



A SPECIAL MESSAGE FROM LARRY C. SPEARS ANNOUNCING  
HIS DEPARTURE FROM THE GREENLEAF CENTER AND THE  
ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SPEARS CENTER

December 30, 2007

Dear Friend:

It is with a mixture of sadness, excitement, and appreciation that I am writing to inform you that I am leaving the Greenleaf Center, due to financial pressures upon the Center.

In a letter dated November 30, 2007, longtime Greenleaf Center board chair, Jack Lowe, wrote the following: It is with deep regret that we must inform you that your position with the Greenleaf Center for Servant-Leadership must be eliminated. This is due to no fault of your own but merely to the fiscal constraints we are currently facing. The members of the Board of Directors join me in thanking you for your many years of loyal and dedicated service to the Center.

It is not the outcome that I had hoped for when I stepped out of the President & CEO role in April 2007 and into a new role as President Emeritus & Senior Fellow. I had much more to give to The Greenleaf Center, and many new projects in the works. Nevertheless, I accept this new reality, and I am grateful for the opportunity to share with you these parting thoughts.

As I look back over the past eighteen years as President & CEO, I find that I have so much to be grateful for. Global awareness of servant-leadership has grown dramatically during that time, as has the Center. When I began with the Greenleaf Center in March 1990, we faced not only the very



real prospect of the Center's going out of existence, but also a decline in the awareness and practice of servant-leadership. With the absence of Robert Greenleaf's active involvement around 1980, the Center's fortunes had begun to decline to the point that when I began in 1990, the Center's annual budget was less than \$90,000—most of which came from a final operating grant that had been given to it by Lilly Endowment, along with the challenge to self-determination.

I came to The Greenleaf Center with a strong sense of what I thought was needed to turn things around, and over the intervening years we succeeded in doing just that, to the point that our 2006 income was around \$700,000—nearly all of it earned revenue, not soft grant monies. In addition, as of December 31, 2006, the Greenleaf Center had assets totaling another \$700,000. As I think back over the past eighteen years, I take encouragement from so many good things that have occurred.

And so, with a nod and a wink to David Letterman—one of Indianapolis' favorite sons, and someone who grew up not far from where I live—I offer my own "Top Ten Farewell List" of key contributions and accomplishments since 1990 (drum roll, please!):

#### Number 10

In 1991, we held our first annual conference on servant-leadership. In the intervening years the Center has held seventeen annual conferences featuring an amazing array of some 300+ thinkers, authors, and presenters including Stephen Covey, Ken Blanchard, Margaret Wheatley, Peter Block, Peter Senge, James Autry, and so many more. Over time, this program has become the greatest single revenue source for the Center.

#### Number 9

In 1995, we established the Leadership Institute for Education with the aim of encouraging and supporting the development of servant-leadership



within institutions of higher education. This annual Institute has since been held thirteen times, with over three hundred colleges, universities, and other schools having participated. As a result, over fifty of them now have some active servant-leadership presence on their home campus.

#### Number 8

Since 1997, we have helped to establish a dozen International Greenleaf Center affiliates around the world. This has contributed greatly to the translation of Center books and essays into more than a dozen different languages, and to the quickening pace of global awareness and practices of servant-leadership.

#### Number 7

In 1999, I established the Voices of Servant-Leadership Essay Series. Since that time, I have encouraged and edited a dozen groundbreaking essays on servant-leadership by many contributing authors, including Margaret Wheatley, James Autry, John Carver, John Bogle, and others.

#### Number 6

I have written numerous grant proposals funded by Lilly Endowment, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, The William Penn Foundation, The Pfizer Foundation, and others, generating 2.5 million dollars in grant funding for the Center since 1990.

#### Number 5

Over the past eighteen years, I have written and published over one hundred articles and interviews and have edited over sixty issues of our newsletter, *The Servant Leader*. Since 2005, I have also collaborated with my friend, Shann Ferch (Gonzaga University), on the annual *International Journal of Servant-Leadership*.



#### Number 4

Since 1990, I have made over two hundred speeches and presentations on behalf of The Greenleaf Center across four continents, a dozen countries, and some forty different states. Over ten million viewers saw an appearance on NBC's Dateline in 2004.

#### Number 3

In 2005, and with the principal support of Paul Estridge, we were able to realize the dream of building our own headquarters. This simultaneously created a wonderful work environment, a hospitable place for visitors, a monthly mortgage payment that was less than what we had been paying in rent, and a hard asset in which we presently have nearly \$200,000 in equity in a building and land now valued at \$500,000.

#### Number 2

I have felt great passion in the creation of nine books on servant-leadership, including: *Reflections on Leadership* (1995), *On Becoming a Servant-Leader* (1996, with Don Frick), *Seeker and Servant* (1996, with Ann Fraker), *Insights on Leadership* (1998), *The Power of Servant-Leadership* (1998), *Servant Leadership: 25th Anniversary Edition* (2002), *Focus on Leadership* (2002, with Michele Lawrence), *The Servant-Leader Within* (2003, with Hamilton Beazley and Julie Beggs), and *Practicing Servant-Leadership* (2004, with Michele Lawrence). These nine books alone have helped to introduce servant-leadership—and the ideas of over one hundred contributing authors—to more than 150,000 people since 1995. One hundred percent of all royalties and advances on all nine books have gone directly to support the ongoing work of The Greenleaf Center, generating over \$250,000 in royalties, plus another \$250,000 in direct sales of these nine books by The Center.



## Number 1

I treasure the tens of thousands of supporters, colleagues, and friends who have contributed mightily to these and many other accomplishments. I am grateful for their caring spirits and for the many kindnesses along the way. I am also thankful for the love, support, and sacrifices made by my family—Beth, James, and Matthew.

While the elimination of my position has appeared as something of a dark cloud for me, the silver lining is that I have great clarity of vision about what comes next. I have been living my true calling for a great many years now, and it is my hope that I can continue to do the work that I have been doing: raising global awareness of the meaning and practices of servant-leadership. In order to accomplish that goal, The Larry C. Spears Center for Servant-Leadership, Inc. has now been established. This will be a not-for-profit organization whose mission is to encourage the understanding and practice of servant-leadership around the world. This will be done through offering a wide range of electronic and print publications, through speaking and other programs, through the creation of a partnership network, and more. Among the immediate projects for 2008-09 are a number of books and essays, including:

- A new servant-leadership anthology, *Servant-Leadership: Heart, Mind, Spirit* (with Shann Ferch, Gonzaga University).
- A Scanlon leadership anthology, *Scanlon EPIC Leadership: Where the Best Ideas Come Together* (with Paul Davis, Scanlon Leadership Foundation).
- Editing a book of writings by my dear friend and mentor, the late Bill Bottum (with George SanFacon).
- Editing a book of writings by the businessman/servant-leader, John Donnelly (with Paul Davis).



- An essay (“Holistic Servant-Leadership” with George SanFacon) will be the first in a new essay series to be published in 2008 by The Spears Center.
- A second essay in that series to be published in 2008 will be “Myers-Briggs and Servant-Leadership” (with Ralph Lewis, Board Chair, Greenleaf U.K.).
- A third essay, “The Seeker’s Journey” (with John Izzo, Izzo Consulting), appears in this issue of the *International Journal of Servant-Leadership*.
- I will continue to edit, along with my colleague, Shann Ferch, the annual *International Journal of Servant-Leadership*.
- I plan to travel and to speak on servant-leadership as I am invited to do so.

I was in my thirties when I began my journey with The Greenleaf Center in 1990. I am now in my fifties. Having grown up poor, and having spent the past thirty years working for several non-profit organizations, I do not have much in the way of personal financial wealth to draw upon in launching this new Center. However, I do have many good ideas, a great deal of enthusiasm, deep reservoirs of commitment, and much positive energy that I believe work in my favor. It is my sincere hope that some of you who are reading this may be willing to support *both* The Greenleaf Center and The Spears Center in whatever ways you can do so. I invite you to be in touch with me at [lspears@spearscenter.org](mailto:lspears@spearscenter.org).

Today, December 30, is my 52nd birthday. A friend said that this is a perfect age to launch my own initiative and commented, “Fifty-two is also the number in a full deck of cards. Play the hand that you are dealt, and make a difference!” That sounds like good advice to me, and that is what I plan to continue to do. My commitment to the great servant-leadership



movement is unwavering, and despite the sadness of having to leave a place that I have lovingly nurtured for nearly two decades, I am filled with hope for the future, and excited about the opportunities to continue to make a difference through servant-leadership and The Spears Center.

Warm regards,

*Larry*

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