

Self-Empowerment

Spring 2007

The newsletter dedicated to nurturing personal development

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Seeking Meaning and Guidance

Many of us seek meaning and guidance when faced with changes in our lives or the lives of loved ones. While issues of illness or death can be the most obvious triggers for such needs, there are other changes that similarly spark such searching.

Change can be frightening

Any change can raise big questions about the meaning of one's life and concerns about the future. Questions arise that can shake the foundation of a person's identity, as in the case of divorce or a child going away to college. The stages of grief, as suggested by Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Some or all of those stages can come into play as a result of life changes.

I experienced grief when my boss retired. During the past 13 years we worked together, a great friendship developed between us. He became a mentor to me, as his counsel and support assisted me through several chapters in my personal life and career. As his retirement drew near, I periodically experienced anxiety. I knew I would miss working with him and having daily access to his wisdom and humor. Several months before his last day on the job, his wife, who is a hospice nurse, shared a poem with me that I found very helpful. That poem by Hank Dunn, "Giving Up and Letting Go and Letting Be" is a gift I share with you following this message. I am grateful that my ex-boss is alive and well, yet life at work is different as the new boss (who is also a gem) settles in and establishes new procedures and work relationships.

Another resource that made a world of difference for me as I faced several big changes at home and at work, was the teaching of David Paul and Candace Doyle, authors of *The Journey That Never Was* and their newest book *The Voice for Love: Accessing Your Inner Wisdom to Fulfill Your Life's Purpose*. I am happy to make this latest book of theirs available to you through the Annual Spring Fundraiser (page 5). I highly recommend this book for anyone who seeks meaning and guidance.

Also in this issue, is an inspirational excerpt of Steve Hart's goodbye message, given to the church with which he has spent the last 24 years as choir director. Despite

their loss and feelings of grief, the congregation wished him joy and success as he moves on to continue his music ministry in a different church.

I am grateful for the blessing of sharing this journey with you. May we continue to find meaning and guidance in our lives. Blessings, Love and Hugs!

Your fellow traveler, *Rev Jill*

Giving Up and Letting Go and Letting Be by Hank Dunn

- Giving up implies a struggle –
 - Letting go implies a partnership –
 - Letting be implies, in reality, there is nothing that separates
- Giving up says there is something to lose –
 - Letting go says there is something to gain –
 - Letting be says it doesn't matter
- Giving up dreads the future –
 - Letting go looks forward to the future –
 - Letting be accepts the present as the only moment I ever have
- Giving up lives out of fear –
 - Letting go lives out of grace and trust –
 - Letting be just lives
- Giving up is defeat –
 - Letting go is victory –
 - Letting be knows suffering is often in my own mind in the first place
- Giving up is unwillingly yielding control to forces beyond myself –
 - Letting go is choosing to yield to forces beyond myself –
 - Letting be acknowledges that control and choices can be illusions
- Giving up believes that God is to be feared –
 - Letting go trusts in God to care for me –
 - Letting be never asks the question

Reprinted with permission of the author from "Light in the Shadows: Meditations While Living with a Life-Threatening Illness," Second Edition, 2005, A & A Publishers, Inc., www.hardchoices.com.



Discovering the Essence of Ministry

By Stephen G. Hart

I bet that there has been at least one time in your life when you have somehow found courage you didn't think you had, to do something you thought was impossible. Perhaps you successfully completed a particularly difficult project for which you were not trained. Perhaps you won a competition when you or your team was the underdog. Perhaps you finally took a public stand for something you believed in but were previously afraid to speak out.

Whatever the reason, when this happens, ordinary people somehow find a way to commit themselves to perform extraordinary acts of courage. They often overcome enormous pressures as well as their own fears and doubts as they take tentative but brave steps into the unknown.

Throughout scripture we read stories about how God worked through ordinary people, gave them courage and inspiration to bring forth the fruits of their calling. Imagine what it would be like if each of us was totally dedicated in our actions to make of our ministry the results we believe God wants from it. We should truly examine whether we are doing all we can to uncover what God intends for us to do. But what is it exactly that we need to do?

A Calling to Teach

God's call came to me almost 30 years ago while working as a music and art teacher in a special education boarding school located in the Lake District in North West England. The school specializes in educating 75 to 80 emotionally disturbed and maladjusted boys ages 6 to 18. The children attending the school while I was there comprised mostly of so called "rejects" from the English education system. They were sent there because they were too disruptive or dangerous to be in the state school system, or they did not attend school at all. Usually, most came from a dysfunctional family situation. Many had severe learning problems; some had addictions or physical and mental disabilities. A few had a history of violence. Not surprisingly, most of the boys naturally resisted any form of learning. Almost all of them had a great deal of difficulty being with or expressing themselves to other people.

I was attracted to the school because it had an impressive record of success and an excellent reputation in the education system. The children who attended had the lowest recidivism rates and a number of graduates had gone on to lead very productive lives in society. I was curious to see how this school's results seemed to stand out when compared to other schools in the same

business, so I was excited when I was offered a job to teach there, not long after graduating university.

In very short order I was overwhelmed with the challenge of teaching these children, especially trying to develop their interest in music and art. At times it seemed pointless, frustrating and futile. I felt inadequate, ill suited for the job and actually feared for my well-being at times. Since I also lived in a house on the grounds of the school, I felt like I never got away from the job. In addition to daily teaching, I was required to stay and to sleep at the school every fourth night or occasionally spend all day Saturday or Sunday supervising the care staff who looked after the boys when they were not in class. In total, counting teaching time and supervision time, including being on duty all night, I worked about 90 hours a week and it consumed me.

After several months of this I was wondering what I had gotten into. I was getting close to burnout. I was just about ready to give up and move on to something else when something happened that helped me see things differently. The breakthrough came in an unexpected way and it surprised me completely.

About five months into my job, it was announced by the head master that we were to be examined by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education. Usually the thought of the inspection was enough to drive most teachers to drink. The inspectors were perceived by most of the more experienced teachers as "failed teachers." Consequently, they appeared to be dedicated to showing the rest of us how to be effective. Not a positive image! It was clear to me that the other teachers I worked with shared that perception and they were not really looking forward to this inspection at all. For the owners and administrators of the school, however, passing the national inspection would mean that they could continue to operate the institution, promote its services, and receive the funding they needed to operate.

The prospect of the inspection was just more added stress for me. I was convinced that any experienced inspector would immediately see right through my façade and reveal me as someone who was just coasting through their work. I was equally convinced that I had to leave before I got fired. About this same time, the head master stopped in my class one and told me that he was appointing me to be the primary liaison between the inspectors and the school staff. It was going to be my job to present the school's vision and mission and to highlight the changes and accomplishments that had taken place since the last inspection 3 years earlier. Just what I needed – more stress! I pleaded with the head master stating that as the new and least experienced person on the staff it should really fall to someone more

senior than me to do this. Besides, I wasn't there three years ago so how would I know what had changed? He quickly said "no, I want you to do it" and he told me to relax, be myself, and speak freely and openly about what I learn. He also suggested I interview the entire staff and listen closely to their stories.

Despite the stress, I found time during lunch and weekends to meet one-on-one with all the staff. One conversation led to another and slowly I began to be intrigued and fascinated by what I was learning. In my interviews I learned that one of the care staff, an ex-army officer, spent his entire summer and winter vacations visiting and working with the parents of the boys we had in school. He would help them to create a better environment for their child when they were home during breaks, and he would give them advice and training on how to handle appropriate discipline and rewards. He would also allow some of the boys to come to his farm. They would help with the chores and he could make sure they stayed out of trouble and away from the influences that tempted them in the inner city.

I learned that the school cook knew the date of every boy's birthday. On every occasion, she made and decorated a cake and invited the birthday boy to ask 3 or 4 of his school friends to go to her house where they would eat supper together with her family, watch television, share the cake and ice cream, sing happy birthday, and play with her many cats.

I learned that one of the daily cleaning staff had secretly helped one of the older boys who had a chronic bed-wetting problem. He was terribly embarrassed about it. She took it upon herself to buy him several new pairs of pajamas and every morning she would quietly and discreetly take care of his bed linens and put a fresh pair of pajamas in his bed. She would then take his soiled pajamas home at the end of the day, wash them and bring them back the next morning.

As I continued my conversations, I heard story after story about people on the staff going way above and beyond the responsibilities of their job for the greater good of the children. Yet almost no one knew about it.

As time went on, and I reflected on what I had heard, I realized that my colleagues did what they did because they were striving for a higher level of meaning and purpose to their work. They intuitively understood so much better than I that being a member of this school community required more than just doing the minimum to get by. They went willingly beyond the limited boundaries of their responsibilities and succeeded separately and together in transforming the lives of the children in their care. Because of their genuine, caring acts of kindness, unconditional love, and the non-judgmental way they interacted, they not only opened the hearts and minds of the children they taught, but they

also gave them a genuine hope in a better future.

On reflection, I think the head master intended me to discover this lesson for myself. That's why I think he insisted I do this assignment. Perhaps he knew all along that I was struggling to understand how I could reach the kids and he knew the only way I was going to succeed was to find my own way to make a contribution to the greater purpose the school was striving to fulfill.

Once I got this message, I learned that the stress and anxiety I felt about doing my job was all of my own making because I was focused on all the wrong things. I measured the amount of time it took me to prepare my lessons, I measured the number of hours I spent in the presence of the boys teaching or supervising staff; I measured my success based only on a set of objective metrics instead of focusing on how I could add value and truly reach the kids by working harder to understand their deeper needs and finding a unique way to minister to them.

Once I made this leap I began to think much more clearly about the higher purpose and meaning that we as a school community were striving for. I also found that success in my teaching happened without my having to think about it. My stress evaporated, and my confidence grew. I subsequently went on to spend two additional very happy years at the school before I eventually moved to the United States. I think it's remarkable that some of my colleagues are still at the school today after more than 30 years.

Finding Meaning

A few years ago I read a book by Victor Frankl called *Man's Search for Meaning*. You may know that Frankl was a noted psychiatrist and Jew. During WWII, he and his family were captured by the Nazis and were imprisoned in Auschwitz. Through the trained eyes of the psychiatrist, Dr. Frankl observed that the people most likely to survive the horrors of the death camp were those who still had things of significance they had yet to do. For some, it was to write a book, for others to visit a loved one in another country. In other words they were not prepared to die with their higher purpose unfilled. They learned to use this motivation as a mechanism to stay alive.

After the war and Frankl was liberated, he used his observations and continued his research and founded a new branch of psychotherapy which he called Logotherapy. Dr. Frankl teaches us that, more than anything else, our search for meaning is what truly motivates us to live our lives in the most complete way. It is also what gives us the capacity to overcome the most trying of circumstances.

Frankl published his book in 1946 and wanted to do

so anonymously because he did not want to profit from his story. However, so compelling was his story that precisely because he did not seek success he achieved it anyway. In the 1984 edition, after 73 additional printings in English alone, Frankl writes in the preface:

And so it is both strange and remarkable to me that – among some dozens of books I have authored – precisely this one, which I had intended to be published anonymously so that it could never build up any reputation on the part of the author, did become a success. Again and again I therefore admonish my students both in Europe and in America: “Don’t aim at success – the more you aim at it and make it a target, the more you are going to miss it. For success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue, and it only does so as the unintended side-effect of one’s personal dedication to a cause greater than oneself or as the by-product of one’s surrender to a person other than oneself. Happiness must happen, and the same holds for success: you have to let it happen by not caring about it. I want you to listen to what your conscience commands you to do and go on to carry it out to the best of your knowledge. Then you will live to see that in the long run – in the long run, I say! – success will follow you precisely because you had forgotten to think of it.

Finding Your Calling

In order for us to transform our personal ministries we have to put our individual needs and rewards aside and seek instead to find and understand the real purpose and meaning behind what we’re doing. If we can do that effectively and with true conviction of purpose, success inevitably will follow.

But that’s not all. There are two more important things to do. Once we understand that our ministry exists to serve a greater purpose and meaning we will see that being open to continual learning is also necessary or else our ministry will stall. Alvin Toffler once said that the illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn. The real vitality of any ministry comes from discovering new things that inform and update our thinking, direct our actions, and enrich our experience. We have an obligation always to challenge our assumptions about what we perceive in our world and to work diligently to learn the truth. Through the process of learning new things we will eventually learn to unlearn, or let go of, what no longer works and then replace it with what we have newly learned.

There is also another obligation that goes along with learning, which is to teach others who are excited to learn along with us. This is a great responsibility and a wonderful privilege and it doesn’t have to be

complicated, formal, or painful. Telling stories to each other about how our ministry is working and what it is accomplishing or failing to do is one simple way to learn, and it is vital for our own growth and development, as well as the ministry we are called to do.

Finally, and perhaps the most difficult for many people to accept, is an openness to change. I think there is a natural tendency in most of us to resist change, especially if it will result in the loss of the things we value.

Sydney Harris once said: “Our dilemma is that we hate change and love it at the same time; what we want is for things to remain the same but get better.” Obviously, change for change sake is neither necessary nor renewing. However, change that results from our deeper learning and skilled practice is beneficial and vital for growth. We should encourage it and not be afraid to act upon it. Mahatma Ghandi once said, “We must be the change we want to see.” We need to take personal responsibility for promoting change and open our hearts and minds to the idea that the perceptions, assumptions, practices, and approaches which we hold today may not be relevant for another time. There is always something new and exciting waiting for us around the corner if we are open to explore and incorporate new thinking and fresh ideas.

I pray: O God, You have blessed us with talents and gifts. We come before You now in a joyful response to Your blessings, to foster our talents and to offer their first fruits to You.

I am eternally grateful for all who have supported me in my music ministry. May God bless you as you continue to find meaning and purpose in yours.

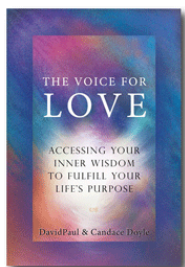
Steve Hart moved to the United States from his native England in 1980. With his American wife, they lived in Northeast Philadelphia before moving to Willow Grove in 1992. Steve joined St. Paul's Episcopal Church in 1981 where he volunteered to be the choir director. After St. Paul's suffered a disastrous fire, the congregation merged with Holy Innocents Church. Steve continued to serve as the Director of Choral Music at the merged church until he left in December, 2006. He served 24 years altogether in that position. Steve is now a leader of the St. David Music Ministry in Willow Grove.

SAVE THE DATE – Spiritual Teacher David Hoffmeister will be in Philadelphia/South Jersey for Gatherings June 1, 2, and 3, 2007.

Call Jill at 215-742-0552 to be notified of the locations and times. Hope to see you there!

What if you could learn specific techniques to access Infinite Knowledge any time you wanted?

What if you could learn HOW to receive ongoing guidance and direction, fulfill your life's purpose, and answer your deepest calling to BE the Presence of Peace and Love in the world?



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Order your copy of *The Voice for Love* for only \$14.95 each through the Spring Fundraiser and receive free shipping!



SPRING FUNDRAISER

Hello, Friends! Happy Spring!

Many of you have responded generously to our annual Spring Fundraiser. This is the time of year that our readers are encouraged to send a voluntary contribution to help cover the cost of publication.

For the cost of just one meal at a local restaurant, you can make a huge difference in supporting the ongoing work of this publication.

This is a golden opportunity to say "yes" to the cycle of Giving and Receiving. Take a minute right now to write a check payable to "Agape Interfaith Ministries" or feel free to send a book or two of postage stamps, which also give great support. Your help truly does make a difference. Whether you send \$5 or more, every bit of support makes this sharing of inspiration possible.

In addition – here is a new opportunity to help yourself at the same time – take advantage of this special offer to purchase a copy of *The Voice for Love* by DavidPaul and Candace Doyle for only \$14.95 with *free shipping*. Buy extra copies for friends!

**Thank you for your support!
Blessings to you!**

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As I draw upon divine wisdom, I am shown ways to follow through on all my decisions. This wisdom guides me as I go about doing what I know in my heart is the right thing for me to do.

I am wise and free, for the spirit of God lights the way before me. No shadow of doubt can overtake me. Freely I let God guide me, and freely God shares with me the wisdom and knowledge for living a happy and successful life.

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The mission of Agape Interfaith Ministries is to encourage, support and inspire a deepening conscious relationship with Divinity for the greater experience of wholeness, abundance, love and peace. We serve to elevate consciousness through individual and group educational activities, and community service.

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