**Steve Spilde:** I’m excited to welcome someone I consider a dear friend, Kristy Walz. First question: Who is Kristy Walz?

**Kristy Walz:** That’s a really interesting question. Why do you ask? That’s an ever-evolving response. I think it depends on the day. It depends on the circumstances. I could give you that cliché that I’m a spiritual being having a human experience. I don’t know that I have an answer to that today. Sometimes life puts you in these stages of transformation and evolution. I would say that I am going through one of those right now, so to have an answer to that is difficult. I’m married. I’ve been with my husband 20 years. We celebrated 18 years of marriage in February. We have a 15-year-old daughter who is the most wonderful human being I know, [and] also often at this stage sometimes the most challenging human being I know. We have a pet therapy dog, Walter, who is a Catahoula Leopard. He was a rescue from down south. He is this calm, delightful presence when I have spiritual direction folks that come to my office to meet with me. He will oftentimes lay right at their feet. We love his energy around this house.

**Steve:** When you came to this program, how would you have described your religious tradition?

**Kristy:** None … n, o, n, e – none. I did not grow up churched. My experiences of the divine came through nature, primarily nature. [My experiences came through] nature, other people, art, music, sensing the energies around me [and] always feeling like I was held even though I don’t know that I really knew what that meant. I always felt a part of something outside of myself bigger than me and sensed the connection between human beings. I think my religious tradition was very experiential.

**Steve:** What does spiritual direction mean to you?

**Kristy:** It’s a lifeline. It’s a gift. It’s a blessing. To be in the directee chair is this revealing, loving path toward wholeness that I have not experienced in any other situation. And to be in the director chair is very much the same experience to be walking with people and have the gift of hearing their stories is truly a blessing.

**Steve:** Do you meet with people for formal spiritual direction, Kristy?

**Kristy:** The answer to that, Steve, really has two parts. I meet with people for formal spiritual direction that are coming [and] choosing to invest their own resources in coming to spiritual direction. And I also primarily the way that I practice is I practice in a corporate setting. What I will say when I start a new relationship with someone in a corporate setting is, “I’m not an executive coach." My friends that are executive coaches say that some of the work that we do is similar, but my training is as a spiritual director, which means that you can bring anything here. This isn’t work-related; this is whole-life related. We ebb and we flow out of those two spaces, and what impacts us at work impacts us at home, and vice-versa. So, I try to be very clear with them that you can call it whatever you need to call it for the contract or for your board. But what we’re really doing here is spiritual direction.

**Steve:** When you came to the program, how would you have described your career to that point?

**Kristy:** My career to that point is very similar to my career now, but I think there’s a depth after having been through the program that I did not have before. I have a consulting practice where I work with leaders in organizations to help them develop their leadership skills. Sometimes that’s in a group setting. More often now, and especially since COVID, that’s in a one-on-one setting where I’m doing that corporate spiritual direction piece. I think prior to SDPP [Spiritual Direction Preparation Program], I was trained in asking questions and listening. In fact, I actually remember sitting in our first weekend of SDPP, and I was thinking, “I could be really good this because I know how to ask questions.” But what I recognized as the time went on was that the questions I was asking of the people that were sitting across from me were rooted in driving them to a certain point and getting them to some specific outcome. What’s different after SDPP is that I don’t want to drive anybody anywhere. I just want to be by your side, like a swim coach. If the backstroke isn’t working, why don’t you flip over and try the front stroke? I’ll walk with you and tell you what I’m seeing, and you can do with that whatever you choose. There is not a specific outcome or objective that we’re aiming for. It's really about giving people the space to be who they are and do what they need to do.

**Steve:** Since completing the program, do you see your career in a new way, Kristy?

**Kristy:** Steve, it’s like the funniest thing because once I finished the program, the invitations for work that started coming my way were to work with individuals that seemed to someone else in their organization like they needed a little extra support one-on-one. Or to work with two people that were having a difficult time getting along with one another, or to work with teams that were labeled as “dysfunctional teams.” It was almost as if by design once I was given the tools to participate in this ministry that the opportunities emerged. I don’t do different work than I used to do. I think I just approach it differently because I’ve had the gift of three years of training to be a spiritual director.

**Steve:** How do you use the gifts you developed during SDPP?

**Kristy:** Certainly, in a work setting and a work environment, working with individuals and leaders and organizations. I think where it’s had the most impact, though, is in my home and in my life and the way I choose to show it in my community, that three years was worth it right there.

**Steve:** As someone who came to the program who identifies as a “spiritual none,” what would you say to other people who are hesitant to apply for SDPP because they don’t feel like they’re Christian enough or religious enough or Catholic enough?

**Kristy:** It never felt to me like … Well, I can’t say that. There was one time that I felt excluded [and] different. You can edit this out, Steve, if it’s not … That was by one person that happened to be part of my cohort who I think was threatened by the fact there was someone in that cohort that didn’t have a defined religious and Catholic upbringing. But I was able to learn from that and grow from that and meet her where she was. I would say I had a great supervisor who, when she recognized that I didn’t have the biblical knowledge that might be helpful on one of our weekends, she would provide me with alternatives. For instance, the weekend with the Ignatian exercises, she handed me *“The New Spiritual Exercises: [In The Spirit] of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin”* and said, “Do this instead. This fits for you.” I think there’s just a tremendous amount of acceptance and permission-giving to find your own way. I think one of the challenges that I thought I might have is, “Who’s going to want to come see me for spiritual direction? I didn’t grow in a church. What do I know?” The Holy Spirit sends you who you need.”

**Steve:** Kristy, when you became aware of SDPP, the program, and you were introduced to it, at one point, my understanding is you had an insight like, “Wow, I could do this.”

**Kristy:** I’m lucky enough to live in the La Crosse area, so FSC has always been kind of in my backyard, so to speak. My first experience there was going to “Grandma Pat’s Yoga Class.” One of my friends dragged me to a yoga class; it was the first time I went through the doors of the center. The second time I was there was also by invitation, so [I received] two invitations. [The first time was] the yoga class, and the second time was for a workshop on intuition, which was taught by Sister Jean Kasperbauer. I can remember, because I grew up without any religious tradition, feeling really intimidated about walking into that space. I like to be early, and I couldn’t find a parking space on Market Street, so I circled the block a few times and finally found a space and ran in the door just a couple of minutes before the class began with my mug of tea. The only seat that was left – it was set up in a circle – was next to the nun that was teaching the class. My stories about nuns came from my dad, who grew up in Catholic schools. I did not have a warm and fuzzy image of the sisters which, if you know anything about FSPA, is these are wonderful, radical women. I just felt like as that day went on, I just wanted to sit closer to her and closer to her. We had a really beautiful conversation over lunch, and before I left that day, I said, “I would just love to spend some more time with you. Is there a way we can do that?” She said, “I’m a spiritual director. You should start coming for spiritual direction.” There’s another invitation. I had no idea what spiritual direction was when she invited me to come see her for spiritual direction.

As our monthly sessions went on – I think it was probably six or eight months in – one day before I left her house, she handed me a brochure and she said, “I think that you can do this work, and I think that you should do this work. I would like for you to consider applying to be part of the Spiritual Direction Preparation Program.” I walked out to my car and I opened the brochure, and there was no discernment. Something moved inside of me. I can remember having a very positive physical response to what I was reading. I picked up my phone, called my husband and said, “I am on my way home, and I would like to go for a walk because there is something I’m going to need your support with over the next three years and I want to talk with you about it. [It was] all by invitation.”