**Steve Spilde:** Welcome. It is my great pleasure today to introduce, again, Jean Pagliaro. The last time we had her on this podcast, she was the program coordinator for the Franciscan Spirituality Center. As of a couple weeks ago, she now is the executive director of the FSC. I am excited about that change, and I am excited you are willing to join us today, Jean. Welcome.

**Jean Pagliaro:** Thank you for having me on here.

**Steve:** You have experience in congregational leadership. How do you think your experience in the parish prepared you for your current role as executive director? And how do you expect leadership at the FSC to be different from congregational leadership?

**Jean:** [Those are] really good questions. As a leader in the church, I was often pulled in many directions. One question that I was constantly asking was what we were doing and focusing on to further the mission of the church. I think people probably got sick of me asking that question, but many times we found that the answer was “yes, we were living out the mission of the church,” but sometimes that answer was “no,” and we realized that we probably did not need to be offering that particular ministry or program at that time. I think that’s a way of discernment, and I really think that that’s helpful for here as well. Another piece [is] I was often present in the church during some of the most difficult times, and also the most wonderful times in people’s lives. One thing that I learned is that I don’t always need the right words, and often it’s simply being present that communicates support. I hope to offer that kind of presence to staff, presenters and guests here at the center.

One way that leadership is different here is that I have more of a direct role in financial oversight. This is new for me. At the church, it was important for me to understand budget needs and anticipate costs for the year, but here that will be even more so. I am actually looking forward to learning more about that and the processes that we have here.

**Steve:** You first assumed congregational leadership approximately 15 years ago. What changes have you witnessed in the church between the time when you first assumed congregational leadership, up until probably prior to the pandemic?

**Jean:** That’s a really interesting question to think about. Up to the point of the pandemic – I think this had already been starting – but I just think about this in terms of clergy and congregational leadership, and the number of pastors that are available to serve congregations. That number had been declining, and I think even more so since the pandemic. Now I think this is a trend that probably going to continue for a while. Although I know this creates challenges for congregations in a lot of ways, I also think that there is some hope in that. Clergy and other leaders are asked to work hours that are pretty unsustainable. They’re asked to be problem solvers and mediators and preachers and wedding and funeral planners and volunteer coordinators and office managers. I’m wondering and sensing if this may be a time where the role of clergy can start to change, and where more congregational leaders are lifted up. To me, that feels hopeful. I know not all congregations are feeling that way right now, but I think there is hope that the leadership in the church may change to allow for a little bit of healthier leaders in congregations. That is a shift that I have seen, especially in the last 15 years, for sure.

**Steve:** Do you see a role for the FSC to support the congregations and church leaders going forward as this transition continues?

**Jean:** I do, and I think that’s where we can really have a role as congregations [and] faith communities are looking to focus more on self-care, and not only self-care meaning go away for a long time and come back and then you’re going to suddenly be renewed. I think we have a really unique situation and presence here where we can help congregations, leaders, individuals [and] congregational members learn how to set some pretty good boundaries and practice good self-care in the midst of a busy life, in the midst of crisis in ministry, and in the midst of what is already happening, and how we provide presence – not only with programs and retreats – but also spiritual directors and other supports that are here. I think we can actually play a pretty crucial role in the wellness and the well-being of congregations.

**Steve:** Jean, you love to read. You tend to read fiction, correct? I mean, you read a mixture of things, but fiction is your favorite?

**Jean:** Yes.

**Steve:** How has fiction enhanced your understanding of spirituality?

**Jean:** I love this question. It has been really fun for me to think about this. There was an article in *Relevant Magazine* a few years ago, and it’s called, “Want Spiritual Growth? Read More Fiction.” It was written by Rick Cummings, and I love it. One of the quotes in there … He says, *“Stories, including and maybe especially fiction, teach us how to live well by opening our eyes to experiences we couldn’t otherwise have. Stories are a kind of playground for the heart, the mind, and the soul.”* Just reading fiction helps me gain perspective into people, emotions, situations, even if they’re hypothetical – just things that I may have never encountered before. Even though it’s fiction, I feel like I still gain empathy [and] understanding. It keeps me grounded in how I like to live out my faith in walking with other people. And for me, reading is a form of self-care. That’s one of my absolute spiritual practices, and I love to get so caught up in a book and forget everything else that’s going on. It’s delightful for me when I lose total sense of where I am and become absorbed in a story. My family knows that if I’m reading to make sure that I put the book down before they ask me anything because I won’t remember what I said “yes” to if I am reading. That is something that we have learned as a family.

**Steve:** I think of for people like you the beauty of the environment we’re able to offer on retreat because people in a busy life oftentimes don’t have the chance to read like you like to read. This is a little shameless pitch for our retreat facilities. For people who long to have that [and ask], “Where can I get the space to just read undisturbed?” they can come on a retreat.

**Jean:** They can. We just started up again the in-person Franciscan Days of Solitude. That’s often what people do: They come, they have a room for the day, [and] they meet with a spiritual director. But then they also have space to do whatever they need to do for the day. A lot of times, people will bring books that they want to focus on, and not all of them are academic books.

**Steve:** I like how you labeled that self-care. I think a lot of times people feel like if they do go away for a retreat or something like that, even then they need to be productive. But just creating space for self-care is the foundation on which all the other good things they do is built. But if you don’t have that foundation, it’s really hard to be productive and take care of business in the other areas of your life.

**Jean:** Absolutely.

**Steve:** When you meet someone new, how do you describe the mission of the FSC?

**Jean:** I say [the word] “amazing” a lot. I say that the FSC is an amazing place where you can come and experience hospitality and welcome, and where you can be supported in your spiritual journey in whatever that looks like for you. It really is a place to nurture anyone seeking God, meaning and wholeness, and now I’m really excited being able to tell them that they can also come and stay here in one of our newly renovated bedrooms that include private showers. I think we were able to continue to offer things during the pandemic when we were out of the building for the past couple of years, and during the renovation. It just feels even more exciting now knowing that we can welcome people back to a physical space, and then offer the bedrooms as well.

**Steve:** You’ve served at the FSC for the past 4½ years. As you become more familiar with the work of the FSC, what have been some pleasant surprises?

**Jean:** There have actually been a lot of pleasant surprises. First, it’s been really wonderful for me to make deeper connections with the presenters that we bring to the center. Presenters that, some of them were kind of on my bucket list for, “Oh, my gosh. I would love to get that person to come here to present.” Then also our local presenters who have such a wealth of experience and knowledge and deep spirituality. It has been a joy forming those relationships. I’ve learned so much from them, and now I’ve formed friendships with some of them as well – that has been great. A wonderful surprise is how much I enjoy working with all of our staff here at the center. We really are a great team, and it’s a really good feeling knowing that I look forward to coming into work and interacting with staff. I fully expect and hope that that will continue, even in this new role. Another surprise that we were just talking about today is how delicious the food is here – we have really, really good food, and many of our staff make delicious treats. That is always an added bonus.

**Steve:** I’m curious [about] your bucket list. Who is still on your bucket list that you would like to invite someday? There are people … We’d love to have Brene Brown, but I think she’s out of our budget. But [who are] people that are maybe reasonable people that we’d like to have come?

**Jean:** I know you have also been hoping to have Jan Richardson come. She is definitely on that list. [As for] other ones, I’d have to think about that a little bit more. But even some of the authors, you and I were talking about Louise Erdrich – how amazing would that be to have her come and present what she writes about, [which is] the deep spirituality that she has [and] how that translates into her books. I would say those two come to mind right away. Maybe we could start working on Louise Erdrich, too.

**Steve:** You’ve always wanted to get Kate Bowler, haven’t you?

**Jean:** Yes, yes. We had tried at one point, and then I think it was right before the pandemic hit. I think she would bring such a powerful testimony and witness to grief and how she has been able to then support others in the journey of grief as well. I highly respect her, and I think she would definitely be on the bucket list.

**Steve:** What’s the name of her book? It’s one of the all-time great titles.

**Jean:** *“Everything Happens for a Reason, and Other Lies I’ve Loved.”*

**Steve:** What a great retreat it would be to build a grief retreat around that.

**Jean:** Absolutely. Absolutely.

**Steve:** The FSC is proud of its past and traditions. How do you see the FSC growing and evolving as it moves into the future?

**Jean:** The FSC really does have a wonderful history. That was actually one of the learnings and the deep appreciations that I have for the center, even before I really knew what I was getting into when I started here. I appreciate that we’ve been able to hold on to some of the traditions such as meditation, prayer circles, spiritual direction, program themes like centering prayer, sacred listening [and] creative expression. I do think that we have amazing opportunities here to deepen our connections with local organizations and to find ways to offer collaborative programming. I also think that we have great capacity to go out into congregations and organizations and offer spiritual growth, opportunities or experiences that help staff connect on a deeper level. An offering that I know we have brought on the road quite a few times has been the Enneagram. I know that you have done that a number of times now. Departments and staff seem to get a lot of learning about their particular number in how each personality contributes to the greater dynamics of the team. I think that is one we can really continue to grow and bring on the road. I think we have a lot of outreach opportunity, and that’s really exciting. I’m sensing that places have been reaching out to us, and I think they will continue to do that.

**Steve:** Looking ahead five years, how would you complete this sentence: “In five years, I hope the FSC will be more \_\_\_\_\_\_\_?”

**Jean:** In five years, I hope the FSC will be more directly connected to systems of wellness and care in the community. What I mean by that is that organizations and faith communities will know us more because we have formed deeper connections with them, and they will consider us to be an integral resource in spiritual formation and support. I want us to be thought of as one of the crucial teammates in our community.

**Steve:** What would you say to someone who has never attended a program at the FSC?

**Jean:** Come and see what we’re about. We won’t try to convert you to any particular faith tradition. The coffee is always hot. The space is always welcoming, and you might be surprised at what you learn about yourself and your spirituality. We’d love to welcome you here.