

Contexts and Core Concepts, Processes, and Products

When we do the best that we can, we never know what miracle is wrought in our life, or in the life of another.

—Attributed to Helen Keller

Beginning the Circle

The *Sustaining Our Spirits* initiative emerged from the dream of one woman. It was based in over two decades of experience leading in the nonprofit and academic worlds where she was often the first African American and usually the first woman in her leadership positions. The combination of her experiences and numerous conversations with other female colleagues who reported sharing many of the same struggles and desires provided the final impetus to do something different, something that would build on the life-giving forces of women in leadership. Listening to her own dreams and desires as well as those of her friends and colleagues, she ventured to create a space for women leaders to come together to discuss their joys and challenges and explore what is needed to keep their souls strong in the highly rewarding, often strenuous—sometimes even dangerous—world of leadership.

Dream big and make plans big enough to hold those dreams. Don't feel constrained by the local context we're in.

(Interviewee)

Interconnectivity

Innately appreciating and understanding the interconnectivity of life, in the face of the growing individualism of our culture, the founding leader of *Sustaining Our Spirits* brought together other women leaders from the nonprofit, faith-based, public, and for-profit arenas to explore the nature of relationships. She dreamed of delving more deeply into those forces that help leaders transcend the everyday chaos and thrive not only in

the workplace but in all aspects of life. To begin this vital journey, she reached out to women in various leadership roles and disciplines, who, in turn, reached out to and were joined by others using what researchers refer to as a *networking* or a *snowball sampling*, wherein existing study participants recruit other participants from among people they know, therefore growing the sample like a rolling snowball. Those of us who came together in the initial retreats shared our service as leaders of communities and organizations. Even though we were all women leading in some capacity, we were all different. Spanning mul-

Once you are identified as a leader, you sort of carry yourself like that, and people naturally know that you're the person they can go to, and trust to lead them, and help them to figure out what they're trying to do.

(Interviewee)

multiple educational and socioeconomic histories with differing identities in terms of age, race and ethnicity, religion, political perspectives, and sexual orientation, ours was a collective that included diversity in its voices. We were all women with an overwhelming desire to find support for our own leadership in the company of a caring and compassionate community, and we all had the daring to reveal our own experiences with the hope of benefiting others.

Together we acknowledged that to be most meaningful, many of our interactions would need to transcend the realms in which we were most used to operating. We needed to create a safe place in which to engage in deep reflection and authentic dialogue. As we will discuss throughout this book, within our circle we learned that these practices were essential to the self-care we required. To do this we had to go beyond (and sometimes beneath) the physical, mental, and emotional levels at which we were most accustomed and felt most comfortable. If we were to truly cherish our connections, our work needed to embody and emanate from our fundamental essence—our souls, our spirits. We increasingly realized that when we embraced our own spirits, we shared even deeper connections with others. When we ignored or were blocked from nurturing our deepest selves, we were unable to fully see our interconnections. It was during those times that we found ourselves out of balance and quite frequently feeling unhealthy. A core of interrelatedness was what we found we most needed to nurture if we were to fortify ourselves and contribute to broader personal, organizational, community, and, ultimately, global healing.

The definition of a leader that I use is one who is able to mobilize people and resources toward the common good. . . . It's a catalytic role that brings people and stuff—institutions—together to focus on something that is in the common good and to mobilize the collective action to make that happen.

(Interviewee)

Using Retreats to Go Inside and Out

Sustaining Our Spirits began with a series of four retreats spread throughout the first year, followed by three years of further exploration. Every three months we gathered around

the exploration of three essential questions: What sustains us as leaders? What threatens or challenges our sustainability? What wisdom do we want to pass on to the women coming after us? During the retreats, we created various opportunities and utilized multiple modalities to explore connections within ourselves, with each other, and with the world. We incorporated time for dialogue, reflection, rituals, and facilitated experiences to examine the challenges that we face as leaders in an increasingly turbulent world. From these purposeful encounters of communal sharing, we began to gather learnings that we felt needed to be passed along to the women leaders to come. Little did we know there would be so many who wanted to be heard.

As is true throughout life, our journey as a group of strong women leaders took a number of turns that we could neither predict nor control. We grew together and we fell apart and grew together again, individually and as a collective. Like the heroes and heroines of many great epics who embarked on their journeys with a single destination in mind only to discover that their expectations and assumptions were challenged and changed as the adventure unfolded, our explorations in retreat produced a richness of learning that far surpassed our original expectations.

As one of our participants so clearly stated from the outset, we wanted to “use our power for good.” We anticipated that by mobilizing our communal energy with positive intention we might reap immediate and enduring benefits ourselves. We hoped that by chronicling and disseminating our collective wisdom, we could similarly help others. As we continued to reach deeper for answers to our three central questions, our discoveries germinated; they took root and blossomed into new insights about leadership and spirituality for oneself and for others. As we have moved forward, the cultivation of the seedlings in this process has become, for some of us, a life’s vocation.

Sometimes I just want to talk to people who just know where I am coming from.

(Interviewee)

I find that in order to be sustained, my biggest struggle, and for other women leaders I know, is to feed ourselves. The first place you have to feed is your spiritual self . . . to believe that it is important. There is a reason that when you’re on the airplane and they demonstrate what to do if there is an accident, they tell you to put on your own air mask before you attend to someone else. You have to be strong, and you have to be around. Every human being deserves the chance to make him/herself happy and joyful.

(Interviewee)

FIVE TOUCHSTONES OF OUR RETREATS

We originally envisaged our experience together to consist of focused, facilitated retreats, which would serve as the primary forum for analyzing and synthesizing our learning. The venues for this work highlighted our recognition of the relationships that exist between ourselves and our environments. Our retreat locations, therefore, were important and purposefully

selected. The concepts of *reflection*, *dialogue*, *metaphor*, *paradox*, and *ritual* were core to our times together as they forced us to focus on one another and within ourselves. We found that these five concepts also solidified our connection with our planet, its rhythms, and its processes, and drove the content of our work together.

Reflection

We arranged the first four retreats to take place in serene, natural settings to accentuate human interdependence with Earth. Celebrating what was around us, the world we shared, we collectively and individually reflected upon our lives. These opportunities refreshed and invigorated us. They helped us to connect with each other as well as to establish a personal center for mindfulness—being fully awake, present—that more strongly linked us with something vast and ongoing, something greater than ourselves. During our daily experiences, by both observing and participating with our surrounding environment, we were reminded of our interconnections. We took time to journal and to record the many lessons that we learned. On a walk one afternoon, for example, a group of us came upon a spiderweb that stretched several feet between two trees. It was beautiful, and it forced us to pause in wonder. One of our participants recounted the experience this way:

Our group almost literally ran into a big spiderweb during our reflection time this afternoon. I had been talking about this the day before, watching a spider in its web blow in the wind . . . We talked about what it might mean for us, right then—flexibility, strength, being centered. Even though it doesn't look strong, the spider carries the web with her wherever she goes. She is at home in herself. She can set up a web wherever she is. It is gorgeous. With it she can catch food, which is necessary for her survival. If someone walks through it, the web sticks to the person but it doesn't destroy her; she simply starts again and builds a new one.

The spider is adaptable; she survives and may even thrive in the face of predators, natural disasters, and human interference. Fundamentally, isn't that a way of being for which we all strive? Certainly, that was true for those of us involved in *Sustaining Our Spirits*, and we continued to hear that message from other women, too.

In addition to connecting us with the larger world, our retreats provided a safe and sacred place to rest and renew vital energy. The immediate benefits affected us so profoundly that one of us actually postponed back surgery to attend a retreat because she knew how valuable these communal experiences were for her:

I, too, am grateful to be here. I postponed surgery and people thought I was nuts, but that's how important it is to be back. What happened [at our last retreat], I had forgotten. The uproariously funny conversations! I had lost all that between then and now. I am happy to be back. I am open to the possibilities.

Dialogue

Genuine dialogue was another foundational component in our retreat experience. As best defined by Paulo Freire (1981), the Brazilian educator who was once exiled from his country for teaching the poor how to read, dialogue is an “act of creation” (p. 77). Dialogue is a process in which two or more people discuss a topic by sharing opinions and simultaneously being

open to the opinions of the other(s). It involves positive regard (for self and other), trust (in self and other), and unconditional caring (of self and other) (Freire, 1981). Unlike many of our personal exchanges and workplace discussions and meetings, dialogue is not simply a conversation where one person talks and the other listens, and it is definitely not where everyone talks and no one listens! It is less about convincing someone of something or proving a point. It is about listening, inquiring, and creating mutual understanding.

Although honest dialogue is not the default mode of interaction in most groups today, it can be. Imagine the benefits to our organizations and communities. Think about a time when you talked with someone and you felt really understood, a time when you experienced that person genuinely hearing you. How did you feel? What did the other person do or say that helped you know you were being heard? What changes did this realization mean for you? How did you respond? What was the outcome? Most likely you felt more comfortable to open up and listen to her or him. It's contagious. Often as leaders, we feel the need to control conversations to reach a desired outcome or the people with whom we are conversing feel they need to do so with us. True dialogue overcomes this tendency through an open-hearted and open-minded exchange of thoughts and feelings—an opening up and honoring of one another that, as Freire taught, can only come from the integration of humility, faith, hope, and love.

As we describe later, humility is a central component for leaders who are able to connect within themselves and beyond to others. When we are grounded, we are secure enough to appreciate our individuality and the value of each person within the whole. True humility allows us to take in the ideas and feelings of others and to understand and use criticism wisely.

The second component of dialogue is faith. Faith is about “understanding that living with uncertainty is okay; it is about walking forward and knowing that the ground will meet your feet” (Bailey, 2006, p. 300). Faith runs counter to fear; even though fear will always be present, as leaders, we must not be beholden to it. When we have faith, we are able to put aside our preconceived notions for the results of our interactions. If we approach dialogue in good faith and with faith, we can trust that the outcome will be beneficial and will be made more so by the richness of creativity that can come from people working from a place of mutual understanding.

Also essential to dialogue is hope. Hope is a belief in the reality that more and better can and will come for us all. It begins our search for wholeness—a search that can only be carried out when we work together with others. Hope is what kept alive all those who came before us; it is the wind in the sails of faith. It is what gets us up every morning; it is why we take care of ourselves and our relationships. When we are hopeful, optimism grows and dreams soar to create environments of possibility within ourselves, our workplaces, and in the rest of our lives.

Finally, at the very heart of dialogue is love. This is the incredibly special type of love, referred to as *agape*. As we will describe more fully, *agape* is a love for all simply because they exist, “not because of who they are, what they have done, or whom or what they know” (Bailey, 2006, p. 302). As leaders, this type of love fuels our compassion and patience to engage with others equally, which only serves to heighten the potential for dialogue.

Together, humility, faith, hope, and love form the foundation of dialogue and our ability to discover and create communities that are inclusive and safe. These spaces draw in people, further enhancing their lives inside and outside of their places of work. We know that people who work in organizations that value collectivity and community report greater

career satisfaction and organizational commitment than those that prize individualism (Jandeska & Kraimer, 2005, p. 470). As we found in our reflections and experiences—our stories—dialogue with one another is an effective way to capture creative ideas that, however partial or fleeting, may become the source of new life and energy for the future. Such open-hearted and open-minded exchanges also lay the foundation for communities of trust, invoking a sense of responsibility to one another, which builds ethical, caring decision making. Leaders in real situations need the integration of everyone's talents to assist them in making thoughtful and clear decisions that do not have (unintended) consequences hurtful to others, their organizations, or themselves.

Metaphor

Metaphor was also elemental in our retreats. Yet, what is a metaphor for? Metaphor has been conceptualized as a way to bring a personal sense of “aliveness” to life and work (Leider, 2004); however, it is also an especially useful way to conceptualize community and relationships in our daily lives. In his book, *A Whole New Mind*, author and former White House speechwriter Daniel Pink (2005) defines metaphor as “understanding one thing in terms of something else . . . a whole-minded ability that some cognitive scientists have called ‘imaginative rationality’” (p. 139). Although not many of us have been schooled in the construction of powerful metaphors (and we may have even at times arrived at what Howard Gardner, 2006, calls “felicitous metaphors”), this ability to interpret and share the world through multiple lenses resonated with us as we explored the many aspects of human relationships in our workplaces, especially as we attempted to describe our experiences of community.

I always looked at my role as a Dean as—I wouldn't necessarily use the word 'ministry'—that sounds a little too self-serving . . . but I always felt that I had a flock—a community of people for whom I was responsible—all the faculty, the students, the staff. . . . So, I had to think about all of those people as part of my flock that I had to look after. I felt this responsibility to do right by the people who were in my organization.

(Interviewee)

Paradox

A holistic, interconnected view of life suggests that leadership contains more ambiguity than certainty. In fact, it might be considered paradoxical. Paradox presents a both/and way of being, a circular perspective. Because there is often no single right or wrong answer or no clear path, inherent and fundamental tensions exist in managing paradox. Living with paradox is not necessarily comfortable, although acknowledging and understanding the realities of paradox can help us manage the inherent challenges of life and birth new systems and processes (Handy, 1994). Indeed, paradox is central in many major world philosophies and religions, from Shiva's dance as creator and destroyer to the Tao's yin and yang, to the Judeo-

Christian's creation story of shadow and light and peace and chaos, to much of the Sufi teachings through riddles and stories. In their most affirming way, paradoxes can be likened to pseudoquestions or riddles that "suspend us between too many good answers" (Sorensen, 2005, p. xii). As leaders we can facilitate the emergence of the most appropriate choices, confident in the fact that there will be many more opportunities to choose again.

Nonetheless, the pressures of facing paradoxes day-in and day-out can be daunting. Whether we consciously recognized them or not, paradoxes were the forces that ultimately led each of us to participate in the *Sustaining Our Spirits* project. Our isolation as leaders encouraged us to search out and offer to others a community of safe space and time free from contradictions between our espoused values and enacted behaviors—a consistent gathering in which we could tell our stories and connect and grow in our leadership roles. Yet, at the same time that many of us felt (and continue to believe) that we, as women leaders, are in danger—an endangered species living in a hostile world—we also knew that we had the potential to help shape the future for ourselves and for the next generations.

Throughout the entire *Sustaining Our Spirits* journey, we have reflected on and engaged in dialogue about the paradoxes of leadership and our roles within it. We focused on ourselves, on each other, on the women that came before us, and on those who will come after, and we focused on Earth as a force that is completely intertwined with our sustainability. The images of our reflections have been of danger and beauty, of new life and death. They very quickly have become mirrors for our joys and sorrows, our successes, our failures, and our transformations. The paradoxes found in our sensory environments allowed us to experience their many edges, challenging ourselves and one another to explore the deepest places of identity, self-definition, leadership, and spirituality. Talking openly about the paradoxes we faced and how we coped with them was, for us, a powerful experience; it was one of the keys to whether we—women who lead—merely survive or really thrive.

Ritual

The concept and process of ritual was another central component of our retreat circle and a tool that we used to focus ourselves personally as well as between and among each other as a group. A ritual is defined as "a rite, a ceremony, a series of symbolic acts focused toward fulfilling a particular intention . . . Rituals are an integral part of nature and our daily lives" (Beck & Metrick, 1990, p. 5). In essence, a ritual is something done formally in the physical realm—from a simple gesture of the hand to an elaborate ceremony—that relates to the higher worlds. The formality of rituals can vary dramatically. Rituals can be as elaborate as a black-tie awards dinner or as routine as working consciously in everyday life so that quite mundane tasks become infused with meaning. Although elements of ritual may be personal, this work is best done in communion with others. The ability to develop and share in rituals is important for personal growth as well as for cohesion and institutional memory of the group or organization. During our retreats, rituals were gentle and engaging—allowing each person to participate to the degree she felt able and safe. The sharing was intense, insightful, and very fruitful.

From our opening and closing ceremonies to our meals and to various daily exercises, we incorporated ritual throughout our time together, and we increasingly experienced its value. In one participant-facilitated celebration, we were in a beautiful grassy setting. We began by honoring Earth, Sky, and the Four Directions (East, South, North, and West) by facing each direction

in turn, beginning with the East. We scooped up the energy of Earth with our hands, moving the energy through our bodies and then releasing that energy to the Sky. We did the exercise four times, as each of the Four Directions has its own metaphoric meaning and reality. (See *Cross-Trainings*, p. 15) By becoming aware of the energy of Earth and embodying it within ourselves, we were reminded that we are one with Earth and each other.

As in the retreats, the aspect of ritual has a place in our daily life, because it seeks to illuminate and connect the inner life with the outside world. Ritual is a way of being with self and others that allows for a perceptual shift in the understanding and meaning of connection; in fact, the presence of ritual celebration is a signpost of a healthy community that allows for “the coordination of human affairs with the great liturgy of the universe” (Berry, 1999, p. 17).

In our lives, the development of simple rituals, for example, a luncheon each month where people “catch up” with one another, can be both nonthreatening and inclusive. For us, the process of “checking in” at the beginning of all of our retreats provided the context for our participation. Moreover, sharing what was most important right then, what was uppermost in our minds and hearts—the joys and the sorrows—allowed others to more fully see and be with us, enabling each individual to be less distracted and more mindful during our precious time together.

Another ritual that we used to create our retreat community and bring all points of view into our meetings and gatherings was the Invitation Method (Law, 1993, p. 82). Using this approach, each member of the group invites another by name to share their ideas and opinions. It brings to consciousness the voices that are not usually heard. This is especially useful when there are people in a group who struggle to feel that their ideas are important. Having all our voices heard and acknowledged is a very important way to create that safe and supportive habitat for which we all long.

Seeds of Writing: Birthing of the Book

From the start, we learned incredible things during our time together. The power of our reflections and insights was so strong that we realized we could not contain our inquiry solely within ourselves. Our enthusiasm bubbled over, and we began to share our work with others. In so doing, we discovered more women leaders who expressed interest in the project, and our circle expanded. We began conducting interviews and hosting small group discussions with these friends and colleagues to explore issues that we had in common. As we carried these gifts back into our retreats, our feelings of affirmation and community grew exponentially. The names and roles of some of those women who joined us are listed at the end of this book as a way to publicly say thank you. Even with this, though, we really cannot thank them enough for their generosity of time, the careful articulation of their thoughts and feelings, and the courage to take this journey together.

At the conclusion of our fourth retreat, we found ourselves at an interesting and somewhat unexpected juncture. Through this work, we had gathered hundreds of pages of data, yet we realized that we were of many minds regarding our next steps. Many ideas for how to share the lessons from our experiences were generated during our time together. It also became clear that, although we had originally planned to co-create a book, the

process of thematically analyzing and interpreting the vast amount of data that we had collected was a much more time-consuming and energy-intensive effort than we anticipated at the start, especially for nine women already working as hard as they could to balance their work, family, and other life commitments. In the end, four of us chose to move forward with the book project, the product of which is in your hands. The others elected to express the fruits of our retreat time spent together in different ways.

To further develop our story, those of us who chose to pursue the book continued to meet in retreats and conduct semistructured interviews and focus groups with other women to both more thoroughly explore our leadership roles and to address the issues of spirituality in depth. In the initial retreats, spirituality became more of an underlying current that flowed through our work rather than a concept, feeling, or practice that we investigated directly. Moving *Sustaining Our Spirits* to this next level of discovery was enlightening and also totally exciting as we once again continued to hear similar experiences and themes.

At this time, a fifth woman joined our circle as a research assistant and respondent to our conversations. Eventually, she has become a full participant with us, and what you read in these pages is as informed and shaped by her perspectives and experiences as by those of the many others who have shared their stories with us.

With the change in the composition of our retreat group came the change in dynamics as we moved into this new phase of exploration. Some of us who were more reticent in our first year of retreat began to become more active participants through verbal and written sharing, and some of us who had spoken quite a bit started to balance our expression with more time for deep listening to others. What remained unchanged was our commitment to maintaining the inquisitive, introspective, creative, challenging, and mutually supportive atmosphere that had nurtured each of us so positively in our first four retreats. Our new sessions included deep reflection on those retreats as we sought to better understand and apply the lessons that they generated for us. We knew that the initial retreats had indeed been instrumental. They brought us together and focused our attention on the critical issues associated with women leaders' sustainability. We came to understand our initial retreat gatherings and the data generated not as the sole content for the book but rather as its context. The earlier retreats during which we explored the issues that women face as leaders were part of the ground upon which we built our relationships and our shared vision. They were the catalyst that allowed us to transform our ideas and experiences into something greater that we could share with others. In short, even as the nine original partners went in separate directions following the four retreats, we realized that the gift of these gatherings was a beginning, not an ending. They provided us with the balance and energy we needed to start uncovering and then disseminating the story of the leadership journey of women. We came to understand the initial retreats as manifestations of the connections and meanings that make up life itself, and, unexpectedly, they became both central to our discussion and the mechanism for our dialogue.

At the same time, these initial retreats were periods of such valuable personal growth that we had been unable to devote the time needed to processing the broader, communal lessons. Now, we needed to create the space for both. Our subsequent retreats became safe places for gathering and releasing, for deepening and broadening, for pulling together, breaking apart, and recombining anew our individual and group learnings for better understanding our own realities and those in the world beyond.

So once again, we met in retreats and further documented women's leadership stories. We continued to frame our work around the three research questions about threats and sustainability, and we continued to utilize a networking methodology to identify and interview additional women. Women we knew as leaders introduced us to women they knew

Leadership is a hard thing to talk about: you can't touch it; you know it when you see it; when you ask people to describe it or tell you about it, it's kind of hard to put into words, but you know it when you see it. Other things will happen when the leader figures out who they are and what makes them strong . . . and [are] not afraid to show their weaknesses and to tap into others.

(Interviewee)

and saw as leaders, who in turn led us to other women leaders, until we had been gifted by hours and hours of narratives and reflections from over 40 women in leadership roles. These women were chief executive officers, executive directors, and presidents, as well as chief academic officers, independent consultants, tribal chiefs, editors-in-chief, community elders, musicians, and visual artists. What we heard from these new colleagues resonated with our journeys; there was a kinship around the frustrations and the triumphs.

We are excited about the prospect of continuing to hear and learn from women throughout the country. We felt it was imperative to translate what we had gleaned, and we did not want to take the next decade to share our thoughts and excitement with you. That being said, this work is so important to us and to the future of women that we hope this book will serve as a platform from which to broaden this inquiry even further—through you, your

sisters, and your colleagues. The collective lessons revealed in this book were born from this rich history and share this ambitious goal.

When we began exploring the challenges, hopes, thrills, and realities of leadership through *Sustaining Our Spirits*, we focused our attention in three main areas. First, we wanted to understand some of the beliefs, practices, and resources that make us, as women, want to be leaders and keep us going every day in our leadership roles. Grounded in the power of this discovery, we sought to discern the elements in ourselves, our lives, our workplaces, and our world that are toxic to us, the characteristics and conditions that pose threats to our sustainability, the overt and underlying forces that put us in danger every day and over the long term. Finally, we began to consider the world as we hoped it would be for the women coming after us. We simultaneously looked inward and outward to discover what we needed more of in order for women like us to thrive as leaders—now and into the future.

One of our first challenges was to decide what and how to share this with you to most effectively bring you into our circle. After much thinking, discussion, and discernment, we made the decision to share our lessons as they clustered around overarching themes. To further validate each of our individual journeys, we wanted to tell at least part of the story in the words of women, like you, who are living this life every day. We have done this by augmenting the narrative with quotes from retreat participants and interviewees. As you have already seen, many of these quotes are offered as sidebars; some are included in the text. We decided early on that content would take precedence in selecting quotes. Each

makes a statement on its own. Yet in most cases, although the words might differ, the thoughts and feelings they express are emblematic of the thoughts and feelings of many others. As such, although words from each speaker have been included, we elected not to identify them. We have, as mentioned earlier, listed their names in our acknowledgments at the end of the book. Rather than focus on who said what and when, we wanted to communicate the meaning behind the message. With these words, we hope to value the uniqueness of each individual leader while we also respect and pay homage to our shared story as women and as leaders who are finding ways to survive and thrive. Through our retreats, interviews, and analyses, we have enacted the position of “passionate participant” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 115), facilitating the “multi-voice” reconstructions (our own and the women who shared their stories) and even each of us as a “transformative intellectual” speaking as an advocate and activist toward expanding consciousness and transforming hegemony (Giroux, 1998, as cited in Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 115).

Please know that to be true to our experiences and the data gathered through our retreats and structured individual interviews and focus groups, this book’s story about the dimensions of women leaders and the role of spirituality is not exhaustive. Despite the temptations to add material from new and relevant books and movies and to listen to all related tapes and songs, we have resisted. This may frustrate some of you, but we trust that most of you will applaud our efforts to be evidence-based.

To make the story of our journey even richer, we have included backstories throughout chapters 4 through 11, following our introduction. These sections add in-depth personal reflections and descriptions of our retreats and work as lived by us. The backstories offer a more comprehensive context to frame the narrative and, much like the sidebars, they provide a level of detail that we hope will make the themes come even more alive. Finally, we have included suggestions for deepening your experience of this book in “Cross-Trainings for the Soul.” These sections offer additional readings, questions for reflection, and rituals that each of us can incorporate into our routines and into our leadership. Again, we could not list all the wonderful resources that are available to us, and we certainly do not presume that every resource listed will appeal to you equally. Nonetheless, we present a range of selections (with which at least one of us has had experience), and we hope that you will share with us and others the resources you have found helpful on your path as a leader.

We have grouped our chapters into two parts. Part 1 introduces the *Sustaining Our Spirits* initiative, our spiritual leadership paradigm, and the Earthview. Part 2 addresses the three questions that we asked: What sustains us as leaders? What threatens or challenges our sustainability? What wisdom do we want to pass on to the women coming after us? In it, we share our learnings, offer words of guidance for acting and aspiring women leaders, and seek to nourish the souls of all the women leaders who yearn for and are open to greater learning, growing, and more sustainable spirits. We then close the book with a short Epilogue—reminders from this time together, our shared experience, as we re-enter our places of work.

Each of us engages with the world in unique ways. Therefore, it is possible, indeed expected, that each woman, each leader, who reads this book will respond to it differently. Whatever feelings it evokes—validation, frustration, anger, hope,—our desire is that you can positively harness the power of these feelings and use them to shape your ongoing development. Only by acknowledging and building on our strengths as women and as leaders can we move forward to create a more generous and sustainable world.

As is evident by now, this book is our best interweaving of head, heart, and soul. We cover a lot of ground moving through past and current literature, from multiple perspectives to experience, lessons learned, wisdom, and the quiet voice within shared by women who lead in all sectors of our community—public, private, and nonprofit. We offer a new way of understanding leadership, by both showing the relationships that make up the whole and rearranging the known pieces to allow us to see them differently.

Yes, the *Sustaining Our Spirits* journey has been much longer and more complex than any of us initially imagined. But the process has become even more exciting and alive as the exploration of our individual leadership and spirituality has intensified through the ongoing conversation and as it continues to be reflected back to us through the prism of others. Our conversations together have revealed peculiarities as well as cultural and learned individualities; they have also demonstrated reassuring connections of shared vision, passion, frustrations, and delights among us as women. They have encouraged us and affirmed that this work is important. What do you dream for in this world? How do you want the planet to be for your grandchildren, their grandchildren, and all those women who come after us? Whatever your vision, it is imperative that we do all we can now to ensure a strong and nourishing habitat within ourselves, in our organizations, and in our communities.

We hope our book helps advance this vital work. As authors we share an enthusiastic commitment to the publication of this book, and we know we were blessed to find a publisher in NASW Press, the professional discipline of two of us. This Press (as is true for the national association) also believes in the importance of the process and the product of our journey. Within its own leadership, there happen to be strong and courageous women. Together, we are dedicated to disseminating the messages of this book and promoting ongoing dialogue and action around it. Now as we share our learnings with you, we also share our hope of honoring women leaders from the past, sustaining women leaders in the present, and inspiring women leaders for the future, for us all, our organizations, and, ultimately, for the world.

Cross-Trainings for the Soul

READINGS

- Angeles Arrien is a cultural anthropologist and cross-cultural teacher who has gleaned wisdom from many societies on how to meet and work with conflict, as well as the many ways to embrace conflict to make oneself a stronger, more effective leader. Her book, *The Four-fold Way: Walking the Paths of Warrior, Teacher, Healer and Visionary* (1993), is particularly powerful. Additionally, her Web site offers an overview of her work, along with a calendar of events: <http://www.angelesarrien.com>.
- Ted Andrews's (2006) *Animal Speak: The Spiritual and Magical Powers of Creatures Great and Small* also offers insights into the connection we, as humans, have with other beings on Earth.
- The Forum on Religion and Ecology, codirected by Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, offers numerous resources on the connections between and among spirituality, religion, and Earth. Visit the Web site: <http://www.religionandecology.org/About/founders.php>.

REFLECTIONS

- What metaphor describes leadership for you? What lessons and actions are implied in that metaphor that can facilitate your development? Find a symbol that reminds you of that metaphor and revisit its richness and nuances every day to learn what it can teach you. An excellent article to help you think about leadership through metaphor is "Reimagining Our Academic Journeys Through Spiritual Metaphor" in the *Advancing Women in Leadership Journal* by Michelle Collay, Sandy Gehrig, Valerie Lesniak, and Carol Mayer (2002). In this article, four women in academia examine their separate and collective journeys through the use of the spiritually grounded metaphors of pilgrimage; labyrinth; gestation, birth, and rebirth; perpetual migration; and sisterhood.
- Consider our three research questions for yourself: What sustains you as a leader? What threatens you? What would you want to share with leaders to come? You may even want to share this conversation with a friend or convene a group of women you respect and facilitate a dialogue around these questions, much as we did. It can be a single session or you may elect to continue it, whichever feels most beneficial to you. Reflect on what you learn from this conversation and, as a result, what action, no matter how small, that you might take to nurture your spirit.

RHYTHMS & RITUALS

- Journaling is helpful to keep us reflecting on our daily experiences and making the connections that support our ongoing growth. Journaling provides us the feedback we might need to change course or keep the course in a leadership situation. It can take many forms. The key is to find the method that works for you. You might write an ongoing letter to yourself or to someone you love; you might write in a free-form style, essentially brainstorming whatever comes to mind; you might chronicle thoughts and feelings from your day. The approach does not matter as much as finding the way that best helps you document your history and reflect on your journey. It is also helpful to write down those thoughts that continue to run

through your mind while you attempt to do other things! Books and tapes by the following authors offer resources for journaling: Clarissa Pinkola Estés, Marion Woodman, Linda Schiese Leonard, June Singer, and Sylvia Brinton Perera. All can be found at Amazon.com or online under the author's name. Audio recordings can be found at <http://www.soundstrue.com>.

- Expose yourself to new ideas regularly. Periodicals such as *Spirituality and Health*, *Real Simple*, *Science and Spirit*, *Explore: The Journal of Science and Health*, and *Magistra* contain many articles about the mind-body-spirit connection. They can be purchased at the newsstand and accessed online at <http://www.SpiritualityHealth.com>.