Welcome to the Franciscan Spirituality Center in La Crosse, Wisconsin’s, What is Spirituality podcast. Your host, Steve Spilde, is the associate director at the Center. His guests talk about their evolving understanding of God. My name is Steve Spilde, and today I’m meeting with Barb Kruse. Welcome, Barb. Thanks, Steve. Good to be here. We've known each other for about five years. We met before when we were part of the Spiritual Direction Preparation Program and that is a program of the Franciscan Spirituality Center and you were on the staff long before I joined the staff of the FSC. So, could you tell me when you joined the staff of the Center and, what brought you here. Sure. So, I knew about the Center and have been part of Spirituality Center long before I started working on staff and probably I think I began coming to the Center maybe in the ‘90s and looking for spiritual direction. I remember coming to an Enneagram program. I was connected with the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, the FSPA, through my husband, Joe's, work at the hospital so we were connected to the sisters in that way because the sisters were sponsors of the Franciscan or St. Francis at that time, so I know a lot of the sisters. I knew about the Center and just felt the draw to come here. So, I would guess that was probably through than ‘90s that I started coming to the Center again for programs and also spiritual direction. With that came an invitation to think about and consider the Spiritual Direction Preparation Program, and I listened to that invitation and it felt right for me and so I started the program I think it was like in, gosh, 1999 maybe, and then finished the program in 2001 or 2002, somewhere in there. Those are the dates that I was part of the part of the program. So, then that connected me to the Center in an even a greater way, but I did not come to work at the Spirituality Center probably until about maybe in 2007 or 2008, I came on just to work on a Venture Grant that the Center had received from the Franciscan Sisters, from the FSPA, to have a Franciscan fest so we created this festival and I was part of that planning and I did that and then what surfaced from that experience was a part-time position on staff in spiritual direction and then eventually leading into being director of the Spiritual Direction Preparation Program and being here for 10 years after that time, knowing you Steve for half that time. That's a long version of long story. No, it’s all good. You mentioned coming for spiritual direction and being involved in providing spiritual direction. For people who are new to that, how would you describe spiritual direction? There are so many definitions of spiritual direction, probably that the one that would come to mind first and foremost would be spiritual direction as an opportunity to sit in the sacred setting with another person who will listen deeply, compassionately, nonjudgmentally to your deeper story . We hear a lot about each other's stories throughout our days. There's a lot of our story that we keep hidden, and that deeper story is a story that when we do share it, and in a spiritual direction setting, it opens us up to tapping into our truer and authentic self, which I believe is our God self and our spirit self. And with that ability and opportunity to do that we find, at least I found, that I become more connected. This flow of love, of what I would call God, other religions would call it something different, that is always calling me more deeply and to love and have compassion for myself and for the world around me, so spiritual direction can offer that place to understand our belovedness and free us from the wounds of our deeper story and help us be more connected to all of creation, which we already are. We just don't really get it most the time. Do you remember the first time you went to spiritual direction? The first visits? Sure I do. Who was your spiritual director? Sister Mary Kathryn (Fogarty). It was great, and you know the best part about it, and I don’t know, it took maybe a couple visits, but really, to have somebody listen who really cared and didn't, I felt that they weren't waiting for their opportunity to speak about their story because I'm a listener, so I'm always waiting for the other person to share and then my story stops and then I receive what they had to say but she was there just fully listening to me so I felt really heard, and I also didn't take very long for her to help me see the connection between my story and God's story and how my story fits into that. Just that beautiful story of love that I am okay just as I am. Even with my baggage and even with my brokenness. I’m fully loved it, and that that was the most freeing thing for me to have somebody tell me what I intuitively knew which I think we all know that we just, it's locked away. Is that what you expected you would get from her? No, I didn't know what I was going to get, no I just felt that a point in a time in my life probably in my late 40s, mid-40s and raising kids, life was full crazy good that it was so good, but inside I felt that unsettledness in a restlessness and even a simmering anger that I just couldn't quite put my finger on, and I don't know, I think, again, I'm all about paying attention to the invitation, so somewhere along the line I heard a conversation between people or a comment or read something that just invited me to consider spiritual direction as a place to go in and maybe to look at the more deeply into my story. So, you did, you met with her one-on-one for spiritual direction, for how long? Well, you know, on and off several years, I'm sure. The peace that sometimes happens in spiritual direction, but not always, Mary Kathryn being the really astute and attentive spiritual director, she listened to my story for a couple of sessions and then said that it might be a good idea for me to see somebody professionally to unwrap the story a little bit more, So, of course, you know I was like you mean go to what, a therapist, which felt real scary, but I think I was brave enough to know that it was the right thing to step into and again. Yet it was the right thing. So I was seeing Mary Kathryn for spiritual direction and went to see Mary the therapist. I saw her for probably four or five times and I just had a deeper story I needed to tell and I told that story, and she listened and there was a healing that happened in just telling the story. So how is therapy different from spiritual direction? How is what you got with Mary different from Sister Mary Kathryn. I think when you go to therapy that there is always a little more outcome focused. When you go to therapy that, as a therapist, a therapist would feel that responsibility to move the person you know maybe from point A to point B. Oftentimes not considering the spirituality that underlies the whole story. So, I think Mary was able to take my particular story and experience in my life, and offer me some tools and some insights that helped me understand the story a little bit more and again a lot of it's just giving permission, like you're okay, this wasn't your fault, this is what happens, so that was really a freeing and healing thing for me but that wasn't the spiritual piece woven through that. Some therapists will do that. But typically that doesn't happen so spiritual direction is not about getting a person to a specific place because as a spiritual companion or a spiritual director, I will just continue to listen to the story, invite the directee more deeply into their story by asking them feeling question longings, but where is God in the midst of this for you? What do you feel you're being invited to? A little more deeply, the directee can explore their particular experience or story in the context of what God's invitation is for them in. You mentioned when you started seeing Mary Kathryn you were busy as a mom and you got four sons? I do. So that's your current family and then the family you were born into, how big it was your family, where did you fit in? Yeah, the family of origin. There were six of us kids and I was the fourth, and in the way the family happened, there were four of us older kids and then this period of no kids and then two more kids a little bit later on so I'm the youngest of the first of the first four and then there's nine years between myself and my sister and then three years between her and my brother Tom, So I have three older brothers and me and then my sister Marianne and my brother Tom. So even though I was fourth born, I was the first girl. And you were kind of like the youngest child when you grew up. Until I was nine. okay yeah. My dad called me fairy wings, but I really wasn't much of fairy wings. I was a real tomboy, I had these three older brothers. Yeah. So, the family you grew up in, religious, not religious? Yeah, I grew up in a Catholic household. I was born in 1956, so my elementary school years were the during the ‘60s, went to parochial school from second grade to sixth grade in a parochial school and then that was it in the town we lived and so then we went to public school. My mom was born and raised Catholic. My dad was not. He was, I think his family was Lutheran. I don’t know how much they would practice their faith, and then my dad converted to Catholicism, probably in order at that time, to marry my mom. This would be back in the early ‘50s yeah which is once I remember his family could not come, no his brother, nobody could be in the wedding party from his family because they weren’t Catholic and I think his mom didn't even come to the wedding. She was just pretty disappointed about the whole thing. I’ve picked that up over the years, that was a little bit of a sore spot, a sadness. But anyway so Dad was the best Catholic he could be. We went to church every Sunday and he was one of the first guys in the church who was asked to be an extraordinary Communion distributor. This is after Vatican II so they were starting to let laypeople get involved a little bit. They asked my dad, and it was a really huge honor to be asked, but he was almost overwhelmed with that request and he did it. They had to wear cassocks and everything. I remember he was always up there, he was just shaking the whole time he handed the host out, but he did it. I just really was always impressed by that. He stepped up to do that in a church that really didn't treat him so well early on. So, how was your experience growing up in the church, how attached were you, how much a part of your life was that, how important was that to you? It was pretty important, it was pretty big part of our life because I went to the Catholic school, and we lived close so you know I would go up there even in late summer and help the sisters, School Sisters of Notre Dame, a lot of them were our teachers, help them get ready for school, dust off the books and clean and so I was a big part of that. My mom was probably involved in some of the women's committees, I know at some point she sang in the choir, my brothers were all altar boys. Where the sisters will still in habits? The sisters were still in habits; yeah, actually one little story is when I was six, my parents built their home, there was a new church and school that I just been built and so they built a home and we had moved into this home and at some point my parents wanted the sisters to come down, they wanted to come and see the house. And you could the school and the church, they were a little bit up on top of the hill just a little ways away and but they couldn't come into the house because they weren't allowed in people's homes at that time. So this is probably the early ‘60s and so we I remember sitting on the dog house in our backyard looking up at the hill and watching these four women coming down the hill in full black habit at dusk so my mom would turn all the lights on inside the house so they could walk around the house and see inside > Isn’t that amazing? But anyway there was that connection and of course we never had them over for dinner at that point because they couldn't come, but later on I think things started changing and then we did have some of the sisters over. Everything started changing fast so that was pretty pivotal for me because all of a sudden we started having a guitar Mass. Sister, Clarice Marie was our teacher, she picked up the guitar and then we singing all of these, I think, Ray Repp songs and I was just actually singing some of them the other day to my grandson because I remember them because we singing them so loud and so free. So this was all Vatican II? Post-Vatican II, just right after. How old were you at this time? I was probably 9, 10 and 11, that was probably fourth, fifth, sixth grade. That was big. I don’t have the words for it. It's probably bigger more intuitively and a little bit more, you know, there's just more of a feel about it than there would be a head thing around it. What was your impression of God at this time? If someone had asked you, how would you have described God? I think at that time God was still you know a guy old kind of the old man with the beard up in the sky a little. That would probably be my first go-to, because that was all the images that I saw and you know and people who were religious were sort of rate, kind of a tier up above everybody else. And then there was us people you know who constantly needed to be better than we were. I think I started thinking about things differently a little bit in fifth grade. It was either fifth or sixth grade and this is such a clear memory for me. It was religion class and we were talking it must've been about heaven and hell and I don't really know how the conversation went. But the question I think was, where is heaven and where is hell? And the answer came as clear as day to me and you know how when you're little in school when you raise your hand and everybody has their hands up and you really want to be called on and you are lifting and you are practically out of your seat. I had the answer. And she didn’t call on me. And then the class ended and I thought, dang, maybe we’ll pick it up tomorrow. So, I went to school with my answer the next day and it never came up again and so that was the first time I think I did any real theological reflection. What was your answer? So, my answer at that time, my sixth-grade answer was, well, heaven is in all things that are good and hell are in things that aren't good, But what was in that for me was that heaven and hell are here, we’re living, how we live our life, we choose and that choices we make can affect that experience of, you even hate to use heaven and hell, I don't even like those (terms), but you know those experiences of life and those experiences of not-life or separation, that feeling of just stepping away or - there's other language to use. How do you think that answer would have been received if you had gotten called on? Yeah, I don't know. Actually, it probably would've been received because I felt really safe and comfortable putting it out there and something in the conversation must've led me there so the conversation and the dialogue must've been opening in some way so that sort of what I'm thinking. Knowing you, my guess is your answer probably hasn't shifted that much over time. Yeah, it's probably evolved a little bit, but there was a lot there that I have been able to unpack over the years to offer more clarity for me about what that was about. So, thanks for asking that question, Steve. That’s the first time I’ve been able to answer it. So, that was your middle school self, or late elementary self. It was fifth or sixth grade because we had the same teacher for both of those years and she was the teacher. What was your experience of God and experience of church as you get older as you got into high school. Oh, we had CCD classes, which were okay. There's nothing that stands out for me in middle school and high school. Then I went to college. College of St. Benedict so all-girls, Catholic liberal arts school in Minnesota. And was that because of the Catholic school or just a good college? That was it was more a good college and that it was close, not real far from home and one of my aunts had gone there. All I really cared about at that time, I really wanted to play athletics, and you know so this was after Title IX, which like in ’72 or ’73. Anyway, when I was in high school, I got in on interscholastic sports because they could start programs for girls, now they had to. We talk about experiences of freedom and that was that was huge for me to do that and then so I chose a college that offered interscholastic sports and my parents were supportive; it seemed like the right fit. But really, you know, spiritually, really the first couple years I was a pretty lost soul I think in terms of who I was and what I was about. But then I met my husband, Joe, when I was a junior, and he was theology and philosophy major and I loved that, I loved talking about that stuff. Did he ever think about priesthood? That's why went to St. John's. I also you know the other thing about some of my other earlier classes. I loved the religion classes At St. Ben’s. I only had a handful of them. I was a dietetics major so I did a lot of sciences and a lot of some math and lot of biologies and chemistries, but I did get in on it. I had to take a few philosophy, theology courses and I just like some of those remember those Nietzsche and Rahner and I know some of those names that just really spoke to me like that. And so when I met Joe I was able to be part of the some of those bigger dialogues and I really liked that too. But then he was involved in teaching CCD at a small town close to St. Cloud where our schools were and he was part of these, were they core retreats? Anyway, some retreats for the high school kids and then I would help out on the retreats so that was kind of life-changing being part of this core retreat experience which is you know that's a Friday, Saturday, Sunday, kind of walked the kids through that experience of death and resurrection of Christ but also laying it on the death and resurrections of your own life and that was just for me, that was all new and really powerful experience. I think that was sort of a shift for me of looking at God in even a greater way and considering God's action in my life, more intimately involved, I guess. You got married and life got busy. We got married and then the next probably important religious experience for me was, after we got married, Joe was working as a youth minister in Hastings, Minnesota, and I was living in St. Paul working as a dietitian, and it was right before we got married and then shortly after we were involved in some Lenten discussion groups, so it was a group of people all older than us who had kids you know in varying stages of life. But these people were all 10 to 15 years older than we were. So we can got swept up in this group and we are first book reread was Redemptive Intimacy. I'll never forget that book. Again, it was another dive into thinking about God and in a more intimate way and different way and so that was in 1979 and we are still really close friends with everybody in that group. During this time, your understanding of God, how is that shifting? I think I'm seeing God as, there’s an inner expansion, I mean I use that a lot. I feel that a lot, but that God is bigger. I think maybe there was this knowing that I have an active role to take in this whole relationship and this experience and there's a lot of inviting going on. Within this group, a community aspect is part of it too. Community has always been a big part of our lives, different communities that we been able to connect to, that have really I think offered a greater container to hold this God energy to hold this love. And I think when you can kind of be in a container like that with others, then you can respond and give back, in some really profound ways. Profound is probably not the best word, but to some greater ways. So, between that time and when you started meeting with Sister Mary Kathryn for spiritual direction, any shifts, any important moments in that time? Just a gradual and continued unfolding. Richard Rohr talks about experiences of great love and great suffering as being just experiences that crack you open in a deeper understanding of God's presence in our lives in acceptance and I think having kids is one of those great experiences. All the other things that come with kids because there’s this unconditional love that's just all of a sudden there that you didn't even know could be there and all of a sudden it's there. So, if you step back and say what's that about and then you know that kind of love for another person, that you created or adopted. All that love is there, and then to be able to step back and say, Wow, there's that, is that experience of love equals as if or doesn't even equal and the love that God has for me and for the world and to start just asking some of those questions are thinking about that little bit more, so having kids for me and our experiences with children just cracked that open in a new way because just a lot of outpouring of love and in the suffering that went with it. We went down the infertility road for lots of years so not real long because it was pretty easy for us to decide to adopt and we adopted Ben, which was just a gift and then all of a sudden I was able to be pregnant and have a natural birth child so that was beautiful. Having both of those experiences and experiencing those ways of receiving life and then some hard things, too. We lost a baby, John. I was seven months pregnant and then John was stillborn, and that was so sad but bittersweet too. There were so many sacred moments that came with that experience of that loss. I’m just trying to think of other things that happened with kids. How old was the youngest about the time you start meeting with Mary Kathryn? Mark was born in ’91, so I probably started meeting with Mary Kathryn, Mark was like 3or 4, 5. So what were some of the early questions you brought to Mary Kathryn that you were wrestling with? Probably the first question was, that I have this feeling in me and it's restlessness and sometimes short patience. Maybe some simmering anger and I'm not quite sure what that's about. That's probably the first thing. I don’t know that I went to her with any specific God questions, but it was just my life story. And you know, God's right in the middle of it, so. We are both familiar with the Enneagram. For people who don't know what that's about, the nine types, personality types. Both of us are the same style number nine, which really struggles with anger. Yeah. Was that a big part of, kind of coming to terms with that when you were meeting with Mary Kathryn, your own anger? I think that's what sort of sent me there. When that's there, then you're not happy and I wasn't feeling particularly happy at this supposedly this should be a really happy time. So, I think, when Richard Rohr talks about our small self or false self and then our true self and that we’re always sort of like trying to meet that true self, but we have so much is baggage the word or so many learned behaviors or so many experiences that prevent us from getting there. Well, I think when I just felt that, the lack of happiness and joy in my life. I could only live with that for so long, and something inside of me wanted that to change. Feel didn't feel right. So, what shifted for you? Was it a letting go of something or a picking up of something? I think it was an affirmation of my belovedness I needed to hear that, I needed to hear that I was okay. I needed to hear that yeah, I needed to stop probably blaming myself for things. My personality at that time I thought it was an Enneagram One because I kind of operated out of this order in my life, in this sort of like perfection kind of things needed to be a certain way and so that's how I thought I was. But for somehow, for some reason after experiencing spiritual direction, and being able to share more deeply my story I somehow was given permission to be a little bit more who I am and love myself who I am because that person I was trying to be really wasn't me. I think it was the person that my childhood Barb was saying I should be, yeah to survive in my household growing up, I think that's what I needed to be, so my experiences with Mary Kathryn and spiritual direction helped me to see that I don't have to be that and that's not me. This is who I am. How would you, the question I'm really curious to eventually get to, is what is spirituality? So, as you described your journey where does spirituality show up in that? As you grow, how would you define spirituality. Wow. I think that's a really good question. What is spirituality? I mean, of course I did some thinking about it but again I'm more of such a feeling person and more of an intuitive person than the thinking word person so but what would come to me it's just that deeper knowing, spirituality for me is just a deeper knowing and a realization that there is something greater in the world, in the universe, greater than me for sure. There is an energy that is flowing all the time and it's evolving and it’s God energy. We could say God, we could say divine love, but we are in that flow. Spirituality doesn't show up places, spirituality is, and we participate in that the best we can during our lifetime and then in another way afterward, after we die, after our bodies die. Body cells are gone, so that spirituality is that flow or that energy of love, is always inviting us to love ourselves more deeply, to be that love, to be that compassionate and presence in the world for ourselves and for others. We are part of that flow and so some of the things that really cracked me open into that was just, probably when I was in SDPP, the spiritual direction program, working at the spirituality center got my master’s in servant leadership, all those things open me up to some of the mystics, the poets, Rumi Hafiz, Mary Oliver, the poetry of these people I think opened me up even more to understanding that God is huge for me. God is spirituality is another way of saying it, but God to me, in that we look at God and we look at the world through God's eyes. I am that, you know, I can look at you and I could say I am, that I can look at all over the room so I connect, I connect in a deep way with all of creation and see the life force there. Was that kind of seamless getting to that point? Was there a moment where you had to let go of some things to continue down that path? I think I always have to keep letting go of shame and blame, and always have to keep reminding myself of my own belovedness and when I can do that, then I can let go of these a little, the littler things, the little pieces that I could get hung up on. And I kinda see, I see a flow you know this, but we get snags just like with fishing and you go fishing and if you're trolling along you get hung up on the rocks to get hung up on the weeds and sometimes you can't get out. Sometimes you have to turn the boat around and go back and reel in and get out and start over again and I think that our journey is like that, we get snagged and sometimes we don’t know how to get off the snake because we are hooked and so somebody has to come and help us off or the branch has to break. I think that this has been sort of a slow unfolding of what I already know, as it can be for all of us because again we all know when I look at my little grandbabies when they're two days old, I mean, I call them God drops because they are all-knowing, just like that and then I look at my kids. I didn't know that when I looked at my kids because I still had a lot of my own work and growing to do, but I wish I would've looked at them more like that because then I proceeded to screw them up for the next 18 years. How many ways can I break you, but we do what we can do in any given moment, and we do it out of love. Marshall Rosenberg, compassionate communication, would say every person, in any given moment, whatever they do, are doing the best that they can. We can look at them and think, really, but in the moment that we are all doing the best that we can in that moment. You seem at peace with that. Yeah, cool. Thank you. This has been a delight. Thank you for coming in. You're welcome. Thanks, it's been fun to talk about myself. That's a treat. Thanks for listening, Steve. You are always such a good listener. If you have any questions about any of the programs that they offer at the Franciscan Spirituality Center in La Crosse, Wisconsin, we invite you to call us at 608-791-5295. You can also visit our website at [www.FSCenter.org](http://www.fscenter.org/). Thank you for listening.