or learned in a particular instance... we find discrete appearances... the singular faces of our loved ones, words heard according to their manner of utterance each time new, more or less memorable meetings.... Things and people do not simply appear, they reappear as being the same, and it is in accordance with this sameness of reappearing that we remember them.

This suggests that the memories of participants will represent narrative elements of their lives; in reflecting upon events that inform our understanding of purpose and work, we remember events within a context that provides meaning to the recollection. This context is also relevant within an understanding of time. Ricoeur distinguishes between cosmic time and lived time, the former being that which is measured by a clock and the latter referring to the reality that some moments are more meaningful than others and therefore

contain a greater possibility of informing the imagination and future action. Further, the present moment is experienced both within the context of future expectations and the context of memories, combining to link memory and imagination to ethical action in the present and future.

Ricoeur (1976: 16) further links memory with public meaning, explaining,

my experience cannot directly become your experience. ... Yet, nevertheless, something passes from me to you. ... This something is not the experience as experienced, but its meaning. Here is the miracle. The experience as experienced, as lived, remains private, but its sense, its meaning, becomes public.

This link between memory and public meaning provides a framework for understanding the relevance of the stories that people tell about the journeys that they have experienced in their search to find spiritual meaning through work. The link also ties memory and public meaning to time, for “any life story is by definition a retrospective reconstruction... research suggests that people’s life stories are neither rigid nor wildly variable, but rather change gradually over time, in close tandem with meaningful life events” (Carey 2007: 1). Time and memory contribute to the narrative function of storytelling and inform this research project by linking storytelling, identity, and imagination.

To better understand how this combination works, it is important to note that storytelling requires “imagination, joyfulness, and social dexterity” (Pink 2005: 58) because effective stories “almost always pack an emotional punch... a fact is ‘the queen died and the king died.’ A story is ‘the queen died and the king died of a broken heart’” (Pink 2005: 101). This example shows both how the power of a story can be contained very briefly and how it incites the imagination. Further, as Norman (1994: 146) writes, stories have

the capacity of capturing exactly those elements that formal decision methods leave out. Logic tries to generalize, to strip the decision making from the specific context, to remove it from subjective emotions. Stories capture the context, capture the emotions... Stories are important cognitive events, for they encapsulate, into one compact package, information, knowledge, context, and emotion.

This comparison of storytelling to formal decision methods explains its value in the process of discerning how research participants in this investigation experience their journeys toward finding spiritual meaning in their work. Such experiences, by definition, include not only the factual events that they remember, but the context within which those events occurred, the meaning that they had for the individuals who experienced them, and the unique ways that the meaning was interpreted and then reappropriated to fuel imagination and future action.

Effective storytellers understand relationships, “the connections between diverse and seemingly separate disciplines... how to link apparently unconnected elements... [and] analogy – at seeing one thing in terms of another” (Pink 2005: 130). Clifford Geertz (1995: 2) speaks earlier in a similar vein, noting that in stories “what we can construct... are hindsight accounts of the connectedness of things that seem to have happened: pieced-together patternings, after the act” and thus use the storytelling process to inform meaning. “Narratives draw together disparate and somehow discordant elements to the concordant unity of a plot,” (Ricoeur 1992: 142) which allows meaning to evolve and be understood.

Like spirituality itself, the process of storytelling is one of making connections and therefore of infusing meaning.

A mental space that concerns a person’s life seems to us to be a slice of... biography. In the slice [the person] has a certain role and a certain character. When we try to run connections across all these mental spaces – as when we try to



predict what she will do in *this* case on the basis of what we already know of a previous space... we may encounter all sorts of incompatibilities.... But we can get... help from blended spaces. As the connections build... the blended space becomes ever more robust, intricate, and conflicted” (Turner 1996: 136).

The process of creating stories through these blended spaces creates the possibility of making a sense of identity, but “identity can change and remains always open to revision” and “is tied to that of others in the narrative” (Ricoeur 1992: 144-145). This requires recognition that “all narratives have ethical dimensions” and “the narrative unity of a life is made up of the moments of its responsiveness or failure to respond to others” (Ricoeur 1992: 165-168). In the stories revealed through this investigation, apparent incompatibilities are discussed and “blended spaces” are used to find connections, as I work with my research participants to reveal their stories in a text that is infused with new meanings.

### **The Nature of Change**

Because this investigation is also oriented toward the concept of spirituality at work as a journey, I explore in this review the nature of change as it relates to finding meaning in work. Anthropologist H. G. Barnett writes about the nature of innovation; his conclusions include the idea that new thoughts and behaviors occur as components in patterns of change. He defines innovation as “any thought, behavior, or thing that is new because it is qualitatively different from existing forms” (Barnett 1953: 7). This definition also applies to changes in thinking that individuals make, for he notes that “in the ultimate sense of being deviant every individual is an innovator many times over” (Barnett 1953: 19). According to him, new thoughts and behaviors occur as components in patterns of change. Barnett (1953: 9) further reinforces the nature of change,

suggesting that “all interventions have antecedents. All are therefore derived from others” and adds that, “when an innovation takes place, there is an intimate linkage or fusion of two or more elements that have not been previously joined in just this fashion, so that the result is a qualitatively distinct whole” (Barnett 1953: 181). This idea of connecting elements to create a new whole reinforces my interest in investigating the nature of the changes that occur on spiritual journeys, where the “elements” are past experiences and the “new whole” carries with it potential for greatness.

Barnett’s conclusions about the elements needed for changes in thoughts and behavior apply to spiritual journeys through work. He suggests that change comes from what the individual knows; in hermeneutic terms this is considered the individual’s biases, for, as Gadamer (1976: 9) states, “our prejudices or biases represent our openness to the world. They are the conditions under which we experience something and whereby what we encounter says something to us.” Mary Catherine Bateson (1994: 6) notes that “men and women confronting change are never fully prepared for the demands of the moment, but they are strengthened to meet uncertainty if they can claim a history of improvisation and a habit of reflection.” In addition to what the individual knows, changes in behavior and ideas come from the elements that compose each person’s experience, which may include things observed, experienced, or learned. This applies to the idea of a spiritual journey and the necessary changes in behavior and perspective that occur in that journey, for an openness to and orientation toward leading a more meaningful and spiritual life through work can create an “excess of meaning” (Ricoeur 1988: 169) that informs experiences and transforms lives.

Human beings are not only capable of change; they thrive on it, according to much scientific literature that seemingly belies our oft-expressed dissatisfaction with, or fear, about proposed change. This “fear” may represent concern about the unknown rather than fear about change itself, for while we tend to believe that we “live in a world of certainty, or undoubted, rock-ribbed perceptions” (Maturana and Varela 1986: 16) “chaos is nature’s creativity [and] our bodies are pervaded by chaotic, open systems that allow a constantly creative response to a changing environment” (Briggs and Peat 1999: 19). Anyone who is isolated from change “becomes stagnant. Any vision – or any thing – that is true to life, to the imperatives of creation and evolution, will not be unshakable” (Levoy 1997: 8). In order to experience change in the way that individuals engage work, they “must therefore be willing to get shaken up, to submit... to the dark blossoming of chaos, in order to reap the blessings of growth” (Levoy 1997: 8). The experience of certainty is “an individual phenomenon blind to the cognitive acts of others, in a solitude which... is transcended only in a world created with those others.” (Maturana and Varela 1986: 16). As a result, creative change exists in community with others and drives beyond existing knowledge about our understandings to new truths, for “the opinions and facts that constitute our conditioning may end up obscuring a deeper authenticity and ‘truth’ about our individual experience of being in the world” (Briggs and Peat 1999: 20). This deeper truth is represented both in science and in spirituality, for the latter acknowledges the observable phenomenon in nature and provides a spiritual explanation for the “incredible power, a blind pressure to grow in all things. If you put a two-inch band of solid steel around a young watermelon it will, as it grows, slowly burst that steel.

The life-push outward will have its way... the earth is ablaze with the fire of God”  
(Rolheiser 2001: 14-15).

The process of searching for meaning in work is informed by both these scientific and spiritual reflections on change, for “the awakening of the self... rings up... a mystery of transfiguration... [that] amounts to a dying and a birth. The familiar life horizon has been outgrown; the old concepts, ideals, and emotional patterns no longer fit; the time for the passing of a threshold is at hand” (Campbell 1973: 51). However, in order to engage that mystery, a shift in thinking is required, which occurs only “by discarding some previously standard beliefs or procedures and, simultaneously, by replacing those components of the previous paradigm with others” (Kuhn 1996: 66). In most cases involving scientific revolutions, the need for change “has lasted so long and penetrated so deep that one can appropriately describe the fields affected by it as in a state of growing crisis” (Kuhn 1996: 67-68). This may mirror the way that individuals make difficult decisions about changes associated with work where “pronounced professional insecurity” can represent a “failure of existing” understandings about work and can become a “prelude to a search for new ones” (Kuhn 1996: 67-68).

This search for new understandings requires creative change, which “is about opening up to your own originality and allowing it to come forward,” for “each individual is an opening where the eternal is breaking through” (O’Donohue 2007: 10). Doing so requires replacing certainty about security and identity with “not knowing. And openness. And something unspeakably and sometimes almost unbearably new” (Ray and Anderson 2000: 44). Further, once engaged, this state of uncertainty often continues to exist, sometimes feeling “awkward or perilous” and sometimes feeling the pleasure of

“freshness and exhilaration. But whether a joy or a trial, the departure from the old worldviews and values is fundamentally an inner departure... the change is above all a change in consciousness” (Ray and Anderson 2000: 44).

In order for exhilaration to outweigh awkwardness, the changes made must be grounded in values that reflect the authentic nature of the individual attempting the change. “Values are the very reasons you do what you do, the catalysts for your every action. If your values are genuine, well established, and consistently maintained, you remain on the path for which you are designed...” (Duncan 2002: 43). It is therefore essential “to evaluate whether your way of life is an accurate representation of those things you value most” (Duncan 2002: 43). Further, change is both informed by and supports values, for “as you mature in different areas of life and take on new commitments... values must also mature or ‘shift’ to ensure that your design remains intact and that you are still accomplishing your purpose” (Duncan 2002: 47). Making such changes is both an essential act of a living being and representative of courage, for “the hero is the champion of things becoming, not things become, because he is” and a hero is not “fearful of the next moment (or of the “other thing”) as destroying the permanent with its change... [rather,] the next moment is permitted to come to pass” (Campbell 1973: 243). Even so, “most everybody” clings to the trivial, “backs away from their authenticity, settles for less, hobbles their own power...” and then tries to manage the emerging discontent by “trying to distract themselves by counting their blessings” (Levoy 1997: 192).

Allowing change to occur requires an authenticity of action, which some suggest can be recognized “when self-consciousness disappears, time vanishes... and there is

little or no concern for failure” (Biggs and Peat 1999: 27). In order for action to be authentic, core issues of identity must be addressed, for “the concept of identity... is germane to questions of action” (Albert 1998: 10). In fact, “predictions about the road taken may be less a matter of assessing the comparative incentives of each path than of understanding the identity of the person... making the choice” (Albert 1998: 10). Identity is defined as “what makes a person a person... [it] constitutes what is somehow core to my being, what comprises the consistently traceable thread that is ‘me’ over time, and what somehow distinguishes me idiosyncratically from a myriad of other people” (Gioia 1998: 19). It is also a “framework for understanding oneself that is formed and sustained via social interaction” (Gioia 1998: 19), for “there is an ongoing dialectic, which comes into being with the very first phases of socialization and continues to unfold throughout the individuals’ existence in society, between each human animal and its socio-historical situation” (Berger and Luckman 1967: 180). This reinforces the connections that occur in the literature about spirituality and meaning, where individuals are seen within the context of their culture and the others with whom they project their authentic being.

However, such authenticity does not imply perfection, for not only are these times of clarity and certainty “the reward for the previous descent into chaos, uncertainty, discomforts, and shock at simply not knowing” (Csikszentmihalyi 1996: 211), but they do not obliterate the innate imperfections and insecurities that everyone harbors within themselves. Dorothy Day summed this up when she called for support in her work with the poor, reassuring that “if we were going to forbid hypocrites to work here with us, there’d be no one to do the work, and no one to do the forbidding!” Instead, she said,

“each day we try to do the best we can – for all of our faults and imperfections” (Coles 1993: xxv). This effort epitomizes the efforts that all individuals must make as they attempt the changes in their lives that they hope will lead to more purposeful work, for it recognizes inherent imperfection while remaining committed to a necessary and important effort.

In order to sustain that commitment, despite such imperfections, reflection is necessary. This is often a challenge, for “knowing how we know is traditionally elusive for our Western culture. We are keyed to action and not to reflection, so that our personal life [and our world of experience] is generally blind to itself” (Maturana and Varela 1987: 24). This difficulty means that “we can miss opportunities for personal transformation” (Boyatzis and McKee 2005: 88). Being keyed to action, we often miss wisdom that action reveals through its very experience and “this connection between action and experience, this inseparability between a particular way of being and how the world appears to us, tell us that every act of knowing brings forth a world” (Maturana and Varela 1987: 26). Further, the knowledge that arises from reflection about action compels “an attitude of permanent vigilance against the temptation of certainty” (Maturana and Varela 1987: 245), for such conviction hinders necessary change. Rather, reflecting upon knowledge gained from experience compels an understanding that changes to the world require transformations in individuals. This understanding ties reflection to necessary action while helping to prevent action that occurs indiscriminately. Instead, it focuses on change that is more likely to lead to meaningful activities. A focus on changing the world through living differently requires understanding that “on the path to resonance with self and with others, hope is the driver, compassion enables it, and

mindfulness makes the path smoother and more understandable” (Boystazis and McKee 2005: 88). This affirms the importance of adopting the practice of reflection in order to remain open to the change that sustains the continuous effort to align activities associated with work in a way that reflects purpose.

While the power to make changes is fueled by habits of reflection, the desire to change is tied not only to individual efforts to find purposeful work, but also to “the deep-seated human desire to have an [effect] on others and feel connected to them” (Briggs and Peat 1999: 34). Individuals have the power through their own actions to change social processes, for each person has the capacity to take “the attitude of the other toward his own stimulus, and in taking that he finds it modified... his response becomes a different one, and leads in turn to further change” (Meade 2004: 30). While the repetitive patterns that keep lives feeling stagnant are “held together by our own collusion,” “the inverse of this is that our influence to change these cycles is enormous” (Briggs and Peat 1999: 37). Thomas Gumbleton, a Roman Catholic Bishop from Detroit, Michigan, argues that “whatever is done for the truth will make a difference” (Gumbleton 2003: 1). He uses as illustration the story of Franz Jagerstatter, an Austrian man with a wife and three young daughters, who refused a call to mandatory service in Hitler’s military. Jagerstatter prevailed in his determination not to serve, despite advice from friends who argued that his decision could cost him his life without making a difference in the war. The Nazis imprisoned him, convicted him in a military trial, and beheaded him on August 9th, 1943. Though his sacrifice was almost forgotten, his story got attention in a book written by Gordon Zahn, who heard of him when researching the subject of German Catholics' response to Hitler. This book later influenced Daniel



Ellsberg's decision to bring the Pentagon Papers to public attention, which in turn helped to end the Vietnam War. This story illustrates the power of individuals to change cycles, meets the desire to connect with others, and demonstrates vividly how action is tied both to individual change and to the influence that change has to ensure that “the rest of the world changes” (Herda 1999: 7).

The process of changing requires both action and overcoming barriers to change; however, “once you start to awaken, no one can ever claim you again for the old patterns” (O’Donohue 2007: 1). This is particularly relevant in relation to the search for purposeful work, for in awakening,

you realize how precious your time here is. You are no longer willing to squander your essence on undertakings that do not nourish your true self.... Now you are impatient for growth, willing to put yourself in the way of change [for] ... you want your work to become an expression of your gift (O’Donohue 2007: 1).

Before arriving at this described state of certainty, change often takes the form of a “between,” which is described as “unknown territory,” and “the gap between what once was trustworthy and what, in some long-off future time, may be so again. In the mythologies of world cultures, it’s the kingdom beneath the waves or above the sky, the territory that must be negotiated if any true change is to occur” (Campbell 1972: 58).

Studies of learning and developing management and leadership competencies have focused on sustainable change and uncovered five areas that require reflection with subsequent outcomes to ensure that the changed behavior and attitudes are permanent and not fleeting. These include:

1. Reflection about the ideal self, or desires related to life and identity, followed by the development of a personal vision statement.

2. Reflection about the real self, or how actions are viewed by others; followed by the comparison of the real self to the ideal self to result in assessment of strengths and weaknesses.
3. Reflection about an individual's learning agenda, which capitalizes upon strength; this is followed by a personal vision that addresses weaknesses.
4. Experimentation with and practicing new habits or reinforcing and affirming strengths.
5. Developing and maintaining close, personal relationships that enable movement through change toward renewal (Boyatzis and McKee: 2005: 88).

Stories are one way to enable individuals to focus on change, for “narratives guide behavior in every moment and frame not only how we see the past but how we see ourselves in the future” (Carey 2007: 1). Those who have researched connections between the stories that individuals tell and the changes that they have made in their lives note that “any life story is by definition a retrospective reconstruction... people's life stories are neither rigid nor wildly variable, but rather change gradually over time, in close tandem with meaningful life events” (Carey 2007: 1). This investigation considers the stories that individuals tell about their life events, including how they have initiated or dealt with change, both change that they desired and change that occurred and with which they had to cope.

Once individuals begin the process of change, their journey typically continues through challenges and trials (Campbell 1949: 97). This process is reflected in changes that occur within scientific paradigms as well, for in scientific developments, existing ways of thinking are often reinforced by the fact that phenomena “that will not fit the box

are often not seen at all” (Kuhn 1996: 24), and changes in thinking occur only when “the profession can no longer evade anomalies that subvert the existing tradition of scientific practice” (Kuhn 1996: 6). In order for such changes in thinking to occur, alternatives must be available, for “the decision to reject one paradigm is always simultaneously the decision to accept another” (Kuhn 1996: 77). However, doubts, uncertainty, fear, stagnation, and other such issues act as barriers that must be overcome before change can take hold.

Many, reflecting on the changes in their lives, echo one author’s reflections on his decisions, noting that many decisions that led to “worthwhile outcomes were not easy to make and seemed as likely to lead to the abyss as to advancement” (Bell 2002: 4). This uncertainty is echoed by poet John Keats (1795-1821) who calls change an immersion in “doubts and uncertainties” (Briggs and Peat 1999: 22) and by the reality that “every choice is a renunciation. ... to choose one thing is always to renounce many others” (Rolheiser 2001: 16-18). As a result, resistance to change “is not only universal but also instinctive” because humans intuitively seek to protect the status quo as representative of all of the beliefs and behaviors manifested to date. A great fear is “that our notion of who we are and what we are might tip over into anarchy” (Levoy 1997: 192). However, much literature affirms that doubts are key to fueling change, because they act as “a way of extending whatever limited degrees of freedom we have come to accept from life [and spurring] new self-organization” (Briggs and Peat 1999: 22). Once individuals accept change, whether they embrace it enthusiastically or with fear and uncertainty, they often learn to “have a different attitude about mistakes, chance, and failure” (Briggs and Peat

1999: 24). However, that learning is a process during which individuals continue to create challenges to the change process,

persistently [blocking] the action of creativity [through] ...obsessions with control and power; in our fear of mistakes; in the constructed grip of our egos; in our continuous pursuit of repetitive or merely stimulating pleasure; in our restricting our loves to the containers of what other people think; in our adherence to the apparent safety of closed orders; and in the deep-seated belief that the individual exists in an irreducible opposition to others and the world “outside” of the self (Briggs and Peat 1999: 29).

Growth requires overcoming fears, for “fear is the greatest source of falsification in life” (O’Donohue 2007: 7). Fear allows individuals “to say to yourself, ‘I know I’m not happy in my work, but I just don’t know what I want to do.’ Then you can safely study the situation. You get ready to know rather than risk knowing” (Braham 2003: 60). In other words, some use fear as an excuse to substitute unending reflection for necessary action. Failing or refusing to overcome fear “converts the adventure into its negative. Walled in boredom, hard work, or “culture,” the subject loses the power of significant affirmative action and becomes a victim to be saved” (Campbell 1949: 59). In studies of changes to scientific thinking, one author notes that many scientists never do accept change because of “the assurance that the older paradigm will ultimately solve all its problems” (Kuhn 1996: 151). Ultimately, changes do occur, of course. Thus, when individuals do overcome that resistance presented by the limitations of the older paradigm and embrace change it occurs “for all sorts of reasons and usually for several at once” (Kuhn 1996: 152).

Various authors offer different opinions about what elements support change when it does successfully occur. From a spiritual perspective, some opine that “life offers a spiritual foundation of support for difficult decisions and the actions based on

those decisions” (Bell 2002: 4-5). Others imply an inherent urge to connect, suggesting that “people usually engage in creative activity because that is where they can contact the authentic truth of the moment in which their individuality converges with something larger” (Briggs and Peat 1999: 30). Change can occur when traditions, which “consist of all those behaviors that in the history of a social system have become obvious, regular, and acceptable,” fail (Maturana and Varela 1987: 242). It can also occur through negative experiences or a desire to change identification. A common understanding of identification is that it occurs because of an inherent need that people have for belonging and affiliation. Such identification can occur between individuals and the organization where they work “when an individual’s beliefs about his or her organization become self-referential or self-defining” (Pratt 1998: 172). However, if organizations fail to meet the individual’s needs “to be safe, to belong, to feel better about the self” (Pratt 1998: 201), that failure may ignite action related to changing jobs, careers, or other forms of identification. Ricoeur likewise notes that the self is always capable of initiative and “an intervention of the agent of action into the course of the world, an intervention that effectively causes changes in the world” (Ricoeur 1992: 109).

In summary, “to be tormented by restlessness is to be human” (Rolheiser 2001: 13). Such torment can translate into either stagnation or transition, and change can lead either to an affirmation of authenticity or to additional challenges on the journey toward such authentic being. In either case, change usually begets additional change, for in order to find meaning in work, individuals must align their efforts with the world’s needs, needs that are continuously changing. Using imagination effectively helps ensure that change unfolds meaningfully. Consultant David Whyte (1990: 25) suggests summoning

an image and letting it unfold so that you “live with the image... and let it work its magic on us.” Imagination works effectively to support change because it “has a huge capacity for trust. It knows that if it goes toward the disheveled chaos, eventually, out of that fragmentation, a cohesive form will surface to bring the fragments together in such a way as to release their secret music” (O’Donohue 2007: 11). Invoking imagination to support change is essential for those engaged on a journey to find spiritual meaning in their work, for doing so often requires making changes that support action, behavior, and attitudes that are necessary to make the connections that will fuel both creative action and spiritual understanding.

### **Summary**

The literature about spirituality, religion, change, time, memory, storytelling, and finding meaning together provides a framework from which to understand the concept of spiritual journeys through work. This framework in turn provides the basis from which to consider individual experiences. By entering into a relationship with the text, we open ourselves for a fusion of horizons from which we can better inform our own journeys toward lives lived with purpose and love. As Herda (1999: 131) notes, “To change our lives and our understanding is more a responsibility than our right. When people demand their rights to gain a better life, they are relying on others to do it for them... In the end, it is our responsibility to think differently, to learn, and to act differently.” This responsibility fuels my engagement of this topic with enthusiasm, deep interest, and joy.

## CHAPTER THREE – RESEARCH PROTOCOL

### Introduction

The research, described in the sections that follow, was designed as an anthropological interpretive study grounded in critical hermeneutic theory. I designed the research with the purpose of connecting the data gathered through this study by analyzing texts that provide background on relevant subjects, as described in the literature review, with elements of interpretive theory that are most relevant as research categories for the topic of finding spiritual meaning through work. My design intent was to create the possibility of a fusion of horizons that contained within it the potential of connecting this research to praxis for the participants and for future readers.

This description of the research protocol begins with a brief discussion of the conceptual background of the research, including Herda's description of the researcher's orientation, Gadamer's concept of a fusion of horizons, Ricoeur's theory relating to text and narrative, and Heidegger's beliefs about the moral imperative of care. Each informs this research by providing theoretical background about how this project creates the possibility of phronesis that can lead to increased ethical action.

In addition, this description includes information about details associated with the research guidelines, data collection, data analysis, and text creation, including a description of a field project on this topic that I conducted during the fall of 2006. My research categories and research questions are also included; the former includes a brief discussion of the three categories that I have used for data collection, as is consistent with established practice as outlined in Herda (1999: 103), who states that the researcher "has the responsibility to make a decision about which categories will shape a research

project... They carry the project forward, serve as markers for inquiry, provide the circumference of conversations, and serve as points or themes for discussion in analysis.” I selected authenticity, oneself as another, and imagination as categories and they provided a guideline for data collection.

### **Conceptual Framework**

#### **Introduction: Critical Hermeneutic Interpretive Research**

Interpretive research that is grounded in critical hermeneutic theory requires attention to both language and symbols, for interpretive theory seeks explanation through new understandings of both text and symbols. These requirements for understanding are addressed by both hermeneutic scholars and by anthropologists. In Herda (1999: 1) we learn that interpretive “research in a critical hermeneutic tradition invokes language, understanding, and action” and Geertz (1973: 5) explains that human behavior is defined as symbolic, for “man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun.” Further, the analysis of these webs is “not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning” (Geertz 1973: 5). In this investigation of finding spiritual meaning through work, both the researcher and the participants engaged in authentic interpretive efforts, allowing the re-created story to resonate. In interpretive research, this re-created story develops when we engage in interpretation through a form of ethnography, which Geertz (1973: 6) describes as “establishing rapport, selecting informants, transcribing texts... keeping a diary, and so on.” This process “provides a proposed world that the reader or researcher could inhabit and in which they could project possibilities” (Herda 1999: 75) by turning action “from a passing event, which exists only in its own moment of occurrence, into an account, which



exists in its inscriptions and can be reconsulted” (Geertz 1973: 19). Utilizing interpretive research that is grounded in critical hermeneutic theory to investigate the topic of spiritual journeys toward purpose through work has allowed the contributing participants to engage with both the researcher and the topic and to consider new possibilities for meaning and future action.

In this section, I briefly explore the concepts relating to the critical hermeneutic interpretive research orientation that best explain my approach to the topic of finding spiritual meaning through work. I address the ideas of text, care, and fusion of horizons from a conceptual background that explains how each concept informs this investigation and how they relate to the necessary elements of an interpretive research project.

Adopting an approach to interpretive research that is grounded in critical hermeneutics provides unique benefits to my exploration of this topic, for it not only addresses the need that individuals have to “live out meaningful lives in our organizational institutions,” but goes so far as to require action in the form of “redescription or refiguration of our existing worlds in our organizations and communities” (Herda 1999: 1), which I develop as part of the implications of this study.

My task in adopting this project required that I partner with those who provide data for this research in imagining changed worlds in which new understandings about the journey toward finding spiritual meaning through work are disclosed. This has significant leadership implications for individuals and organizations. Herda (1999: 2) emphasizes this, noting that the work of interpretive

research is a text created by the researcher and the research participants that opens the possibility of movement from text to action. The text refigures the world under consideration and, in so doing, engenders new possible worlds in the shared meaning obtained among the members through the research act.

This partnership extended beyond the collection of mere data to the mutual development of new understandings about the data, including its implications for myself, for each of the participants, and for others who in the future may enter into the world disclosed by this text. This task is one that required not only that I adopt an orientation toward understanding, but that I willingly embrace my responsibility for making the judgments that inform my interpretation of this data. Doing so was a moral act in which I made “a judgment that mediates between universal ideas and particular contexts” and thus required the development of phronesis, “which [as Gadamer claims] characterizes all authentic understanding” (in Herda 1999: 5). I therefore entered into this process with humility and respect toward the data collected, gratitude toward those who were willing to share in this journey with me, and hope for the disclosure of new and better worlds related to how people find spiritual purpose in the work that they do.

### **Narrative, Action, and Meaning**

Critical hermeneutic field research “chronicles the events, goals, means, people, and consequences of our lives” and it concludes with a narrative that often includes several plots, even plots that may appear contradictory (Herda 1999: 4). These apparent contradictions are important, for “in actuality [they] provide a new sense of time and order of importance of our activities” (Herda 1999: 4) for “to understand a text is at the same time to light up our own situation” so that “the spirituality of discourse manifests itself through writing, which frees us from the... limitation of situations by opening up... new dimensions of our being-in-the world” (Ricoeur 1991: 149).

However, although this research was employed in the process of creating a text through the interpretation of data, I first engaged participants in conversation to solicit their memories of past events and their imaginations with regard to their expectation of future activities, for “what is resignified by narrative is what was already presignified at the level of human acting” (Ricoeur 1984: 81). This raised the idea of the social dimension of human action, for “an action is a social phenomenon not only because it is done by several agents in such a way that the role of each of them cannot be distinguished from the role of the others, but also because our deeds escape us and have effects we did not intend” (Ricoeur 1991: 153). In conversing with participants and asking for their stories about their journeys toward finding spiritual meaning through work, it was important to remember that “with simple actions... the meaning... and the intention... coincide or overlap” (Ricoeur 1991: 153) so that the individual’s story did not differentiate between meaning and intention but instead described them as a unified phenomenon comprised in terms associated with action. However, in order to develop a cohesive plot from the events recalled or projected, action must connect to future meaning to explain its relevance in the story of a spiritual journey and such action must be defined as “an important action,” which developed “meanings that can be actualized or fulfilled in situations other than the one in which this action occurred” (Ricoeur 1991: 155). In such a way, interpretive research draws the connection between action, meaning, and text creation through narrative so that the “researcher [can] find structure and explanation embodied in text as a whole work” (Herda 1999: 14).

### **Care: Concern and Solicitude**

Although Heidegger's concept of authenticity is tied to the moral imperative of care and used as a category in this research for data analysis, the philosophy of care for the other also informs the research process itself. Herda (1999: 7) states that "the identity of an individual is found in a moral relationship with others which, when in aggregate form, makes up more than the sum of the membership." She adds that "we are always in relationship – in our personal life and our professional life – and are in the position of responsibility to the other one" and recognizing this "transforms the manner of approaching the issues we investigate and the position of the researcher" (Herda 1999: 9). This reflects Heidegger's philosophy toward care as an essential part of being, for he notes that *dasein* "is always 'beyond itself'" through the concept of care, which "is always [encountered as] concern and solicitude" (Heidegger 1962: 236-8).

This orientation distinguishes interpretive research from that grounded in a positivist perspective in terms of both data collection and analysis, for being willing to be changed by the research process required that I approach the investigation with both honesty and an authenticity that acknowledges all that I brought to the process. Further, knowing that I remain "in relationship" and in a position of responsibility to the other removed the false promise of "objectivity" implied through other research processes and instead required that I consider the future of my relationships with those who are part of this research and conducted my analysis in a way that honors my responsibility to each of them.

## **Fusion of Horizons**

As referenced in the “Background and Significance of the Research Issue” section in Chapter One, interpretive research that is grounded in critical hermeneutic theory opens the possibility of a fusion of horizons for the researcher, the research participants, and potential other readers of the text that is developed through the research process. In this potential lies the possibility that any of the individuals involved in the research will appropriate a new understanding of the subject of spiritual journeys through work, either through the research conversations or through the process of analyzing and reappropriating the data. As Herda (1999: 82) writes,

it is important to have this process provide opportunities for participants to develop competence in raising universal validity claims; it is also important that the process allows for the emergence of critique, reinterpretation, and creation of new meanings that can inform current activities and future possibilities.

This potential fusion of horizons occurs within the context of our own past, our own biases, and our own expectations about the future. “There can be no doubt that the great horizon of the past, out of which our culture and our present live, influences us in everything we want, hope for, or fear in the future” (Gadamer 1976: 9). This concept relates also to the nature of prejudices, which Gadamer (1976: 9) explains are

biases of our openness to the world. They are simply conditions whereby we experience something – whereby what we encounter says something to us... is not our expectation and our readiness to hear the new also necessarily determined by the old that has already taken possession of us (Gadamer 1976: 9)?

This is important to understand within the context of memory and imagination, for prejudices inform the stories that individuals tell about their spiritual journeys and affect our projection of proposed new worlds.

The understanding of a fusion of horizons also relates to continuous learning, which is required of both those involved in this project as researcher or participants and those who want to continue on a journey toward increased purpose through work. This is critically important, for

learning changes who we are. The difference between mere activity or entertainment and learning is not that one is fun and the other hard... but that learning changes our ability to participate in the world. By transforming our relations with the world and with others, learning transforms our identities as human beings (Wenger 1996: 4).

Such “transformation” is essential to change processes in order to move from a current understanding of meaning through work to one in which increased purpose is discovered.

As the participants in this research and I learn more about spiritual journeys toward meaning through work, we develop a responsibility to act based on our new understandings. This responsibility is based in the ethical obligations described by Herda (1999: 10), who writes, as “the researcher and the participants mediate through conversations and actions the interconnections, the points of accord, and [the conflicts, they form] different narratives that may open more preferred forms of social and communal organizations.” In this way, changed understandings related to how we understand journeys toward meaning through work require that learning take the form of action, for “learning is a matter of engagement in practice. The experience of identity... implies the ability to engage the world in certain ways” (Wenger 1996: 4). This research therefore embraced the concept of continuous learning. This concept is essential both to interpret the specific data gathered for this project and to consider how ongoing learning enhances an individual’s ability to find spiritual meaning through work.

## **Summary**

In brief, this project incorporated a research approach grounded in an interpretive research orientation informed by critical hermeneutic theory. The conceptual topics of narration, action and meaning; care: concern and solicitude; and the fusion of horizons, informed the structure of this research process and helped to establish categories from which the collected data were analyzed and new meanings appropriated. I introduce these categories in the following pages.

## **Research Categories**

### **Introduction**

The categories of authenticity, oneself as another, and imagination provided a guideline for data collection and were used as the basis for analysis in this investigation. Although I remained open to the possibility of having the text unfold in a way that called for different analysis categories, I ultimately determined that these remain most appropriate for the purposes of this research.

### **Category I: Authenticity**

Authenticity was the first category used for this investigation because it provided theory that addresses one's true nature, including each individual's unique purpose and meaning, which was revealed through conversations and subsequent data analysis about spiritual journeys. In reference to Heidegger, Herda (1999: 56) writes that "understanding... constitutes, along with state-of-mind and discourse, the essence of human beings – the being that understands is *Dasein*. If the essence of human being is understanding, then we see the most important aspect of us is an activity, the activity of

understanding.” Ricoeur (1981: 56) likewise embraces this concept, noting that understanding “is not concerned with grasping a fact but with apprehending a possibility of being.”

Heidegger (1962: 78) explains that “the compound expression ‘Being-in-the-world’ indicates in the very way we have coined it, that it stands for a unitary phenomenon. This primary datum must be seen as a whole.” One’s authentic being, therefore, is tied to everything that we are and everything that we do; our work is not something that we can do as a separate manifestation from our spirituality. To lead a meaningful life that is both full of purpose and consistent with the reason for our creation, we need to look at our own ‘Being-in-the-world’ by considering our actions as they manifest our being in our work and in everything that we do. This investigation of spiritual journeys through work considers spirituality from precisely that perspective, looking at work and the way that it was approached throughout the lives of my research participants as an indication of how each person fulfills “destiny, which is different and unique for each individual” (Frankl 1946: 98).

The concept of purpose is described by Heidegger (1962: 320) as “calling.” While he prefaces his discussion of calling by dismissing the idea of God, which is not consistent with either my own judgment or that of many of the conversation partners who contributed to this text, his further discussion provides important theory that applies to this specific concept and interpretation does not exclude a belief in God. He refers (1962: 323) to the “inexorabl[e] and unequivocal character of the call...” and states (1962: 321) that each ‘Being-in-the-world’ exists “factically... its character is determined by thrownness as a Fact of the entity which it is; and, as so determined, it has in each case



already been delivered over to existence, and it constantly so remains.” This is consistent with the idea of calling, which can lead to much angst if left unrecognized or unfulfilled, for while such a calling comprises each individual’s very purpose of existence, it can elude recognition by the person so called.

Heidegger acknowledges the possibility that this calling may not be clear, stating that is “may be obscure and hidden as regards the “*why*” of it; but the “*that-it-is*” has *itself* been disclosed in Dasein (Heidegger 1962: 321). He adds that while it “reveals itself constantly in its current state of mind” its revelation often takes the form of anxiety, for “Dasein is anxious with anxiety about its ownmost potentiality-for-Being” (Heidegger 1962: 321). The concept of calling acknowledged as a form of anxiety shows consistency with the metaphor of journeying towards one’s purpose, for such a journey contains many unknown factors, from the events that will unfold to the journey’s ultimate destination. Heidegger acknowledges that individuals have a calling, but in describing the manifestation of that calling as anxiety until fulfilled, he likewise supports what others have found, that calling is not always clearly revealed, but that the search for it can take the form of revelation and discovery over time. This search explains the popularity of contemporary literature on the subject, with a single on-line bookstore search of published books with “vocation” in the title revealing 24 books published in calendar year 2006 and 140 books just since 2000. Heidegger goes so far as to say that “the call discourses in the uncanny mode of *keeping silent...*” and yet “it is for itself something that simply cannot be mistaken for anything else” (Heidegger 1962: 322). He acknowledges that the journey toward finding calling may be long, suggesting that when

we are off track it is because “we have not looked long enough to establish our phenomenal findings as to the call” (Heidegger 1962: 323).

Heidegger’s theory also supports the idea that our purpose lies in our connectedness. He states that “*Conscience manifests itself as the call of care*” and further reinforces that idea when he adds that “Dasein, in the very basis of its Being, is care” (Heidegger 1962: 322-323), thus linking the idea of each individual’s calling to the concept of care.

### **Category II: Oneself as Another**

I used the category of oneself as another for this project because it relates so closely to the definition of spirituality as interconnectedness. Although authenticity addresses the concept of calling, oneself as another focuses on the essence of that calling, which includes the concept of service to others. This manifestation of calling has immediate and future implications, thus providing the bridge between the foundational research category of authenticity and the final category of imagination. Shahideh (2004: 37) introduces the concept of understanding the self in relation to the other, noting that

what is most important is our understanding of self in relation to each other in the present. Such understanding is instrumental in creating a foundation by which we decide and act not only in the present, but also... with the awareness that the narratives that we create today are the history of our future generations.

In a journey in which one’s spirituality, sense of interconnectedness, and sense of service to others are manifested through action and work, this awareness with regard to the narratives that we create ties us to individuals in an imagined future world. Herda (1999: 7) earlier explains how understanding ourselves in relation to the other changes our world by emphasizing that each individual’s identity

is found in a moral relationship with others which, when in aggregate form, makes up more than the sum of the membership. A full and mature sense of self... arises from a recognition that in one's relationship with others there resides the possibility of seeing and understanding the world, and therefore one's self, differently.

Because "our interactions are affected by and are driven by our knowledge of self, which is exercised through interpretation" (Shahideh 2004: 37), reflection on and interpretation of our own spiritual journeys is important in order to apply the concept of oneself as another. Ricoeur (1992: 3) explains this, noting that it "suggests from the outset that the selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other [and] instead one passes into the other." This description reinforces the link between spirituality, connectedness, and concern for the other.

Venema (2000: 97) adds more to the explanation of one's interpretation of self, saying that to do so is a "process... that advances the understanding of personal and interpersonal identity through narrative representation of human action." Shahideh (2004: 72) contributes to this explanation, noting that "reflection and interpretation can be viewed as human action because individuals generally act by transforming their thoughts into power and action." However, Herda (1999: 10) also warns that "understanding one's past is not an end in itself. An understanding can serve... to mediate the past, which can be related to the development of a just social text." Ricoeur (1992: 18) notes that an understanding of self is "tightly bound up with solicitude for one's neighbor and with justice for each individual," which can be further understood with respect to ethical action and service to others.

Developing this understanding of the past and relating it to the creation of a just social text lays at the foundation of this investigation, which considered the elements of the research participants' pasts as relevant to contributing toward an evolving journey

toward more meaning as expressed through work. Ricoeur (1992: 114) looks at the theory of narrative as it applies to “its contribution to the constitution of the self” noting that “narrative theory finds one of its major justifications in the role it plays as a middle ground between the descriptive viewpoint on action... and the prescriptive viewpoint.” He established a three-fold requirement for analysis: “describe, narrative, prescribe – each moment of the triad implying a specific relation between the constitution of action and the constitution of the self” (Ricoeur 1992: 114-115). This concept was used in this investigation as my research participants shared stories that described the narratives of their journeys, for our conversations included both reflective discourse about the past and prescriptive discussion about where they expected their journeys to take them in the future.

Ricoeur (1992: 115) also makes “the anticipation of ethical considerations” an essential part of self narrative, noting that “narrative theory can genuinely mediate between description and prescription only if the broadening of the practical field and the anticipation of ethical considerations are implied in the very structure of the act of narrating.” In this investigation, the definition of spirituality to include the idea of connectedness is consistent with Ricoeur’s concept of “the *connectedness of life*” (Ricoeur 1992: 115). He applies this concept comprehensively, including both ethical issues and the identity of the self, which “seeks its identity on the scale of an entire life,” for “we find staggering degrees of complexity which carry the theory of action to the level required by narrative theory” (Ricoeur 1992: 115). His conclusion, which applies to the category of oneself as another as it is analyzed in this investigation of the stories of spiritual journeys, is that “there is no ethically neutral narrative” (Ricoeur 1992: 115).

### **Category III: Imagination**

How we use our imaginations to tell stories that form discourse is important both as a means to remember our past and to lead us to new possibilities, for it is only through such use of imagination that we create phronesis and the subsequent ethical action.

Herda (1999: 72) writes that “our past grounds us and gives us perspective,” Ricoeur (2004: 182) relates the importance of using history to carry “our minds far beyond the sphere of private and public memory into the range of the possible,” and Kearney (1999: 27) speaks of the need to understand the past in order to “recreate ourselves in a new future.” How we use our imaginations to tell the stories about our spiritual journeys that remember our past successes and failures while grounding our consideration of future possibilities in ethical action is critically important.

Imagination is essential for human progress and “an original power or production, in whose absence neither sensation nor understanding could have meaning” (Kearney 1998: 48). When imagination is lacking, progress, whether on an individual or societal level, will fail. Shahideh (2004: 74) affirms that “lack of imagination and hope for a better future prevents individuals from taking the necessary actions towards transformation between the stages of understanding and action.”

Kearney tells us that “imagination lies at the very heart of our existence. Since the beginning, imagination has been acknowledged as one of the most fundamental, if concealed, powers of humankind” (Kearney 1998: 1). Ricoeur (1981: 53) also emphasizes the power of imagination, defining it as “the capacity for letting new worlds shape our understanding of ourselves.” In fact, imagination is so influential that Kearney (1998: 6) describes it as

the very precondition of human freedom... to be free means to be able to surpass the empirical world as it is given here and now in order to project new possibilities of existence.... It is because we can imagine that we are at liberty to anticipate how things might be; to envision the world as if it were otherwise; to make absent alternatives present to the mind's eye.

Imagination allows us to reconfigure our own lives and our own futures and in doing so to create situations that are better than what we experienced in the past. While Heidegger suggests that everyone has a unique calling and that that unique purpose comprises an essential part of each individual's being, many do not begin with a conscious orientation toward discovery of their spiritual meaning or purpose in work as they select career options. Imagination is therefore essential to fuel an ongoing journey that incorporates a search for authentic purpose, for it allows anticipation about how things might be.

Stories are used to transform the imagination of readers by helping to create a pattern and then to provide meaning to the pattern. "When we tell a story we capture time. One can say that in a story our past and future belong to us, and the story we have to write (or read) only takes on meaning in the here and now of our lives" (Herda 1999: 76). Kearney (2002: 4) explains how storytelling relates to narrative identity and the specific journey of each individual, saying that

when someone asks you who you are, you tell your story. That is, you recount your present condition in the light of past memories and future anticipations. You interpret where you are now in terms of where you come from and where you are going to. And in doing so you give a sense of yourself as a narrative identity that perdures and coheres over a lifetime.

The narrative identity of my research participants was provided through our conversations and revealing the role that imagination has played in past and future elements of their journeys was part of the narrative composition of this project.

Ricoeur (1991: 115) provides further explanation of the power of imagination through stories, explaining that “by telling stories and writing history, we provide shape to what remains chaotic, obscure, and mute.” By looking at spiritual journeys from the perspective of the stories that individuals tell about their own evolving work experiences, we helped to shape what may otherwise be unrevealed. Shahideh (2004: 12) suggests that “unless we reflect, share, learn, and take actions that capture the essence of our experiences and being, we cannot find connectedness in our lives, nor can we find happiness,” which are important efforts for individuals engaged in journeys of purpose.

Kearney (1998: 242) notes that “it is the task of narrative... to provide us with specific ways of imagining how the moral aspects of human behavior may be linked with happiness and unhappiness.” This investigation used narrative imagination to explore the relationships between the research participants’ perspective of their relative happiness and unhappiness and the work in which they engaged in the past and anticipated doing in the future. The action of engaging in reflection about the past journey requires interpretation, for events that appeared critical at the time of their occurrence may fade in terms of apparent relevance with time, whereas seemingly trivial activities may in retrospect take on a critical role. Kearney (2002: 5) notes that

the idea of a past ‘as it truly was’ [is] very problematic whether at the level of individual psychology or at the level of collective or group consciousness. Acknowledging this challenge, those seeking to use reconfiguration to imagine new possibilities should recognize that ...if narrative calls at times for critical and theoretical interpretation, it also enchants us with the sheer magic of imagination.

This “sheer magic of imagination” is the power that ignited my enthusiasm for this topic, for investigating how imagination manifests itself into new worlds is a powerful concept. To look at this through stories told by people who see themselves on

journeys of purpose carried additional strength, for stories transform the imagination by allowing the reader of the story to increase knowledge of the “other” and to thus create a text to fuel the imagination about even better future worlds. Kearney suggests not only that “stories allow us to come to know one another... which opens us to the complexity of what is other than ourselves,” but that “stories empower readers to identify with the concrete events that affect particular people.” He concludes (1998: 245) that narrative imagination “enables each one of us to relate to the other as another self and to oneself as another.” Every individual with a favorite novel can relate to the characters through the story that is told, despite the fact that the characters may experience events and times that are outside of the reader’s experience. In this way, narrative allows each individual’s life to be enriched through imaginary events by re-appropriating meaning toward both actual events and future possibilities.

As a necessary component of an effective discourse to new possibilities, imagination carries with it a responsibility for new possibilities of wise, informed, and ethical action. Kearney (2002: 154-5) reflects on this, warning that “storytelling is never neutral” for

it is because of our belonging to history as storytellers and story-followers that we are *interested* by stories – in addition to being merely *informed* by facts. ...This interestedness is essentially ethical in that what we consider *communicable* and *memorable* is also what we consider *valuable*.

The concept of “interestedness” informs phronesis, which Kearney (2002: 143) defines as “a form of practical wisdom respecting the singularity of situations as well as the nascent universality of values aimed at by human actions.” Using imagination to construct stories that are ethical connects phronesis to spirituality in that such wisdom applies to connectedness in what we dare to hope for in terms of a better future. “When we work



together in a spirit of critique, understandings, and shared responsibility, we can appropriate a specified future” (Herda 1999: 2). This possibility of a better future informed this project, which sought to engage participants in conversations about how they used imagination to inform their journeys toward more meaningful work and how their imaginations project even greater futures.

### **Summary**

In summary, the categories of authenticity, oneself as another, and imagination provide a critical basis from which to analyze the data collected through this research, for each provided important insight both about the journeys taken thus far by participants and the potential future worlds that we can together inhabit. My intent was to investigate this topic with the understanding that we can use imagination to create discourse to refigure more ethical futures related to our spiritual journeys through work, acting as “agent[s] of love’ sensitive to the particular details of [the needs of] others” (Kearney 2002: 155), manifesting Ricoeur’s idea of connectedness through oneself as another, and combining both with Heidegger’s concepts of authenticity and care.

### **Research Guidelines**

#### **Entrée and Research Sites**

Each of the conversation partners who took part in this research emerged through conversations that I held with friends, academic colleagues, professional contacts, or through community associations. Some volunteered their own journeys as worthy of conversation while others became part of this project through recommendations of friends or associates.

Each participant was asked for permission to record our conversation, quote from the transcript that emerged, and use his or her name in the dissertation and any subsequent professional publications. Participants had permission to withdraw at any time. Consent was demonstrated by participation, by permission to record conversations, by receipt of and opportunity to review the transcription, and by knowledge of the ability to withdraw at any time. This approach was approved by the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS); that approval is listed as Appendix G.

### **Participants**

The participants that I formally invited to converse for this project came from a variety of backgrounds and their spiritual journeys toward work that is aligned with their purpose indicates that they have taken very different paths. Some, like the conversation partner in my pilot project, have made major changes to their career to follow a path that they feel is more spiritual; others have made less obvious changes but still consider themselves on an important journey that is aligned with their life's purpose. All participant names, occupations, and affiliations are listed in Appendix F.

When I present the data created with these participants in Chapter Four, I refer to most of them by their first names, with three exceptions. First, I include Steven Maekawa's title of "Father," referring to him as "Father Steve" out of respect for his vocation as a priest, a journey that is profiled in the story that he shares in this project. I refer to Maria Francisca Vickroy-Peralta as "Francisca," which is her middle name, in order to distinguish her from another participant with an almost-identical first name. Similarly, I use Kirsten Lynn Jones' middle name to refer to her in order to avoid confusion between another participant with a phonetically similar name.

A brief description of my ten participants follows, in the order of their presentation in the data analysis:

1. Father Steve Maekawa is a Dominican (Roman Catholic) priest who is currently the Vocations Director for the Western Dominican Province. He is based in Oakland, California and also serves as a chaplain in the U.S. Armed Forces.

2. Ipek Serifsoy is a Business Consultant and Leadership Coach from Sausalito, California. She previously worked in financial services before leaving that line of work to first pursue a Master's Degree in Theology and then to start her own consulting business.

3. Marie Gallo is a philanthropist and civic leader in Modesto, California. Her family owns Gallo Wineries and her work within her family's business is inextricably tied to her work as mother, fundraiser, and civic visionary.

4. Ellen Herda is a professor at the University of San Francisco where she teaches in the Leadership Studies program. She also conducts research and publishes on topics related to her expertise as a hermeneutic scholar and as an anthropologist, and as related to her concern for and support of people from ethnic minority populations in Southeast Asia.

5. Charity Kahn is the founder of Joy and Music (JAM), a children's music group in San Francisco, California. She is a business woman, a performer, a composer, and a teacher. Her academic background is in mathematics and she is the author of a book about the link between music and math.

6. Karen Junker is the Hospice Director for the Center for Attitudinal Healing, located in Sausalito, California. She is also an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ; her professional background is as a teacher.

7. David Dionisi is the Founder of Freedom from War, a nonprofit organization located in Davis, California. Previously, he worked in financial services and, before that, as an officer in the United States Armed Forces.

8. Hank Milanowski recently retired from his dentistry practice in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He was a partner in the practice, where he worked for 38 years.

9. Maria Francisca Vickroy Peralta is a theology student at the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology in Berkeley, California. Her professional background is in banking, where she worked for many years in several different, international banking institutions.

10. Kirsten Lynn Jones works full time as a mother to her two young sons. She previously held a series of progressively responsible positions in information technology services.

In addition to these ten formal participants, I also included data from informal participants; that is, individuals who offered insights, experience, wisdom, or other information that informed this text, but who did so spontaneously, without benefit of the invitation letters, guiding questions, taped and transcribed conversations, and other accoutrements associated with formal conversation partners. Herda (1999: 97) acknowledges that in research “there may also be informal conversations carried out with people who are not part of the formal arrangements.” She adds that “these conversations

are [often] very informative.” A list of informal participants, which includes their affiliations and locations, is listed in Appendix F.

### **Invitation Letters**

Please refer to Appendix A for a sample invitation letter. Appendix B likewise includes another sample letter to participants, thanking them for the time and reflection that they invested in this project.

### **Data Collection**

#### **Introduction**

The conversations that I had with my research partners and the transcripts that arose from it comprised the data that I used for this research. I used this data by weaving the stories and reflections provided by the ten formal participants with my own insights and experiences and then added the voices of the five informal participants to highlight particular points. As a result, the data considered in this investigation represented eleven main voices, with five additional voices also contributing.

As I looked at the data and the literature associated with this research, I saw connections between this investigation, topics that I have been interested in all of my life, and my own experience as demonstrated in my own personal reflections and subsequent actions as related to my life. For example, not only have I sought meaning in what I personally do, but I have always been fascinated by and instigated conversation about people’s journeys through work, collecting informal data from the time of young adulthood on the interests and circumstances that motivate people to follow different paths and inform their meaning about those journeys. Consequently, I approached this

topic with considerable enthusiasm and often shared my interests even in casual conversations, thus finding both enthusiastic volunteers to be conversation partners and receiving eager referrals of others who reflected an authentic orientation toward being on a journey of purpose through work. This “revelation” of participants occurred with the ease with which life at times reveals its purpose when we find ourselves on the right path and is consistent with a hermeneutic approach to research in which it is not so much a matter of “*doing* hermeneutic... research as it is a way of *being* a researcher” (Herda 1999: 93). I therefore engaged the research participants with respect for both their willingness to provide data for this investigation and with appreciation for the insights and experiences that they shared.

### **Conversations**

See Appendix F for a table listing conversation partners. While each of the conversation partners emerged through different personal, professional, or academic relationships and represented a variety of professions, they each shared in common an enthusiasm for the topic and an eagerness to contribute to this investigation. For the experience, reflection, and time that they have enthusiastically provided, I am grateful, as I believe that each participant’s shared experiences and reflections on authenticity, oneself as another, and imagination have strengthened this investigation and increased its potential to become a text that will help inform others who are either on or would like to be on similar journeys of purpose.

My conversation partners included people whose journeys have taken very different courses from one another; some made radical changes to the choices that they made about their work activities while others told stories about their journeys to find meaning in their

work that incorporated more incremental changes in understanding about the way that their work contributes to the development of their sense of spiritual meaning. Choices in work that my conversation partners find meaningful also varied significantly, from parenthood and the priesthood, to dentistry and founding an organization geared toward world peace, to yet additional choices that participants explained as manifestations of their journeys toward authenticity. The stories that evolved showed both commonalities and differences and together the text that emerged helps to reveal the nature of an authentic search for meaningful work that is aligned with purpose.

### **Research Guidelines**

The following are research guidelines that I provided for reflection to my conversation partners prior to our meeting. While most of the conversations incorporated a discussion about the answers to these questions, none of them followed the rigid format that this listing could imply. Rather, I used the questions to introduce and frame the topic and our actual conversations were determined by the interests and experiences of each conversation partner and myself as the researcher.

- 1) Symbols: What metaphor would you use to describe your journey to spiritual meaning through work so far? For example, some might say that their journey has been a “rollercoaster,” others that it is a “marathon,” or even a “surprise party with lots of unexpected gifts.” How would you describe spirituality? Both in relation to finding meaning through work and more generally.
- 2) The Journey Toward Meaning: Please share with me how you arrived at the point of doing the work that you currently do. Can you describe for me some of your experiences that make this work a calling that you want to continue doing? As

you journeyed thus far, what were the things that provided indication to you that you were on the right path?

- 3) Effect of Work: How does the spiritual meaning that you draw from your work affect other aspects of your life? One (anonymous) quote that I have collected suggests, “When your heart is filled with love, you will do all things well.” Has this been true in your experience?
- 4) Concern for Others: If you were to give counsel to someone else who felt frustrated in his or her own journey to find purpose through work, what advice would you give? What struggles have you experienced in your journeys? What have been the challenges and detours along the way?
- 5) Imagination and Action: Ten years from now, how do you expect that you will look back on your journey from the present? How has your journey thus far been different from how you originally imagined it?

### **Text Creation**

Each research conversation lasted about an hour. These conversations were recorded and transcribed to form texts for analysis; all transcripts are in a separate document, handed in with the research. The research participants were provided a copy of the text and encouraged to make comments or suggestions based on further reflection on the topic if appropriate. I sent transcripts and preliminary analysis notes to each conversation partner, thereby each participant had the opportunity to read his or her own transcript and the preliminary analysis and reflect upon them. Subsequent to such reflection, each conversation partner had the opportunity to delete, add, or change the transcript of what he or she said in the recorded conversation. As indicated above, the



guiding questions were provided in advance of the meetings to focus the conversations so that an exchange of ideas between the participant and the researcher could occur. Herda (1999: 83) explains that this research process

requires reflection, risk, and, for the most part, a change in orientation toward research and social reality in general. Often the lay person we invite to participate in our research project has not experienced such paradigmatic shifts. This burden is on the researcher to understand this and assume responsibilities of teacher, in a broad sense.

For this reason, I took additional responsibility in conversations that occurred to guide the discussions in such a way that reflected an orientation toward conversation. Clearly, the boundaries of this research were created by the people who agreed to participate and the selected categories for data analysis. How the data may be interpreted and applied by the reader depends on the tradition of each reader and what he or she brings to the text.

### **Journal and Observations**

In addition to collecting data through conversations, I kept a journal of my thoughts, reflections, and ideas relating to this topic. Excerpts from this journey are included in Appendix C. The intention of the journal was to organize and document the perspective that I brought to this research. In addition, I recorded data that came from informal conversations in this journal, including the insights that I obtained from the conversations. The enthusiasm with which many anecdotal conversations emerged suggests that this was an important way of incorporating data and enhancing both the text and its analysis. Further, its use is advocated by Herda (1999: 98) as “the life-source of the data collection process for in it goes the hopes, fears, questions, ideas, humor, observations, and comments of the researcher.”

## **Research Timeline and Location**

The research occurred in the spring and early summer of 2007 at private homes, workplaces, and public restaurants in Northern California. While original plans included conversations with participants in Southern California; Washington, District of Columbia; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and Columbus, Ohio, those conversations did not occur as planned, primarily because the proposed participants in each of those areas did not respond a second time to specific inquiries about availability for research conversations and my own travel abilities became increasingly limited by my pregnancy. Instead, different participants emerged and the text of this project reflects those voices.

## **Data Analysis**

Transcribing the conversations described above created a text, which, together with the journal and observations, became data. This process represents “an act of distancing, a distancing ourselves from our conversations” (Herda 1999: 97). The participant received a copy of this text, which “is an opportunity... to review and reflect on what was said” (Herda 1999: 97-98).

After the transcripts were created and reviewed by the participants, I took responsibility for analyzing this data, which “is a creative and imaginative act” in which the researcher “appropriates a proposed world from the text... [coming] away from it different than we were before” (Herda 1999: 98). I did this analysis by reading the conversation transcriptions and then emplotting the revealed story by pulling out significant statements, developing themes, and placing them within categories. At this stage, if one of the categories of authenticity, oneself as another, and imagination had been determined to be inappropriate, a new category would have been established;

however, that potentiality did not occur. Instead, the analysis continued as described by Herda (1999: 98-99) when I substantiated the themes with quotes from transcripts and from my journal, examined the themes in light of critical hermeneutic theory, considered implications and areas that required further study, and provided examples of learning experiences, including a description of how the data has been appropriated by relating the study to my life experience.

As Herda (1999: 82) notes, the purpose of interpretive “research is to create conditions whereby people can engage in discourse so that truth can be recognized and a new reality can be brought into being.” Therefore, the analysis of the data provided through these conversations was not oriented toward finding a single “truth” or “correct path” in the journeys of purpose that were shared; rather, discourse revealed broader concepts of wisdom for application to practical action for the researcher, the participants, and others. In this way, this text differs both from positivist forms of research and from some of the literature on the subject of finding one’s purpose, which sometimes suggests a finite number of specific steps to success. The interpretation of the collected data was oriented toward “a proposing of a world that I might inhabit and into which I might project my ownmost powers” (Ricoeur 1983: 81) and what is “resignified by narrative is what was already presignified at the level of human acting,” (Ricoeur 1983: 81) which grounds the ethical imagination proposed in realistic new worlds for the researcher and the participants. Future readers can appropriate the text as a “world in front of itself,” in ways that are unique to their own experiences and not limited even by the imaginations of those contributing to this project.

Because the topic guides the data, the voices of participants combined with that of the researcher to reveal insights about finding spiritual meaning in work. Some participants elaborated more fully on the relevant aspects of this research topic; some voices are subsequently presented in the analysis more prominently.

## **Field Project**

### **Introduction**

In the fall of 2006, I developed my ideas for research by completing a pilot field project designed to test my research questions. To do so, I engaged David Dionisi about his own spiritual journey toward work that he felt was consistent with his spiritual purpose. He currently runs a non-profit organization called “Freedom from War” and his journey included work for the military, corporations, and other non-profits. I have included an excerpt of the theory and analysis of this text in Appendix D.

The most significant finding of my field project reinforced the importance of ensuring that both the researcher and the conversation partner have an orientation towards being open to a fusion of horizons, for while my partner shared significant insights with me about his own journey, his preunderstandings about my journey and the orientation of my research indicated significant misunderstandings. Because he did not appear to be invested in a learning process that was entirely mutual, I left the conversation with some apprehension. This process was a valuable one, for it helped prepare me for my additional research conversations, which I describe in more detail below, and I oriented my introduction to them to better emphasize the mutuality of the conversation process. The field project did help prove to me that the questions that I initially drafted were

successful in generating conversation and new ideas, and I revised them only slightly to adjust the language in order to provide greater clarity.

### **Implications and Revised Research Guidelines**

While I found that David's work was aligned consistently with his actions, I struggled with the text of our conversation, for despite the apparent alignment of word and deed in many elements of his work, they were misaligned in other cases. For example, we discussed specific issues of spending in relation to a statement that he made about giving out of his need rather than out of his excess and the struggle to define "need," especially considering the austere life of Mother Theresa, who had inspired his intent about giving. He and I discussed this as part of our conversation and I included this consideration in the data analysis, incorporating a discussion about whether journeys may always be considered to be in progress, with demonstrated inconsistencies an inherent part of human weakness or something that can be used to judge the authenticity of a particular journey. Another consideration incorporated for reflection after the pilot but before the rest of the research related to the possibility that some journeys are in states of paralysis and not experiencing any movement toward increased purpose whatsoever, which is an important dimension to consider.

### **Summary**

This field project helped to prepare me for the research, both in practical terms by providing insight about how to pose better questions and in terms of my enthusiasm for the theory and the future implications of this topic. David's story and the implications that his work has both for himself and for others reminded me of the importance of this

topic and of the need that so many people have to find spiritual meaning in the work that occupies so much of their lives. As I reflect on my own interest, which I expand upon briefly in the following section, I recognize that the idea of finding purpose through work is one that has fascinated me.

### **Background of Researcher**

The gradual unveiling of purpose within my own life drives my interest in this topic, for I have experienced both much angst and much joy as I have sought more spiritual meaning in the work that I do. I recall being an undergraduate, infused with concern that “life is short” and struggling with the disparity between my long ambition to be a pediatrician and my dislike for everything related to the field other than the generalized and altruistic notion, remaining from early childhood, that doctors “help people.” While true in many cases, that reality did not make the choice the right one for me, especially when my talents and interests were elsewhere.

After graduating early from college, I followed a recreational interest to Yosemite National Park, where I began work in the hospitality industry, considered a graduate degree in journalism, which appealed to me because of the influence that journalists have on others, and pursued a temporary ambition to advance within the hotel and restaurant industry. A strong dislike for working in a hotel on holidays combined with a seemingly random invitation to “work in Personnel” instigated a fortuitous career change and without even a formal interview, I began working in a position that took responsibility for both recruitment and retention issues and those related to disparate treatment and harassment on the job. This unexpected opportunity seemed then and now like a blessing, for I was able to apply my talents at writing, analysis, and relating to others with

interests in helping others in resolving workplace disputes and in appropriate job placement.

This led to a series of promotions, both for that National Park concessionaire and, later, as a civil servant working for the City and County of San Francisco. However, I found that the work that initially excited me became more stale as my expertise grew; in retrospect, I see this both as a general discontent that drives appropriate growth and as an indication of my need to find greater spiritual meaning in what I was doing. Eight years out of college and the joy that I had felt to have aligned my talents with a profession now waned as I found myself wanting more than simply a “good job.”

In 1997 I accepted a lateral transfer from one department to another, which meant that I was doing essentially the same work, but my orientation toward the work began to change as I began to invest more time in thinking about spiritual meaning, which now included both prayer and community activities. My journey through work continued both through increased community activity and through a promotion at work, one for which I was only minimally qualified on paper. Still, my limited qualifications as compared to many of my peers motivated me to pursue my Master’s degree while instigating many professionally fulfilling assignments and the additional responsibilities that came with new knowledge about my own purpose in terms of leading others toward finding spiritual purpose through work.

Ironically, perhaps, my journey took what appeared at the time to be an abrupt detour when I unexpectedly came to the conclusion that I wanted to resign my job (and within a short period also decline two exciting promotional opportunities) to care for my newborn daughter and thus align my greatest joy with how I spent the majority of my

time. This in no way meant that my previous activities at my paid position lacked joy; simply that life had given me an opportunity to manifest a new purpose. At the same time, the joy that I have felt with my studies in the doctoral program at the University of San Francisco over the past few years and particularly with this topic convinces me that this academic journey is also part of my purpose and I look forward with excitement to see how my purpose is further revealed.

### **Summary**

In my case, authenticity, oneself as another, and imagination have all played important roles in my own understanding of my ongoing spiritual journey toward work that fulfills the purpose for which I was created. In retrospect, I can see that much of the angst that I felt at various times in my journey was related to a failure of imagination, which reinforces the role that it plays in revealing my authentic self. Further, care and solicitude are essential in my own journey, for in various stages in my journey I have found the most meaning when I was authentically oriented toward service to others.

Both the conversations and the theory supporting this topic are important parts of the investigation and together they include broad implications for providing greater spiritual meaning to others, for the resonance that I have found within my own journey indicates that this has become a text from which others can likewise learn. The theory associated with authenticity resonates in that it suggests that our purpose in the world is reflected in a unique call. Failing to manifest that purpose is a great cause of angst and a great loss of unique talent applied to need. Further, the theory associated with oneself as another is consistent with other literature that suggests that we are never happier or more satisfied than when we are helping others; therefore, finding out whether my research



participants likewise report experiences that confirm this theory is intriguing, especially when such motivation is not often celebrated in career assessment discussions. Finally, I remain inspired by the theory associated with imagination because it contains the joyful language that I most associate with dreams I have had throughout my life of “the kingdom of the *as if*” (Herda 1999: 78). It not only conjures up images of pretending as a child that the rock in the backyard was a ship sailing to Hawaii, but of using literature as a child, adolescent, and adult to enter unknown worlds and there to experience emotions and events that I would not otherwise have known. Most importantly in terms of ethical action, the theory related to imagination provides the basis for change and through this investigation I hope to have provided that inspiration to others, reassuring with a realistic assessment of the anxiety associated with spiritual journeys toward purposeful work, challenging with stimulating stories from the journeys of others, and drawing conclusions that others can likewise use to engage with the text in a meaningful way that provides the basis for increased spiritual fulfillment through manifested ethical purpose.

## CHAPTER FOUR DATA PRESENTATION AND PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

### Introduction

*“I was certain that God had a greater purpose for me, and I prayed every day for Him to reveal it to me. At first I was expecting Him to show me my entire future all at once – maybe with a flash of lighting and a clap of thunder thrown in for good measure. But I came to learn that God never shows us something we aren’t ready to understand. Instead, He lets us see what we need to see, when we need to see it. He’ll wait until our eyes and hearts are open to Him, and then when we’re ready, He will plant our feet on the path that’s best for us... but it’s up to us to do the walking.”*

Emmaculeee Ilibagiza (2006: 114)

An anthropological interpretive study grounded in critical hermeneutic theory calls on the researcher to use the data collected to interpret meaning and, in so doing, to present a new story. This act of emplotment “confers an intelligible configuration on a heterogeneous collection composed of intentions, causes, and contingencies” (Ricoeur 2005: 100). The new story that results from this act of emplotment is created in part by the conversation participants and in part by the researcher, as their voices and perspectives together engage the subject at hand, incorporating both individuals and their actions so that “the plot governs the mutual genesis between the development of a character and that of the story told” (Ricoeur 2005: 100). The story I tell is one that I share with the ten individuals who contributed their stories to this project, people who are on individual and continuing journeys toward finding their authentic purpose through work. Their voices describe their experiences and explain how their reflections provide meaning to their memories, leading to success in their goal of finding spiritual meaning through work as well as to ongoing imagination about how their futures will better manifest their purpose.

In this presentation of the research data, I have incorporated the voices of my conversation partners within the themes that emerged in both the research and the literature review, so that the richness of experience illumines the subject of searching for purposeful work. Kearney (2004: 55) describes this task as the creation of a plot that “transforms a sequence of events into a story” by “‘grasping together’ the individual incidents, characters, and actions so as to compose a unified temporal whole.” He ties this to imagination, which is discussed again in the secondary analysis and applied to this project in my implications, explaining that “the narrative act of emplotment, which configures a manifold into a synthesis, exacts what Kant defined as the productive power of imagination.”

This Chapter is laid out in the three main sections of authenticity, oneself as another, and imagination, broadly following the analysis categories outlined previously. These categories are topics about which hermeneutic scholars have provided a depth of insights, which in turn have served to help understand the themes that emerged from the research. The authenticity section contains a majority of data related to the participants’ journeys; the sub-section on journey is then divided into sections related to the stages in a journey, with reflections on starting points, first steps, threads, and challenges. How these journeys are manifest in oneself as another and how they utilize imagination is described in the final two main sections.

### **Authenticity**

This investigation considers the different stories of others who have sought, found, and continue to seek meaning in the work that they do. It delves with appreciation into the very different routes taken, considers the implications of their common desire to

find work that manifests their authentic being, and reflects upon their accumulated wisdom related to recognizing and defining authenticity through the experience gained from their journeys.

Manifesting authenticity within a life represents a noble challenge; inherent in the concept of authenticity is the idea of understanding and releasing the “spark of divinity” that exists within each individual (Young 1993: no page). Work, as defined in this investigation, comprises activities that occupy a majority of time. Therefore, the idea of manifesting authenticity within work inspires, and those who have done so, even in part, provide wisdom and inspiration.

I began this work because purposeful work is so personally important to me and I have long felt interest in the insights others have gained through their experiences in the search for meaningful work. I sought out each participant because of his or her experience and reported success in manifesting purpose within the context of their own lives. Kearney (2004:41) suggests that “the shortest route from the self to itself is through the images of others;” the stories my conversation partners tell demonstrate the value of that authenticity both in their lives and mine. These stories also inform by sharing the experiences of searching for and finding purposeful work and then continuing to search for increased meaning in such work. Most importantly, the success of these research participants in achieving purpose in their work inspires, both because they find it individually satisfying and because the purpose consistently reflects concern for and outreach to others. Theory supports the concept that we can learn from the experiences of others as told through stories, for “what is interpreted in text... is the proposing of a world that I might inhabit and into which I might project my ownmost powers” (Kearney

2004: 54). The changes that these participants have made to work and life as they have sought and manifested their unique purpose have enriched the world that we inhabit together. When Herda says (1999: 7), “when I change, the rest of the world changes,” she describes not only the effect of the journey but the motivation for it, a motivation that excites and inspires through stories that are both uniquely individual and inspiringly relevant.

The search for authenticity within being dates at least to ancient Greek philosophers, for Plato’s *Republic* articulates “in a metaphorical form the first statement of belief that each of us possesses a true self, a holistic identity that is the basis for our character” (Gioia 1990: 18). This authentic being includes the lives that individuals lead through work, which engages time, energy, talents, and passions, together comprising a significant manifestation of being. Finding spiritual meaning in work is therefore an important journey, for while work is defined ideally in this investigation as activity that brings the individual closer to God, it is also defined realistically as the functional activities that occupy a majority of most people’s time. The reality of the latter definition brings emphasis to the longing identified in the former, and finding a way to merge the two definitions allows authentic being to emerge, purpose to manifest, and individual satisfaction to be revealed.

The desire to engage in work that represents authentic purpose is a yearning that addresses the very nature of being. Merton (1955: 57-58) explains this in spiritual terms, saying that “before the Lord wills me to do anything, He first of all wills me to *be*. What I do must depend on what I am.” I once had a singular experience of calling that dramatically illustrated the pervasive nature of that search for the work that manifests my

being. While submerged in the demands and chaos of a job that I held early in my career I had a sudden insight, as vivid as a voice in my ear, telling me, “this is not your life.” The message was so clear that I quit that job almost immediately, for though that job held many satisfactions and utilized many of my talents, it failed to satisfy a deep need to manifest my unique purpose. My next career steps, while not initially dramatically different, allowed me to re-engage my own search for purposeful work, a search that had stagnated within the demands of that job but which found renewal as I redirected my activities. Ricoeur (2005: 69) suggests that this type of experience is an essential step in a necessarily long journey, for “the road to recognition is long, for the “acting and suffering” human being, [but it is one] that leads to the recognition that he or she is in truth a person “capable” of different accomplishments.”

This personal example was a unique experience of a specific “call,” in this case, one that ejected me from a stagnant place in my own journey. Father Steve had a very different experience of calling. Whereas I was merely nudged out of a dead-end position into one where I found more growth and opportunities, he found himself receiving a direct call from God to serve in the very demanding and all-encompassing role of the priesthood. His call began when he was a child in Middle School with the vague sense that his life would be spent in service to God. As he matured and continued to discern this call, he felt strong resistance to it, for neither the work nor the lifestyle associated with the priesthood appealed to him. However, he found that it was a call that he could not escape, despite diligent efforts that included trying to distance himself even from his Catholicism and its associated expectations by avoiding weekly mass. While many college students skip religious services without a qualm, his decision to do so was in such

contrast to the strength of the call that he heard that he found it consumed his every thought. He described himself as a seemingly typical architecture student at the University of Washington who also played in the university marching band. While other students who were part of the band enjoyed the game, the performance, the opportunity to be seen on television, or any similarly exciting element of university life, he had a very different experience of being engulfed in tension as the excitement of the football game utterly escaped his consciousness. Instead, he could repeatedly think only, “I am NOT going to Mass tomorrow.” Finally, exhausted by his determination to avoid the call, he bargained with God, promising to explore the vocation of the priesthood in exchange for a reprieve from the tension. After a year of continued attention to his studies he acted on his promise and began exploring the priesthood in earnest. Soon after, he entered the priesthood and embraced a lifestyle and work choice that encompassed his very being.

Others had similar descriptions of the strength of the call, though that to which they were being called varied significantly, as did the call itself. Ipek described her own call to engage the journey in strong terms, saying that it “felt compelling and I didn’t really see any other options.” Marie noted not only that work and deed must be consistent, but that both must be represented in being. She used Ellen as an example of this, noting “it’s not just the work she is saying, it’s the work that she is” and added, “and it’s the same with me, it’s not what I say, it’s how I relate to people in my persona.” Charity felt that she had “no choice” but to follow her interests, saying, “I’ve got to make this work” as “the only other choice is like a spiritual death.” These experiences and strong sentiments demonstrate the persistent nature of the call to authenticity, for finding work that fulfills purpose ties each person in an individual and personal way both to

others and to God. My research partners echo the importance of this search with their own shared experiences, which consistently demonstrate the strength of the call, the way that authenticity creates connections between people, and its purpose in tying each person more closely to his or her unique relationship with the divine. Authenticity within work therefore addresses the very nature of action and being for

what we are is to be sought in the invisible depths of our own being, not in our outward reflection in our own acts. We must find our real selves not in the froth stirred up by the [effect] of our being upon the beings around us, but in our own soul, which is the principle of all our acts (Merton 1955: 117).

This urge within each soul to manifest a truly authentic self in work both drives the momentum that keeps the search ongoing and provides meaning as work is engaged.

In our discussion about finding authentic being in work, Karen emphasized the importance of the search by remarking with alarm on statistics that she had read about the lack of meaning that many find in work. She said that she had read that most people in the United States do not even like their jobs, suggesting that they dare not even hope to find work opportunities in which their authentic meaning could be reflected. Her own journey to search for such meaning in her life's work began, ironically and dramatically, with a decision that she made to end her own life. When she was a child, a priest told her, without any context that she can recall, that she was a bad person from whom no good could come. Despite vociferous protestations to the contrary from her family, this misinformation became a part of her early identity. It shaped the decisions that she made throughout her teen and early adult years and caused her to engage in behavior that hurt many and isolated her from those who most cared about her. The behavior that caused harm to others also affected her horribly; in her misery, she purchased a handgun with the express intent of killing herself in order to escape from the person whom she had become.



Fortunately for Karen, her loved ones, and those who now benefit from her work, at the last minute she suddenly heard a voice who told her, “I am in here too.” She realized that she could choose to seek God rather than to listen to the disruptive and demeaning ideas that had previously informed her behavior. This experience led her directly into a relationship with God that now forms a solid part of her identity and drives her desire to find work that manifests the reason for her life.

Karen’s particular journey reflected the conclusions reached through the different informing experiences of others who inspired and participated in this investigation. Each described his or her journey to find meaningful work in ways that showed how memory of past experiences and imagination about future possibilities have played roles both in finding satisfaction with work and in an interest in finding additional meaning as the journey progressed. In fact, the very basis of human existence is “both actuality and possibility, [with] ... the latter... the site of the former” (Kearney 1999: 37), a concept that supports the dual roles of both memory and imagination in manifesting authenticity. Karen’s reflections echoed those of other participants; if she had to go consistently to a job that provided no meaning she “would die...; there wouldn’t be enough faith and spiritual practices to sustain me.” The powerful nature of this statement reflects the significance that authentic meaning can have within a journey that is truly engaged.

Ipek echoed Karen’s concerns with regard to the challenge of engaging the search for authenticity within a work culture that often insists on separating spirituality from “professional” behavior in a way that leaves many individuals feeling torn and incomplete. I met Ipek through a fellow student at the University of San Francisco. Don recommended that we meet when I described my research topic, for he had seen the

integration between Ipek's professional and personal lives and knew that finding spiritual meaning in work was important to her. We met at a coffee shop near our homes; she was coming from a meeting associated with her work as an executive coach and was en route to a yoga class. Her actions in the simple task of meeting with me demonstrated the holistic approach that she takes to her life. Her reflection about her intentional efforts to achieve that integration led to her criticism even of words that many commonly associate with their work, noting, for example, that when she considers the term "professional," "there is a sterileness to it, that people have to strip parts of themselves in order to fit in and be." Her admirable integration of all elements of her life helps to define her authentically. When we met, she explained that "every element of my life flows together. Just that fact that I can meet you this morning, then go to yoga, then have business calls in the afternoon, meetings all day tomorrow... I feel like – knock wood! – everything is just flowing together." She went further, defining her life as "very integrated... I wake up in the morning, I do things, and I go to bed at night. I am the same person all day long. There are various activities that I am engaged in, but there's no separation of anything."

Charity echoed this in discussing authenticity within her work, saying that "when your work is your passion is your life, it is all tangled up." These descriptions both represent examples of authenticity and raise for consideration the value of the commonly referenced "work life balance." Neither Charity nor Ipek described their lives as being composed of separate entities that must be "balanced;" rather, they described authenticity within their own lives as an integrated whole that was equally represented in all elements of life.

The concept that life's activities must be integrated in order to manifest authenticity in all aspects of work again evokes the concept of a journey. In this metaphor, authenticity exists in both the intent of the work and all the other actions that compose an individual's life. Father Steve's work emphasizes this most dramatically and obviously, for, by definition, the priesthood is work that encompasses all elements of a life, both temporally and in terms of action. He described the integration within this journey as an understanding that "it's not only about getting where you are supposed to be, a lot of it is how you get there," as he talked about his initial call to be a priest and his ongoing journey to make choices with regard to his work that represent his authentic self. Within the priesthood, such reflection about the importance of authenticity within the journey is important. Father Steve provides a remarkable contrast to the stereotype of a priest who sees his journey as complete with the decision to be ordained and now performs his work methodically and with no apparent inspiration to connect with the divine. On the contrary, Father Steve tells the story of his life in a way that shows how reflection about "how you get there" leads to authenticity within the journey.

When I first met Father Steve about ten years ago, he was working at his first assignment as a new priest at a busy parish in the center of San Francisco. Though I enjoyed his creative and thoughtful homilies and gave them ongoing reflection, it was an event outside of my parish associations that best illustrated for me how Father Steve manifested authenticity throughout his journey and thus touched others. I knew Phil from a previous job and when we met again several years ago to catch up over lunch, he told me that his father had recently passed away. I knew that his relationship with his father had been difficult and that any such loss carries sadness. I expressed my sympathy with

an invitation to converse about the experience and he responded by describing the events that occurred at his father's death bed. While Phil, his wife, mother, and sister sat at the bedside of his dying father, the hospital's staff offered to contact their chaplain to administer the sacrament of the anointment of the sick. It had been a long time since Phil had practiced the faith of his youth and he did not have any memories that drew him back for consolation; however, he agreed to the offer out of respect for his parent's religious beliefs. He was surprised with a wonderfully positive experience through the approach of the priest who responded. After only a few questions, the priest was able to sum up Phil's relationship with his father and, in prayer, provide Phil with the peace that he needed to lay to rest both his father and their tumultuous relationship. In excitement and recognition, I asked if the priest was Father Steve, for I knew that he worked as a chaplain at that hospital and we determined together that indeed it had been. This unexpected connection between people I knew from different spheres of my life illustrated for me the pervasive nature of authenticity, for helping others to deepen their relationships with God is inherent in Father Steve's call. It is something that he was able to achieve for someone he did not even know, when Phil was not either expecting or seeking such a result.

Father Steve prepared a series of photos from another element of his work, again epitomizing his ongoing journey to project his authentic being into what he does. About eight years ago, he began training to be a military chaplain and was eventually sent for an 18-month tour to Afghanistan. The pictures represent activities that he engaged in while on duty as a Marine chaplain stationed in Afghanistan. According to a description of the photos, one

simply shows a rosary swinging in the windshield of a Humvee as the vehicle follows in the dust of another. Another picture depicts men huddled for a final blessing at the conclusion of Mass outside a C-130. The Mass was celebrated in 15 minutes as the huge plane was being unloaded. 'The C-130 kept its engines running and it was very noisy,' Father Maekawa wrote. 'Services are small in the field, typically 3-10 people' (McGuire 2004: 1).

These images of faith practiced despite difficult conditions of logistics, timing, and weather illustrate and dramatize the challenges inherent in any journey, for while authenticity may at times feel as obvious as the religious symbolism that a rosary represents to a Catholic priest, it is for Father Steve and others ever-changing. Further, the attempt to continue to reflect authentic purpose in work can be as difficult as concentrating on the meaning in a religious service when distracted by the described noise of the military vehicle in Father Steve's photo. Still, continuing the effort to manifest it in ways that affect others, like my friend Phil, not only links authenticity to oneself as another, but also reinforces the importance of engaging the journey itself.

Understanding authenticity within the context of this investigation has included a spiritual element, as participants raised for discussion the infinite nature of the human soul. Ellen noted that "any meaningful work will have some spiritual ... overtone." This understanding instigated conversation about the definition of authenticity and whether it was possible to achieve it without engaging in inconsistencies between action, intent, and belief. Recent revelations about Mother Teresa's questions regarding her faith dramatically epitomize the challenge. Discussions of her life have revealed that her actions, while indubitably admirable from the perspective of supporting worthwhile goals of helping others, were supported by beliefs in God that were not always firm. An example of this is contained in a letter that she wrote to Reverend Michael Van Der Peet in September 1979 in which she complained that within her relationship with God, "the

silence and the emptiness is so great that I look and do not see, listen and do not hear”  
(Van Biema 2007: 1).

Participants in this investigation provided analogous examples of their own struggles for consistency in their manifestation of authenticity. Though Father Steve’s celebration of the sacraments have been memorable and poignant, he struggled to find meaning while doing so after returning from military service in Afghanistan, where he experienced such great challenges in just doing so. In a different example, David expressed a desire to contribute to worthy causes “out of his need,” though he admitted that he lives a relatively comfortable lifestyle because of his previous financial success in a corporate setting. Though he vociferously rejected the corporate work and its financial benefits as failing to meet any spiritual goals, his continued reliance on those profits to sustain his family’s current lifestyle raises issues of his authenticity within his continued journey. Charity described her work with children and their insistence on her authentic presence as she teaches, performs, and inspires, but even she added that

obviously, you don’t pull it off in every moment and obviously you are a grownup and have to deal with this stuff... but that gift of being inspired to challenge yourself and to stay in the moment and be real and be honest... I see parents miss it all the time, completely miss this insane opportunity for divinity in their arms, a connection with God....

Conversations about such issues help to frame an understanding of authenticity, for they show how human weaknesses and inconsistencies invade any story and that all individuals will find themselves behaving at times in ways that appear inconsistent or flawed, to themselves or to others. Whether looking at the life of Mother Teresa with the obvious good she created or the less public efforts of some of my conversation partners to change the world in ethical ways, human weaknesses occur - yet they do not undermine

the overall journey toward manifesting authentic purpose. Many years ago, Father Steve and I had a conversation in Seattle about the life of Saint Catherine of Siena, who lived from 1347 to 1380 and engaged in behavior that a modern observer might explain by using terms that refer to psychological conditions. To my question about the worth of her contributions, given a contemporary mental health perspective on her behavior, Father Steve replied, “we judge it by its fruits.” Similarly, journeys undertaken by humans will contain flaws and challenges, for all individuals are imperfect. However, the message that inspired is through the examples of these “fruits,” which manifest despite such flaws.

For this reason, inconsistencies did not deter my research participants from their journeys toward finding meaning in their work; rather, they fueled their understanding of the journey by applying it as wisdom and experience to informed understanding and action. Telling the stories of these challenges shows how participants use narrative to give their lives “ethical qualification” (Ricoeur 2005: 103), for

every human act takes place in language. Every act in language brings forth a world created with others in the act of coexistence which gives rise to what is human. Thus every human act has an ethical meaning because it is an act of constitution of the human world. This linkage of human to human is, in the final analysis, the ground work of all ethics as a reflection of the legitimacy of the presence of others (Maturana and Varela 1987: 247).

Father Steve provided insight about the nature of authenticity when he reflected on his own struggles, saying,

when I got back from deployment [to Afghanistan], it was very difficult for me and I basically told the Lord, okay, I will do whatever you put in front of me, and that’s it. ... I [had] really lost a sense of zeal or excitement about work... for the first time in my religious life... [I felt] a real strong sense of apathy, or lack of meaning.

This temporary apathy contains lessons, for he did not let it undermine the authenticity of his work. Rather, he used it as an opportunity to reflect on how individual interpretation

of a life can be incomplete at a particular moment and requires both ongoing individual thought and the supportive input of others to give it the broader perspective that allows individuals to see life's "fruit" even in periods where inspiration is lacking. This is important, for in order for "narrative identity to be ethically responsible, it must ensure that self-constancy is always informed by self-questioning" (Kearney 1999: 100). Father Steve described this particular life lesson as being analogous to a backpacking trip, where

sometimes there is just something extraordinarily meaningful and beautiful right there and something extraordinarily uncomfortable and this is the last thing I would rather do... [but] you are working with someone else on the same journey and they might be noticing a flower while I might be complaining because I have a blister on my toe.

Through such reflection, Father Steve explained why relationships with others are an integral part of authenticity, for they create the opportunity for individuals to "become better... not by trying to fill the potholes in our souls but by knowing them so well that we can [help each other to] avoid falling into them" (Palmer 2000: 52). Extending Father Steve's metaphor, the analogy that follows suggests that in order to appropriate meaning from the beauty of a flower rather than the pain of a blister, support and reflection must work together to inform the memory of the experience. This can occur because our being "exists beyond itself, forever projecting itself into the temporal horizons of past and present" (Kearney 1999: 36).

I could relate to his metaphor because I once did a 17-day hike in the Sierra Nevada mountains of California with two friends, one who saw beauty despite the physical anguish of a challenging journey for which we were not fully prepared and another who forgot the journey in her focus on the destination, literally saying at one point, "I can't look at the mountains now; I'll look at the pictures when I am done." My



own memory of the trip was informed both by the experiences of my friends and by my own reflection about the eventual meaning the trip held for me. At any particular moment, my pain or awe or frustration or wonder could have elicited a specific response, but it is only with time and reflection that I appropriate the meaning that is authentic for me.

Father Steve noted that a backpacking trip, like a journey toward meaningful work, “has a combination of great moments, of boredom, of joyful moments, of not-so-happy moments and there’s still a sense of [the] unknown... is it going to rain or not... [or] things just crystallize and life is really really good.” This relates also to the journey toward meaning in work, where the relative importance of a particular work experience can only be determined after time and reflection, for individuals are “continually moving beyond... presently absent possibilities” and “always interpreting [authentic being] in light of its possibilities” because time “extends the present toward the possible worlds of past and future” (Kearney 1999: 36-37).

While determining authenticity can require reflection, time, and the help of others, other challenges also occur in the journey to authenticity. Father Steve struggled even with defining his call to be a priest as authentic because he initially lacked any desire for the priesthood; indeed, he was strongly opposed to the very idea. As he pointed out, “it was like, you’ve got to be kidding me, this was just like the weirdest thing. If you want to do something, you usually put the desire of the person into wanting to do it and He didn’t, really.” Instead, he found that his “personal desire was so different from where this intuition was leading and growing toward” and reflected that at the time of his

decision that “the only reason I know that this is real is because it is so disagreeable to me and I can’t shake it loose.”

However, while in Father Steve’s experience desire was unexpectedly missing from his initial experience of discerning authenticity, it did more commonly play a role in the experiences of other participants as they explored career options that would allow them to manifest their authentic being. I met Hank through his youngest daughter, a friend and associate of mine with whom I had shared leadership responsibilities on the Board of Directors for a nonprofit organization. Like my academic colleague who told me that I must converse with Ipek about this topic, Andrea heard me speak of this project and told me that I must discuss this subject with her father, a retired dentist, who would have much to offer this text. When I met him, he was visiting San Francisco from Michigan for the imminent birth of his grandson. His reflection about his work showed integration between profession and family that seemed as natural for him as combining his family-oriented trip with this research conversation. Of his decision to become a dentist, Hank included his own desire as one motivation, noting that “I knew when I was a freshman in high school that that’s what I wanted to do.” Others involved in this project indicated similarly that their interests were paired with desire and together directed their search for authenticity toward their career options. While this is not a universal experience, it is a common one.

Though not all participants experienced lack of desire as a challenge, the journey to purposeful work contains some challenges for all. In order to overcome such challenges, whether in the form of inauthentic moments, lack of desire or other issues, several elements are required. Conversation partners referenced the importance of

community, being solidly grounded in a relationship with God, and having a clear understanding of values and priorities. The call to relationship with the divine influenced the participants' responses in terms of the very intent of the journey itself, for within the context of the immortality of the soul, the topic of authenticity takes on additional significance in terms of the purpose of one's life. While my initial inquiries about this topic assumed the possibility of manifesting authentic being in purposeful work, they did not directly assume a relationship with God, regardless of religious beliefs. However, my research participants voluntarily added information about the role of the divine within this search, elaborating on the importance of a relationship with God to a successful journey. Some went even further, conversing about the nature of that relationship as being primary, with the human results of any work engaged in during this lifetime as secondary. In an informal conversation that occurred at a date subsequent to my taped research discussion with Francisca, she went into some depth about her concern that people placed too much emphasis on the journey itself, rather than understanding that a strong relationship with God was the only relevant destination. She discussed many ideas about her own future in terms of how she imagined her purpose authentically manifesting, but added in our later conversation that those activities were subordinate to, and a result of, her ongoing efforts to maintain a strong relationship with God. In conversations with other participants, I raised this concept for discussion. While they agreed that finding work that manifests authentic purpose is an important goal, they likewise acknowledged a primary focus on the eternal.

Within the perspective of a journey tied to spirituality, it is not surprising that understanding authenticity was never described in material terms; that is, not one

participant expressed a goal of financial success or expected that such success would be tied to manifested purpose. Though meeting basic needs can drive a search for a job, work that manifests authentic purpose is consistently described by those who participated in this investigation as separate from the achievement of material goals. In fact, David said that he looks at “reducing material possessions as a very freeing concept” and said that his previous definitions of success as oriented toward possessions “helped keep me blind to far more important uses of my time.” An absolute separation between earning money and engagement in work that is purposeful is not essential; many of my conversation partners found meaning in work that also provided material benefits. However, others reflected on work as defined in roles that did not earn wages, but instead consistently defined their authentic purpose in terms of serving others. David, for example, said that “this for me is a journey about saving souls” while Marie emphasized that authenticity “comes out in our persona” and reflected on “how many people you can touch, how much you can do with that.” While authentic being is typically reflected in work that serves others, the very act of engaging in work that reflects authentic being is an action that serves others. Charity explained this by saying, “if I would meet somebody, I would get this huge energy hit from them if they were inspired by living their passion.”

As I engaged this research topic, I saw these themes develop with regard to purposeful work that does not necessarily bring even the expectation that material rewards will follow, and so intentionally solicited Lynn’s reflections. I knew that she sees her work as a mother as a vocation, albeit one that lacks both monetary reward and, often, legitimation from others. With regard to the latter issue, she said that “sometimes

people will ask me, what do you do? And I answer, oh, I am a mother. And I am ready to talk about it and I just don't feel that I've gotten the respect." In a separate conversation, Charity added wisdom to this issue, noting that

I don't have control over someone's reaction. ... I've got to do what I need to do, put it out there, ask for what I need... but then letting go of the need for a particular reaction. It's like, I put this out there and, oh, you are going to do that with it, okay, I love you anyway.

When my conversation with Lynn turned to the devalued sense of self that can occur when others fail to recognize her work as meaningful, she offered thoughts that again emphasize the very pervasive nature of an authentic call; she said simply that she needs only to "picture my son and I am whole again." Her memory of previous roles in which she did earn significant financial rewards informed both her strong sense of self in her current role and her satisfaction with the nature of motherhood as a manifestation of her authentic self. Her ability to rely on her own tradition as developed in previous roles can be understood as the "living transmission of an innovation always capable of being reactivated by a return to the most creative moments of poetic activity" (Ricoeur 1984: 68). She reflected on "the money, the control, the power, the recognition, and self-esteem" and said that she "just didn't feel fulfilled, I didn't feel happy. And I was happy to a certain extent, but I just thought, there is something else out there." This reflection on what authenticity is not can thus inform both a motivation to change, if a current job does not reflect authentic being, and can help to provide appreciation for authenticity when found. Memory thus serves to provide insight and help to interpret meaning in the present moment in a way that is most relevant by "liberating the still untapped potentialities of inherited meaning" (Kearney 2004: 67).

## **Journey**

### Introduction

When I look at my own daughters, who were both born while I was enrolled in this program of study, I see a manifestation of my authentic being in my work of being their mother. This journey was itself filled with frustrations but never lacking in either desire or solid conviction that this work represents a purpose for which I was created. I look with awe at their unique gifts and personalities, knowing that they too were created with a specific purpose. Part of what informs my motivation for this investigation is my desire to see them both find success in their own journeys to manifest that unique purpose. I have approached the conversations that inform this investigation with curiosity about the various courses that a journey can take, and with hope that my investigation will help reveal understanding about how a life's purpose can be discerned for my daughters and others whose lives contain as yet untapped potential to manifest authentic purpose.

Those with whom I have spoken share several important attributes. First, the contributors were able to reflect upon this topic, telling stories about their journeys and revealing their individual understanding that discernment of purpose is a commendable goal and a topic worthy of conversation. Contained within this attribute has been the shared and implied understanding that each individual is created with a unique purpose in mind. In an informal follow-up conversation with Francisca, she told me of a talk that she gave to a group of adults who were interested in discerning their purpose. She said that this concept, which was so obvious as to be assumed by those with whom I conversed, was radically exciting to those who had not previously considered it. Further,

while each participant indicated that he or she considers life a journey in which meaning continues to be revealed, each reported some success in the process of discerning purpose to date.

This reported success instigated my initial interest in having conversations with each of these individuals. However, while participants shared the common element of success, the details of each journey were diverse, both in terms of the work in which they found meaning and in the routes that they took to discover meaning in their work. This diversity emphasizes the particularized nature of each individual voyage while simultaneously revealing another theme: each found satisfaction and meaning because their work incorporates as essential the goal of helping others. This illustrates that “we can only hope to recover our ontological *desire to be* by first understanding ourselves as we exist outside of ourselves” (Kearney 2004: 26), for “in the most positive hermeneutic scenario, the self returns to itself after numerous hermeneutic detours through the language of others, to find itself enlarged and enriched by the journey” (Kearney 2004: 2).

As described above, participants recognized authenticity in different ways. Understanding authenticity as individually defined shapes the nature of the journey. While all report feeling called to meaningful work, the individual journeys vary from those in which the work calls the worker, almost involuntarily, to those in which the worker seeks meaning, which may be fleeting and difficult to discern. Father Steve provides a dramatic example of the former example, which I think of as the “burning bush” example, using God’s very unsubtle directions to Moses as a model of a clear calling. Ellen and Hank both described having similar confidence about what they should

do, though neither faced the challenge that Father Steve did with a call that was initially unmatched by desire. In each of their cases, however, the journey did not end with the selected work; rather, finding meaning in work represented an ongoing process as the needs of the world changed.

These experiences are different from those of other conversation partners, who described the search for meaning within their work as an evolution that called them to a series of different activities, some calling for dramatic changes within careers and others to the next steps within a progression of work options. Charity, Ipek, Francisca, Dave, and Lynn were all in positions that most would describe as successful. However, they felt unfulfilled because the work did not match either their passions or their desire to serve others within the opportunities created by their unique talents. Each then made major changes, moving out of the positions that were not personally fulfilling and into completely different fields where different sets of skills were utilized. Marie and Karen took a more gradual and progressive approach to the activities that they engaged as part of their work, but described their journeys not just in terms of their work activities, but inexorably tied to their relationships with God and only evolving as those relationships deepened and matured.

As I reflect on the different stories that my conversation partners told me, I can see elements of my own journey reflected in parts of each of their stories, both in terms of what did occur within my own story and in terms of what I would have liked to have seen happen. To garner meaning from these stories is “to arrive in the middle of a dialogue which has already begun and in which we try to orient ourselves in order to make some new sense out of it” (Kearney 2004: 31) for “in this dialectical encounter in and through



the text, the meanings intended by both author and reader find themselves mutually transformed” (Kearney 2004: 33). This emphasizes the power of stories to “transcend... subjective intentions” and to open up “a world of possible meanings, to new modes of being-in-the-world and of being-interpreted” (Kearney 2004: 32).

For example, I often wished for a “burning bush” to speak to me and yet also feared such an occurrence, knowing that it was possible to have God’s purpose not align with my individual preferences. Fortunately, on the rare occasions when I did get a sudden and strong message about my next step, it came with such confidence and in the midst of such unacknowledged unhappiness that the direction given matched my desire and fueled my courage in overcoming my fear of the unknown. Similarly, at certain points in my career I have taken a “plunge,” most recently quitting a paid position in order to pursue a passion that I know with certainty represents a purpose for my very being, even if it does not simultaneously meet any material goals. Most often, I have found spiritual meaning in the work that I have engaged even while attempting to remain open to the possibility of more meaning and more manifested purpose in different positions. In that sense, my journey has been a progression of related positions.

The particularized nature of each of these journeys intrigues me, as does the fact that I can relate to some elements in each journey I heard. This reflects the “creative capacity of language to open up new worlds” (Kearney 2004: 85) for “to imagine ourselves as we truly are is to imagine ourselves otherwise” (Kearney 2004: 73). I present these stories to inspire others with descriptions of those who have achieved authenticity within their positions as well as to provide insight with regard to the elements that help to drive success within such journeys. In the section above, my

conversation partners spoke with great passion about their work, emphasizing the value of the journey and the excitement of achieving their destination when that is authentically defined. However, such authenticity is meaningless without some indication of how it can be achieved and indeed, where such a journey should begin.

### Starting Points

Father Steve had a dramatic story about his own journey, which appeared consistent with the commitment entailed in his vocation as a priest and yet unexpected in light of his soft-spoken approach and humble demeanor. When I met Father Steve during his first assignment as a priest, he looked so young that my friends and I found subtle ways of asking him his age in order to determine whether someone in such an esteemed position was older or younger than we were. I learned that we very nearly share a birthday, for he is but one day older than I am. This knowledge made me especially appreciative of his excellence within his selected job, for over the years I have noticed that his expressed wisdom is beyond what I would expect from someone with less than a decade's experience as a priest. Moreover, he projects the very essence of authenticity; I have observed and experienced on multiple occasions how his presence at important events contributes to the spirituality of the event (including my own wedding). His recollection of his own journey intrigued me, both because the priesthood represents work that does not allow gradual experimentation and because it so clearly suits his very being.

He describes his starting place in his journey to find spirituality in work as his recollected initial belief in God, saying that as a child, he had a hard time even believing in God. He said that

my Mom tried to raise us Catholic and stuff, but when you are talking to a second grader, it's kind of hard, when it's something that you can't see, touch, taste, or smell and you are still trying to learn your numbers and all of the other stuff of the material world, then on top of it all, you've got to be kidding me! You're trying to tell me that there is somebody who is beyond....

That his own story begins not with a job held but with his very questioning of spiritual belief establishes an interesting component within the developing plot of his evolving sense of finding meaning in his work. The struggle itself becomes an important part of the process: it led him to greater awareness about God, which in turn contributed to his awareness of his calling toward work that would provide meaning most relevant to his very purpose. While his struggles began early and would continue, the very question that drives this investigation was one that he dealt with at a much younger age than other participants. He said that

about the eighth or ninth grade I started to get a – and the best way to describe it, it was kind of an intuition – an intuition that my future might have something with God in store. And I had a lot of mixed feelings about it, because the priesthood didn't look like a very attractive option.... So, I kind of ignored it, but it was during this time that I first recall contemplating what I really want to do with my life.

David had a different experience, holding different jobs in the military and the corporate world before he felt his journey truly begin. He described an experience volunteering in an orphanage in Honduras, during a vacation from his corporate job, as the beginning of his search for meaningful work. Although he did not immediately give up his corporate position, the experience of working with the intent of helping others raised his awareness of the potential for more purpose in his work. From that awareness came his eventual transition through different volunteer experiences to full-time involvement in organizations that seek world peace as their ultimate goal.

Unlike Father Steve, who felt a strong calling early, and David, who developed his sense of purpose after having satisfying experiences helping others at a later stage in life, Karen's story begins dramatically with an experience of emotional abuse so negative that it eliminated from consideration any discussion of meaningful work and plunged her instead into a despair that left her simply trying to survive. She said that,

I like to start by saying that... I had been emotionally abused by a priest who told me that I had a poisoned soul and that I was going to hell when I was seven. So I really believed that was true... I negotiated my whole life around trying to distance myself from my family so that they wouldn't be harmed... it was horrible. By the time I was 29, I was suicidal. I had a voice in my head that would wake me up at night and say, just kill yourself. And one day I realized that the only way I was going to shut that thing up was just to do it!

By the time I was 29 I bought a handgun and I was going to kill myself and instead I had a salvation experience where... God revealed Himself as this huge light in my head and outside my head, everywhere. And this was the moment where I realized that I had a choice. ... and then I just immediately started to pursue that...

From literally saving her life, Karen's story of searching for meaningful work continued to be aligned with her deepening relationship with God. Although she felt joy in her work teaching high school math, her journey took her to seminary school and then to a series of different positions in which her skills as a minister were utilized. The very dramatic negativity of her experience was very different from that described by other participants, yet it simultaneously represents some commonality: many found that the search for meaning within work is inexorably tied both to evolving relationships with God and to the alignment of work with other elements of life, so that there is no separation between volunteer activities, employment, spiritual beliefs and other manifestations of authentic being.

## First Steps

After the journey begins, whether in dramatic form or in a first of a series of evolving steps, participants engaged in serious play as they began to take exploratory steps toward purposeful work. Ipek said of these steps that “you go where there is love.” Father Steve spoke of his intention to pursue the priesthood, for though his call was stronger than that experienced by most, it still ultimately required that he take the very human steps of filling out and sending in an application with necessarily bureaucratic supporting details. His first steps after accepting the existence of God continued to project a struggle, for the sense that “there was something in my future regarding the Lord and specifically the priesthood” was something that he “didn’t want to entertain... because I wasn’t really great on the idea.” He described his struggle as continuing throughout his college years, as he moved from a strong intuition, to active resistance, and finally to acceptance.

So, going into college, I told the Lord, there are some things we can talk about, there are other things that we can’t and won’t. The priesthood thing is not negotiable. ...I [now] believe that there is a God, but I can’t believe that God would ask me to do something I don’t want to do. ...And I got real depressed. I started eating a lot, missing classes, I got really bad grades and all and so, I went to the doctor, thinking, maybe there was something wrong with me.

... At the end... he said, “is there anything big going on in your life, any big changes or anything big that you are having to deal with, or maybe, not dealing with?” And I said no, and then the light went on and this thing with God was totally unresolved and I couldn’t even admit it.

... There were several times during that year where I’d go on faith strike and I’d just decide I’m not going to church on Sunday or that type of thing, really dumb things. Throughout the week, it was kind of funny, because I’d remember it and... I remember one time, I was playing in the marching band, so it was a half time show, we were playing USC, and... all I could think about was... I’m not going to church tomorrow!” ... There were... times when I’d find myself in my room and I couldn’t stand it anymore and I’d just get up and run to church. And this sounds really psycho, but I’d run to church just swearing up a storm, being so angry at God, it was just, calling God names...!

While Father Steve's struggles added both humor and drama to his reflection on his next steps, other participants found that their restless dissatisfaction with their work reflected a different form of struggle. Rather than resisting a specific call, they struggled to find appropriate action to turn discontent into satisfaction through informed choices.

Interestingly, several of my conversation partners used travel or education as an intermediary step between work that they had decided was unfulfilling and their next steps. Lynn said simply, "I just felt like I needed to go." While the intent that drove her desire to travel was based in the "fun things" that she and her husband wanted to do in life, the experience provided the time to reflect on her work and her life as well as providing a transition between her corporate life and her evolving next steps. She said that "the minute we went on our trip, that's when everything changed. I got away from that environment and it's almost like I allowed myself to say, it's okay, I don't have to be a successful business woman. I was identifying myself so much with that, that was my identity." Ellen spoke similarly of travel as a step in evolving her thinking about life's purpose, though in her case she noticed it in the students with whom she traveled to Southeast Asia, indicating that they would initiate individual conversations with her about their imagined futures and how they hoped to contribute to the needs of the world.

Similarly, Francisca quit a high-powered corporate banking job in order to pursue a second Master's degree, this one in theology. She described her own spiritual journey as a chrysalis, saying that as a banker, she was in a "caterpillar stage... just busy, almost mindlessly consuming whatever nourishment or whatever I needed at that time," whereas in her current stage as a student she feels "like I am growing, but I am still in this little chrysalis and it will be nice when I can stretch out" into the butterfly stage. She pointed

out that “the Greek word for butterfly is ‘psyche,’ which means soul,” indicating her eagerness to “fly” from her transition stage as a student into work that will authentically manifest the purpose of her soul. While she described her current work as a theology student as the achievement of a dream, she also noted that “it’s not necessarily the conclusion, it’s a stage, and it’s a transformative stage... preparing me for that next period of what I will be doing with that part of my life.”

However, for those who have experienced evolving purpose in their work, the journey itself takes on an authentic nature, as the very search for ongoing meaning within a career or even a single position engages serious exploration of different options. Ellen, who has been a professor at the University of San Francisco for over two and a half decades, talked of her work as a “gift.” Hank, who likewise held the same position as a dentist for his entire career, used the analogy of a “treasure hunt” to describe his journey. Both saw their purposes manifested in their work with others - students, patients, colleagues, or family - and both said that their ongoing journeys provided evolving meaning as the needs of the others with whom they interacted changed. Ellen spoke of matching her academic interests to the interests of her students and how their natural gravitation toward one another provided opportunities to “just play... seriously play,” combining better and different understandings of hermeneutic scholars with the needs and interests of her students. Similarly, Hank said that “I had this treasure hunt, in all different aspects: I had no idea where the family was going to go, it was a treasure though, certainly one that I embraced, as was dentistry, as was my faith, all of these things...”

## Reflecting on Threads

Participants described initial steps on their journey toward finding spiritual meaning in work as “serious play” that took different forms, from the highly academic to travel adventures. However, such “play” did not occur randomly; it was often informed by reflection about earlier experiences, for within those experiences lie common threads that inform the imagination as the search continues. These threads keep “the future from dissolving into fantasy” by utilizing “intermediary projects within the scope of social action” (Kearney 1999: 80). I asked many of the participants to describe a metaphor that represented their journey to date, knowing that Kearney (2004: 52) uses Ricoeur to explain that metaphor “thrives by virtue of the fact that it introduces the spark of imagination into a ‘thinking more,’ ... which is at root a seeing more and a saying more – [attesting] to the curious paradox that ‘the concept of imagination... is also a ‘logic of discovery.’ Such reflection and its subsequent revelations provide knowledge that informs discernment about next steps in the journey, for memory and imagination work together to inform, ignite, and drive an ongoing journey of purpose. This is essential, for Ricoeur adamantly states that “one of the most pressing tasks facing our culture... is to ensure a creative relationship between tradition and the historical future,” (Kearney 1999: 80) which requires the engagement of both memory and imagination

For myself, I have found that such threads take different forms: those that are apparent even with minimal reflection and those that lead to revelation only after a longer period of reflection. For example, I currently engage in much imagining about how my life will incorporate teaching as my work progresses, both with my daughters and within an employment context. This interest has evolved from a natural role as the oldest child



teaching younger siblings, to required presentations on employment law issues I reluctantly made for groups of employees in my first roles as a Human Resources professional, to enjoyment of the development and presentation of training modules that reflected my embrace of continuous learning concepts for myself and for others with whom I worked. As I consider these and other “threads” of teaching in my life, I can think of many examples, both positive and more challenging. However, I have struggled much more to recognize other threads of passion in my life, even when in retrospect they appeared both obvious and indications of where my authentic being resided. For example, when I had my first daughter, I agonized over my decision about returning to work. Only later did I recognize that I had made choices throughout my adult life to support the only obvious choice for me, and only with time was I able to recognize authenticity of the messages that so many friends and colleagues had provided to affirm my decision.

The retrospective obviousness of my choice drives my curiosity about how others effectively used reflection about their own lives to inform future decisions in a way that supports growth. Francisca reflected upon the importance of reflection on past experiences in order to look for patterns, saying that with practice she learned “to synthesize the things I’ve learned as a banker, in school, in the other experiences I’ve had... and [being in school] is a chance to sit back, allow these things to coalesce, and start to make sense and see patterns.” She emphasized the connection between memory and imagination, noting that the process of looking for patterns can be humbling, but also that “this is really good for me. When you are a banker and you’ve done things for so long, it becomes second nature and you are just on auto-pilot. Is that really living?” This

understanding of imagination as “the very instrument of the critique of reality” “simultaneously [juxtaposes] two different worlds – real and unreal... [and thus produces] new meaning” (Kearney 2004: 38).

Ipek has a similar background to that of Francisca, combining banking with a period of reflection while in theology school before launching a completely different career as a life coach. She similarly reflected upon the threads of interests that she sees in looking back at her career. Despite her career success in banking, she consistently ended up doing tasks within her banking job that were reflective of her deeper interests, noting that she “was the person who built relationships and reached out to clients” rather than seeking positions where she would be “number crunching or underwriting.” She noted that while working as a banker, she had her blinders on, you are just so... you don’t know what else there is out there... all I knew that that I wasn’t happy. And so I just took a leap of faith into the abyss....”

Father Steve tried to avoid the thread in his life that called him because he did not feel a desire to move in the direction of the call. However, avoiding such reflection took a physical and emotional toil on him, as described above. He recognized that “this thing with God was totally unresolved” and now says that he is able to “look back at that and recognize a certain degree of completion that the Lord was bringing to my life, even though I didn’t recognize it at the time.” He said that

some people are very head focused and they make their list of pros and cons; for me, I am more gut focused, so... I look back at memories and experiences and say, were these essential or inessential? Do they line up and point in a general direction, these experiences, or are they just a collection of separate experiences that I am forcing a meaning upon them... is there a real magnetism there, or am I just hoping that there is?

Such reflection takes practice, or “serious play;” it also takes a maturity informed by experience, for someone with many years upon which to reflect will have a clear advantage over someone who is younger and has less material upon which to reflect. While obvious, this has implications for those who are seeking meaning in their work, for reassurance that the journey has some future potential to succeed may help to alleviate the angst of youth.

Many contributors reflected upon their relationship with God, for that relationship connected participants to the purpose of their creation as well as to others. Both of these provided meaning as participants searched for work that manifested their authentic purpose. However, their relationship with God took different forms, many of them different from a typical image of a devout follower. Father Steve challenged God in frustration and resignation, describing the language of his prayers in vivid terms. He said that he addressed God by saying,

you’ve got to make me [become a priest] and you’ve got to make me want to do it more than anything else, and beyond that, you’ve got to change my mind, you’ve got to change my head and everything because I can’t... but if you want me to do it, then I will. And I even added this on, which was more out of spite than anything else... and if you’re going to bother doing such a miraculous job, don’t just go ahead and do it half way, make me good at it... I just tossed that in.

Karen likewise spoke of her relationship with Jesus and explained that it developed despite similarly overt resistance from her that finally took the form of a dare. She recalls saying to Him,

here’s the thing, I’m a nonbeliever, I’m committed to not believing, but it seems like there is something going on between us. So if you have something to say and you make yourself obvious, I’ll do whatever you ask me to do.

In her case, the responding call again lacked the subtlety that causes others to spend more time in discernment. She recalled that

one day I went home and I sat down on my bed – I don't know what I was doing – and – this has happened a couple of times – the voice of God came in the back of my head... and He said, I love what you are doing, your work is great and I just want you to be more overt about me. Which I couldn't do [where I was teaching] at the Jewish Day School because I was Christian and God said, I want you to go to seminary. ... I knew that I had been told and there was nothing I could do!

While engaging in spirited conversations with God showed the depth of the struggle and provided valuable insight to some participants, others also remarked on the importance of their relationship with God, though they described it in much more subtle terms. Marie, who spoke enthusiastically and definitively about God's influence in all areas of her life, still acknowledged that discerning "what God is talking to you about" is "very hard to do." Francisca similarly described a methodical means of reflecting upon her past experiences within the specific context of her relationship with God in order to inform their search for purposeful work, explaining the value of the concept of charisms as part of her journey toward finding purpose in her work. She valued the experience of attending a "Called and Gifted" workshop, which uses a questionnaire, facilitated discussion, and guided exploration to help discern what gifts each individual was given by the Holy Spirit at baptism in order to serve others.

I attended the workshop with Francisca several years ago and helped to facilitate both individual and group discernment discussions following the workshop and I found the concept of charisms similar to what Ellen described as "witnessing, [letting] Christ speak through you." Francisca recalled that the workshop helped to provide focus and direction to her search as well as providing a framework for necessary exploration. It also provided her the freedom to concentrate on the uniqueness of her purpose, for it is conducted within a Christian context that looks at the relationships between each individual and the rest of the world. It acknowledges that no individual is called to fulfill

the needs of the entire world but, rather, that each person has a particular role that works in concert with others to meet greater goals. Francisca described this knowledge as giving her “permission not to feel like I should be doing something different, that we are many parts, one body. That perhaps someone is really good at mercy and even though mercy is a virtue... I can be merciful without having the charism of mercy.”

Francisca’s own story of discernment included the methodical approach outlined through the workshop, as well as other steps that reflected her intentional search to tie purposeful work to her spiritual beliefs. When I first met Francisca, she was a successful banker who had progressed through a series of promotions in banking, steps that represented both her talents and a means to financial success. However, she had just begun to get more involved with parish and social justice activities as part of an effort to find more meaning in her life. After several years of increased parish involvement and concurrent changes in banking positions, Francisca abandoned her search for meaning in banking and took the intermediate step of entering theology school, which has provided both additional knowledge and ideas that have fueled her imagination about next steps. Her ongoing story is now driven both by past success and by informed imagination, as she considers ways to engage her financial skills in a spiritual setting so that her charisms of teaching, knowledge, service, faith, and wisdom are best used to help others.

Participants also reflected upon how their relationship with God affected their journeys, sustaining them during periods of chaos and providing perspective on fortuitous events. Ellen spoke of the challenges that she faced when the program that she had developed was curtailed, saying that her initial disappointment turned to gratitude for the decision. She recognizes the events now as “all God. He took it away, which was good,

it was wonderful” because she found that the change that initially disheartened her led to increased satisfaction with the classes, students, research and related writing that she currently engages with enthusiastic joy. Francisca likewise told stories of obstacles that she had encountered in her studies, and with which she had dealt by asking herself whether there was anything that she could do about them. Since they mostly related to her fear of the unknown future, she simply “left it to God and said, ‘if this is what you want, here are the obstacles, take care of them.’” Similarly, Marie repeated over and over, about different accomplishments, “it wasn’t odd, it was God.” She emphasized this several times, not only repeating it but directing that I repeat it to others, telling me how her understanding of the role of God in her work not only provided perspective to her philanthropic accomplishments, but to the challenges she experienced in her life. For example, when describing her mother’s gradual physical decline and death and the difficulty of that loss, which was compounded by the sudden death of her father only two days later, she reported that “it was the strongest I’d ever been in my life, because I just knew that that was the plan of God.” “Somehow,” she said, “he knows how to help you through things. Somehow, it happens. You begin to feel love and more... acceptance.”

Some participants described such feelings of strength despite the apparent contradictory life situations as “things just falling into place.” This helped inform participant’s sense that they were on the right path within their unique journeys. Karen startled me with the drama of her own story. As horrible as it is to imagine an adult making a hurtful statement to a child, worse was her recollection of the effect that it had on her, for her pain and related acting-out behaviors perpetuated the isolation that she felt. The hair on my arms rose with goose bumps as she described in emotional terms her

agony and my heart ached for the unnecessary distress that she had experienced. Considering the course of her life to the point where she had decided to end it, she said, “I was really bad. When you believe that you are going to go to hell in your 20s, you do terrible things to people and it’s a miracle that no one was harmed... I had been horrible.” I expected, therefore, that her journey from that point would be a difficult struggle; however, she said that, to the contrary, “it all kind of came along. Options just showed up. Every time I’m at a place where I don’t know what to do next, the universe goes, there you are.”

She experienced this sense of things falling into place again after a difficult transition in which her success in her first ministry position after finishing theology school was met with resentment and, ultimately, the elimination of her position. She lost this job within days of the death of her mother and right before Christmas, making this time again a miserable one, and took her subsequent step toward meaningful work simply because “it was just time to get work.” She explained that “the universe just drops me off in different neighborhoods” as a way of explaining how “it all just lined up just perfectly, the unemployment ended at just the right time, this job came along at the right time.” In fact, she said that she was so confident that she did not even feel any tension about either the unemployment or the suitability of the next job; instead, she said that she felt confidence about the direction of her life because of her belief that “you can choose what you imagine” and that she subsequently trusted the unfolding of events as her next employment simply fell into place.

When David experienced things falling into place, it was so amazing that he referred to it as a miracle. He had described his journey from a corporate position in

which he felt no spiritual fulfillment to his current role as one that began during a volunteer trip to an orphanage in Honduras. That experience so inspired him that he determined to duplicate the success of the Honduran orphanage in Liberia, despite his complete lack of experience with either the task or the region. He said that

what happened – which is really miraculous – is I felt this call, God’s call. And specifically for Liberia – and this is before I knew anything about Liberia. And so when I flew into the country, God put me on a plane with some of the key officers of the new government. So even before I went through customs, I had all kinds of things set up through the cabinet members. One thing I know – and this message will stay with me for the rest of my life – we have to be open to the messages that God gives us. And I feel like that whole experience is witnessing miracles that are still in the process of unfolding.

David transformed his inspiration into tangible action, taking an idea, or call, and moving despite apparent obstacles directly toward his intended outcome. As he did so, seemingly insurmountable obstacles cleared and in the mere three weeks that he had set aside for the purpose, he traveled to a country in a continent where he had never before been, cut through innumerable levels of red tape, hired staff, and set up an entire orphanage, designed to be self-sustaining and one in which the individuals orphaned take an active role in managing and maintaining. Such an outcome indeed appears miraculous and yet was reported by many as an indication that their journey toward authentic meaning was indeed on course. The complications in a journey reflect Ricoeur’s concept of a ‘long route,’ which “examines the various inevitable detours which interpretation undergoes through language, myth, ideology, the unconscious, and so on – *before* it arrives at the ultimate limit of Being” (Kearney 2004: 22).

#### Staying on Course: Challenges

Participants reported that at other times things did not “simply fall into place,” and reflected on how this distraction from the journey’s purpose also informs



understanding. Challenges arise in each journey and have the potential to derail the course of the search itself, so finding ways to move past or around challenges or learn from them are also important parts of the journey toward authenticity expressed through purposeful work.

Francisca put the issue of challenges into perspective, noting that “we can’t really idealize our purpose, because I think that when we are doing it, we may not feel a completion. I think that people are looking for this sense that it is going to be perfect – I think that we idealize too much.” She reflected on her belief that the journey itself is about transformations, noting that while she believes that her current graduate studies in theology do represent a manifestation of her authentic purpose, they also represent a “desert,” explaining that

you look at the Old Testament and the Israelites after they left bondage in Egypt and I feel like... I’ve left my bondage in terms of the corporate world and the materialism associated with that, but then I have to go through the desert to... get to the Promised Land.

This outlook puts the challenges inherent in any journey into perspective, for understanding that complete satisfaction is ever-fleeting leads to an acceptance of ongoing dissatisfaction and unrest. This in turn drives further exploration of the evolving journey of purpose, for when individuals “retain a questioning attitude” they engage the “hermeneutic imagination to be inside tradition [and] ... to be simultaneously outside it, [for]... to imagine ourselves as we truly are is to imagine ourselves otherwise” (Kearney 2004: 73).

Karen’s position at the time of our conversation was another example of ongoing exploration within an authentic journey, for though she believes that it represents the right interim step, she knows that it will not ultimately satisfy her need to manifest her

authentic purpose. After losing her job and her mother and taking time to heal from both losses, she began to seek work and immediately found it. She was offered, and accepted, a position as the Director of Home and Hospital Visitors, where she ministered to people who were facing issues associated with death and dying. Given her experience, both personally and professionally, the position represented an opportunity to manifest her authentic purpose at that point in her life. She expressed appreciation for the “controlled falling” that she described as a metaphor for her journey with God thus far. She said that the position and organization were uniquely appropriate to meet her needs at that point in her life, especially as for the first part of her tenure there “I was still really grief-stricken and the people have been great about that.” However, she then faced the challenging realization that the job was “increasingly... uncomfortable isn’t the right word because I don’t mind being uncomfortable... it’s increasingly out of integrity for me.” She added that

it’s been a hard place to work... not even sure I really think that [the organization’s] principles are all that great... there’s just been so much bad behavior and disruption. ... I had to say that I didn’t see [the principles] being acted out at all, so we can talk about that and we can read them at the beginning of the meeting, but there’s no difference if we’re not leading them.

Her story therefore includes apparently contradictory plots that are resolved only through time, for she is clear that her work was aligned with her purpose for a time, but that the organization’s structural issues created a challenge that she will resolve by pursuing her purpose in a different position. This understanding of “the dynamic perspective of ... being-affected-by-the-past” [is] ... in turn related to... historical horizon of expectancy,” for through reflection Karen can “rediscover suppressed potentialities of past meaning” as she imagines her own future. “Indeed, it is only in terms of such an interplay between

memory and anticipation that the ideal image of a reconciled humanity can be invested with an effective history” by taking “concrete steps... toward realizing what is desirable and reasonable. ... Such transaction is a role for hermeneutic imagination” (Kearney 1999: 87). However, inherent in understanding such challenges as integral parts of an evolving journey is the development of tools with which to handle such issues. Karen noted that she relies upon “consciousness and responsibility and spirituality” to support her journey, but she noted that even the development of these tools can be challenging, for “they are not in the easy path. It takes rigor and discipline and putting other things aside that are perhaps more fun or more pleasurable.”

Lynn and I shared the challenges that we experienced in currently feeling called to work that has no material rewards, both for the financial challenges that the work creates and because often work is equated with material gain, which means that our work is often not recognized as having value. My nephew once reacted with surprise when realizing that I no longer had a paid job. I responded to his inquiry by telling him that caring for his cousin was my job. His response was, “but you don’t get paid!” Telling him that hugs and kisses were my pay did not assuage his realistic concern either, for he responded with clear concern that epitomized that which is less clearly expressed by adult observers, saying, “but you don’t make any money!” At eleven years old, he thus clearly articulated what Lynn repeated had occurred in conversations she had had in which her work as a mother “for some reason... isn’t enough... there has to be more.”

I have also felt disrespect and misunderstanding from others and yet, as I told Ellen in conversation, I knew with certainty that I did not “want to miss out on happiness that I can’t have back because I am focused on something that doesn’t really matter.”

Still, despite the certainty that I have felt about my choice to make the change and temporarily give up the material rewards associated with a paid position, making that decision was difficult, both because of the challenges that I felt in terms of others' perceptions and because I had to allow my own sense of identity to evolve. While individual identity "is provided by the narrative conviction that it is the same subject who perdures through its diverse acts and words between birth and death," challenges lie in the evolving "identity of human subjects, [which] is deemed a constant task of reinterpretation in the light of new and old stories we tell about ourselves" (Kearney 1999: 99).

Lynn's story includes intentional action that she took to facilitate that evolving sense of identity. She admitted to experiencing the challenge associated with the fear of losing power, prestige, and money that she believed would occur should she explore more purposeful work, and she initially consoled herself by developing "a sense of security, knowing that I could come back." However, that initial consolation and subsequent change then led to additional challenges, for after the adventures that she experienced when traveling, she still lacked specific direction about where her purpose would manifest and she forced herself

not to go back to the business setting. I almost took a leap... I wanted to become more humble. So that's why I went to a temporary agency, which was extremely challenging for me. I was making nine dollars an hour and knew that I could be making ninety dollars an hour. ... Nobody had any idea of what I had accomplished! And I would go on these assignments. I remember I was working for this one woman, just doing data entry. And I used to write these programs! And I was sitting there, after a while, my eyes were hurting so bad after four or five hours and I got up, I told her that I needed a break, could we work out a different schedule, could I do something else... and she just absolutely refused!

This intentional embrace of experiences that she found humbling worked to help Lynn to address some of her fears with regard to the journey toward more purposeful work, for the new experiences were ones that she intentionally selected because they lacked that which she had initially feared losing. While remaining unemployed would have provided the same experience of loss, choosing to take employment in positions where such losses were emphasized helped her to face, accept, and then welcome changes.

Francisca acknowledged the power that a personal fear of failure can have on the decisions that people make about their work. She agreed that many fail to do what Lynn did and instead “react too blindly or too uncritically of those fears.” She articulated for herself what Lynn had practiced, asking of herself “what is the worst thing that can happen?” Still, despite receiving some consolation from her reflection on the answers to this question, Francisca did acknowledge ongoing anxiety about her next steps, saying “I love school and... having to go back to work is completely different.” She noted that with age comes wisdom, insight, and experience, but that time also brings with it additional challenges “because in that first job, we’re not scared, everything is new to us, so we don’t have anything invested.” Furthermore, changes in employment after more years invested in a particular career can bring measurable costs in income lost, promotions deferred, and other material investments compromised. Francisca spoke of this as an additional challenge that she had to overcome in order to pursue her interest in studying theology, acknowledging that she had actually put a significant dollar figure on the repercussions of her decision. By doing so, she confronted her fears head on and was able to accept the consequences of her decision by quantifying it.

Charity likewise used specific questions to help put her choices into a perspective that was consistent with her values and her authentic purpose. She discussed the concept of “choosing fear or love” and said that when faced with a challenging choice she asked herself, “so, are you operating from a place of fear, which includes separation, or is it love?” She then described the lessons she learned from her own experience of using the wrong motivation. I first met Charity when my then 21-month-old daughter and I began taking her JAM (Joy and Music) classes. One day, while we helped to bring equipment into the studio, Charity mentioned that she had been an engineer but that after having her first child, she was “psychically not in that place anymore,” describing her temporary transition back to her previous job, even though it was now offered on a part-time basis. I knew then that I wanted to talk further with her and we worked together to ensure that her voice became part of this project. She later elaborated on her earlier statement, saying that her choice to return to work in a part-time status was not a good choice, given her motivations and strong desire to be elsewhere. She said that she “went back to that job because [her husband] really wanted me to and I was afraid of what it meant to stand up for myself in that situation.” In this case, her recollection of making the mistake of choosing out of fear rather than love drove her reflection about the damage of such a choice and fueled her determination not to do so again.

Participants also noted that they dealt with challenges by exercising patience, through humor, and by recognizing the layers of meaning inherent in any given experience. Father Steve and I discussed the metaphor of a backpacking trip for a journey toward purposeful work and he said, “I think sometimes we just have to wait. Either the clouds go or... a combination of things will come up and change it.” I recalled

a travel adventure with my mother through Bolivia in which our train got stuck in the jungle while we remained trapped in very uncomfortable physical surroundings. Rather than complain about an event that we could not control, my mother and I instead entertained ourselves by giggling at the imagined reactions of horror with which other members of our family would have reacted to the situation. By doing this, the greater meaning of our adventure lay in increased camaraderie with each other, turning an uncomfortable event into a fun experience that deepened the friendship that sustains us each in many ways each day. Work experiences can become similarly invested in unanticipated meaning, including developing friendships within which care and concern manifest in action that becomes purposeful work, for

the realm of human affairs, strictly speaking, consists of the web of human relationships which exists wherever men live together. The disclosure of the “who” through speech, and the setting of a new beginning through action, always fall into an already existing web where their immediate consequences can be felt. Together they start a new process which eventually emerges as the unique life story of the newcomer, affecting uniquely the life stories of all those with whom he comes into contact (Arendt 1958: 183).

For example, I recently spoke with a former colleague who worked under my supervision several years ago. We recalled the time that we had worked together, a difficult time for me in which failed organizational understandings created enormous pressure on me as the Director of Human Resources. Despite the unfairness of the challenges posed from outside of our group, the senior managers who worked under my supervision developed into a team; my former colleague recalled this experience fondly within his own career as “the time of Camelot.” His recollection helped to put my own experience in perspective, reminding me that my purpose at that point in my work was not manifested so much in

the product as in the people, who were sustained both professionally and personally through the relationships that grew through the development of that team.

Father Steve told a similar story of a lesson learned while deployed in Afghanistan. As a result of a discussion with a British military colleague, his friend pointed out the differences in leisure activities between the troops from the United States and those from other countries. As they walked from tent to tent in which service men and women were spending their days off, he noticed that those from the United States remained busy with activities, doing projects, writing letters, and otherwise engaged in ways that were oriented toward “being productive.” This he contrasted with the leisure activities of service people from other countries who appeared less “productive,” but were engaged in activities in which they were more present to one another. While we agreed that both types of activities have value, including an orientation toward continuous improvement that can manifest in projects, Father Steve also noted that the result of a culture in which projects are valued more than the presence required for relationships tends to “cultivate dissatisfaction. We’re very goal-oriented, which is great, it’s a beautiful culture... but we are always having stuff to do and we are task-oriented and so do kind of focus on not enjoying the journey... there’s always something interesting to be encountered every day.” This comment epitomizes a common challenge encountered in the journey of finding meaning in work; that is, the difficulty of focusing on being an authentic presence for others and of valuing the effort that it requires as purposeful work.

As I conclude my reflections on these challenges, my daughter reminds me how such an orientation is so inherently rooted in the call to authenticity in every individual.



At two and a half months old, her needs are clear and my work to meet them equally obvious as I feed, change, and bath her. However, purposeful work goes far beyond such obvious activities, whether in childcare or in other callings: in addition to having her physical needs met, she calls me to be present to her, to simply hold her, to smile at her, to giggle together with the enthusiasm and joy of life. Rather than creating a “straitjacket of an insular present,” her obvious “horizon of possibilities [that give] my life world significance” unveils the possible, “which alone renders our lives authentic” (Kearney 1999: 38). Doing so, she reminds me that being authentically present in work is a noble task well worth the challenges of the pursuit. In an informal conversation, a children’s gymnastics instructor gave me a similar example. Denise described her approach to her position, including the relationships that developed between she and the children whom she taught. One day, one of her students arrived and was “not herself,” expressing no verbal distress but revealing in subtle body language significant stress. Denise looked at her and asked with concern, “did you have a rough day?” and the authenticity of her presence to this child merited a heart-felt response as the little girl threw herself into Denise’s arms and began to sob. Her trauma was not extraordinary and the specifics not even remembered, but the relationship that was revealed simply through the attention to authentic presence made a difference to Denise as she remembered the meaning that she gained from her work.

### Linking Authenticity to Oneself As Another

The authenticity of the journey, including inherent challenges, is linked to the construct of oneself as another, which recognizes that meaningful work is most often found in work that serves others. Charity began our conversation by referencing a quote

by Marianne Williamson. It emphasizes the link between authenticity and oneself as another by reinforcing that living authentic lives frees others to do the same.

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others (Williamson 1992: 190-191).

Charity explained that this concept is “basically about, who are you to think that you are anything less than beautiful, brilliant, just bursting with passion, creativity, gifts to the world...” She added that “if you dull that at all, you are letting the universe down.” This understanding about how an authentic life is revealed is reflected in two main themes that emerged from my research conversations. First, living an authentic life is inspiring, and doing so changes the world by creating more opportunity for others to do the same. Further, stories of meaningful work are rooted in stories of the other, which is manifested in lives lived in community, in service, and in a conscious relationship in which the needs of the other become the needs of oneself, for “the employment of practical wisdom draws upon good counsel... oriented toward realization of the good life - which always essentially involves the good life in common” (Barash 1999: 35).

### Oneself as Another

Authenticity is inextricably tied to the concept of oneself as another, for the very essence of individual identity incorporates a moral relationship with others. This is

grounded even in biology, where “all behavior is a relational phenomenon” (Maturana and Varela 1987: 171), and is tied to the fact that

every human act takes place in language. Every act in language brings forth a world created with others in the act of coexistence which gives rise to what is human. Thus every human act has an ethical meaning because it is an act of constitution of the human world. This linkage of human to human is, in the final analysis, the ground work of all ethics as a reflection of the legitimacy of the presence of others (Maturana and Varela 1987: 247).

Each of the participants in this investigation expressed an instinctive understanding of this, telling the stories of their journeys toward meaningful work and describing the elements of the work that gave them a sense of purpose as narratives of individuals in relationship with and oriented toward others. The “others” were as varied as the stories told and ranged from individuals represented by clients, patients, colleagues, and specific students to broader concepts and organizations embodied in Catholic Church, the armed forces, world peace, local communities, and political party affiliations.

The world unfolded as my conversation partners told the stories of the emerging ways that they had found to serve others within their career choice; they described having their very identities surface as their relationships with others deepened through work. Ellen’s experience sharing knowledge with her students epitomized this, for she is a well-loved professor who has introduced many students to concepts that have changed the course of their lives and their careers. Still, her orientation toward her work reflects the metaphor of a “gift,” showing the duality of the interchange between herself and those who have benefited directly and indirectly from her work. I met Ellen when I first enrolled as a doctoral student at the University of San Francisco; I recall that she called me at work to welcome me to the program. In class, she honored my potential by

assuming that I held interests and was pursuing opportunities that I had barely begun to understand. Her enthusiasm and love of her students inspired me and I found myself challenged academically in ways I had never experienced while at the same time feeling almost giddy with my own enthusiasm for the subjects being presented. I recall telling a friend that I felt like I was drowning, in that the information presented was so foreign to me, and yet I simultaneously felt so much excitement by the opportunity to acquire this new knowledge.

Ellen's previous success in different fields show the emergence of her passion, for though she found other work "rewarding," she "didn't find [herself] delving into the issues that were meaningful to me... it's nice, but it's not the same as teaching students and learning with them about things that I think are important." She also had the opportunity to see "how students change in what they learn, how their lives change." Students come to her and tell her, "I don't want to do my job anymore. I don't want to live the way I've been living. I'm creating something in my life so that I can be really free to serve people, to do something different." Her enthusiasm for learning with her students demonstrates the concept of oneself as another in that her identity is tied to those whom she serves. This also affects the other work that she engages, for part of her teaching includes taking students overseas to participate in the research that she does in development. That work, says Ellen, has likewise "affected my giving, it's affected how I spend the spare time I do have, and it's drawn me very close to my family...." Her spiritual life similarly coheres, for "how I teach... my lectures, my writings, open doors for thinking about [spirituality]." These inextricable links between volunteer work, research, teaching, learning, giving, and Ellen's spirituality demonstrate the fiction

behind the unnecessary glorification of life “balance” and instead reinforce the value of integration, which occurs when identity is linked in an authentic way to relationships with others.

Other participants echoed Ellen’s understanding of oneself as another. Hank described dentistry as a “natural way to serve” that fulfilled the “need to serve others” that family traditions had modeled. His volunteer work in an inner city clinic for 40 years was an extension of that service. He said that it was “just the way that we were brought up, you had to give back.” However, doing so was not limited to a specific volunteer activity or even to his dentistry practice; rather, it was manifested holistically in his relationships with his own family, his marriage, his staff, and his business partners.

Other conversation partners had ambitious and far-reaching concepts of the other that included cohesion between political parties and other methods for achieving peace around the world. Karen, who had described having so little personal peace for so long, spoke of her desire to bring peace and understanding to Democrats and Republicans

to see if there is a place that we can stand that is for something instead of against something or against each other. I assert that until Democrats and Republicans stop killing each other off, of course the government is not going to work. Of course there are going to be injustices in the world, of course there is going to be crappy education. Of course! Of course!

In passionately and enthusiastically refusing to objectify political opponents, Karen instead reflected on the lack of constructive interaction between them as an affront to her legacy as a citizen of the United States as well as to her desire to work for broad and lasting peace. She referred to history, noting that

the Republicans and the Federalists did not agree with each other about how to get the job done, they didn’t agree... but they were mature enough and they were spiritually aligned enough... see that’s where it wasn’t their inner guidance, it was

something... the Republicans, the Federalists, and then their relationship also got a vote. And that's how the great experiment was created.

Such an orientation toward work as a relationship with the other reminds me of an article I read many years ago about a man who had sought meaning in work throughout his life in a series of progressive promotions in a variety of different organizations. While I do not remember the source of the article, the content impressed and I especially recall the lesson that this man learned: that meaningful work is inextricably tied to service to others and that real satisfaction in work does not exist separate from this concept. In that article, the man retired after a career that fit a materialistic description of success; yet he reported finding satisfaction in his work only when he began volunteering for a service that provided meals to people who were unable to leave their homes. While this work was neither lucrative nor representative of activities that utilized his particular business talents, it satisfied him because of the connection that he felt to others and therefore, to an authentic self that included his spiritual need to be in community with others.

I shared this story with some of my conversation partners during this research and found that it resonated. Francisca similarly pursued success through a lucrative career in banking and now agreed that “material things and the outside world are not what are going to make you happy.” However, the journey toward finding the work that does bring happiness, satisfaction, and purpose appears different for each person. As previously shared in this text, half of the participants reported having felt frustration in work that provided no purpose; this angst led to significant changes that launched quests for more meaningful work. The other participants experienced fewer dramatic changes in profession, but instead told stories of discerning evolving levels of meaning in their work and finding that their unique purpose was revealed in subtle ways that required reflection

and attention. Regardless of the particular route that the journey took, each reported finding meaning in work in which their identities were revealed through their relationship with others. Marie was blunt about the importance of this understanding, saying that “I try to help people as much as I can because... I do it almost for selfish reasons, I know that’s why I am here and I should be doing it. If you don’t do it, you are missing the boat.”

Marie’s blunt language use permeates her story and is reflective of a woman who is confident in her relationship with God, understands her role in her community, and takes righteous pride in the results of her work to raise her eight children. When I met her at her home in Modesto, she began by asking where my daughter was. She showed me the cookies that she had arranged for her visit and the swings that Katherine could have enjoyed, had I not substituted my initial plans for a family trip to Marie’s home with child-care arrangements with my parents in San Francisco so that Katherine would not have to miss a well-loved music class with Charity. Marie took charge of our introduction, showing me the books and audio tapes that she had gathered to share with me and telling me that she wanted to begin our formal conversation with a prayer. After a rich discussion, she concluded by sharing a recent family photo, revealing obvious pride in her children and grandchildren, pride defined both in terms of their achievements but also inclusive of their successful relationships with God. She thus confidently demonstrated that which she revealed in her own story of her journey, a life that was informed by past experiences and future expectations to draw her ever closer to God through service to others.

Marie's story was punctuated with her unique rhyme, applied to different situations, "it isn't odd, it's God." While uniquely representative of her particular personality, her rhyme also depicted a theme that was commonly disclosed by my conversation partners, that finding oneself in others must include finding oneself in relationship with God. Marie noted that "everything stems from that relationship... there's nothing that doesn't. Romantic love stems from it, mother and child, friendships..." Her story of finding meaningful work spans all elements of life, from raising her children to teaching elementary school to numerous philanthropic projects. She expressed delight in her work and her life, saying that

it is just wonderful to go through life, to be on this journey, and to know who to thank for it. It makes it so much more beautiful. It's like Technicolor versus black and white. Even when things aren't perfect, it's still Technicolor. Everything in our life, the way that we handle things, the way that our spirit is much more joyful. You know, you see people with no sparkle in their eyes, you know that they are consumed with other things. And if they start out remembering to say, please God, show me the way this day and thank you again at night....

Marie's enthusiastic gratitude toward God may appear at first glance to represent an obvious satisfaction with a life full of material rewards, for she married into a prominent and wealthy family and our conversation was conducted in a large home on expansive grounds, surrounded by family vineyards. However, her journey is one that is full, incorporating success, joy, and love as well as sadness and challenges. In addition to the nearly simultaneous deaths of her parents, she experienced what no one should have to experience: the death of her teenage son to a rare form of lupus. She has also been challenged with having two daughters experience breast cancer, a trial that is ongoing for her and her family. Marie's relationship with God has not spared her the pain of any of these events; indeed, she acknowledged that she struggled with alcohol abuse after the



death of her son. However, the relationship does sustain her and provides a sense of meaning that drives her ongoing embrace of philanthropic projects that serve others.

Ipek spoke specifically of her spiritual practices and their orientation toward the other, again connecting oneself as another and spirituality. She said that

one of my spiritual practices is unconditional positive regard for people, wherever they are and if I feel like I don't really like somebody, oftentimes there is a message there, what's going on with me that that is bringing up. And how can I find a way to come to a place of love with this person. And if and when I can manage to do that, oftentimes the results are quite cool because then that person feels real love.

In connecting spirituality and oneself as another so consciously, Ipek projects her spirituality into her work, specifically bringing God's love to her clients and thus showing the value of self-leadership and the effect that it can have on others.

David provided insight about how such a relationship with God also carries the potential to inform organizations, noting that "what sustains any lasting group is community, service to the poor, and prayer or a spiritual dimension. Everything else will eventually pass away." He reflected on the importance of grounding organizations in order to ensure that they are sustainable, noting that without being grounded in a spirituality that manifests in community and service, the organization will lack the leadership to grow. He told me of his experience at an orphanage in Honduras where he worked with a priest who had established such a model and said that "Father Cook, who started it, could die tomorrow and everything would go on because the leadership has been in place for years."

David initially got involved in this organization when he went to Honduras with little overseas experience apart from the time he spent in the military more than a decade earlier. He found himself inspired by the efforts and successes of Father Cook's

orphanage, because it served those in need in a way that mandated economic self-sufficiency, for the individuals served as well as for the organization as a whole. The orphanage is economically sustained through “businesses at 11 sites in Honduras and he has programs in place for financial independence.” He was so impressed with the strength that this model creates for lasting change that he traveled to Liberia himself to create a similar model that likewise allowed both for local ownership of the program and for its growth. Currently, that enterprise includes an orphanage and a school that can serve about 400 people. The school does charge tuition in order to promote true investment in the school’s success, but David said that

the tuition can be a chicken, or whatever they can afford. If the kids have nothing, we let them do chores for their tuition. So, everything is geared toward a hand up instead of a hand out. We have a democratic leadership system and the only people that can vote are owners in the corporation. To become an owner you must be a child that has benefited from the program and obtained a university degree.... This leadership and ownership model provides the right balance between entrepreneurship and teamwork.

This entire story is contrasted with David’s previous experience in a corporate setting, in which he, along with some of my other conversation partners, reported feeling absolutely no spiritual fulfillment. He noted that

spirituality is generally absent in corporate America. This is not surprising in a way as it is forbidden by most corporations to discuss subjects like religion and faith at work. When you are in a position of power, as corporate senior executives are, people will kiss your butt. Executives have chauffeurs, people who bring your meals in, and you have your own personal assistant – it is very close to how royalty is treated.

He emphasized the danger that such power can have when uninformed by a spirituality that grounds ethical action, noting that, in such a role, he had “the power to hire people, you can destroy someone’s life by firing them....” However, such unethical potential is

dramatically contrasted with the beauty that occurs when concern for the other is linked to spirituality, whether manifest in organizations or in individual relationships.

Marie, Francisca, Ipek, and David all shared examples of this potential and emphasized through their stories not only that understanding oneself as another requires seeing the relationships between people, but that such an understanding carries even more meaning when it includes an understanding of one's life as being in partnership with God. Ellen said this directly, noting that "there has to be oneself and the other, starting with the other of God."

Hank tied this spiritual concept to the religious experience that informed his story, noting that as a young Catholic "we heard a lot about... the Baltimore catechism, who made us and for what reason and 'we were made to love and serve God in this world and the next' and that stuck, that was... weaved through a lot of teaching that went on...." He further noted the role that religion played in his journey to serve others in ongoing ways, noting that when challenges came up, "the anchor was and is my faith" and that his understanding of spirituality "calls me to a much more personal relationship with God." Like David, he drew organizational implications from this connection between oneself as another and spirituality; however, his story incorporates the relationships that occur between individuals who share organizational roles as opposed to informing organizational structure. He spoke of his dentistry practice at length, noting that he worked in the same practice for 38 years, longer than any other partners in their community had ever worked together. His story of individual relationships within that organization is a story of changing specifics, but is also one that incorporates an overall theme of trust for one another. When Hank joined the practice, the dentists "never

tracked who did what” in order to determine profit share. Instead, “their business plan was, we figure out what we want to charge, we do the work, we get paid, money comes in, we pay the bills, and we split 50/50 what’s left. It was that simple.” While “that did change down the road, implicit in this was the trust that both of these guys were just there to work, to serve people, and the money would take care of itself.” This trust was “unique and continued all of the way through right to the end... there is nothing greater than that through the years.”

The importance of seeing oneself as another in relationships both with other individuals and with God was thereby reinforced by my conversation participants. A simple analogy occurred to me while driving. Driving safely in traffic requires seeing yourself in relationship to others; while each driver is an individual, he or she is also in relationship with the others on the road and failing to recognize that relationship affects both the individual and the group. We choose driving speeds, lanes, and stop patterns in association with an instinctive understanding that other drivers also have a destination in mind and that a concern for the overall flow of traffic will benefit each individual driver. Carrying the driving analogy one step further, recognizing oneself in relationship not only with other drivers but with the Creator of the Universe implies a partnership that carries with it enormous potential for meaning.

Much of oneself as another is defined through action. David notes that while each individual needs to “focus on your particular calling” he also noted that “however you are called, if it is serving others, that is a good thing.” His current organization focuses on eliminating the threat of war. He does so by incorporating educational efforts and engaging the efforts of others for whom “the attitude is, now that I am aware of these

issues, I am going to do what I can to change them.” This is an example of how the action associated with oneself as another can spur additional action in pursuit of the same relationship.

Taking action to affirm the associations inherent in seeing individual identity as being in relationship with others requires reflection about how success is defined, for some traditional models of success do not include oneself as another in their definition. For example, the acquisition of possessions can impress as an indication of success, but the process of acquiring such goods does not require an understanding of oneself in relationship to others, though it does not exclude such an understanding. Similarly, meaningful work may or may not include a salary. Interestingly, even when the work does include monetary compensation, those engaged in the work speak of the money as being incidental to the meaning that they find in the work. Still, in order to make the changes that may be necessary to engage in meaningful work, some consideration of how success is defined may be necessary. Lynn, who had experienced laudable financial success in previous positions, is now engaged in rearing her two children, for no monetary compensation. In reflecting on the material possessions that she had given up in order to embrace this new role, she described conversations with others who claim they also want to find meaningful work but are unable to give up material possessions.

I talk to some moms and they say, oh I’d love to stay home, and then I look at them and I see that they have their nails done and they have their hair all done, wonderful clothes, and they’ve just gone out... and I have to hold my tongue, because I want to say, you can do it! Don’t get your nails done, I haven’t gone out to dinner in nine months....

Charity similarly reflected on the difficulty in affirming her own efforts to engage in meaningful work when it doesn’t meet a traditional model of success. Though she has

an intellectual recognition that worth is not judged in dollars, especially when she can say that she is in a “place of joy, pure joy around touching families in the way that I get to do,” she admitted struggling with the

worthiness of just doing what I do, without the validation. Maybe the CD doesn’t get a good review, maybe it isn’t selling like hotcakes. How can I bring to myself a belief that this work is worthy if it doesn’t necessarily get the kind of external definition through making money or wide recognition or whatever....

Her answer lay in reminding herself of the authenticity of her connection, the activities where she feels

the most at home, the most myself, the most just completely in tune with what I am supposed to be doing, the most authentic. [This occurs] in three places. It is when I am writing a song, when I am in the studio making a song, or when I am in the throws of a connection with the JAM band...

This connection is linked to both authenticity and meaning for Charity, because “it’s a lot about love for me. It’s a lot about love of self and other....”

This sense of action is also reflected in the journey itself, for the search for work in which individuals can see themselves in relationship with others requires reflection about the value of such work as well as affirmative steps toward such work. Francisca spoke of the meaning that she found in her work as a banker, saying that “to a certain extent, you find meaning just by doing a good job... you have an excellent character and so you try to do things with excellence.” However, she said that “at some point I realized that I wasn’t really finding that spiritual meaning at work and so I started looking for it outside of work by becoming more involved in my church and in parish organizations and things like that.” This initial step took her further in her own journey as she developed her interests in theology and teaching, which led to her entrance into her current theology program.

Charity also describes her journey toward finding oneself as another. She ties the journey not only to her developing sense of being in relationship with others, but back again as a journey toward true authenticity. Through the story of her journey, she points out that being engaged in work that implies a concern about relationships and the common good is not necessarily a reflection of authenticity. She

used to be an activist, an environmental activist, and the same passion that I now have for my work was at the root of that, but there was also a sense of anger and judgment that I think a lot of activism has, there's a sort of, my way is the only right way and you are evil for doing it this way... the older I get, the more clear I get on the amount, what havoc any sort of anger and judgment and separatism can wreak on your ability to be... supporting other people's light, your own light.

Father Steve reflected similarly about the ongoing challenge of actively living a life in relationship to others, affirming both the importance of doing so in order to find meaning in work and the challenge that such an effort can take. He said that in his work, he can "just go and close my door," shutting out the needs of the others with whom he is in community; however, finding meaning is about "the involuntary, the things that are important that come up that aren't part of one's time schedule." In this sense he tied change both to individual actions and to the broader commitments of action that frame life, noting that "we tend to change as much by choice as by not having a choice, by things being put upon us and so, especially when it comes to acts of love, of selflessness, of generosity, and of regard for others...."

### Imagination

Being able to see oneself as another requires imagination, especially in the stories that are part of this text, for the other takes a variety of forms as participants describe their hopes for and efforts to create a better world. Ricoeur links the productive power of

language to that of imagination, for in order for “new meanings to come into being they need to be spoken or uttered in the form of new verbal images, which requires that the phenomenological account of imagining as *appearance* be supplemented by its hermeneutic account as *meaning*” (Kearney 2004: 40). The very concept of imagination conjures up plentiful images of different worlds and is such an essential part of human nature that it is inextricably connected to memorable childhood memories of play. Whether in children’s play or in journeys of purpose, imagination usually orients toward the future; however, the ability to apply imagined concepts to the action necessary to make visions real is also linked to the past, for it is from past successes that many gain the confidence to continue projecting future ideas. Interestingly, while participants generally affirmed this orientation toward action, their imagination about future action combined specific ideas with confident ambivalence about the specific direction of their own journey.

Memory about the ways that the journey has unfolded thus far is thus linked to a spirituality that provides confidence about the orientation of the journey toward both individual and common good, so that participants anticipate the unknown elements of the future with both trust and enthusiasm. When speaking about her own future, Ellen demonstrated confidence when she said that “when I am done here and I move to the next stage, I will also be proud of that...” while commenting that she “may not have a specific vision, but I certainly anticipate.” Karen suggested similarly that she expected her future to be “amusing” and “unpredicted and yet... I would say that there will be an ease, a sense that, oh of course it went that way. Even though it was unpredicted and unprecedented.” The way that memory informs ongoing imagination was likewise



demonstrated by Hank, who spoke of the “great deal of satisfaction” that he felt when a colleague encouraged him to participate as a volunteer dentist in a clinic and how that subsequently “led to all kinds of other things... a nursing home... a Hispanic clinic in the inner city and another clinic that treats mostly young black kids and in later years, going to Mexico and doing some things there.”

Imagination also provides inspiration for change. Karen spoke of her memories of an event at a previous job and how that experience informed her ideas for a future project, a plan that she is using to guide her decision about her next career step. Like Ipek and Francisca, Karen went to theology school as the first step in her decision to change her career. After becoming a minister, one of her activities included hosting a “house church” in which other members of her spiritual community came together to pray. One day, she brought pictures of President George Bush to the prayer group, suggesting that praying for him or sending “a neutral light to him” would be a way toward the peace that they all purported to desire. Her description of the events that followed were ironic and sadly comedic, for she said that one participant, who had a physical disability and so had “dragged himself up the stairs to get there... literally threw himself down the stairs to get out of there, personally cursing at me, how could I send love to that evil, horrible guy, aren’t I for peace?” We laughed sadly at the irony of approaching with a violent attitude those who disagree with you when your mission is one of peace. However, the experience made Karen reflect on the violence that exists in the attitudes that Bay Area residents have toward each other based on political affiliation, and how this is symptomatic of a political process in which understanding of the other is not something that people aspire toward. She determined to change this and proposed

church-based projects that bring individuals with radically different political beliefs together to discuss common ground on controversial subjects, thus helping others to see themselves in others.

Informed by confidence that memories of changes have brought, participants projected ambivalence about their own specific futures as well as an apparently contradictory sense that life's events occur as a result of their design. In this sense, memory is also tied to the future through imagination, for change often occurs only when patterns are recognized and the role that the individual plays in creating those patterns is acknowledged and altered. As Ricoeur tells us, "imagination is the very instrument of the critique of reality" and "the innovative power of imagination... to transform given meanings into new ones, enables one to construe the future as... a horizon of hope" (Kearney 2004: 39).

Some spoke of the "threads" that can be seen in reflecting on the story that individuals tell of their lives. Others spoke of the fear that can arise when imagination operates insufficiently to provide a specific vision for the future. Lynn knew that she was not finding meaning in the material rewards of her corporate executive career and embraced motherhood for the greater satisfaction that it provides. And yet, inherent in parenthood is the understanding that the goal is to raise children to adulthood, so adopting and embracing change is an appropriate sign of success. Still, this goal, once visualized and then achieved, requires that parents use imagination to sustain an ongoing sense of purpose for themselves. Those who lack imagination about future purpose can feel fear at the concept of an "empty nest," for the departure of the children is linked to a

dissolution of purpose. Indeed, though Lynn's children are much younger, she said that lacking a specific image about her own future leaves her "very scared" already, for

that's the little piece that's missing [from] my puzzle. Before we knew about [her pregnancy with her second child], I was planning on going back to school and getting my teaching credential. That's an area I'd like to explore, but now I've put all of that on hold because I just don't know what I can expect out of myself in the next couple of years with a second child. And I remember talking to [another friend] and she said, 'I've just kind of lost who I am after all of these years with the kids. I tried to provide her some comfort, but then I reflected on that and I thought, am I going to be there? So there's fear. And I don't want to put so much expectation on the next step that I take that if it doesn't fulfill me... that it is a huge letdown.

In this sense, imagination is also tied to action, for simply envisioning a different future is insufficient to make it real unless the present also includes some activities that are oriented toward that future. Because Lynn's second child has curtailed her research towards returning to school for her teaching credential, she expressed fear. On the other hand, Karen, who developed her idea for the political party cohesion efforts as part of her search for her next career move, expressed no tension. Francisca expressed overt understanding of her affirmative responsibility to tie her imagination to action, summing up the lessons learned and iterated by other participants, that "it's just up to me to think of different things and things that are possible... and at least think that everything is possible until I make sure that it is not possible."

I relate personally both to the importance of taking action to fuel enthusiasm for future imagined activities and to the value of having that imagination about the future in order to feel true satisfaction with the present. Like Lynn, I made a radical change in my work when I went from being a Director of Human Resources to providing full-time care for my children. However, I was simultaneously enrolled in this doctoral program on a full-time basis and thus exposed to a variety of new ideas that fueled my own imagination

about, and preparation for, my future. This dynamic between past successes, present satisfactions, and future imagination is absolutely key in my sense of confidence and excitement about my own manifested purpose, for I have let “new worlds” shape my understanding of myself (Kearney 2004: 35).

Imagination is also informed by changed understandings. Many of the participants in this research project told stories of the radical changes that they made in their choices of work; making such changes requires exposure to new experiences that will necessarily change understandings. David’s career path has unfolded from being an Army officer right out of college to a corporate career in finance to running a nonprofit organization that he founded. He reflected on his intent and his actions, noting that while his intent was relatively consistent in that he was motivated to help others, his choices of work to effect that goal changed considerably. This led him to the conclusion that God would look at his actions, however noble, and “say that we are on some level asleep relative to what we would be if we were each in heaven.” He said that this “makes sense” to him because “when I was in the military, I felt like I was there as a peacemaker. I know I was called to be there as a peacemaker, but I also knew something was not right.” David’s later experiences as a volunteer in Honduras compelled him to question the information that he had been given as an Army officer, which led him to additional research and then to a more different role in promoting peace through his non-profit organization. This change in how imagination manifests itself within an individual life shows the “dual potential of creation and critique, the hermeneutic disclosure of possible worlds which are suppressed in our present reality and whose very otherness provides alternatives to the established order” (Kearney 2004: 68).

Challenges also emerge as life unfolds to affect imagined events. Lynn spoke of a memory in which she imagined that she and her husband would live abroad doing development work. However, with two small children, she acknowledged that it is “such a difficult step for us to take right now.” The priesthood contains valuable lessons that inform others who face challenges to their imagined expectations, for it inherently incorporates authenticity, passion, and spirituality, all of which inform the journey toward meaningful work that participants describe in this text. Father Steve described his own lessons in letting go of expectations, noting that doing so is so much a “part of spirituality and the life” that it carries “itinerancy” as a defining term. In his own life, accepting the integration of spirituality with imagination required embracing changes and challenges that he never imagined; indeed, his current role as Vocations Director is not one that he ever imagined himself filling. Yet, “if the brothers ask you, the brothers must see good in you and you have to see God’s will in it and just let go and do your best job, give them what I’ve got and if it works, great, if not, they can fire me....”

This wisdom is reflected in Ipek’s reflection that there was a time in her life when she “had it all figured out,” and yet acknowledging that those expectations are neither what she now wants or expects. Lynn’s challenges take a parallel form, as her initial vision of herself working abroad has currently been replaced by a family that appears to contradict that original ideal. Still, she anticipates a future in which she hopes to “have done some of the things that we are talking about, some kind of missionary work.” However, she also expects disappointments, but is sustained by her spirituality, which provides a “wakefulness” that gives her the confident knowledge that “deep down in my heart... I’ll know that I’ve done the right thing and I’m just happy that I’ve been given

the opportunity.” Further, her imagined future includes a holistic understanding of her authentic being, one in which her family life is integrated in her work life. “I will definitely be involved in my children. I will choose things to do that include my children.... They will always be included.” Lynn thus designates “*possible modes of existence* which surpass the limits of any given, present situation” (Kearney 2004: 25).

Getting past challenges requires decision making and change, both of which occur when grounded in values and spirituality. Francisca admitted to times when she continues to question the material success that she gave up, quantifying her choices in dramatic terms by calculating that her education has cost her “about a million dollars” in the three years of lost income since she started her theology program. However, though she reflects, “am I crazy, did I just give up a million bucks?” she reminds herself of the values that inspire her desire to live a purposeful life, asking, “ten years from now or when I am on my deathbed, am I really going to value that money or the education? No, there’s no way I would want the money, no way I would say that.” Her confidence is informed by her own reflection about the consistency of the “threads” that weave through her own memories of her imagination. She reported recently telling an old friend about her current desire to be the Chief Financial Officer for a non-profit organization and her friend reminded her that she has expressed that same desire since she first graduated from college. We also discussed the role-playing games that we had individually played as children and she reported that she had played being a teacher, which is another of the roles to which she currently aspires.

Charity summed up the mixed feelings of many participants about their imagined futures, for she combined joyful anticipation, memories, present satisfaction,

acceptance of challenges and a sense of momentum that will take her to unanticipated places in her reflection about the future of her journey.

Wow. I'm going to be really happy about [my journey.] ... I feel like I am at such an amazing place right now, getting to have discovered what I have discovered, having the tools and gifts that I have... I feel like it's another beginning even, right now. I feel like it's gathering this whole other momentum that I don't even know because they are pieces that I trust more than I did before and I just, I have nothing but faith and... I'm not saying that there's not going to be those terrifying places, because there will and there are, but I feel like I've woken up and I'm now in a place where, even when the challenging parts come, it's part of the process that I trust... I also look at my life going, not that I am feeling old or anything, but it's like, there is no time to waste here!

Finally, for participants in this research, imagination is tied to spirituality. Marie epitomized this when she spoke of her philanthropic efforts to build a new church and the imagination that drove the work. She said that “the whole thing just evolved in a different way, a good way, more than I could ever accomplish!” Now “it's going to be a cathedral and it probably will be the bishop's seat someday.” She rhymed again, “it's not odd, it is God” and then added, “There are no accidents! He's calling out loud and clear and our ears half the time are just not open.”

### Conclusion

The idea that God is calling us to the purpose for which we were created in “loud and clear” terms both terrifies and excites me and it is that mixed emotion that ignited my interest in this topic. My terrified reaction is informed by the fear of missing that call, of living a life in which my purpose was not manifested, of wasting opportunities for joy and satisfaction. My excitement is fueled by the opposite possibility, that of a life in which God's will and mine unite in a way that is productive, satisfying and joyful. Both feelings of terror and excitement have been informed by my own experiences during my

journey thus far, for I have felt at times disconnected from my purpose and at other times aligned with it.

My experiences informed the conversations that I had with each of the participants in this investigation. These conversations demonstrated the uniqueness of each individual journey. However, they also showed important commonalities: that of the search for authenticity within work and the experience of finding success within that journey informed by both memory and imagination. Each told stories that provide important insights about the approach to the journey, struggles that occur along the way, and action that each participant has taken to ensure some level of success in finding spirituality and meaning manifested in the work that they do. Their success provides individual satisfaction, fuels ongoing commitment to further steps in their journeys, and unfolds changed understandings and new worlds.



## CHAPTER FIVE: SECONDARY ANALYSIS

### Introduction

A critical hermeneutic, interpretive inquiry includes reflections about the meaning interpreted, or laid open, before the text (Ricoeur 1988: 157-179). Hermeneutics acknowledges that “when we use language, we are already interpreting the world, not *literally* as if it possessed a single transparent meaning, but *figuratively* in terms of allegory, symbol, metaphor, myth, and analogy” (Kearney 2004: 20). In this Chapter, I provide an analysis of the conversations that inform this investigation, using the research categories of authenticity, oneself as another, and imagination. The story that emerges utilizes “the conjunction of practical wisdom (phronesis) and creativity (poiesis)” to form a plot at the level of the “social imaginary – [a] body of collective stories, histories, and ideologies, which informs our modes of socio-political action... [and] is constitutive of our lived reality” (Kearney 2004: 6-8).

This section follows the same broad outline as Chapter Four, considering and interpreting the data presented in terms of the research categories. “To interpret meaning is, for Ricoeur, to arrive in the middle of an exchange which has already begun and in which we seek to orient ourselves in order to make some new sense of it” (Kearney 2004: 5). All three categories assist this aim in that they are fundamental to a careful understanding of finding spiritual meaning in work. The stories that my research participants shared with me about their own experiences are informed by an instinctive call to reveal their authentic being by manifesting the unique purpose for which they were created. They revealed an intuitive understanding that this purpose is part of their identities and that their very being is revealed through their relationships with those

whom they serve through their work. In order to reveal the amalgamation between their purpose and their relationships with others, imagination is an important element in making sense of their memories of past experiences and in providing wisdom about how ethical action can best manifest in future work activities.

Heidegger established a relationship between these three categories when he explains Dasein, a key concept in his philosophy, which translates from German as “being there.” He ties authentic being to oneself as another through care and solicitude and to imagination through a discussion of possibilities, noting that it is not

something present-at-hand... it is primarily Being-possible... [it] is in every case what it can be... it is its possibility. The Being possible which is essential for Dasein, pertains to the ways of its solicitude for Others and of its concern with the ‘world,’ as we have characterized them; and in all these, and always, it pertains to Dasein’s potentiality-for-Being towards itself, for the sake of itself (Heidegger 1962: 183).

This relationship is also explored by other theorists, who provide additional insight into each category and to the data presented through the stories told by my research participants. By using these research categories to consider the presented data, I put the data and theorists who reflect on these categories into conversation. Doing so, I acknowledge “a two-way passage from action to text and back again [in a way that recognizes] the indispensable role of human agency” (Kearney 2002: 151). This research protocol is especially important to this investigation, which highlights the crucial role of “human agency” in the search for spiritual meaning within work.

### **Authenticity**

As explained in Chapter Three, Heidegger provides a depth of understanding about the concept of authenticity, the search for which is a primary concern within the

context of finding spiritual meaning in work. Others also contribute to this understanding and lend their voices to this analysis of the data presented through the stories shared by my research participants.

The data presented in Chapter Four is based on stories that participants shared with me about their ongoing journeys toward finding spiritual meaning through work. These narratives explain the paths that they have taken to manifest authenticity in what they do, describe how seeing their identity through their relationships with others has added layers of meaning to the journeys, clarify the ways in which they have used imagination to inform their searches, and illustrate how imagination continues to operate as a driving force in the stories they tell about their expectations of their own futures.

Each story has a different starting place and each incorporates distinctive elements of the participants' lives, yet despite the diversity of experience shared, each story coheres through narrative unity. Ricoeur (1992: 178) explains that "the notion of narrative unity places its accent on the organization of intention, causes, and change that we find in all stories," which are reflected in these narratives. Arendt reflects similarly on the many dimensions that cohere through narrative identity, noting that the result of these stories is "public action," which is "a web of human relations within which each human life unfolds its brief history" (in Ricoeur 1992: 196). The hermeneutic task of interpretation thus provides meaning both within this text and in the lives of the individuals who participated in this investigation, for

it is in [the] unending work of interpretation applied to action and to oneself that we pursue the search... between what seems to us to be best with regard to our life as a whole and the preferential choices that govern our practices. ... between the idea of the 'good life' and the most important decisions of our existence (career, loves, leisure, etc.) (Ricoeur 1992: 179).

The stories of the decisions that participants make about their lives as they unfold provide a text “in which the whole and the part are to be understood each in terms of the other” (Ricoeur 1992: 179). This understanding of narrative unity within each individual’s life puts actions within relevant context and helps the reader and researcher to learn more about how purpose manifests authentically.

The desire to manifest authentic purpose in work reflects Heidegger’s concept of thrownness, which is rooted in Dasein. Heidegger (1962: 6) asserts, “this Being which we ourselves in each case are and which includes inquiry among the possibilities of its Being we formulate terminologically as Dasein.” He uses this concept as the basis for understanding thrownness, which is especially relevant to the data disclosed through this investigation. According to Heidegger (1962: 203-204), in thrownness, Dasein is understood as being, “always, already in a definite world” and only in this “context of an analysis of the authenticity of Dasein does it receive its existential, ontological definiteness.” Authentic being therefore begins “as soon as I unveil the hermeneutic horizon of possibilities which gives my life-world significance” (Kearney 1999: 38).

In this investigation, participants describe their own experiences of being “thrown” into the search for purposeful work amidst the many possibilities that life offers. Many tell stories of successful careers that satisfied the utilitarian purpose of work in addition to providing economic outcomes that made many other elements of life enjoyable. However, they each report feeling drawn toward more, to what Kearney (1999: 38) refers to as “the horizon of the possible.” This potential “alone renders our lives authentic, shatters this myth of anonymous assurance and compels each individual

to face up to their responsibility” to discern the purpose behind their unique creation, which inevitably incorporates talents with opportunities to serve others.

Heidegger also links thrownness to the concept of a call, which is a term used frequently in discussing vocations, both secular and spiritual. “The call is not something which is explicitly performed *by me*, but that rather ‘it’ does the calling...” “its character is determined by thrownness as a Fact of the entity which it is; and, as so determined, it has in each case already been delivered over to existence, and it constantly so remains” (Heidegger 1962: 320-321). For participants in this investigation, the call took different forms and yet remained linked to their desire to manifest their unique purpose through serving others. Heidegger (1962: 322) says that the call “is for itself something that simply cannot be mistaken for anything else,” which represents a dramatically accurate description of Father Steve’s experience of feeling God’s call toward the priesthood, despite his initial contrary desire and his previous plans to become an architect. Others also find that the call has a character that is inexorable and “unequivocal” (Heidegger 1962: 323); however, it more commonly takes less dramatic forms. Many participants describe this call as a dissatisfaction with the status quo that leads to further exploration, often beginning with intermediary steps such as education or travel, and then on to different jobs where they have greater opportunities to use their talents to manifest authentic purpose. Others link it to their deepening desire to enrich their relationship with God through prayers of action by making innumerable daily decisions about their jobs, relationships, and care of others that best allow their authentic being to reveal itself.

Regardless of the tone of the call, each participant sees their search for authentic purpose within work as an ongoing journey, one in which they use their memories to

learn from the past and are able to use imagination to project ever-deepening understanding about purpose. Heidegger (1962: 223) affirms the evolving nature of authenticity, noting that “Dasein in its state-of-mind, has the character of throwing and of movement. Thrownness is neither a ‘fact that is finished’ nor a Fact that is settled. Dasein’s facticity is such that as long as it is what it is, Dasein remains in the throw...”

The ever-changing and continuous nature of this search is reflected in the metaphor of a journey that includes an ongoing search, for “Dasein is anxious with anxiety about its ownmost potentiality-for-Being” (Heidegger 1962: 321). However, this anxiety is also a form of anticipation. By looking forward hopefully in this way, participants find that “Dasein *brings* itself *again forth* into its ownmost potentiality-for-Being” (Heidegger 1962: 388). Participants reflected on their previous choices to consider themselves on a journey toward manifested purpose in work and the anticipation of more satisfaction in work that informed those choices. This ability to make choices that reflect this search demonstrates how “anxiety makes manifest in Dasein its *Being towards* its ownmost potentiality-for-Being – that is, its *Being-free* for the freedom of choosing itself and taking hold of itself” (Heidegger 1962: 232).

Dasein therefore includes the possibility of potential greatness and often calls through restlessness or a general search for more meaning in life. However, the call toward authenticity often “calls without uttering anything. The call discourses in the uncanny mode of keeping silent” (Heidegger 1962: 322). This “silence” about specifics drives participants toward seeing their lives as exploratory processes. Ricoeur (2004: 29) approves of this, noting that the uncertainty of life’s unfolding requires “an absolute renunciation of the self-righteousness of certainty.” Within my own journey, my

approach has evolved significantly, as I learn to let events unfold without specific expectations that could limit imagination from informing additional possibilities. For example, when I was a child, I had a specific plan about the profession I would have when I was an adult. This changed as I realized that my image of that profession was not aligned with either my interests or particular talents; my certainty was then initially replaced with a feeling of insecurity bound with tension. However, with maturity have come both acceptance and excitement about the unknown possibilities that life will disclose, for I recognize that in that “uncanny silence” lies great possibilities for informed imagination to flourish. This reflects what Kearney (2004: 29) refers to as “a genuine hope,” one also reflected by my participants, “hope in the ultimate possibility of a unified or reconciled discourse” in which purpose is authentically aligned with action.

This hope motivates the choices that my research participants make about their work and continues to drive their imagination about ongoing opportunities to manifest authentic purpose in their work. Whether their journeys unfold slowly through gradually revealed meaning or abruptly through intentional shifts in career pursuits, each reflects genuine hope that their work has and will continue to reflect authenticity in their pursuit of meaning in work.

That hope does not eliminate the challenges that participants have experienced; instead, it fuels their determination to surmount those hurdles. Participants explain that this determination is often rooted in their experience of inauthenticity, or the memory of work that did not fulfill spiritual purpose. This is clearly reflected in the stories told by those who made radical changes to their careers; for example, both Francisca and Ipek speak of the challenges that they felt to find meaning in their work in banking and how

these struggles led to action in the form of change. It is also reflected in the stories told by those who saw meaning evolve gradually as action and reflection merged in authenticity. Hank's story reflects this possibility of evolving meaning as the choices that he made about family and career deepened his interest in ensuring that his work reflected his purpose. Heidegger (1962: 303-304) affirms that "inauthenticity is based on the possibility of authenticity... [for it] characterizes a kind of Being into which Dasein can divert itself and has for the most part always diverted itself." These "diversions" are shown in participants' stories of their past experiences, such as Father Steve's descriptions of himself as an architectural student, Charity's experiences as an engineer, David's recollections of his activities as a corporate executive, and other participants' memories of previous work.

I found it interesting to observe these changes in the stories that my participants told of their own journeys, for they reflected Heidegger's sense that authenticity is not found in such "diversions" while simultaneously affirming the value that Kearney and Ricoeur place on reflection through memory to inform imagination and future action. Heidegger (1962: 303-304) notes that

Dasein does not necessarily and constantly have to divert itself into this kind of Being... [but] because Dasein exists, it determines its own character as the kind of entity it is, and it does so in every case in terms of a possibility which it itself *is* and which it understands.

That call to the possibility of manifested authentic being is informed by "the cognitive dimension of memory, its character of knowing" (Ricoeur 2004: 27), which comes to those who participate in this research through reflection about previous work experiences. Although these experiences do not themselves reflect the authentic purpose of the participant's lives, they nevertheless demonstrate how authenticity is revealed through



the journey. Each reflection establishes an understanding of what Dasein was not and therefore provides a basis for the “interplay between memory and anticipation” (Kearney 2004: 67) reflected in the stories that participants tell of their lives.

The continuity of life is reflected in such narratives, for in recounting them participants “move back without interruption from the living present to the most distant events” (Ricoeur 2004: 96) and in doing so “bring the expectancies for the future closer to the present by a strategic praxis sensitive to the concrete steps that need to be taken toward realizing what is ‘desirable and reasonable’” (Kearney 2004: 67). Participants speak of steps taken intentionally to move toward work that better reflects their authentic being and of their evolving understanding of meaningful work. This understanding is demonstrated in the work that each now embraces and uses to serve others and project praxis to meet the needs of the world. Avoiding such reflection about the past would deprive memory in the same way that circumventing the forward look would deprive imagination (Kearney 2004: 87). Both reflection and imagination require time, for “in the end, does not the reason why ‘explanations’ of the conscious have gone off the track lie in the fact that we have not looked long enough to establish our phenomenal findings as to the call” (Heidegger 1962: 323)?

Authenticity is inextricably tied to spirituality in the reflections both of my research participants and in those of theorists. Ricoeur affirms that each individual’s “ontological desire to be... finds its ultimate articulation in an eschatology of the sacred” (in Kearney 2004: 28), which reflects the importance of seeing life’s evolution within the context of a relationship with God. Many participants emphasize this concept, using concepts and examples that reflect their individual personalities and thus demonstrating

the very individualized nature of that relationship. Still, while the language used to describe that relationship varies, that relationship is consistently manifested in the actions of participants, which showed an unwavering focus on care and concern for others. This focus ties the spirituality of participants to authenticity, for “*conscience manifests itself as the call of care*” (Heidegger 1962: 322) and in such manifestation, “thrownness [is] a basic attribute of care” in which “the Self is lost in the ‘they’” (Heidegger 1962: 435).

### **Oneself as Another**

Spirituality is also tied to the theoretical concept of oneself as another. For the participants in this research, the “other” in this concept includes understanding their own identity as being in relationship with God. This is reflected in action associated with their journeys to find purpose in work, for Ricoeur (1992: 25) defines “common morality” as one in which “love is tied to the ‘naming of God,’” resulting in “a dialectic of love and justice.” For the participants in this project, justice and love are reflected throughout the many elements of their work; the care and concern that they reflect in their orientation towards life’s choices provide the basis for praxis that benefits their families and communities at the local and international levels. From family to clients, local students to international communities, neighborhood churches to national political parties and international issues, each of the participants in this research investigation have found ways to merge their identities with those of others through actions that demonstrate care and concern for others as individuals, in community with one another and with God.

Shahideh (2004: 34) indicates that “understanding of self and the awareness of our interconnectedness with others [is] the basis for our being.” Participants demonstrate their awareness of this connection in the choices that they make every day with regard to

how they manifest their unique purpose, finding meaning in their work because their actions are authentically aligned with care for the others with whom they find themselves in community. Ricoeur (1992: 3) emphasizes in clear terms that “from the outset... the selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other, that instead one passes into the other.” This understanding of self in relationship to others provides context for the activities that participants report give them satisfaction and provide meaning; participants unanimously demonstrate the connection between spirituality in work and care and concern for others.

Ricoeur (1994: 193) notes that “solicitude adds the dimension of value, whereby each person is irreplaceable in our affection and our esteem.” This has implications for understanding how care and concern for others manifest themselves in the work that participants do and also provides insight into the unique nature of each individual’s purpose. Ricoeur explains this when noting that solicitude teaches “through the transfer of the other onto ourselves, the irreplaceable character of our own life” (Ricoeur 1994: 193). In this investigation, participants describe their journeys to arrive at the understanding that their purpose is manifested in care, each stating in individual ways what Marie says most bluntly: “that’s why I am here.”

Concern for others and reflections about previous experiences further emphasize the uniqueness of the participant’s sense of purpose. Although each reports feeling called to solicitude toward others, the identity of the “other” ranges broadly according to talents, interests, and other individualized elements of each life. This emphasizes the unique nature of the call, which is especially relevant to authenticity. However, such knowledge cannot be complete without understanding similitude, which “authorizes us to say that I

cannot myself have self-esteem unless I esteem others as myself” (Ricoeur 1994: 193). Heidegger (1962: 188) affirms this important connection between concern for others and authentic being, noting that “the primordial constitution of care is simultaneously “being-ahead-of-itself, already-being-in-a-world, [and] as-being-together-with-innerworldly-beings.”

The nature of the care provided also provides important insights, for genuine solicitude is offered in friendship, which “presents itself from the outset as a mutual relationship [in which] reciprocity... [exists as] its most basic definition” (Ricoeur 1994: 183). Participants provide many examples of this, demonstrating through their stories their orientation toward a reciprocal relationship with the “others” whom they serve with care and concern. I saw this when participating in Charity’s music classes, for she shares her music with the children and adults in her classes in a spirit of mutuality. In this spirit, her wisdom is transmitted through the words to her music, shared through dance and song, and reflected in a joyful experience that is inherently reciprocal. Ellen’s enthusiasm for learning is similarly reflected in her approach to teaching in which knowledge becomes a shared journey between teacher and students. Moreover, this approach to oneself as another through a relationship grounded in friendship is demonstrated by the stories told by other participants, who demonstrate their ability to approach those whom their work serves with a mutuality in which “each loves each other as being the man he is” (Ricoeur 1992: 183).

Ricoeur suggests that this orientation toward the other in a mutual relationship of “friendship is a virtue – an excellence – at work in deliberative choices” (Ricoeur 1994: 182). The participants in this research provided examples of their intentional choices to

approach others in friendship, rejecting a common understanding of helping others that too often represents a deficit model in which one individual provides something to another who has a need, that very need undermining the expectation of mutuality. Hank, for example, speaks of being the person within his dental practice to which others come with their problems. He understands that his ability to listen informs meaningful conversation, which by definition represents mutuality. David provides another example, approaching the development of an orphanage in Liberia within the context of an orientation toward friendship that provides foundation both for his initial activities and for the organization's very design. While he initiated the action that began the orphanage and continues to be involved, his activities are determined by the needs as identified by those participating in the organization rather than by his individual assessment. This orientation not only provides a foundation that is more likely to support the change he envisions, but also links his own satisfaction with the needs of others. Ricoeur (1992: 186) describes this by noting that

under the aegis of need, a link is made between activity and life and, finally, between happiness and pleasure. Friendship, therefore, works toward establishing the conditions for the realization of life, considered in its intrinsic goodness and its basic pleasure....

The concept of oneself as another is therefore tied to purpose in work through both authenticity and spirituality. Biologists Maturana and Varela (1987: 247-248) note that "without love, without acceptance of others, there is no social phenomenon. ... We have only the world that we bring forth with others and only love helps us bring it forth." Research participants indicate that their work is made purposeful by that connection with others, in friendship, in which new worlds are revealed through both phronesis and praxis. This affirms that "all service is directly or indirectly ethical activity, a reply to a

moral call within, one that answers a moral need in the world” (Coles 1993: 75). The existence of that call both internally and externally entices participants to manifest the unique purpose behind their individual creation in care for others, for their own identity is inextricably aligned in their relationships with other people and in their relationships with God.

### **Imagination**

Authenticity necessarily takes place through an understanding of oneself as another and such manifestation occurs in ways that inform praxis and phronesis about the choices that individuals make with regard to purposeful work through imagination. Kearney (1999: 104) emphasizes this connection between imagination, wisdom, and oneself as another, noting that “narrative imagination serves ethical *phronesis* in its power to empathize. In addition to its capacity to envision a new project, evaluate its motivations, and initiate a viable course of action, narrative enables us to identify with others.” Kearney (1999: 106) also offers further reflections on the connection between oneself as another and imagination, tying each to ethics and therefore to purposeful work.

He notes that

narrative imagination... [possesses] a singular capacity to commit us to a dimension of otherness beyond ourselves – a commitment that, in the moment of decision, invites the self to imagine itself as another and to imagine the other as other. Were we devoid of such narrative imagining, we would be devoid not only of poetic freedom but also, in the long run, of ethical judgment.

In this investigation, participants describe the ways that imagination has both directed and fueled their journeys of purpose. To discern that identity is manifested most authentically in relationship with and service to others, participants first imagine making

the choices that led to such service. Success in doing so led to further use of imagination and action, which all participants continue to project with regard to their future activities.

Imagination also provides participants with a link between their search for meaningful work and spirituality, for, through potentialities that each has envisioned for their future, “imagination [becomes] the place where you are most divine” (O’Donohue 2007: 1). This occurs through the action that propels progress within an individual’s journey for spiritual meaning in work; taking such action requires creative imagination, which itself mimics God’s creative force. While all participants provide examples of such creativity within their own journeys, Lynn’s experience illumines prominently how imagination can be informed intentionally, carrying “our minds far beyond the sphere of private and public memory into the range of the possible” (Ricoeur 2004:182). After feeling dissatisfaction with her choice of employment, taking a break to travel and reflect, and then concluding that she did require a change in her work in order to manifest her authentic purpose, she relies on both her memory of past experiences and her interest in imagining a different future to drive her action in experimenting with different temporary jobs, in which she took on roles quite different from her previous ones. Through such experimental action she informs her imagination about future possibilities. She was able to see work differently, imbue different meanings to it, and thus approach the continuing evolution of her journey toward purposeful work armed with new understandings. Kearney explains that imagination is essential for such a process, for it is “an indispensable agent in the creation of meaning” (Kearney 2004: 35).

In Lynn’s previous employment, she valued control and power over people and purpose. To imagine work differently requires informed imagination. She therefore

places herself in roles in which the stated purpose of her activity is subordinate, in her perception of the work, to relationships with co-workers and clients. This allows her to practice understanding her own identity as revealed in relationship with others. Doing so, she creatively acts to tie her imagination to authenticity, for “thrownness, as a kind of Being, belongs to an entity which in each case *is* its possibilities, and is them in such a way that it understands itself in these possibilities and in terms of them, projecting itself upon them” (Heidegger 1962: 181). As Lynn’s approach to work changed, her identity likewise changed, providing greater spiritual purpose in her work and her life.

Imagination is an important category in this investigation, for the way in which participants use it within their journeys can help to inform others who similarly seek more meaning in their work. Imagination carries enormous capacities; however, the very vastness of such possibilities can be overwhelming. A poem about “a circle of students [who contemplate] a question of vocation” sums up this difficulty, for in it, the author describes the many choices that a child plays with and the ongoing frustration of projecting that imagination effectively.

When a child, I wanted to be a vampire. Or a scientist. Or an actor. The world seemed open to me in a way it does not seem open now. What is your passion, the facilitator asks and students giggle. What drives you? I try to focus on the question at hand, but lose myself in the sunlight streaming in through the open door. In this, a sanctuary, I don't feel safe. What do you want to be when you grow up? Not a teacher, certainly; not a soldier; not a poet.... When in college, I wanted to be an archaeologist, wanted to dig into the storied dirt of time and come up with some history... What is your vocation, the facilitator asks and at this moment, I'd say, I am a bringer of light; a man who stands in a doorway flooded by sun; I am a bird; someone who learns, in shadow, the real shape of brightness. (Reichard 2007: 1)

Frustration can drive action, as demonstrated by the stories told by many participants, but to do so it must be fueled by imagination that is focused enough to take initial steps,



rather than careening from possibility to possibility. Kearney (2004: 67) explains that “we must bring the expectancies for the future closer to the present by a strategic praxis sensitive to the concrete steps that need to be taken toward realizing what is ‘desirable and reasonable.’”

The cohesiveness required for such informed action occurs in narrative imagination, which provides necessary structure from which to translate random visions into meaningful steps. Kearney (1999: 92) refers to “three central tasks of narrative imagination: 1) to realize our debt to the historical past; 2) to cultivate a notion of self-identity; and 3) to persuade and evaluate our actions.” He notes that “all three... lead ultimately to the decisive hermeneutic threshold where a poetics of narrative converses with an ethics of responsibility.” Like Lynn, all participants tell of using the three tasks effectively to inform the action that leads to increased purposeful meaning within their work, utilizing their memories of past experiences to project work that occurs in conscious relationship to others and to do so in a way that provides opportunity for reflection and continuous growth. Doing so, participants demonstrate the ways in which “narrative imagination... serves ethical initiative,” for they saw their own “being-in-the-world in terms of larger possibilities of vision, [which empowered them] to undertake action...” (Kearney 1999: 104).

Undertaking action is a concept that may appear daunting if the destination of the journey is unclear. It is therefore important to highlight the experience of several of my conversation partners, who took action that can be described as transitional: returning to school or traveling in order to move away from the current habits and patterns even before determining the new destination, goal, or outcome. Lynn quit a high-leveled but

unfulfilling job to travel. David used his vacation time to experiment with travel that incorporated new volunteer opportunities. Francisca, Karen, and Ipek all used the transition provided by an additional advanced degree in order to redirect their careers, and Charity found herself transformed during a break from a previous job that occurred because of her maternity leave. The wisdom of making such a transitional step is affirmed by Arendt, who notes that “the living... become conscious of an interval in time which is entirely determined by things which are no longer and are not yet. History has often shown that it is such intervals which may contain the moment of truth” (in Kearney 2004: 68).

In my own life, I have taken transitional steps on multiple occasions, finding extended travel experiences as opportunities for discerning more meaning within the same positions. I have used travel, education, and even maternity leave as an opportunity to reflect on my own values and priorities, then taken necessary additional steps toward redirecting my journey toward manifesting my authentic purpose in work. In my own experience and in the stories that my conversation partners share, such transitional activities are valuable because they create space in which to reflect on values and priorities. They also reassure by creating a “safe haven” in which retreat remains an option should considered change be decided against. When I asked my research participants whether they felt fear when making necessary changes, they reflected on this transition and the comforting knowledge that there was no decision that they had made that could not be reversed. In fact, knowledge of past success provided a confident foundation for additional changes, because with experience comes the reassuring

knowledge that a return to a previous career is always a possibility if the desired transition fails to provide either expected meaning or necessary financial rewards.

Experience provides reassuring comfort but also feeds imagination about the specific nature of future visions. Kearney (2004: 6) notes that “innovation needs tradition in order to make sense as a form of expression governed by rules.” Karen’s humorous story about suggesting to her prayer group that they pray for President Bush as part of praying for peace, only to see her suggestion rejected in decidedly unpeaceful ways, reinforces this concept. The experience appeared to be a failed attempt to bring additional spiritual understanding to those with whom she worked. However, ongoing reflection about this has allowed her to make innovative sense of the memory, transforming it from a startling experience and apparently failed idea into a new project. As Karen looks forward to her next steps, she speaks of using her ministry to form groups composed of individuals who are strongly aligned with either the Democratic or Republican parties and providing a forum from which to better understand each other, thus demonstrating through action a real commitment to establishing the foundation for the very peace that she advocates on an international scale.

Such possibilities ignite imagination about the future for many conversation partners, who express uncertainty, but excitement, over what they expect to unfold through their work. Ricoeur (1995: 373) explains that “the relation between imagination and the world of possibilities is a relation to an unreality that becomes real in the act of transforming the world.” The possible ways in which the world can be transformed inspire, for within the excited uncertainty expressed by those with whom I spoke lies incredible potential at individual, local, and international levels. These potentials include

a more holistic approach to work and family, allowing parents to provide guidance for future generations while contributing to the world in other ways without compromise. They also include tangible building projects, such as Marie's vision of a new cathedral where future generations can worship and come for inspiration and guidance. They incorporate service to others, whether through Father Steve's encouragement of others to heed a call to the priesthood or Ellen's attention to nurturing students toward new possibilities of work and service. The specific visions continue, including world-wide peace through justice and care for one another, and affirm Ricoeur's certainty about the importance of imagination in transforming the world by creating new possibilities, for "the self-attribution of the set of memories that compose the fragile identity of a singular life is shown to result from the constant mediation between a moment of distancing and a moment of appropriation" (Ricoeur 2004: 496).

These new possibilities, while inspiring, remain rooted in reality through the spiritual beliefs and practices of the research participants. Although each expresses inspiring visions for the future, they simultaneously express uncertainty. This uncertainty does not reflect fear; rather, participants describe it as being borne both through their experiences with life's transitions and of a humility that recognizes their relationships with God. This uncertainty itself carries potential, for participants show that "every act of memory... is... summed up in" a recognition that events could occur to change their visions and to inform different visions (Ricoeur 2004: 495). Marie describes the difficulty that she experienced in losing a teenage son in death due to a rare form of lupus; her experience reminded me of the many who have been inspired by such unanticipated events to create foundations, drive research, advocate for legislation, or

otherwise merge their identities with others in ways that ethically serve and transform lives. Participants share less dramatic examples as well, such as Lynn's adjusted imagination regarding future overseas service opportunities in light of the additional responsibilities associated with her growing family. By relying on both strong spiritual practices and the memory of experiences with changing visions to provide confidence, participants effectively tie practical action as related to imagination to thrownness and authenticity, reinforcing that "the object of the entire quest merits the beautiful name of happiness" (Ricoeur 2004: 494).

Such use of imagination, combining incredible visions of inspiring possibilities with an acceptance of the possibilities of change and confidence in the direction provided by God helps participants to overcome challenges, for "we are not perfectly free until we live in pure hope, [which] shows us that we have something to work for and teaches us how to work for it" (Merton 1955: 14-15). However, while a hopeful imagination inspires visions, it also remains grounded in a reality that sustains challenges. In an approach that combines enthusiasm with uncertainty, participants embrace the idea that "hope is the wedding of two freedoms, human and divine, in the acceptance of a love that is at once a promise and the beginning of fulfillment" (Merton 1955: 22). This acceptance of change, even to imagined visions, allows participants to face challenges and to accept inconsistencies within their own journeys toward meaningful work. Many tell stories of changes to embrace more meaningful work, only to face frustrating financial challenges, periods of spiritual dryness in which God's presence failed to provide expected reassurance, or other types of continued dissatisfaction that indicate that the journey toward purpose within work continues to be incomplete.

The incomplete nature of the journey emphasizes the ongoing importance that imagination plays in manifesting authentic purpose in work. I recently spoke with a friend about her own journey. In the past few years she has made dramatic changes within her choice of work and now expresses apparent contradictions, indicating both regret and appreciation for the consequences of her decisions. Although work now has more meaning and she is clearly manifesting some elements of her purpose, for which she is appreciative, she lacks a vision for her future, and this deficit of imagination is the source of frustration and angst. Imagination thus fuels both action and satisfaction, igniting new ideas and reassuring through fueling excitement about unknown possibilities.

### **Conclusion**

Kearney (1999: 106) says that “the good life is a life recounted.” Through the stories presented in this investigation, it is clear that participants see themselves as leading “the good life.” The success that they have had in seeing themselves on a journey toward meaningful work and in manifesting that purpose in their work is inspiring. Though the journeys are incomplete and though each would affirm that they have lessons still to learn, imagination plays a key role in driving journeys toward spiritual meaning in work in which authenticity can be manifest by providing opportunities for seeing oneself as another, through care and solicitude expressed in work that takes the form of service to others. The stories shared by my research participants affirm that “although we cannot predict what will emerge in the future, we can learn from our past” (Shahideh 2004: 14) and in doing so, inform ethical futures in which satisfaction and happiness can thrive when purpose matches action. The stories presented

and analyzed in this text thus provide interconnected levels of meaning that inform through discourse about relationships with others, approaches to work, and manifestation of the unique purpose behind individual creation.

## CHAPTER SIX: IMPLICATIONS

### Introduction

The question that ignites this investigation excites, for the call to find authentic purpose in work is rooted in the desire to live a meaningful life. The stories of those who are engaged in this journey inspire and inform; the success that the participants in this investigation have enjoyed thus far provides hope for those who similarly seek to lead a life in which the purpose for their creation is fulfilled and their talents and desires merge in work that builds satisfaction and provides joy.

My initial inspiration for this work lies in my own understanding that life is “not a dress rehearsal,” but a singular opportunity to experience God’s love by aligning myself with God’s purpose for me. That understanding inspires many choices made throughout my life, including the adventure opportunities that I embraced for the sheer joy of exploring my own physical limitations and the travel experiences that I sought around the world in order to experience some of the many faces of God. It also encouraged my curiosity, long expressed casually, in asking others about their work and their journeys to their current destinations. These questions were posed most insistently when I encountered others who exuberantly expressed enthusiasm about and joy for their work. It fueled my own work history, in which I seek meaning both in the specific work engaged and in the way that I approach each opportunity. Most recently, the birth of my daughters inspires additional passion about the nature of the search, as my joy in the privilege of sharing their lives causes my curiosity to extend beyond myself to the



seemingly infinite possibilities that they will have to experience life and to manifest God's unique purpose for their creation.

Although my curiosity has always been revealed genuinely through my own life choices, including expressed academic interests, my love for my daughters has moved me to new levels of passion for the subject. I am filled with amazement at their very being, and approach with humble wonder the belief that within the perfection of their physical beauty and joyous approach to life lies God's intention that their lives have a specific and unique purpose. My hope and intent is that the implications gathered through this investigation will assist them and others similarly engaged; Kearney (2004: 24) suggests that this can occur through understanding, for "to understand a text is at the same time to light up our own situation... [and] to open up the world."

My joy about this investigative process deepens as I reflect upon the gratitude that I feel for the honor of working with participants who share my interest in the topic. This interest created a foundation for the stories that they told of their own experiences, for the narrative power of emplotment allows stories and experiences of different participants to emerge through conversation, bringing to life Kearney's (2004: 53) reminder that "*seeing-as*... not only implies a *saying-as* but also a *being as*." Further, narrative imagination reveals implications associated with this text by providing both the researcher and the participants with "a certain aesthetic distance from which to view the events unfolding, hereby discerning the 'hidden cause of things'" (Kearney 2002: 12-13). Creating a research foundation in stories allows concern for the other to emerge as an important concept, both as represented in those who seek information or inspiration about finding purposeful work and the many who are served by such work. The stories that

participants share have vastly different starting points and take immeasurably different shapes as they progress. However, what emerges from the various experiences is a common understanding that our identities are inherently integrated in relationships with others and that meaningful work requires attention to those relationships. The research conversations and the text that emerges from them thus demonstrate how “exposure to new possibilities of being refigures our everyday being-in-the-world... so that when we return from the story-world to the real world, our sensibility is enriched and amplified in important respects” (Kearney 2002: 132-133).

To engage life as a journey that contains the hope of successfully finding spiritual meaning in work requires an openness to change. That openness includes not only the logistical changes that individuals experience as part of their journeys from one type of work to another, but deeper changes related to identity. Shahideh (2004: 47) explains this by noting that “in order to re-interpret our sense of self we must first lose ourselves to new meanings and new possibilities.” This investigation explores the changes in individual identities that occur during journeys toward finding spiritual meaning in work and the stories told are of searches that are both multi-dimensional and simultaneously integrated. Participants describe the different details that comprise their experiences and place common emphasis on the importance of the journey toward discerning and manifesting authenticity in work, the sense of satisfaction that comes from service to others, and the relevance of deepening their relationship with God as a way of manifesting their purpose and ensuring ongoing integration of purpose with action. Memory and imagination inform success within these journeys, for reflection and vision

each provide opportunities to learn from past experiences and to use that knowledge to approach an imagined future with excited anticipation.

In this Chapter, I elaborate on the implications of this investigation, share my final reflections about the topic, suggest additional research, and then summarize the implications. I break the implications into different categories, elaborating upon each in sections titled, “Reassessing Commonly Used Terms;” “Understanding the Important Dual Role of Memory and Imagination;” “Embracing Change Informed by Reflective Spirituality” a section that includes specific participant recommendations; “Discerning Authenticity;” “Organizational/Institutional Implications;” and “Personal Implications.”

This Chapter is one that I write, but many of the implications are co-created with those who participated in the research process, for they provided valuable insight and advice for others who engage in such a search. However, beyond even the value of these specific implications, the participants provided important contributions to this topic by sharing the examples set by their lives through stories. Each participant in this research provided different yet insightful narratives of lives engaged with love and experienced with satisfaction and joy as they remembered their past successes and anticipate new ones in ever-evolving journeys.

These implications share a common foundation in spirituality. As I reflect on this research and its various implications, it is clear that prioritizing an ever deepening relationship with God grounds the success of those who are engaged in journeys of purpose. Balance, reflection, imagination, change, discernment, and other implications all contain infinite possibilities of meaning when they occur within the context of a spirituality that seeks to bring the individual closer to the divine.

## **Implications**

### **Reassessing Commonly Used Terms**

Many concepts that I have explored in detail in this investigation are commonly used in ways that this text reveals as incomplete or misleading. “Work” is too often understood simplistically as the activity that individuals engage in, in order to earn a paycheck. “Success” frequently refers only to material gain. “Journey” often implies an emphasis on a destination instead of a process. “Balance” is often used in association with the equilibrium between “work” (paid employment) and “life” (preferred activity) and is something to be desired. This investigation reveals a different understanding of each of these concepts, the reassessment of which allows new dialogue about the process of finding spiritual meaning in work and new possibilities of being for those who seek such work. Kearney (2004: 54) suggests that “what is interpreted in text... is the proposing of a world that I might inhabit and into which I might project my ownmost powers.” Through an explanation of these implications, I propose a new understanding and use of these familiar terms as I imagine a world in which the search for meaning is approached with more clarity and emphasis.

Rather than defining “work” as being inextricably tied to a paycheck, this text reveals an understanding of work as activity that brings individuals closer to God. For some, this elicits the image of prayer; for example, a cloistered group of nuns who see their purpose manifest in ongoing prayer. However, the manifestation of authenticity in work goes beyond this understanding without excluding it. Each individual is created with a unique purpose and a corresponding unique expectation about how that purpose should be manifest in work; activities that bring each individual closer to God are

therefore as singular as the people engaged in them. Work that provides a paycheck is included in that definition; indeed, most of those who participated in this investigation find meaning in work that they are paid for. However, pay is not necessary in order for work to qualify in accordance with this definition, for volunteer and other unpaid activities also function as callings and therefore are important to include in an understanding of purposeful work. This refined understanding of work is important in order to expand the definition to include the many activities that can manifest within a purposeful life, and to allow all such work to receive appropriate time and attention within an individual's discernment process.

Further, success is tied to happiness and satisfaction when individual purpose is revealed, but it is neither tied to nor exclusive of the accumulation of material wealth. This is an important concept, for a common understanding of success is defined in terms of power or material wealth, yet such rewards are unlikely to provide sustained fulfillment. Instead, this investigation provides a different definition of success, one of manifested authenticity or the ability of individuals to fulfill the reasons for their creation in their work. Many of the participants in this investigation left lucrative jobs in order to fulfill some element of their unique purpose, deliberately choosing lifestyles in which they enjoyed fewer material resources. Although they were each honest in describing the challenges of such choices, noting that they missed the lack of angst about "making ends meet," the freedom to travel at will, or the ability to enjoy expensive food or wine, they expressed clear satisfaction with the overall results of their decisions, unilaterally embracing the greater happiness that they felt in doing purposeful work and accepting as comparatively easy the loss of such materialistic rewards.

The concept of a journey is also one that is often associated with rewards, in that it can be associated with a particular goal or destination. Indeed, when I began this research, my initial expectation was that I would examine the stories of individuals who had changed from one career to another, in the process exchanging angst and dissatisfaction for the soothing peace that comes with manifested purpose. However, this process has revealed an alternative understanding of the value of the journey when seeking purpose in work. Participants in different positions and at different stages of their own journeys consistently revealed their understanding of purpose as something that is continuously revealed, for even when some level of success is achieved, imagination continues to inspire with ongoing insight about different ways that their unique skills can be used to serve the evolving needs of others.

The final term that this investigation challenges is balance. Although balance is typically seen as an admirable goal, it often implies giving appropriate amounts of time to completely separate interests. The image of items balanced at opposite ends of a scale epitomizes the most common understanding of this term. However, this very image illustrates the inherent problem with the word, for it reinforces a separateness that does not allow for the interests to be viewed holistically within the context of a single life. In reference to work, the opposing items that require balance are paid employment on one side and family or personal time on the other. This image creates problems for two primary reasons. First, its adoption as a relevant goal within life implies that meaning should be found in the spare time created within an otherwise busy schedule; this is inconsistent with the stories that participants told of their own prioritization of the search for meaning in their work. Further, this metaphor reinforces the image of separation,

which conflicts with the descriptions in the stories told in this text, of meaningful work that is holistically integrated in every aspect of life. No participant referred to their lives as being composed of separate entities that must be “balanced;” rather, they described authenticity within their own lives as an integrated whole that was equally represented in all elements of life. Meaningful work, therefore, should not be viewed within the narrow confines of the concept of balance, but must instead incorporate as one the relationships that occur in family and the broader community, the efforts that are part of community or volunteer activities, and the activities associated with paid employment.

This reflection about balance raises a practical concern about the role that the fulfillment of financial necessities plays in the search for purposeful work. Nearly everyone has taken a job for no reason other than to pay bills. I had numerous jobs that I took to make needed money, starting with newspaper delivery when in high school, continuing as a cafeteria employee and parking garage cashier while in college, and extending even to a recent unchallenging job as a disciplinary hearing officer in which I heard both sides of an employment conflict and then issued a decision about the justification for management’s recommended action. None of those jobs exercised my best talents, represented a strong desire, or furthered career goals; I engaged in each of them with the primary goal of making money. However, even those situations, while lacking a complete manifestation of unique purpose, nonetheless contained possibilities for purpose when approached reflectively and with an understanding of how authentic being manifests in activity. Rather than approaching such opportunities as a conflict between necessity and purpose, an individual so engaged can remain authentically whole by looking for potential manifestations of purpose within all kinds of work, even that

which appears outside of an understanding of purpose; each individual's identity is linked to that of others and work almost always carries the possibility of expressing care and solicitude toward others. As I reflect on these past experiences, I see opportunities lost as well as occasions relished as I made choices about being present to those with whom I worked, by considering the needs of those served by the work, and by applying lessons learned in future endeavors.

Understanding the search for meaning as a journey puts this discussion about balance in important context. An integrated approach to finding meaning in work requires an understanding that individuals are called to manifest their authentic being in employment, volunteer efforts, family, and all other activities that are commonly seen as requiring balance. In addition, this commitment to manifesting authenticity must be seen as one that is approached holistically over time, understanding that some elements of each individual's purpose are revealed with time as skills develop and the needs of the world evolve to match each purpose. I can manifest my authentic purpose even while accepting a job primarily based on financial needs by, for example, approaching a disciplinary hearing with care and concern for each of the other individuals involved and allowing that concern to inform my decision. At the same time, I know that this effort is but one of many manifestations of my purpose, and that time will reveal other opportunities in which further purpose will be exposed. The concept of balance as commonly used is therefore incomplete, as it underestimates the important goal of manifesting oneself authentically in all areas in which activity can bring individuals closer to God.



## **Understanding the Important Dual Role of Memory and Imagination**

This discussion of balance, which rejects the concept that work should be approached as separate from purposeful activity, reinforces the importance of memory and imagination as implications revealed through this text. The concept of a journey is important in order to understand purpose as something that is revealed in multiple ways over time. In addition, the time required for a journey allows for the dual roles of memory and imagination to inform satisfaction and enable the discernment of purpose. Although satisfaction in the present requires attention to the current moment, it also makes necessary “the capacity to liberate ourselves from the blind amnesia of the ‘now’ by projecting futures and retrieving pasts... [for] projection is an emancipatory function of narrative understanding [and] retrieval [is] a testimonial function” (Kearney 2004: 99).

Recently, I spoke with a neighbor about her decision not to begin a Master’s in Nursing program and instead remain engaged full time in the care of her children. Kathy expressed dissatisfaction and concern, even though she also said that she agreed with her husband that the intensity of the program would have distracted from the care of their very young children and caused her to miss opportunities with them that could not be regained. She expressed surprise at her own angst, for she had previously felt great joy in her time with her children and relished the opportunity to be with them at a crucial developmental stage and enjoy them at an age that seems especially fleeting. I told her that I suspected that her dissatisfaction was rooted in the loss of imagination that her decision not to pursue this educational opportunity implied, for while she was considering this educational opportunity, she had been able to inform her imagination with some concept of what her future would hold. Without it, her sense of her own

career future lacked any action upon which her imagination could build future possibilities. While her present situation remained unchanged, her satisfaction with it remained contingent upon her ability to use her imagination in a practical way to envision an exciting future. This resonated with her and she responded affirmingly, exclaiming “what a beautiful concept!”

Memory also plays a crucial role in current satisfaction. Kathy has nearly 20 years of professional accomplishments behind her; in fact, when her first child was born, she returned to a grueling schedule that demanded her absence from her baby for days at a time and during that time received accolades for her professional success. Kathy has many memories both of this period and of the decades of success that preceded it. This knowledge of her own abilities fuels her confidence about future possibilities, even as the memory of the pain that she felt when her job required her separation from her child provides her motivation for imagining different future career options. Memory then works in conjunction with imagination to fuel her vision about someday achieving fulfillment in paid positions that are structured differently from those she experienced in the past. This dual role of memory and imagination informs vision about the future, helping to avoid the possibility of “change for the sake of change,” which can both exhaust with unnecessary effort and paralyze with the fear of unintended consequences. Kearney (1999: 82) cites the value of tension between interpreting “being-affected-by-the-past” and “our horizon of expectancy,” noting that without the tension, “we easily succumb to a sterile antithesis between a reactionary apologism of the past and a naïve affirmation of progress.”

## **Embracing Change Informed by Reflective Spirituality**

Although memory and imagination provide an important tension to inform vision and action, change remains a necessary and important element of a journey. Kearney (2004: 83) speaks of “the complex set of social and cultural circumstances which each one of us presupposes as a speaking and listening being” and notes that these give “voice to hermeneutic imagination.” This investigation reveals the very individualistic nature of these specific circumstances, which inform the uniqueness of the search for authenticity and meaning in work. That search, while unique to each individual, has in common the concept of change, including both a trust of unplanned change and a willingness to instigate change informed by reflection through disciplined spiritual practice.

Participants told stories about experiences that they had had in which change was forced by circumstances, including extraordinary events such as the death of a child. To continue the search for meaning in work in the face of events that are so extraordinarily painful requires refocusing the search for meaning. Because identity is created through relationships in which oneself and the other are inextricably linked, identity changes dramatically when someone dies and the grieving process of necessity includes a realignment of identity. Kearney (1999: 100) describes this as

the process of narrative self-critique, [which] takes the form of a cathartic clarification whereby the self comes to ‘know itself’ by retelling itself. This may occur, for example, when a person commits herself to working the bits and pieces of unintelligible or suppressed experience into a narrative that acknowledges a certain self-constancy through change.

While a powerful example of unplanned and uncontrolled change, the implication remains even in the other, less dramatic examples that participants also shared of changes that happened to them, such as the loss of jobs or even of long-held expectations. In each

case, disciplined and rigorous spiritual practices become increasingly important to cope with the initial loss and then to make sense of changed identities. Rolheiser (2001: 229) poetically addresses the value of such changes within a life, recommending always looking

for the hand of providence in our interruptions. These often constitute a conspiracy of accidents within which God guides our lives. If we were totally in control of our own agendas, if we could simply plan and execute our lives according to our own dreams with no unwanted derailments, I fear that many of us would (slowly and subtly) become very selfish and would (also slowly and subtly) find our lives empty of simple joy, enthusiasm, family life, and real community.

Within a journey of purpose through work, change also must occur by design. Rolheiser (2001: 228) also reflects on this necessity, noting that while some lack of control allows God to create possibilities of grace within the search for purpose in work, “our lives are not meant to be left to pure circumstances and fate. We must actively choose and create destiny. It is not always good to accept whatever happens. We have dreams and talents and these are God-given and so we must fight for our agenda.”

This “fight” for individual “agenda” takes many steps, some specific and outlined below. Reflection is one important element that creates a foundation for other specific steps. Contrary to an understanding of the future as open and the past as closed, individual experiences reinforce the value of Kearney’s (1999: 81) adage to remain open to the insight that can come from reinterpreting past experiences through contemplation and subsequent action. Doing so, past events that initially appear to manifest purpose may be revealed instead as steps in the journey rather than a destination in which all elements of purpose are disclosed. Similarly, reflection allows purpose to be revealed in

events that did not appear meaningful when they occurred. Both revelations of meaning help to reinforce the value of reflection in informing change.

Reflection also plays a key role in change with regard to experiences that are initially perceived as negative but in retrospect become imbued with additional meaning that informs changes with a journey toward purposeful work. Participants describe this as “making lemonade out of lemons.” Karen’s dramatic story of suffering epitomizes the way in which the memory of such an experience can inform change. Merton (1955: 89-91) provides context for changing the meaning of suffering in order to grow, noting that “the effect of suffering upon us depends on what we love.” He emphasizes the value of each experience in informing a life’s journey of purpose, adding that suffering is useless only “when it turns us in upon ourselves, when it only makes us sorry for ourselves, when it changes love into hatred, when it reduces all things to fear.” Overcoming suffering and reinterpreting it in order to give it affirming meaning invokes the concept of a hero on a journey, an image that aptly applies to so many of those who shared their stories as part of this investigation. Campbell (1973: 51) notes that

one of the ways in which adventure can begin [is with] a blunder – apparently the merest chance – [which] reveals an unsuspected world and the individual is drawn into a relationship with forces that are not rightly understood. ... blunders are not the merest chance. They are the result of suppressed desires and conflicts. They are ripples on the surface of life, produced by unsuspected springs. And these may be very deep – as deep as the soul itself. The blunder may amount to the opening of a destiny.

Making change happen by informing it through reflection can lead to a fulfillment of destiny. Change must therefore be embraced even if the initial steps toward an intended purpose turn out to be a “blunder,” for wisdom can be gleaned even in apparent mistakes. The implication of embracing informed change is reinforced by the stories

participants tell of small steps and larger “leaps of faith” made during their journeys. Half of those who contributed to this investigation made major changes to their choice of work, decisions informed by reflection but unsupported by any absolute certainty about the success of their outcome. In each case, participants had some comfort in the knowledge that their decisions could be reversed, for jobs left can often be regained or similar jobs obtained. That provides initial reassurance; however, participants indicate that as they venture to make additional changes, they require fewer assurances, as their confidence grows with regard to their own discernment processes and moves from caution to excitement and anticipation of necessary change. This suggests that initial steps can be the hardest, even with “safety nets” in place; once instigated, however, change becomes easier to embrace and discernment about appropriate change becomes clearer with practice.

The lives of participants inspire others to embrace change informed by reflective spirituality. In addition to inspiring through example, participants offered specific advice for others engaged in a search for purposeful work, recognizing that each journey is individual and yet that common elements may be informed by shared wisdom. This counsel carries inimitable value, as it is informed by the success experienced within the very different journeys of those who participated in this investigation. The value of such counsel is affirmed by Kearney (1999: 95) through his description of “the hermeneutic act of transfer by analogy, [which] ... enables us to transport ourselves into alien or eclipsed moments, refiguring them as similar to our present experience, while simultaneously acknowledging their dissimilarity as distinct and distant.” Because of

this, specific advice that carries only general meaning for one person may resonate more with others. These follow below:

- Make the time to engage in both reflection and conversation about what is desired and valued, now and in the future. Ask what questions guide action and whether they are questions grounded in values, beliefs, and a deepening relationship with God.
- Constantly evaluate work holistically in relationship to dearly held values, goals, and dreams. Take action in areas that draw out the heart's deepest happiness, that which ignites passion and reflects deep desire. Consider gut reactions, for feelings act as indications of what works and that which is not right for individual choices.
- Start exploring opportunities by playing with different options, engaging activities that are imbued with love and see where the journey continues. Embrace discomfort and seek activity that is beyond that which has been previously experienced.
- Engage in reflection about motivations in order to develop self-awareness and then follow that reflective understanding with appropriate action. Ipek describes this as “a tuning in and showing up, not being afraid... being willing to show up... wherever I am called. As life presents opportunities, being aware of them, watching out for them, and considering them valid sources of messages.” The metaphor of a journey is used with the understanding that a journey of purpose is not a simple tour with a pre-established itinerary, but an adventure in which meaning is revealed with time, experience, and reflection.
- Engage in a rigorous and disciplined spiritual practice; acknowledge individual incompleteness and reliance upon both other individuals and God. The emphasis on

spiritual practices is imbued with particular importance when the search for meaning meets pain, for

there is no doubt that pain damages. Often, the most beautiful people are those who have been badly broken, who have accessed a place of grace and light and healing. They come back, cohered together beautifully. Out of dead vacancy, great darkness and sinister negativity can arise. Therein is the need for prayer, forgiveness, and mercy, which are sublime presences beyond human achievement that visit and mend us (O'Donohue 2007: 5).

While much literature allows a broad definition of spirituality, including “individual guidance,” participants indicate that such general beliefs are insufficient to a useful spiritual practice, as they represent understanding that is inherently incomplete and restricted by the limitations of individual understanding, knowledge, and experience. Specific recommendations offered as alternatives to a very broad understanding of spiritual practices represent the diversity of the participants. Therefore, the overall implication is not in the details, but in the advice to engage in a way that creates a deep and ever-growing connection between the individual and God, and the individual and others. Some efforts that participants share as effective within their experience include prayer, going on retreats, attending daily Mass, doing yoga, and engaging in meditation. Beyond the specific technique, individuals must decide what is meaningful in accordance with their spiritual beliefs and then commit to a practice that deepens a relationship with God.

- Start with the goal of rigor and discipline, but “go easy on yourself,” as Charity recommends, warning of “the fallacy of the perfect practice.” Balance a commitment to a spiritual practice with an attitude of exploration that allows discernment of a practice that matches personality to a demonstrated commitment to a deepened relationship with God.



- Develop a community of people who share the desire to talk about spiritual issues and in which open discussion can occur. Making promises in community emphasizes the commitment itself, so a community of supporters can both provide insights and can help keep individuals accountable for the action planned to affect the desired change.
- Take action and serve others. Stagnation can occur when an individual feels isolated from others who support a commitment to change; it can also occur when individuals become too oriented toward their own needs and forget the importance of finding identity in relationship with others. Karen emphasized the value of this advice, saying that when she met others caught in a sense of stagnation, she would “send them down [at a homeless shelter] to serve a meal.” She noted that “there would be almost always a radical increase in gratitude, or shift in perspective....” Even without a homeless shelter readily available to serve, she recommended the same thing, noting, “I say... get off the phone right now and call three people and ask them how they are doing, listen to how they are doing, ask them how you can support them....” By reorienting the emphasis from self to that of others, individuals overcome stagnation through action that is oriented toward service. Merton (1955: xx, 7) also reinforces this guidance, noting that

we do not exist for ourselves alone and it is only when we are fully convinced of this fact that we begin to love ourselves properly and thus also to love others, [which means] ... desiring to live, accepting life as a very great gift and a great good, not because of what it gives us, but because of what it enables us to give to others. ... Without my love for [others], they may perhaps not achieve the things God has willed for them.

- Look for growth or new connections as change is engaged and as more alternatives emerge; follow the options that appear most desirable and clear.

- Focus on gratitude for the gifts that are known and the areas in life where others have needs. Keep a list of things for which gratitude exists.
- Prioritize by focusing on what is needed for a complete spiritual life: community, service to others, spiritual practices, and a joyful approach to life. Prioritize specific options by using one of several different exercises, such as asking one of the following questions: What are the three things that you have in your possession that you would want to take with you into the next life? At the end of your life, in what activity would you want to spend a final hour?
- Be open to learning from every opportunity offered in life, in people, experiences, education.

### **Discerning Authenticity**

One of the most common questions posed by those frustrated with a search has to do with how authenticity is discerned. In this investigation, I refer to Father Steve's story as one that includes a "burning bush" experience, referencing the biblical story of Moses, who was spoken to by God who took the form of a burning bush, a form that was both unavoidable and absolutely recognizable. Those who have such experiences are provided clarity that may spare them the angst that many others feel about discerning whether the steps that they are taking as part of their journey are the right path; however, such an experience is appears to be less common. The implications of this research include insights with regard to how authentic purpose is revealed, some of which overlap with the advice provided in the section above. However, participant reflections about their own experiences provided additional implications, especially with regard to defining

authenticity within a life that is laden with inconsistencies and understanding that authenticity is found in care and solicitude toward others.

With regard to inconsistencies, I struggle to understand how to align the ideal described in the concept of authenticity with the real challenges faced by those who have engaged the search for unique purpose. Even those with whom I worked on this research, individuals who manifested much success within their own journeys, exhibited and described behavior that appears at times inconsistent. In describing authenticity, Heidegger (1962: 78) uses terms such as “unitary phenomenon,” “seen as a whole” and indicates (1962: 323) that “its character is determined by thrownness as a Fact,” has been delivered over to existence” and “constantly so remains.” The absoluteness of these descriptions depicts an ideal that inspires, but the reality participants share in their stories is one of unending challenges and continuous growth. Reflection led me to an important conclusion: part of a journey toward purposeful work must include acceptance of individual imperfections, for progress toward the goal of greater manifested purpose becomes impeded if artificial standards are imposed. Rather than striving for unrealistic consistencies in ourselves or in others, it is important to adopt an attitude of openness that allows for continuous learning for ourselves and an attitude of reciprocal forgiveness toward others who are similarly struggling.

Another implication of this research is captured by Marie, whose voice of conviction contributes much wisdom throughout this text. She is unequivocal in her certainty, supported by the stories of other participants, that authenticity will only be found in service to others and therefore advises that

we are really here to serve God and to comfort people and the minute you get into that mode, it is a miracle what happens in your life. A miracle! I don't know why

you can't have that as a slogan everywhere. Because it starts to change, things start to be a little nicer, a little less stressful, a little more light, but the minute you go back into you and start to worry about yourself, it gets very dark. And it never did any good!

Merton (1955: 3) echoes the narratives of those who participate in this investigation, noting that, "a happiness that is sought for ourselves alone can never be found." This wisdom raises a question regarding the discernment of authenticity, suggesting that individual guidance may be found in reflection about how individuals live their lives in relationship to God and to others. Merton (1955: xv) again poetically summarizes the importance of understanding that authenticity will only be found in service to others when he notes that

what every man looks for in life is his own salvation and the salvation of the men he lives with. By salvation I mean first of all the full discovery of who he himself really is. Then I mean something of the fulfillment of his own God-given powers, in the love of others and of God. I mean also the discovery that he cannot find himself in himself alone, but that he must find himself in and through others.

### **Organizational/Institutional Implications**

The implications above relate to individual journeys of purpose; however, this investigation reveals organizational implications as well. Education about the importance of finding meaning in work should occur at all levels so that no opportunity for discerning purpose is lost. The search for purpose in work began at different points for each of the participants in this study. However, several of the older participants described engaging in discernment early in childhood and indicated that this process was instigated by discussions about opportunities to serve that occurred in the organizations in which they were involved. In a contrary comparison, I recall being asked frequently, "what do you want to be when you grow up?" and of hearing that question posed to my

friends and siblings, yet I have no recollection of subsequent discussion related to opportunities to serve or to find purpose through work. “The greatest opportunity of childhood [is] the opportunity children have to develop their strengths, cultivate self-discipline, and find their *calling*” (Llewellyn and Silver 2001: 21). This statement, made in the context of realigning childhood education to relevant forms of learning, applies to learners at all ages and to those in educational, organizational, and community contexts. Therefore, one organizational implication of this research relates to the importance of introducing this topic for children at a young age and in continuing the discussion as learners age, excluding no one, so that continuous learning is adequately supported by a community similarly engaged in meaningful growth. Specifically, leadership programs should prioritize conversation about this concept in courses that emphasize the importance of discerning individual purpose in work, for the essence of leadership is contained in the ability to manifest authentically an individual’s true self in the activities of work.

Another organizational implication rises from the reassessment of the term “balance,” described above. A “work/life balance” is often seen as a desirable goal and one that is addressed with particular poignancy within the context of motherhood and employment. However, even a casual glance at the literature commonly referred to as the “mommy wars” indicates huge dissatisfaction with any of the choices that are available to women: women who define their work exclusively as the care of their children often feel that some of their talents are becoming stale, while those who are employed outside the home often find themselves unreasonably stretched by conflicting demands. I have talked with many women about this issue, seeking wisdom in the choices of others with which to

inform my own decisions, and yet have found few who are entirely satisfied with the tension created by the choices that they have made.

This investigation provides insight that applies to this tension, for implications are revealed by better understanding the refined definitions of work, authenticity, and uniqueness of purpose. First, in refining an understanding of work to include activity, paid or unpaid, that brings individuals closer to God, the very real work of child care is put into a much different context. One article described the women who choose this activity as having been “downgraded to full-time nannies,” (Graff 2007: 3) an offensive description that clearly puts this activity in a much more negative context than the definition of work revealed through this investigation. Such an impression undermines the important sense of calling that many feel for the work, relying upon traditional expectations of financial reward to determine the value of the activity. In order to discern all possibilities in the search for meaningful work, motherhood must join paid work, volunteer callings, and other such activities as being open to definition that defies common and materialistic understandings.

The same article reinforced the implications related to an understanding of authenticity as something revealed over time, for it suggests that “women are happier when occupying several roles” (Graff 2007: 3). This suggestion also relates to another implication: that multiple manifestations of authenticity may occur within a single life, either over time or within the same time period, all contributing to the fulfillment of a unique purpose in life. This is an essential concept, for the discussions related to the “mommy wars” are full of great angst about the difficult choices that women feel pressured to make in order to achieve balance between demands that occur

simultaneously. Valuing authenticity as both multi-faceted and a concept that is revealed over time as the world's needs change introduces new impetus into the discussion. Rather than choosing between apparently conflicting demands, an approach that truly honors the search for meaning must allow all possibilities to manifest. Women and men, both those who are parents and those who are not parents, must be empowered to reveal their authentic being in meaningful work. For this to be possible, radical changes need to be made to the way that employment is structured and to the way that career progression occurs. Rather than advocating for adjustments to the workplace that allow for a few more weeks of maternity leave or a few hours of “flex time” here and there, impetus exists for new understandings that fuel radical restructuring of the workplace in ways not yet imagined.

All people – including mothers - deserve ample opportunities to manifest their purpose in work over time. They should not have to experience “balance” in ways that lead to exhaustion rather than satisfaction and they should not have to fear that their choices will close doors rather than revealing ongoing opportunities for purpose. Doing this adequately requires changing the conversation from one in which adjustments are considered to a model that evolved without consideration of the needs of so many, to one in which innovative dialogue occurs with regard to how an ideal workplace would be structured if it were to be designed “from scratch.” Only then will imagination truly be free to redefine expectations and establish a framework from which advocacy for real change can occur.

Further, dialogue about women in the workplace that can be described using the term “war” needs to change, reflecting and honoring an understanding that each individual has

a unique purpose, one that will reflect unique choices, and one that should be honored in community. Some mothers find their purpose in the care of their children; some do not. Others find it manifest in that work only during certain stages of life. Chosen freely, no choice is better than another and yet dialogue continues to insinuate otherwise. Defining motherhood within a concept of work requires honoring all of the choices that women make. Oddly, such a basic acceptance of different choices rarely occurs, as evidenced by the multitude of articles about the aforementioned “mommy wars.” I recently discussed this phenomenon with a friend who had just resigned from an executive level engineering position when she adopted three children. Leticia and I talked about how odd it is to have such judgment imbedded in a discussion that is as inherently personal as the call to authenticity itself, and how misaligned such judgment is within workplace conversations that more typically value diversity and uniqueness. We spoke of the many models for workplace conversations that help to assess different personality types, work styles, and productivity patterns, explaining differences as relatively minor as how individuals organize their desks, and agreed that mothers need to have similar tools to help both discern appropriate choices and to explain such choices to others.

A final organizational implication relates to the concept of peace, which, like all other ideas addressed through this research, must be honored with an authentic understanding and approach. Karen described one example that she had experienced of individuals who were engaged in advocacy for an end to a war and yet approached their advocacy with anger wielded as a weapon. We chuckled over the hypocrisy of advocating for peace in a way that would have made the most aggressive diplomatic effort appear tame by comparison had the approaches been made on the same scale. This



example suggests that the very concept of peace needs to be redefined and understood as occurring not just on a national level but in the relationships that individuals have with each other. Herda's (1999: 7) adage bears repeating in this context: "when I change, the rest of the world changes." A true understanding of that statement functions as a reminder about the authentic definition of peace as an attitude that each individual affects.

### **Personal Implications**

Many of the implications of this work for me are included in the individual and organizational implications above, for as researcher, my voice blends with those of the participants in proposing new understandings and new worlds. The definition of work, understanding of authenticity, and affirmation of multiplicity of purpose are revealed for me in deeply personal ways, as I engage in different types of work that I know are manifestations of my authentic purpose. Angst that I had felt about opportunities lost through choices I made resolve, as I become increasingly respectful of and honored by the opportunities to engage in work about which I feel truly passionate. Concern about my future mitigates as I reflect on the experiences shared in the stories of others, and is replaced by gratitude for the opportunities to put practical use to imagination and excitement about the opportunities in my future. I have learned to approach work with humor borne of the irony experienced when working in the middle of the night, writing about purposeful work only to be frustrated by the interruption of being literally (and loudly!) summoned to do it. I have accepted and embraced the truth in the idea that I have multiple purposes. In my life, raising and educating my children is the most meaningful thing I can imagine doing and yet I know that I am also called to other work that is also important and purposeful.

I also appreciate the opportunities that I have created to blend the academic, professional and personal manifestations of my purpose, which allow my authentic being to emerge in the fruits of my labors. A humorous example of this occurred a few weeks ago when family members were discussing my efforts as engaged in this investigation, while out of my presence. I was later told that my mother could not remember the word “hermeneutics” and, knowing that I share much knowledge with my two year old daughter, turned to Katherine to ask her, “what is your Mommy studying in school?” To my sister’s surprise, Katherine immediately responded “hermeneutics,” at which my sister remarked, “I don’t even know what that is.” Neither expected Katherine to explain; however, she immediately offered insight, responding accurately that hermeneutics is, “the art of interpretation.” While this story is rooted in humor, it also depicts an element of my life that I deeply value, for it demonstrates how my academic work blends with the work of educating my children, signifying through such integration that my authentic being is revealed in each activity rather than forcing a “balance” between different manifestations of being.

In each of these individual implications, I am reminded of my purpose, which I believe is to increase the balance of love in the world. My work, in broad terms, is to fulfill that purpose by authentically being there in relationship with others, including my family, my community, and the employment, academic, and volunteer environments where I utilize my talents. My purpose therefore reflects the many implications revealed in this investigation, for it includes both specific service and the activity of being authentically present in relationship for others; it relies on memory and imagination to

provide current satisfaction and joy; and it allows for many manifestations as I continue to grow in my own understanding of myself in relationship to others and to God.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

Kearney (1999: 14) quotes Ricoeur as saying that “no historical period ever exhausted its own dreams.” It may also be true that no individual ever exhausted his or her potential, at least not here on earth, which emphasizes both the relevance of the journey as a metaphor and the focus on purpose as alignment with God. It also accentuates the challenge in this investigation, for every individual has a unique calling and so a story about finding purpose in work is inherently incomplete when other stories remain untold. Ricoeur (2004: 506) also affirms this reality, noting that “...writing a life is another story. Incompletion.” Additional research could therefore include other stories and additional implications that would arise from the wealth of experience in such narratives.

As noted in the introduction, this work includes the stories of ten formal participants, plus the researcher and informal participants. Each offers a unique perspective and has many different experiences; however, each also shares similarities born of nationality and location as well as education and corresponding opportunities. Future research could include different interpretations of work in the stories of those who seek meaning in work and who are from different cultures, who have different educational experiences, or who offer other forms of diversity.

One realistic boundary created by this research was that I sought participation from those who have stories that inspire; those offer wealth that provides value to this text. However, additional research could include conversations with others who may not see their lives as a journey to find meaning or who have not reflected on this topic,

addressing a question about what more could be done to encourage more reflection on this important topic.

As I learn more about the newest manifestation of my own purpose in my position as a parent, I see many implications of this research for parents who wish to facilitate the evolving journeys of their own children to find purposeful work. Additional research that focused on the support roles that parents and educators can play in such journeys could provide important insight.

Finally, I worked with participants who all feel some level of success in their journeys thus far. However, additional research could include conversations with others who feel that they have failed in their attempts to manifest authentic purpose. Such stories likely contain wisdom that could inform.

### **Conclusion**

The search for purpose in work often is a journey fraught with challenges, both those that provide ongoing frustration and those that reward through perseverance. Despite these difficulties, the search is worthwhile, for individuals who engage this journey ignite their imaginations with great possibilities for purposeful work that provides satisfaction, joy, and meaning. The participants in this investigation embody this conclusion, for in unique ways each demonstrates that this world is better because of the work in which they engage. Their initial search, their ongoing efforts to continue to discern evolving purpose, and their genuine engagement in the outcome of their work provides benefits to individuals, organizations, and institutions world wide.

This investigation tells the story of the lives of the participants and researcher to find spiritual meaning in work. It incorporates struggles, challenges, successes, lessons

learned, and ongoing imagination. Together these elements provide inspiration for others who understand their lives as containing the possibility of manifested purpose in work. The participants are each remarkable in very individualized ways; however the cumulative message of their experience is that each person has similarly extraordinary potential, created with a unique purpose that yearns to manifest.

The joy and satisfaction reported by those who have seen success in their journeys inspires and the stories told by participants contain wisdom from which others can enrich their own journeys. This wisdom highlights three main points. First, participants consistently emphasize the importance of adopting specific spiritual disciplines, recognizing that while some exploration of individual spiritual “style” is appropriate, a rigorous approach to deepening a relationship with God is an essential part of finding spiritual meaning in work. In addition to a rigorous practice, participants also reiterate the importance of manifesting prayer as action by helping others. Moving from reflection to action that is engaged with the intention of helping others puts self-identity in appropriate context, reinforcing connection with others. This helps further the journey toward authentic representation of life’s purpose.

Finally, engaging a journey of purpose toward spirituality in work requires the courage to be open to change that may reveal different possibilities for being than previously imagined. Half of those who participated in this investigation made major changes in their work and report that such changes were integral to the satisfaction that they feel. They also reassure through their experiences, for despite initial fears that may hinder initiated action, participants report that once undertaken, change becomes easier.

However, though such radical changes that lead to significantly different types of work may call, meaning can also be found in work without completely restructuring job, career, and lifestyle. Many of those who informed and inspired this investigation provide wisdom about the deep levels of purpose, satisfaction, and joy they have found in their work, work undertaken for many years without major detours. Doing so requires reflection and a genuine relationship with God. It also requires understanding oneself as being always in relationship with others. That understanding, combined with reflection and an understanding of oneself also in relationship with the divine, reinforces purpose as being continuously engaged in ethical action and in genuine, solicitous, and caring relationships with the many “others” encountered in any particular job. Further, an understanding of spiritual purpose as a journey provides wisdom related to the evolution of that journey, for many participants find that their purpose manifests in multiple ways.

Lebanese poet Kahil Gibran tells us that “work is love made visible” and the Gospel of John in the Bible notes that “God is love and anyone who lives in love is living with God and God is living in that person.” This investigation reveals clearly that work links individuals to God by a reflective process of discerning action. With spirituality rooted in the divine and action rooted in care and solicitude, a journey toward spirituality through work will be inescapably purposeful and inevitably joyful.

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## Appendix A: Letter of Invitation and Guiding Questions

Date

Participant's Name and Title  
Company or Organization  
Address

Dear Mr. /Ms.:

I very much appreciate your willingness to participate in a conversation about my dissertation topic. As you know, my research looks at the journeys of those who have sought their purpose in the work that they do, investigating the various ways that spiritual purpose is demonstrated in work and the different routes that people take when engaged in a search to reveal and manifest that purpose. I am inviting people from political, academic, corporate, non-profit, medical, and other fields to share their experiences with me, looking back on the route taken thus far, reflecting on the current status of their journeys, and reflecting on how they imagine their paths will reveal meaning in their future work. By engaging in such conversations, I hope to create a text that will allow others who seek their purpose through work to imagine new futures that are infused with meaning.

Our conversation and my conversation with other participants will act as data for the analysis of this research topic. Once transcribed, I will provide you a copy of our conversation so that you may review its content and form. You may add to or delete any section of the conversation at that time; when I receive your approval, I will then use our conversation to support my analysis. Data that you contribute, your name, and your position will not be held confidential.

While the conversations and transcripts in this research are collaborative in that you will have the opportunity to edit, add to, or delete any section of the transcript of our conversation, the writing that comes from them will be the researcher's product. You have consented to forgo anonymity under these conditions, have been given complete and clear information about this research, and have complete authority and control at the outset and throughout the process about whether to participate or not. Further, you can withdraw at any time without any adverse consequences.

Below you will find a series of proposed questions. These questions are primarily for use as guidelines for our conversation; my hope is that our conversation provides an opportunity for the richness of this topic to be revealed through our conversation so that we can learn together through the exploration of this topic.

Reflecting upon your own experiences, please consider the following for discussion:

- Symbols: What metaphor would you use to describe your journey to spiritual meaning through work so far? For example, some might say that they journey has been a “rollercoaster,” others that it is a “marathon,” or even a “surprise party with lots of unexpected gifts.”
- The Journey Toward Meaning: Please share with me how you arrived at the point of doing the work that you currently do. Can you describe for me some of your experiences that make this work a calling that you want to continue doing? As you journeyed thus far, what were the things that provided indication to you that you were on the right path?
- Effect of Work: How does the spiritual meaning that you draw from your work affect other aspects of your life? One (anonymous) quote that I have collected suggests, “When your heart is filled with love, you will do all things well.” Has this been true in your experience?
- Concern for Others: If you were to give counsel to someone else who felt frustrated in his or her own journey to find purpose through work, what advice would you give? What struggles have you experienced in your journeys? What have been the challenges and detours along the way?
- Imagination and Action: Ten years from now, how do you expect that you will look back on your journey from the present? How has your journey thus far been different from how you originally imagined it?

Again, I very much appreciate your willingness to contribute to this research project through your reflections on your own experience. I look forward to meeting with you soon.

Most sincerely,

Therese M. Madden  
Researcher, Doctoral Candidate  
University of San Francisco  
Organization and Leadership

[madtortuga@aol.com](mailto:madtortuga@aol.com)



## Appendix B: Sample Thank You Letter

Date

Participant's Name and Title  
Company or Organization  
Address

Dear Mr. /Ms.:

Thank you very much for taking the time to meet with me on \_\_\_\_\_. I appreciate your willingness to contribute to this research project and I believe that our conversation will be a valuable part of my dissertation.

I have attached a copy of the transcribed conversation. Please take a moment to glance through the attached transcript and add any changes or clarifying comments that you feel may be appropriate. If you have any changes, please let me know by \_\_\_ that you will be providing them. If I do not hear from you, I will adopt the transcript as data for my analysis. As a reminder, data from this research are not confidential.

Again, thank you for your participation and for the exchange of ideas in conversation. I very much enjoyed talking with you and appreciate your time and reflections as I believe they will be a very valuable addition to this project.

Sincerely,

Therese M. Madden  
Researcher, Doctoral Candidate  
University of San Francisco  
Organization and Leadership

[madtortuga@aol.com](mailto:madtortuga@aol.com)

## **Appendix C: Field Journal Excerpts**

February 7, 2007:

Re: journey. If I didn't have imagination about my own future (through school), would I feel so much angst that I would fail to appreciate this blissful time, fulfilling my true purpose as Katherine's mother? How often do we miss the precious present? How does this failure to live in the present affect our understanding of our purpose?

I have (mostly) a sense of confidence and peace about present and future because of the depth of my past experiences – desiring children, success at work, diverse application of my talents within neighborhood community work. What is required for that sense of peace? X amount of success, years of experience, faith, a combination of these... or, even, shared bliss in the project.

February 11, 2007:

As I finessed the section in my proposal about my own journey, I reflected on my own sense of satisfaction, joy, and purpose, but wish that I could go back in time to reassure a former self that all of my angst would resolve!

February 20, 2007

Awareness of being on a journey: this has got to be an important element of the reflection of each conversation partner. There are so many components of this... they have led me to reflect on the value of each stage of my journey.

Talking with Ellen, we reflected on the “meaning in work” essays that her Culture and Work class do and the fact that so many are looking for more meaning in work. For me, I remember feeling like I had meaning in my work at the time I took that class, but finding meaning at that stage in the journey (which Ellen and I agreed sounds rather terrible now – and she doesn't know a fraction of it!) didn't stop me from moving on to even more meaning.

It's an interesting question – balancing finding beauty where you are with continuing to imagine more, being satisfied and yet dissatisfied at the same time. Embrace the dissatisfaction, I suppose! Although it was really in part my imagination and in part circumstances that led me on – how much did I construct myself and how much was the hand of God? As I look back, I can see fragments of clues (threads) at many stages. The fact that I liked learning enough to pursue this program, for example, and my long-standing financial plans for saving so that I could stay home with Katherine. Also, having some “tools” for giving myself perspective helps too. For example, imagining myself at the end of my life and wondering what I would say in terms of where I would spend one precious last hour of my life as a way to make the (now obvious) choice between Katherine and my job.

Does change feel hard if it is part of your authentic purpose? Should it? Although in some ways giving up my job was hard in that it took a while to decide – and I still have dreams about it that make me realize that my feelings about it remain unresolved – I also

feel like adjusting to my new life with Katherine is not an “adjustment” at all in terms of feeling awkward or difficult and instead is a coming into myself – being with her is where I am supposed to be. The things that I worried about regarding staying home – my career, mostly – are completely irrelevant both in light of my complete joy and because I see so many possibilities for and in my future.

### March 1, 2007

Thoughts, unrelated:

- 1) God. How can someone find a sense of purpose if they don't believe in a Creator who gave them that purpose, created them with unique gifts, etc.? I don't expect to find an answer, as my proposed conversation partners so far do have faith. But it is an interesting question.
- 2) What if you think your purpose is something it is not? If you pursue something and then find out it was the wrong course? Or if you want something, but never quite achieve it. Thinking of life as a journey answers part of this in that in such an analogy you learn from each element and that knowledge hopefully informs future legs of the journey, but I feel for those in this situation.

### March 3, 2007

More thoughts. What if purpose finds you in a way that defies imagination? Thrownness in the form of, for example, having a family member stuck with a disease and care for them or advocacy for prevention/cure becomes a life purpose, as never before imagined. Some people have a “burning bush” and others have a more obscure discernment process, yes... but this particular question has to do with those suddenly confronted with a situation that forces their hand and evolves into their passion. But then, perhaps even in those cases, other elements of life prepared them for this? Whereas others in the same situation don't adopt “the cause....”

### March 4, 2007

Barash's article on collective memory raises (among other things) the issue of how one determines the ethical nature of one's journey. Must be for the common good, but how is this determined?

See Ricoeur: “Imagination, Testimony, and Trust” in Questioning Ethics. He says that “no historical period ever exhausted its own dreams” – is that also true of people? Relevant because he goes on to say that we should go back and look for the future of the past. Could we do that, as individuals, look for our own true path (traces of it revealed in imaginings throughout our lives)?

### March 16, 2007

Conversation last night about work really irked me. The idea was “Europeans have it better – they work just to work and then spend more time with leisure.” But what's the point of life if not work? If you get no spiritual meaning through work, then you need a new job, not more leisure time. I think of leisure as more time for TV contrasted with activity that brings one closer to God. Family time is good – another form of purpose in work – but pure leisure – what's accomplished if you fill your life with that? Also, I

consider stories of maternity care abroad as an example of the result of this attitude toward work, where friends have reported being so ignored in the hospital during “non business hours.” That lack of solicitude toward others, except when it is convenient, seems to be a result of this idealized attitude toward work.

#### April 4, 2007

A busy day spent going over books on vocation and purpose. So much there! But so many of this literature resonates only in small parts.

I had an interesting conversation with Charity Khan. I was asking her how she got started with JAM and she said that though she was working half time after the birth of her first child, she was just not in the right “psychic space” to be doing both things. I can see that! To pour so much physical and creative energy into kids music and affirming them, etc. and then to do the unemotional work of an engineer would be a real challenge because the work is so different.

I’ve been thinking a lot about Rose as I write, since her life seems to need change – according to her! How can I cull from the wisdom that is out there and create something that speaks to her life and help her to find more meaning. Her spiritual life seems so strong, but perhaps she needs more in terms of action – service to others – to call her beliefs into action and thus bring meaning to her life.

#### April 28, 2007

Conversation with Francisca about journey versus purpose: why focus on the journey if the purpose is the relationship with God?

#### May 20, 2007

Imagination drives – and assuages – discontent. (NOTE inserted December 17, 2007 when re-reading this entry: Think of Kathy and her discontent – and the light that went on when I said this!) Imagination makes us keep on thinking about what is next, never quite satisfied, always open to more... even when you are completely satisfied, you know that change is part of life and your own interests – plus the needs of the world – will change, so you remain open to new opportunities, etc.

#### August 4, 2007 (Later note: Only a week before Gabriela was born!)

Reading “Guerrilla Learning” reminded me of what Charity said – that what we want instinctively for our children, adults also deserve. So, in the context of education as a synonym for life, some initial thoughts about what I most want for my children:

- Love. To go through life with an innate and complete sense of being loved. I want it to be a cushion that both protects from the ‘slings and arrows’ of life and one that informs their very identity, giving them confidence to be their authentic selves and manifest their purposes in every way. My goal in my work as their mother is to demonstrate my unconditional love in every way humanly possible, with the hope that by doing so, they will discover God’s greater love and the infinite possibilities for which they were created.

- Learn. Katherine has such an innate joy, enthusiasm, and knack for learning. I want her to retain that, which I believe will be so important to help her manifest her purpose AND nurture her relationship with God. I want her to be a critical thinker and I want her educational experience to nurture that thinking so that she learns to come to intelligent and ethical decisions about life that are rooted in consistent values, not simply regurgitated thoughts or behavior learned from others.
- Responsibility. Action starts with self. Develop solid values and live them. Take control of your own life, your relationship with God, etc.
- Elaborate more....

#### August 8, 2007

Talking with Leticia today, we were discussing choices and priorities related to career versus parenting. My point is that what works for one mother does not work for another... and yet there is this odd sense of criticism/justification tied up in the discussion about women and work. I told her about a column I read in which the author took over her nanny's duties for two weeks, only to conclude that while some may find fulfillment in taking care of the material needs of their family, she did not. She liked the additional time with her kids, but not the laundry/cleaning time. My contention is that no one feels satisfied with work composed of laundry and scrubbing floors – not stay-at-home moms, not nannies, not housekeepers. That's just something that needs doing. This column – phrased so unintentionally condescendingly – epitomized the problem to me of the whole “debate” of the “mommy wars.” Why do we have tools that make it acceptable to prefer working alone versus with others (MTBI “E” versus “I”) but not a mentality that makes different mothering choices equally acceptable. Why don't we have tools to help women discern whether or not... and when... they should go back to work? (And to what job – straight to the concept of vocation.)

#### September 5, 2007

I keep getting hung up on how much there is on this subject. I have to focus my own research on the stories of the journeys of my conversation partners and the perspectives of memory, imagination, and authenticity – past, present, and the search.

#### October 8, 2007

Work: Katherine asked me “why” Daddy worked. My answer: some people work because they need money and some people, like me, work because it brings them satisfaction, happiness, and brings them closer to God. How blessed I am!

## **Appendix D: Excerpt from Transcript of Field Conversation**

TM. The work itself really excites me because I am looking at how people find meaning in their work. And I am hoping through the conversations, literature, and gathering data that I will learn more and be able to create a dissertation that helps inform other people who are looking at this.

My first question relates to metaphors, just getting us thinking creatively. If you were to describe your own journey toward finding spiritual meaning in work, is there a metaphor that comes to mind?

We don't have to be limited to these questions, these are just guiding questions to clarify the topic, but I am most interested in having a conversation with you and learning from whatever you have...

KJ. Okay. I would say that for me it's been a controlled falling. I'm clear that I am out of control and that I am falling. And yet I'm also clear that I have some control too, that I am participating with God in all of this. I find that the meaning that I glean from... any meaning that is true and not just my perspective is where my will and God's will are aligning. That's where I'm falling, and yet it's controlled, somehow. So I can't really explain it, it's a cooperative effort, I allow myself to be falling and I am also controlling... like, I am trying to keep my feet down stream. So it's not like I am bashing against the sides or concerned that I am going to bump my head – no...

TM. That brings up a question that came up in my defense. They asked how I was going to distinguish spirituality from religion and suggested that I ask you how you define spirituality.

KJ. In all of us, there is an innate presence that I call God or Christ, that is in all of us, authentically, always there. And we lose track of it by the time we are three years old and its really, we forget. And spirituality is the search for that place where my will and God's will are aligned together. So God is not something out there that I am searching for or something that shows up when I need a favor, but for me my spirituality is where I can rest some peace in knowing that I am aligning my will with God's will.

TM. That really puts the rest of the conversation in context, too. In terms of your own spiritual journey toward finding, feeling like you are aligned with God's will and how that has evolved in your choice of jobs.

KJ. I never know where to start the story. I like to start by saying that I was really a huge non believer, not even an atheist because they believe something.... I had been emotionally abused by a priest who told me that I had a poisoned soul and that I was going to go to hell when I was seven. So I really believed that was true, because he knew, he was the priest, and I lived that out, you know, tried to be really good when I was younger and then I went through stages where I was really bad... I couldn't figure out how I fit in with my family and I didn't want to poison to get on them and so as a kid,



I negotiated my whole life around trying to distance myself from my family so that they wouldn't be harmed. Can you believe it? From ages seven to 29, but it took different forms. From seven to 16 I tried to be really good and then from 16 to 29 I tried to be bad so that they'd throw me away, but they never did, so... it was horrible. By the time I was 29 I was suicidal. I had a voice in my head that would wake me up at night and say, just kill yourself. And one day I realized that the only way I was going to shut that thing up was just to do it! Because it wasn't going anywhere and there was no where to turn. And I had no... I wasn't mad at God, I didn't think about God at all, I just knew that I was a wretch.

TM. It had really become part of your identity.

KJ. Yeah.

TM. And just one comment, one time.

KJ. Yeah. And I started to cry. At seven. I was standing up and he was kneeling down and I said, well, Father, what can I do? And he said, there's nothing you can do! And then he turned back and said, don't make it worse, which as an adult is kind of funny – how much worse can it get? You just sentenced me to hell. But as a kid I was like, okay, I'll try not to make it worse!

TM. That's horrible!

KJ. I hate to think about other kids that that happened to, who didn't have the family that I had, who didn't... because my Mom – I developed a nervous twitch right away and she said, what's that about, and I said, what do you mean? And she took me and brought me in front of the mirror and I told her and she was like, what the hell? Who told you that?! And both of my parents were like, that's it! My Mom said, you and God are going to be great and you'll work it out and that guy's a liar and he's wrong and they went and told him and we quit the church. But it still left a seven year old... yeah, like that's nice Mommy, but the priest knows about the God stuff. So it was really horrible, but my parents were so great about it.

KJ. And it is one thing to like be hit by somebody, but to have the threat of hell and I knew God was, could see everything I was doing, I mean literally, he could track me, there was no escape. It wasn't just you are a bad student or you are a bad girl or you are a bad Catholic or any of that, it really was just you are bad to the bone and the universe is watching that all the time, so it really was, just, oh man, what a drag. So anyway, by the time I was 29 I bought a handgun and I was going to kill myself and instead I had a salvation experience where... First of all, the day I was going to do it was a very peaceful day for me. Finally I was going to end this voice. It wasn't so much about ending my life so much as it was about ending this voice. By then, by the time that I was 29, the only thing that was in my mind was this molasses dark, bitter, horrible thing, all darkness and noise in there and God revealed Himself as this huge light in my head and outside my head, everywhere. And this was the moment where I realized that I had a

choice. That's in there too? You're in there too? And then I just immediately started to pursue that, really romantically, with my friend, everything. I really didn't know that this was there, that I had a choice. And it didn't wash everything away, no blood of Jesus treatment to wash away my sins, because I was really bad. When you believe that you are going to go to hell in your 20s, you do terrible things to people and it's a miracle that no one was harmed, I wasn't harmed, no jail terms, but really, there was a lot to clean up and none of that got washed away. So it wasn't one of those, oh my sins are washed away by the blood of Jesus. I still was left responsible for the mess I'd created. And in the distancing of my family – I had treated them really badly. You know, trying to like keep them away from my poison, I had been horrible. So there was a lot to clean up. And I'm so glad that it was like that. I wouldn't have, for me, if I had had all of my sins washed away, probably I would still be broken up with my family.

TM. Because you wouldn't have dealt with it?

KJ. Yeah, I would have been like, hey, all of my sins are washed away. Get over it! Or, you should be converted too, or all of that good stuff. But I was really, really responsible for all of that and I got to be responsible, so that was God's gift to me, too. To NOT wash away my sins.

It took a while, but I really pursued, whatever that thing was for me.

TM. How did you do that? I would think that that would be so completely foreign, if you are oriented so completely in another direction, to the point of buying a handgun and then suddenly having this revelation... what were the practical steps that you took?

KJ. I started in the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. I had been drinking myself to death, well, not really to death, but definitely to kill my pain. And to not have to deal with people. So that was the first thing I did. Someone suggested it. Within like 12 hours of this revelation someone said, have you thought that maybe you drink too much. And I said, yeah, maybe I do. And I worked myself through Alcoholics Anonymous and it turns out that I am not an alcoholic but I was drinking alcohol to kill myself. So I started hanging around people who were talking about stuff – that was huge, because my whole thing was, don't be around people and don't talk about what's going on between our ears for sure, because that's like just too gross to me. And then, look, they have those things too; it's not just personal for me but... and I really got to be with people. And I took that on like someone threw me a life raft, like, I really pursued it. My romance with God was fed by being with these people who were considering different spiritual principles, talking in a spiritual language, and I hadn't done that since I'd been at church, it had been over 20 years.... So that's what I did, putting myself into work where people wanted to talk about spiritual issues.

TM. Did you have trouble finding that?

KJ. It all kind of came along . Options just showed up. Every time I'm at a place where I don't know what to do next, the universe goes, there you are, choose. The previous part

is almost like a movie that I saw. I mean, I am clear that that was me and I don't want to lose – I'm glad to have had it. I consider myself very uncommon. Common people live their lives like that, like on TV, their whole lives. I'm almost glad I had it to such a bad degree because if I had it to just 60% I probably could have survived it.

TM. ...[inaudible] because they are dealing with that kind-of 60%, they are just dealing with life as it comes and they are not thinking either to their spirituality or to purpose or to God or to anything, they are just going through it day by day. And I don't even know where to begin with people like that....

KJ. Most people are like that. I think that it would be conservative to say that 80% of people are like that. Because consciousness and responsibility and spirituality... they are not in the easy path. It takes rigor and discipline and putting other things aside that are perhaps more fun or more pleasurable. And I think that there are a lot of people who say that they are spiritual and they go to church once a week and they put ten bucks in the basket, but the rigorous, every day discipline of spirituality is... I am clear that I suck at it! And I give my whole life to it.

TM. And seeing yourself as being on an ongoing journey.... Most people I know who see themselves as spiritual are on an ever deepening course and looking always to strengthen that relationship with God. And it adds so much depth to life.

KJ. And it may not even be true. That's one thing, Therese, it may not even be true, but it's a much better game than the one I was playing before.

TM. I was having that conversation last summer, who was saying, how can you believe in God; it's like believing in Santa Claus. It occurred to me that my life is so much richer because I don't believe that. And to believe that, would make me feel empty...

KJ. Yeah.

TM. Tell me about how that new insight manifested itself in work, you clearly are finding a lot of joy in what you are doing. Tell me how your journey progressed.

KJ. How my journey progressed. Well, I was a school teacher and I taught math at that time and that was a great place to be because I was as mature as they were.

TM. What age?

KJ. High school, so 16 to 18. And they really, they were the perfect group for me to get conscious with, to be working with. So, that happened. And then, two of my students murdered someone. And I witnessed a drive-by shooting and one of my colleagues was killed. So I took a year off..

*(Continued in separate document that contains all of the research conversations, transcribed)*

### **Appendix E: Field Project Excerpt of Theory and Analysis of Text**

Our reflection on the topic of spiritual journeys toward purpose revealed a slowly discovered authenticity of being, or, explained differently, an ongoing attempt to “apprehend a possibility of being” (Ricoeur 1982: 56). The motivations that have been a consistent part of Dave’s being, even when his journey took apparent detours, are important to understand, for Dave’s authentic being, as explained by Heidegger (1962: 78) “stands for a unitary phenomenon. This primary datum must be seen as a whole.” This element of being is relevant not just in Dave’s journey, but as an assumption that drives much of this investigation, for while many people hope for a calling that is clear and unequivocal, the more common journey appears to be one in which meaning, including spiritual meaning through work, is revealed only over time when experience and discernment unite with wisdom and grace.

Ricoeur (1991: 115) reminds us that “in many narratives the self seeks its identity on the scale of an entire life; between the brief actions... and the *connectedness of life*.” This connectedness is tied to spirituality and Dave’s life “between [his] brief actions” reveal a journey toward spiritual meaning through connectedness to one another. His current orientation lies firmly grounded in what he sees as his three-fold purpose, to be a good person and father, to support and maintain the orphanage he started in Liberia, and to spread a message of peace and freedom from war through his organization. In each of these endeavors, Dave is driven by the idea of service to others and his actions reflect Ricoeur’s concept of oneself as another when he stated that the concept “suggests from the outset that the selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other” (Ricoeur 1992: 3).

Kearney (1998: 1) tells us that “imagination lies at the very heart of our existence.” Imagination allows Dave to anticipate how things might be, thus providing “shape to what remains chaotic, obscure, and mute” (Ricoeur 1991: 115). He envisions the orphans in Liberia becoming productive adults who will someday contribute to the self-sustenance of the orphanage and he imagines a world without war in which people in all countries live free from fear. Imagination also allows Dave to look at his own journey and from it to see threads of consistent motivation and instigating experiences that propelled him to new levels in terms of finding his authentic purpose. While he continues to make plans to sustain and grow each of his endeavors, he reflected on the “miracles” that have occurred in the journey thus far and acknowledged that his purpose may yet be further revealed.

**Appendix F: Conversation Partners**

Table I: Formal Conversation Partners

<b>Name</b>	<b>Occupation/Title</b>	<b>Organization/Affiliation</b>
David Dionisi	Founder	Freedom from War, Davis, CA
Marie Gallo	Philanthropist	Self/Family: Gallo Wineries, Modesto, CA
Ellen Herda	Professor	University of San Francisco
Kirsten Lynn Jones	Mother, former IT executive	Self-employed, Windsor, CA
Karen Junker	Director of Home and Hospital Visitors and ordained Minister in the United Church of Christ	Center for Attitudinal Healing, Sausalito, CA
Charity Kahn	Artist/Founder	Joy and Music: JAM, San Francisco, CA
Henry Milanowski	Dentist (retired)	Private practice, Grand Rapids, MI
Steven Maekawa	Dominican (Roman Catholic) priest; Vocations Director for Western Dominican province	St. Dominic’s Catholic Church, San Francisco and St. Albert’s Seminary, Oakland, CA
Ipek Serifsoy	Business consultant and leadership coach	Self-employed, Sausalito, CA
Maria Francisca Vickroy-Peralta	Former banker, current theology student	Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology, Berkeley, CA

Table II: Informal Conversation Partners

<b>Name</b>	<b>Occupation/Title</b>	<b>Organization/Affiliation</b>
Dawn	Legal Advocate	San Jose Courts (CA)
Kathy	Parent	Tamalpias Valley, CA
Theresa	Special Needs Educator	Foster City School District, CA
Leticia	Foster Mother	San Francisco, CA
Rose	Engineer	State Government, San Francisco, CA

**Appendix G: Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects**  
**Approval**

March 30, 2007

Dear Ms. Madden:

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) at the University of San Francisco (USF) has reviewed your request for human subjects approval regarding your study.

Your application has been approved by the committee (IRBPHS #07-020). Please note the following:

1. Approval expires twelve (12) months from the dated noted above. At that time, if you are still in collecting data from human subjects, you must file a renewal application.
2. Any modifications to the research protocol or changes in instrumentation (including wording of items) must be communicated to the IRBPHS. Re-submission of an application may be required at that time.
3. Any adverse reactions or complications on the part of participants must be reported (in writing) to the IRBPHS within ten (10) working days.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRBPHS at (415) 422-6091.

On behalf of the IRBPHS committee, I wish you much success in your research.

Sincerely,

Terence Patterson, EdD, ABPP  
Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

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IRBPHS University of San Francisco  
Counseling Psychology Department  
Education Building - 017  
2130 Fulton Street  
San Francisco, CA 94117-1080  
(415) 422-6091 (Message)  
(415) 422-5528 (Fax)  
[irbphs@usfca.edu](mailto:irbphs@usfca.edu)

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<http://www.usfca.edu/humansubjects/>