

Denise Vargas Podcast Transcript

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B: Hi, I'm Brandon Nappi.

H: Hi, I'm Hannah Black.

B: We're your hosts on The Leader's Way, an audio pilgrimage from Berkeley Divinity School, the Episcopal Seminary at Yale University.

H: On this journey, we reflect on what matters most in life, as we talk about all things spirituality, innovation, leadership, and transformation.

H: Hey, Brandon, how's it going?

B: It's going really well. Happy spring.

H: Happy spring. The sun is shining, the tank is clean.

B: Graduation is in the air, students are ready.

H: I'm actually very excited for graduation. Brandon and I get to march with Morse College, which we are fellows at. Do you want to share about the drums?

B: Yes. We all get to dress up, which is great fun. Actually, my dad is joining us. Shout-out to dad, who is an avid listener of The Leader's Way podcast, who is part of the oldest marching drum band in the United States, founded in 177- ...I'm going to get the date wrong. Sorry, dad, but ... 4?-- before the American Revolution; founded in Waterbury, Connecticut. And they dress up like it's the 1770s.

H: Like it's the 70s, yeah.

B: They play either original or replica instruments made of sheepskin and wood, and it's just great fun. They play the same kind of music with drums and fiefs that would have been heard hundreds of years ago. I should say why! So they lead the law school graduation, which is great fun to watch. Yes, lots of regalia, lots of celebration.

H: The itinerary is like watch our favorite drummers march in our fancy outfits with Morse College, and then come celebrate our divinity students.

B: It's going to be so fun. Hopefully, the weather holds out.

H: Speaking of things we love, we're talking to a poet today. I was wondering if you have a favorite poet or poem.

B: Oh my gosh. I guess we have to say Dante. It was in my mind. When in doubt, I'm often reaching for Mary Oliver. I'm seeing a Mary Oliver book of poems across the way. I love a good Rumi poem now and again. Sometimes as a spiritual director, when I'm working with folks, I share a lot of Rumi poetry. Then of course, there's also John O'Donohue, the wonderful Irish poet and mystic and spiritual teacher. What about you, Hannah?

H: It was a question I was prepared to ask, but not to answer. I'd also have to say Dante, Obvi. I'm a real sucker for John Donne and George Herbert. I go back to them time and again. I actually was thinking of Mary Oliver too. Yeah.

B: You're reminding me of our dear friend T.S. Eliot. I feel like we need to have a T.S. Eliot episode.

H: Yeah, duh! How did I not say T.S. Eliot first?

B: Yeah. We must have a T.S. Eliot scholar. Let's go find them.

H: Have I told you about the time that I went and saw Ray Fiennes do a one-man production of The Four Quartets? So ... Voldemort was doing a one-man production of The Four Quartets in a very small theater. It was wild, like very surreal for many reasons.

B: (laughs) That's incredible.

H: It was very cool.

B: I hope there are videos of that. Can I YouTube that?

H: Maybe he can come on The Leaders Way. (laughs)

B: Okay. So the bar has been set very high.

H: And he can just read us The Four Quartets and that's the whole episode is Voldemort reading The Four Quartets.

B: Oh my gosh. The Dark Lord on The Leaders Way podcast. That would be too much. It would be. So here's what I love about this conversation. It combines justice, grassroots activism, leadership. There's a motorcycle reference and there's poetry. So in classic leaders way form, we go low, we go high. We actually blow up these categories of low and high. There's everything. Yeah. Denise Vargas is sort of the Renaissance woman.

H: Absolutely. And somebody who's really embodying many of our values we often talk about, but then she's going to work implementing Christian love day to day today and changing people's lives. Really amazing.

B: Yeah. Let me tell you about Denise Vargas. She's a Honduran poet. She's the executive director of El Hogar projects in Honduras. She'll describe this incredible work that she's doing with young girls and families. She's actually the first Honduran executive director in the organization's 40 plus year history. She worked in management and business for 25 years or so, specializing in business model innovation, team development, entrepreneurship. She's the founder of Impact Strategies, a consulting and training company. She was a commercial manager of Ultra Motor, Moto Mundo motorcycle companies in Latin America. And so she's done some really interesting diverse work at all levels. And she's published two books of poetry and she actually reads some of her poetry in this conversation, which is really fun. She's fluent in Spanish, English, French, Italian, and is just a radiant human, being exquisitely humble, easy to talk to, and a member of the Aspen Global Leadership Network and Central American Leadership Initiative. Just a radiant person who, as you said, Hannah, just putting love in action in really concrete ways. So, so happy for this conversation.

B: Wow, Denise, it's just so great to have you here. And we had a chance to connect over coffee and chocolate. We're just so thankful that you visited New Haven and hopped on the podcast.

D: Thank you. I'm so happy to be here and to hear your stories and also get to see this lovely campus and community and spend some time in New Haven and at Yale.

B: I feel like one of the greatest blessings of my life, whether this be professionally and ministry or just in my family is to be able to receive the stories, to bear witness to the stories of people's lives and how people have come to do the important work that they do. And so I'm wondering, Denise, if you could start off just by telling your story, your vocation, and how you came to do this incredibly urgent and important work in Honduras.

D: Thank you. So growing up in Honduras, I was always certainly aware of the hardships that so many of the Honduran citizens were experiencing. But I was working in the private sector for decades; marketing, communications. Halfway through that, I was feeling that I needed to do something to contribute more to my country. I spent a few years in New York City working in the UN, researching and supporting children's and women's rights. But that again, felt also very removed from my home country. So I came back to Honduras, went back to the private sector, but started working with a group of women supporting youth, specifically adolescent girls, who faced tremendous challenges in Honduras. I knew deep inside that that's the kind of work I wanted to be doing, but I hadn't had the courage to make that leap. I had a wonderful job. I was the director of a motorcycle business, selling motorcycles.

But I remember a story of what triggered this change. I used to go to the same supermarket. Every week. And I would always say hello to a kid who sold strawberries. And one day as I was walking out, he said hello to me, but he said hello to me in a man's voice. I realized that a lot of time had passed and I hadn't done anything about my own work and how I could contribute to make his life better. And I felt that it was a time for me to change. And I gave up

my work in the commercial sector and moved to start a consulting company to support women, entrepreneurs, and youth. Micro-entrepreneurs. So these are women who had their own small business. I did that for several years and then received an invitation to join El Hogar as the executive director, to apply for the position. When I went to visit and I met the board members and visited the campus, that's what felt right for me. I felt I could reach a lot more people, and combine my experience in business with my passion for education and youth and working with fellow moms to see how we could contribute a little to supporting the progress and the growth of Honduras.

H: That's wonderful. And I wonder following from that, if you could tell us a little bit more about El Hogar and its mission, what kind of work are you engaged in?

D: I am the executive director of this organization that is over 45 years old now. It was started as a mission of the Episcopal Church in Honduras, and continues to be a mission and a ministry deeply connected to the Episcopal Church, but also working closely and managed by Hondurans. We offer licensed education from 1st through 12th grade to students who experienced very vulnerable conditions in Honduras. We offer also an alternate residence or residential home for children who are either orphaned or who need to be separated from their families due to extreme conditions of challenges, not just poverty, but additional challenges as well.

And we also offer a vocational program. So students graduate not just with a high school diploma, but also with a technical degree in electricity and with a background experience in welding and carpentry. So they have a lot of hands-on education also, to give them the tools so that they can secure a job right after high school if they want to.

B: I wonder if you can go back to the entrepreneurial work just for a moment that you were doing with women. And I wonder, what were some of the lessons you learned in that space? I mean, so much of our conversation these days in the leaders way and in the work that we do is helping leaders, rectors, priests, folks in ministry to think in an entrepreneurial way, to think about creating new pathways to communities of faith. And so we're always looking for support and guidance and lessons from entrepreneurs who are on the path of creating new things, and creating new things that make a difference or that are sustainable. So, help us as someone who's worked in entrepreneurship for a long time. What is it that we in the church, who are in ministry, should keep in mind about the entrepreneurial path?

D: Well, the first thing is that it can be a lonely experience. Entrepreneurs tend to work independently very much and having a sense of community really empowers entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial thinking. It's easy to miss that that's a big component to what motivates us as human beings-- to feel like we belong. And most of the women that I worked with were solo-preneurs, or micro-business owners. And part of the value that I would add is having them feel that they were part of a community and have other women cheer them on or share the experiences and the challenges that they were facing. And also having other people believe you and see you in a perspective that often we as entrepreneurs can overlook. We can be very hard on ourselves and sometimes others can be even more gentle. So that's one.

And the other is that there is a sense of urgency that is required sometimes to be an entrepreneur. Often, entrepreneurship is like learning to swim as you're in the water. And it

doesn't have to be that way. Regardless of where you are in your life, I encourage little pilots and little initiatives of entrepreneurship as opposed to having to jump off a ship and start swimming.

B: I'm really heartened to be reminded that the path of entrepreneurship doesn't need to be so lonely and isolated. I think it's one of the fundamental illusions here in the United States. It's just the air we breathe. How separate and isolated. And the sense of collaboration; I know, I mean, Hannah and I have had this conversation so many times, right? --How treasured it is for the both of us. And it's not always equally valued, collaboration, working with others. So I'm really thankful that you're raising this up. And I know for folks in ministry, this kind of isolation feels so real and so overwhelming. And I feel like a big, big part of what we do here at Berkeley in terms of The Leaders Way and Transforming Leaders is just to bring people together so that they can learn from one another and remember that they're not alone.

D: Yeah, and we're also experiencing that with mothers and fathers, the parents of the children we serve, a benefit they receive from the students attending our school, one that we didn't anticipate, was also feeling they had a sense of belonging to something and belonging to this organization. And to a group of other moms that are also investing their own time to help their children have an education. So I think being a source of community and welcome and generating connections is priceless to me, beyond what we understand or consider frequently of how valuable it is.

H: Yeah, as you're talking about entrepreneurship and especially what Brandon was saying, the tension between the loneliness--not even loneliness, but kind of working as an independent leader versus doing that in community with other independent leaders--it is reminding me a lot of how a lot of our clergy guests will talk about being leaders of churches, and then being in community with one another is really big for them. But it also is making me wonder, what does entrepreneurialism, entrepreneurship have to do with the church? Do you think like church leaders should be entrepreneurial? What does that look like?

D: To me, entrepreneurial thinking ... it's been associated mostly with starting businesses, but it's really a way of living, it's embodying a state. Similar to embodying a state of poetry, for me is embodying a state of entrepreneurship, of saying, I embrace the newness, to another person, to an initiative, to a project, to a new way of seeing things within our own biblical interpretation. It's a path to something new, a journey. That's how I see it, personally.

B: So I love this way of thinking about entrepreneurship. It sometimes involves letting go of something old, embracing something new, and that can be really hard. And I wonder if you have an example of this in your work, has there been some letting go to make space for something new in the work that you're engaged in?

D: Well, just to give an example at El Hogar, so we have been providing residential services for children for decades, and our services used to be directly to the students because most of the students were in our homes. And now we're embracing and ensuring that we empower the parents more. Instead of us seeing ourselves as the direct providers of support to the children, it's ensuring that parents, who are the primary caregivers and the ones where the children have the deepest connection, that *they* have the tools and the opportunity to support the children better.

Innovating in this way is taking a step back from seeing the child as an individual, but seeing him in community: as a family member, as a community member. But it has forced us to let go of our roles, and even to let go of how we did things in the past. And it requires compassion. To do things in a new way requires acceptance that we're always learning. We constantly do the best we can with the current information we have. And so if we are too attached to the way we've been doing things because we feel that it was right, it's hard for us to innovate and to be entrepreneurial.

H: Yeah, that takes some real humility, I think. And some energy for change, which is the second part of it. Sometimes we just don't want to go that extra mile, but it really is worth it.

B: Yeah, you mentioned compassion. I'm just reminded that the path of compassion is slower than other paths, right? I mean, so you could just ... you can go in, you can clean house, you can institute new policies, and yet that can disrupt a team, that can blow up a community, it can blow up a nonprofit. And so I'm wondering, just as a person, as a person of faith, how do you hold the tension between the kind of patience and slowness that compassion requires on the one hand, and on the other hand, the utter urgency that you must see, right? Because you want to change things yesterday, right? And so, I just wonder how do you live with that tension inside of yourself?

D: What a great question. So I think it's about identifying milestones of success that are smaller. So for example, one of our first steps and change in the organizations that I worked for is building trust, trust in a new path or trust in the people, new people working together. And sometimes it's identifying little signs of success that you're heading in the right direction. So I think that we consider a goal to something that's far in the future, but it's so important for us as a leader to identify what would be a good indicator of quick successes that are short term. And to remind the people who you're traveling with that it's almost like there's a road and it helps to have these markers that we're heading in the right direction. But sometimes we don't see them. We see the frustration of the slowness. We see the frustration of somebody else holding us back. It's finding these common indicators of progress.

And also it's that empathy of sharing making time to share. So that's why they say that if you travel alone you get there faster, but if you travel together you get farther. So it's making time to recognize the struggles. And openly, about how slowly things seem to be moving-- as long as they're moving in the right direction. I think that's what's at least been useful in this organization. So we just stop and celebrate the little things.

B: Oh, thank you. That's so helpful. I'm so appreciating this, and I'm gonna take this to our Leaders Way fellows for sure this summer, because we'll embark on this journey together to bring some kind of innovation to our own communities. And it can feel so overwhelming and it can be so hard. And so thank you for that little bit of wisdom which is not so little. It's actually really quite profound.

H: Gosh, I wonder if you have even more, do you have more advice for leaders, community leaders, church leaders who are wanting to take concrete steps to innovate, to institute those kinds of things?

D: Well, I think that empowering those who've been doing things a certain way to do the research and lead it themselves. So sometimes, so for example, it would be easy for me, as you said, to say, "Okay, this is how we're gonna do things." We have directors that have been working with the organization for 30 to 35 years. It turns out that because they know the community so well, when they are directly involved in deciding how we're gonna do things, their experience brings trust to the organization. So, ensuring that the leadership feels that they have a say as to how to manage it and to make sure they bring in the right people to the conversation. One of the big shifts that we made in the organization in the residential services was to move from more of a traditional setting to very home-, family-centered. And this initiative was led by the director of the residential services. And she had been working in this one methodology for years, but she understood where we were heading, and she actually was the leader of making these changes.

But I think it's having invested enough time in having conversations with the right people, with the moms, with the children, and she being the one who leads the way and binds the resources, it's slower for sure because it means that there are many layers to the conversation, but then it takes off. To me, I see change as a very slow curve that eventually lifts up. So patience is a challenging word with the sense of urgency that some things are required, but I do think it pays off.

H: Well, and yeah, as you've been talking, I've been thinking about how we end up talking about hope a lot on this podcast. And one thing that being entrepreneurial requires is that you have the hope and the energy to even take first steps in trying to change things. And I think it's really easy to despair; to throw your hands up--way easier than hoping! To just say, "Oh no, this is happening in the church, this is happening in politics ..." whatever it may be, to throw your hands up and say, "Well, it's just gonna end in disaster and there's nothing I can do." But what you're demonstrating really in your life is that there's this other way. And I'm wondering where you find the hope and the energy, and if you can share a little bit of that with us.

D: Well, I do wanna share that I did feel that lacking hope can lead to paralysis because you feel, "Okay, nothing I do will change the magnitude of the problem, problems like corruption or poverty that seems so enormous.

H: Huge!

D: Yes, can lead us to say, "Well, I won't do anything about it." But El Hogar has helped me have hope because it is work that leads to getting to know people in depth. One story matters, one person, one individual. So having a sense of agency to change even one person's life gives me hope.

So for example, when I started at El Hogar, we had ... several of our children are referred to us through the government agency. They come from situations where many of these children don't even have a birth certificate. They don't know how old they are. They don't know who their parents are. They don't know what city they were born in. And just really understanding the impact of not having that sense of identity was, for me, a big motivator of change. And connecting with organizations that we're supporting one by one-- it's a lot of work to ensure that one child has a birth certificate. It takes a large team of lawyers and activists. And it seems

uphill, right? When there are hundreds of thousands of children in this same circumstance, but then hearing the story of the child who through this research suddenly feels like an individual.

I am also motivated by a child who was part of a residential program who saw that situation. And then this one person can then start a nonprofit that supports children. So to me, this one individual who went through this and then decided, "Okay, I'm gonna help children." Helping one person can have multiplying effects. To me, that's what gives me hope. We don't serve a number of children. We serve a community by giving hope. Hope to moms, hope to people who see the work that El Hogar does. I find the work in the one story.

B: Well, and I can really hear how relationship is at the heart of this for you. Maybe a slightly different model than historically, certainly in universities and sometimes even in churches, has been employed. You have the leader from on high who sort of swoops into a community as a kind of superhero and makes change. It's just not how sustainable change is made in general. That model is so problematic in so many ways. And so what you're describing is really beautiful. It's based in community, it's based in relationship, and we need more and more leaders to sort of model what that can look like. I know certainly here at Yale, there's a great hunger for the university to adapt a new model of partnership with the New Haven community, for example. And so, I mean, just the work that you're doing in Honduras is a kind of example and witness to how community-based partnerships can really work and be sustainable over time. So, just a thank you for doing the work the way you're doing it.

D: Thank you for those words. It inspires me to keep working, and I will share them with the team in Honduras who do so much of the hard work day to day. Thank you.

B: So I have a question that's been burning for the last 10 minutes because you mentioned one of my favorite words, and that is poetry. And so I'm just thinking about the kind of front row seat that you have to some pretty big challenges. Your heart must break when you sit with some families and moms and kids. So I wonder about the role poetry plays as you meet all of these heart-stretching moments in life personally, but also in your professional work too.

D: So, you started the podcast saying how to you, it's so gratifying to bear witness and to give a voice through the podcast to people's stories. And to me, poetry is a way of giving a voice to stories, to people, to feelings that can be hidden. And I find that through the act of writing, there is a healing process. To me, art is a source of healing. It's very spiritual. There's so much connection to a higher self. And so I find it to be quite useful in the work. It's generative. So poetry leads me to have an open heart and to be healed, to be more engaged. And then the work I do gives me just inspiration to keep writing.

H: Wow. So, I grew up as a dancer and I often really struggled with what the point of dance was. What's the point of dance? What's the point of art? What's the point? Even, like, reading as a child felt a little bit like that. It was like, well, this is fun, but what's the point? What's it accomplishing? And I think that speaks to my little capitalistic mindset, even as a teeny ... American. But what you're expressing is how powerful art is and not just in kind of an ambiguous way. You're talking about real world change that has a very real relationship with art. And I love how you're talking about that relationship of the work and the art within yourself, too. It's empowering.

D: Yes, I am sure that art can play the same kind of role. It's a self-expression and it's often art, whether it's alone or with someone else, it's also co-creation. So that's the beauty that dance allows that poetry may not.

H: But even reading poetry and then writing it, you can hear other poets in your own voice. Do you have favorite poets?

D: I have my favorite two poets. My favorite poet is Wislawa Szymborska. She's from Poland. She has a sense of irony that I don't have in my poetry. And I find it just fascinating. I like Jean Marguerite who's a Spanish poet as well. He translates his own poetry. And so I relate to that a lot.

H: Oh wow.

D: Actually, Jean Marguerite mentions that a poem is really executed by the reader, because there is so much interpretation related to art. And so I take it back. There is a co-creation when you write because...

H: Yeah.

D: And I've experienced this when I've shared a poem and then somebody tells me how they interpreted it. And it had nothing to do with my intention and the writing of it. And so it comes to life in a whole new way, and with a whole new perspective, and it shows the importance of that empathy and that other side of the other perspective.

B: Talk about the letting go in innovation. Right? As your reader reads the poem, it's literally a new phenomenon. It's a new poem. And as the author, you are totally power of us. You've let it go. It has its own life. It's like being a parent in that way.

D: Absolutely.

B: You co-create this being and they go and they leave you and they do their own thing. Can we put you on the spot. We didn't talk about this, Denise, would you read a poem for us? Either a favorite of yours or...

D: Sure.

B: Meaning either one that you've written or one that you've drawn inspiration from. I don't know if you have one at your fingertips.

D: Sure. Actually, yesterday we were talking about a poem that I wrote. I could read a poem. Yes, I actually have it here. We were talking about this poem yesterday and it's in English. So I think it's easier if I read something in English instead of in Spanish.

Okay. The poem is called "Shadow."

Ponder for a moment what a shadow is.

A space without light. Presence in absence. The shape of anything but itself.

I see you playing on the grass beneath the trees.

And I believe it's not too soon for me to tell you this.

Never be shadow, child.

Color the wind with your laughter. Moisten the ground with your tears.

Be the oar that stirs the water, not the ripple.

Be the scream that breaks the silence, not the echo.

Be song, be scar, be question. Be anything but shadow.

Be life in all its complicated splendor.

H: That's really gonna stay with me. That was beautiful.

B: Do you have it at your fingertips in Spanish? I would love to hear it in Spanish too.

D: It's actually a poem that I haven't officially ...? I wrote it in English. But I could read another one in Spanish if you want.

H: Oh yeah.

D: You want me to read it now?

H: Yeah, please.

D: Do you want me to read a poem in Spanish? Sure, yeah.

H: We had a funny, quirky, bilingual household for about a year when I was growing up, because we had three foster sisters who primarily spoke Spanish. One of them was learning English in school and the youngest was two years old. So she just spoke like baby Spanglish. Spanish speakers and English speakers were always like ...

D: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I know what that means. So sweet. Yeah. Well, I found a poem that it's called, in English it's called Biography of an Ocean Wave, but it's Biographia de la Ola.

Yo sé porqué la ola se desprende del mar
y qué busca en la arena.

No hace falta preguntarle.

Yo sé porqué rompe: sueña con planicies
con los siglos que caben en cada grano de arena.

Quiere ser lluvia,
caer sobre la copa de un árbol,
deslizarse por sus venas y pertenecer a una raíz.

Con el tiempo convertirse en río
y regresar al mar con las historias de las piedras
que la habrán salvado
de esta lenta eternidad de sal.

H: Brandon and I don't want to go back to hearing our own voices.

B: No, no, oh my gosh. Oh, it's just so beautiful. And I'm just sitting with the invitation in your first poem. The invitation to “be scar, but not shadow.” And at the risk of dissecting a poem and making it lose all of its power, I wonder, could you share a little bit? Because that’s quite an invitation, to be scar, especially when most of us want to hide scars or run away from scars or feel shame about scars. I wonder if you can maybe just share a little bit about the context of that invitation.

D: So, a scar means something was torn open, but it healed. And it's the focus on the healing versus the focus on the tearing that to me, leads to not being in the shadows. And a lot of the children that we work with have been through a lot of trauma, a lot of breaking, a lot of separation. And it's encouraging them to see that it's healed and it may not be perfect, but it's the strength of that new tissue and that it brings things together in a new way and that you can heal and heal and heal. And it just means you've lived, you've experienced. It requires forgiveness. It's not easy. I'm not trying to minimize or diminish the pain, but it's where you set your sights.

H: This morning in a class I'm helping to teach, one of our professors, Willie Jennings, said to our students that a lot of people have these very deep and intricate faith lives, but they've only ever been given trash language to talk about that or to understand those complex faith lives. And so often our theology just, it can't speak to what's going on in people's lives of faith. And one of the things that poetry does is it helps us to grasp--not even to grasp, but to point to ungraspable things where language doesn't really come close. It strikes me that language and visioning a hope for the future do have a lot in common, because you're imagining something that's not quite tangible, but you know it's there.

D: Yes, language can be a lens and it's about how we use it, yeah.

B: And how important it is to have poetry at our disposal. I mean, of course, these days, I guess memorizing poetry might seem so old-fashioned when our phones can spit out a poem, any poem, right? But I really lament the loss of memorization in education. I mean, I remember the poems that I had to memorize when I was a kid, and they sort of sink into your bones in some kind of way or, to have them like friends.

D: And the value of memorizing it is you have the exact words of the writer because the subtlety of the choice of the words. And right now, for example, I'm struggling with a poem by Rumi that says, the break point is where the light seeps in. And I know it in Spanish and I don't know it in English, but yes, memorizing them because then you have them. You have them like a branch to hold onto or a light you can turn on at any moment. I love that. I hadn't thought of how important it is to memorize it.

H: And also sometimes for me, I'll experience something new and then think, "Oh, that clicks now," whether it's a line of poetry or something similar.

B: Well, I mean, you're reminding me of that famous poem that Leonard Cohen quotes, right? Often Leonard Cohen gets the credit for that poem, right, "How the light gets in." But of course it's a Rumi poem. And my favorite line from that poem, this isn't the literal translation, "and don't think for a second that you healed yourself."

D: Mm-hmm.

B: Right? And so I wonder in all of this work, Denise, that you're doing throughout the world, I wonder if you could share a little bit about how your spirituality and your faith animates the work. You could do this work from a totally secular perspective, and it could be really important and powerful. And there's a different energy, of course, infused throughout this work when we bring faith and hope and spirituality to it. So I wonder if you could share a little bit about that part of your life.

D: The faith leads to even allowing ourselves to dream bigger because it's no longer self-reliance. It's learning to trust and have faith, but also to be part of something so much bigger and that connects communities in such a profound way. I actually didn't have the experience for many years in my life, and I've been searching for ways to increase my faith and to increase the role that God plays in my work. And my best friend kept praying for me. And I was led to El Hogar, and it's an organization that really has transformed the way I see my work. Entrepreneurship takes a whole new light, because it's also trusting to find the path that God is giving us. It may be that we created, or that we keep our eyes open and pray for it. And I don't see it much of a distinction. Because all creating is finding. Even writing a poem, I don't feel I created a poem. I found it, and so I received it. This gift, we received the gift. So that's how I see it. Yeah, I feel blessed.

B: So, I was an executive director once upon a time. And so I know that every leader in a mission-based organization has a wish list, has a hope that people might get involved. What can ordinary people do for people who are philanthropic? What can they do? What are you dreaming about that you need some support? You need prayers, you need help, you need a big check.

D: All of the above.

B: What are you dreaming of?

D: Well, certainly prayers. But yes, we're looking for longer-term partners. For the person who gets involved, whether it's giving monthly ... it's all based on what anyone can give. Or, the partner that can give a big check, but also the long-time person who can walk by our side and share a big vision. So that's what we're looking for. Anybody who wants to get involved, we see El Hogar as a model that works, and we would love to replicate it. We'd love to reach hundreds more children, see how we could make it grow. So that's what we're looking for. We're looking for partners in this path. And I think that when you join an organization and want to see it reach a whole new milestone, it can be an exciting work. Anybody who wants to get involved at any level, but for more than one project, but for a season, that's what I personally as an executive director, I'm looking: someone to plan with, to dream with, and to also collaborate and join us, sharing the word or sharing the work and supporting us, donating.

We also certainly welcome new partners in our partner program, and we have a visitor program as well. It's called Connects, El Hogar Connects. So we welcome people who want to visit Honduras, get to know our program, see it in action, meet other people, either become ambassadors of El Hogar or simply stay connected with us, but it's a transformational experience. So that's another thing that we welcome and invite people to get involved. If they can go to the website, Elhogar.org, they can see many ways to get involved with the organization.

H: Wonderful. Thank you.

B: I'm thinking a Berkeley pilgrimage is in our future, Hannah.

H: Oh, yes. Yes, yes, yes. That would be wonderful.

D: Yeah, you get to experience Honduras, and understand why this work is so important. Over 40% of school aged children are outside of the school system in Honduras. And what El Hogar does is break the barriers so that more and more students can attend school and stay in school.

H: Wow. So as you're thinking about ... I don't know if expanding is the right word, but are you thinking about that within Honduras or elsewhere or both?

D: My goal is to expand in Honduras as a Honduran. I see opportunities. I also see us expanding, not necessarily in just replicating the work, but also becoming a referent as to how to ... How other organizations ... and sharing what we've learned and partnering with other organizations to work together. That's another way of expanding the reach.

H: And it's nice to be able to share that slow, compassionate work you're talking about before so that people don't actually have to start from scratch.

D: Yeah.

B: I'm so thankful for the early bonds of friendship. And I hope you know that you always have a place here in New Haven to come and visit. And if we can be supportive to this amazing work in any way, please just let us know. But thank you for all that you do. You go with our prayers and our real gratitude for the work you do, and the way you teach us to in some ways continue similar work in our own communities.

D: Thank you for allowing me to share a little bit about this amazing mission. We have wonderful supporters that have connected me to your podcast and your work as well. And I just want to say thank you to them as well. And I feel very welcome here. I enjoyed visiting campus, the city, it's my first time, but mostly the opportunity to share a little bit about my country and the work that our team in Honduras does with so much dedication. You know, it's the work, but the poetry was so surprising and exciting. Didn't expect to go there, but that was wonderful.

B: Thank you for listening to The Leader's Way. We hope you were encouraged and inspired. To learn more about this episode, visit our website at berkeleydivinity.yale.edu/podcast.

H: Rate and review us and follow the podcast to make sure you never miss an episode. Follow Berkeley@Yale on Instagram for quotes from the podcast and more.

B: Until next time.

H: The Lord be with you.