



SERVANT-LEADERSHIP AND THE NEW MILLENNIUM

—LARRY SPEARS
THE GREENLEAF CENTER

The following essay by Larry Spears gives a current history of the work of servant-leadership associated with the Greenleaf Center for Servant-Leadership, Westfield, Indiana, United States of America. Following the essay is an interview of Larry Spears conducted by Barbara Tey, from Malaysia. The interview appeared in the Jan.-March 2006 issue of the Journal of the Malaysian Institute of Management.

The 2005 annual international conference on servant-leadership, held in Indianapolis, attained significant reach, with people attending from thirty-five states and nine countries: Brazil, Canada, Japan, Korea, the Netherlands, Singapore, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States. I think it's important that we recognize our international visitors and the growth and learning that they bring to us, and from the pre-conference meeting we had with the directors of the international Centers I can say without reservation there is incredible work going on around the world in servant-leadership.

Each year the conference bookstore, and now accessible in real time our online catalogue (www.greenleaf.org), offers over 140 different books, essays, manuals, and videotapes on servant-leadership. The depth and poignancy of servant-leadership materials is ever-expanding.

February of 2005 saw the passing of an exemplary servant-leader, a longtime Greenleaf Center trustee and perhaps the kindest friend I ever had: Bill Bottum. Some of you knew Bill; many of you probably did not. He was the longtime president and CEO of the Townsend & Bottum family of companies, based in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Throughout its history as a com-



pany, and especially in the 1980s and 1990s, both Bill, and Townsend & Bottum, served as incredible examples of servant-leadership in action. T & B was purchased by Black & Veatch a few years ago and so it no longer exists as a separate company, but its memory and that of Bill Bottum continue to inspire and instruct many of us in servant-leadership. Bill served on the Center's board of trustees for twenty years, stepping down in 2001 only when his health problems prohibited him from continuing to travel. During the fifteen years that I knew Bill he became a close personal friend and confidante of mine. I made frequent trips to Ann Arbor to visit with him and his wife, Olivia, and was a frequent houseguest with Bill and Olivia in Ann Arbor. Bill and I spent many wonderful evenings together sipping Asti Spumante and talking about some of his favorite subjects: The Greenleaf Center, spirituality, servant-leadership, and especially the Beatitudes. And Bill wrote a lovely little book or monograph on the Beatitudes, which I hope to be able to make available in some fashion, perhaps on our website. It's sort of impossible for me to express the depth of loss I've felt since his passing, but I can tell you that Bill made a real difference in my life. He inspired many of us who are working with servant-leadership today. I want to say thank you, Bill.

The recent past has brought forth many wonderful developments at the Greenleaf Center. I'm going to just mention a few of the highlights. In October of 2005 we saw the publication of our ninth book, *Practicing Servant-Leadership: Succeeding through Trust, Bravery, and Forgiveness*. This book, as all the others, is produced by the Greenleaf Center and then published through one of our publishing partners, this one by Jossey-Bass. Of all the books we've done, this one has been selling the fastest. It reached as high as number 350 on Amazon.com's list of two million books shortly after it was released. I don't know where it is now, and it fluctuates, but it certainly is an indication of the growing interest in servant-leadership generally speaking, and in the book itself, so I invite you to check this out if you haven't yet done so.

As many of you know, servant-leadership continues to evolve and grow in many places throughout the world. We now have a total of ten



international Greenleaf Center offices, in Australia-New Zealand, Brazil, Canada, Germany, Japan, Korea, the Netherlands, the Philippines, Singapore, South Africa, and the United Kingdom. Both we and our partners in other places have been working on translations of the “Servant as Leader” essay in particular, and also encouraging publications in other areas. Several months ago now the “Servant as Leader” essay was published in its eleventh language: German. This edition was nurtured and made possible by Ed Voerman and his colleagues with the Center in the Netherlands. I’ve also recently asked my colleague in the U.K., John Noble, to serve our growing international network as our international consultant, and my hope and expectation is that John’s going to be able to help raise even further our outreach around the world. I want to recognize both Ed Voerman and John Noble for their outstanding work and leadership.

In 2004, *NBC Dateline*, as some of you may know, had a segment on servant-leadership that was seen by ten million people, and resulted in thousands upon thousands of inquiries to our office, most of them coming the day after it appeared, which was interesting in and of itself. It was a wonderful way of introducing servant-leadership to a large audience. We have many new members and customers, people attending the conference, as a result of it, and have continued to have inquiries. In September of 2004 NBC and Paramount released a DVD called “The Last Days of Jesus,” which was from another program that had been done with *Dateline*, but they included on that DVD four bonus features, one of which is the eight-minute segment that was done on servant-leadership on a later *Dateline*. A number of people have inquired about its availability, and now it can be found and purchased on this DVD, which is available from our online catalogue. I’ve actually seen the DVD in my local Blockbuster and Best Buy and elsewhere. I don’t know how well it’s selling, but I know we are getting a whole new spate of inquiries as a result of people seeing the segment on the DVD, so double duty has come from that experience.

In 2004 I announced we reached an agreement with Gonzaga University to jointly produce the first academic journal on servant-leadership. Over the past two years Michelle Lawrence and I at the Greenleaf Center



have worked closely with Gonzaga's Professor Shann Ferch on producing the first two volumes of the journal. Rather than being delivered in two or three thin volumes per year, the journal will come out annually as one thick tome of practical, scholarly, and visionary work in servant-leadership. Shann serves as editor of the *Journal* and has done the lion's share of the work in producing it. Our copies of the first *Journal* to be printed, and now this second volume, astounded us with the precision, depth, and beauty of the presentation. Anyone wanting to purchase additional copies or a yearly subscription can contact Dr. Ferch's colleague Marnie Broughton (broughton@gonzaga.edu; or 509-323-3485). The journal is a very important development in servant-leadership. I know that both Shann and I hope it will serve to encourage others to lift up servant-leadership as a field of legitimate research, study, teaching, and publishing in business, social justice, the political world, the arts, higher education, and other disciplines. This is a big step forward, and I'm happy to see the advances being made in this area.

Finally, in 1990 I was hired to lead the Greenleaf Center, and one of the very first things I did was to sign a five-year lease for office space. We started with a simple two-room office, and it was just me kind of banging around in the two rooms for a little while, but by 1995 we had outgrown our space and had moved seven miles north to our 86th St. location, and I signed another five-year lease. By 2000 we had reached the boundaries of our existing space, but we were able to annex a suite of offices next to us, and to expand, and so I wound up signing a third five-year lease. I swore to myself when I signed that last lease it would be the final lease I would sign. It seemed to me the time was right for the Greenleaf Center to try and figure out a way to have a place of its own, to put down permanent roots, and to provide a really wonderful working environment both for us and for visitors, an environment we simply had not had in the last fifteen years.

About three years ago, I met with one of our members, Paul Estridge, who heads the Estridge Company, one of the premier builders of residential communities in this region. At that time I shared my dream with Paul and invited him to dream with me. In 2004 we commenced a series of meetings



that led to Paul's offering to build the Greenleaf Center a home in Centennial Communities in Westfield, Indiana, which is just a couple of miles north of Indianapolis. Centennial Communities has actually been created with the idea in mind of creating a spirit of servant-leadership among its neighbors. It is very unique. There have been a number of things written about it, and if you go to the website on Estridge, you can read about it as well. Recently in November 2005 we moved into the beautiful brand new building Paul Estridge and his colleagues built for us. The feeling was just incredible, and I really have come to the conclusion that this is going to be one of the best things that has ever happened to the Center. The building is six-thousand square feet, two stories, with a basement, and modeled on the Carnegie Library design. It is our new home and serves as a vastly improved work environment, and one where we are able to show colleagues, members and visitors, and host occasional seminars and leadership development activities. . . all opportunities we just had not been able to do before. The building includes a reading room, which is something I'm very excited about. . . a space with a cozy fireplace, a nice inviting setting where residents of Centennial Community and members of the Center and anyone else who is interested can come and relax and read and learn and talk about servant-leadership, or simply to take a load off their feet! The total cost for the land and the building was about five hundred thousand dollars, and among other things, our new home greatly reduces the pinch on our annual budget by saving us tens of thousands of dollars over what we currently pay for rent. But even having said that, it is our hope that we are going to be able to lower that still further. To make things even better, Paul Estridge has made a cash donation of one hundred thousand dollars towards reducing the amount of our mortgage, which I think is just incredible. In addition we have recently launched a mortgage reduction campaign, and we are hoping to raise additional monies to shorten the period of our mortgage. The lower the mortgage, the more monies we have to be able to do other things. Paul, whose title at the Estridge Company includes that of Chief Servant, has also generously offered to help us in raising additional funds. It's just outstanding! An act of heart and soul in action. If any of you want to be thinking



about this and might be interested in supporting the Center in some fashion with our mortgage reduction fund, please be in touch with me at the Center (lspears@greenleaf.org). This is such an important new development for us; it will serve as an asset very quickly for the organization, and has blessed us with a great work environment. I want to add that we've worked the last ten years in an office that was built at the height of the energy crisis. I don't know if you know some of the buildings that were built at that time, but they had windows that didn't open, they had tiny windows, and the windows were all tinted. We spent ten years working in that environment. . . this is a big deal for us, so we are very thankful. The building is important for the Center for the long-term health of our organization, and none of this would have been possible without Paul Estridge and his incredible colleagues at the Estridge Group and at Centennial. I would like to give our heartfelt thanks to Paul Estridge for his making this dream come true.

Recent history and past history have been very good to us. We walk toward the future with joy in life, confidence in the hopes of servant-leadership, and celebration of our colleagues.

Larry Spears is the President and Chief Executive Officer of the Greenleaf Center for Servant-Leadership, which was founded in 1964 and originally called the Center for Applied Ethics. The Center's mission is to carry the message of servant-leadership to the world. Servant-leadership is a term originated by Robert K. Greenleaf, who was the Director of Management Research at AT&T, where he worked for thirty-eight years. Mr. Spears is also the editor of the classic servant-leadership texts *Insights on Leadership*, *Focus on Leadership*, *Reflections on Leadership*, and *Practicing Servant-Leadership: Succeeding through Trust, Bravery, and Forgiveness*. He serves as Senior Advisory Editor for *The International Journal of Servant-Leadership*.