

## **Community - Resource for Transformation**

I began this year of 2014 with a paper on "Change - The Essence of Life" and then, at the end of January, followed it with a paper "Do Not Conform - Be Transformed". This year, like any year, will be a year of change and transformation because these facilities are the essence of progress toward the future. For people around the world there is no way of avoiding these basic aspects of life itself. Because the speed of change and transformation continues to increase with greater rapidity, it will require more energy and ingenuity to maintain a good level of progress.

The dictionary says that transformation is, "The act or an instance of transforming. The state of being transformed. A marked change, as in appearance or character, usually for the better." This definition supports the idea that transformation is continuous and not just intermittent or sporadic. Since change is a part of the whole universe and transformation is an on-going process, perhaps community should be a part of our discussion as an important and essential resource for working together for our health and well being.

### **Without Community can we survive?**

First, consider this definition of community - "(ecology) a group of interdependent organisms inhabiting the same region and interacting with each other".

For individuals, community is the basic environment that enables people to gather together and work together. Without community then how can we survive? From early times people have gathered in small groups of family and into larger groups of community to promote a better life and provide for their survival. What if we are losing community today, as our world is shrinking, so as to diminish this long standing facility for human survival? As communication and travel increase many of us believe that we are losing community as quickly as the growing speed of the Internet. The Internet, of course, is not the cause since it is simply one of our tools for communication. As our world grows smaller because of these modern technologies we must not lose the value of interdependence and interactions among people everywhere. The use of the word ecology in the definition above is a reference to the environment of living persons as well as the environment as it relates to living organisms. Without proper care and concern for these environments we could be growing further apart when it may be more vital that we continue to work and function together.

Without community, interdependence, and mutual or reciprocal actions our world could literally fall apart! It is the interdependence and mutual actions from places far and near when disasters strike that most people are able to survive. Even with tremendous resources it takes years before any form of normalcy begins to return. It might also be noted that these occurrences seem to be more frequent as time moves forward.

- Effects of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in October 2005 that had disastrous and major implications for the population, economy, and politics of the entire United States
- The 2010 Haiti earthquake was a catastrophic magnitude 7.0 Mw earthquake, with massive human and infrastructure casualties continues to recover with multilevel humanitarian response
- The recent "Superstorm Sandy" in 2012 devastated a large portion of the Northeastern United States costing untold billions and the displacement of thousands of families and their property
- Super Philippines typhoon Haiyan in November 2013 that ravaged nine regions in the Philippines affecting some 14 million people.

Anyone who is familiar with world news knows this list is a very brief list of what has happened concerning famine, fire, flood, tornados, war, volcanos and more. Where would all of us be if it were not for the interdependence and interactions of many communities, local and foreign, to give aid and support?

## Some observations about community now:

Involved in all of this is Politics - (the activities and affairs involved in managing a state or a government) which must become integrated nationally and internationally as our world community becomes smaller and more mutually involved as a global community. Individualism and the tribal mentality are too often the real enemies separating people of good will. People today hardly know the names of their neighbors even when they live close together in large apartment buildings or in separate homes or in crowded neighborhoods. At almost every level it appears that community is being diminished and destroyed when we see this lack of involvement.

Richard Rohr, a Franciscan priest writes in his online meditations, "There is the difference between merely having correct information and the true gift of wisdom. Both knowledge and wisdom are good, but wisdom is much better. It demands the maturity of discernment, which is what it takes to develop a truly consistent ethic of life." He continues in several of his meditations to say, "When the first level of the spiral of violence, "the world" (group selfishness), is not exposed for what it is, and the second level, "the flesh," generates out of control (murder, stealing, rape, lying, adultery, greed, etc.), then a third level of fully justified and even idealized evil usually emerges. These are systems like oppressive governments, penal systems, legal systems, military systems, economic systems, and all the other systems we create to control disorder and violence."

Obviously individuals are necessary to the makeup of community and when individuals come together in community we clearly need some kind of polity to organize their well being. I believe that Fr. Rohr, as quoted in the previous paragraph, summarizes the breakdown of our communities, especially in this twenty-first century. Group selfishness, individuals out of control, and oppressive systems of control are causing our growing dilemma. Curbing these excesses in human behavior in every facet of our social order is absolutely essential for our global well being.

Some important aspects of Community are articulated by Rolland L. Warren, who published many scholarly books and scores of articles in learned journals. Here are a few of his thoughts from a PPT on "The Community As A Social Entity".

- Socialization: knowledge, social values, behavior patterns, all across the life span
- Social Participation: Opportunities for support, meeting and associating with others, interaction around significant activities of growth, change and maintenance
- Mutual Support: care in time of sickness, exchange of labor, helping others

It is also interesting to notice when one looks up the word transformation in a web search, there also appears phrases like; Transformational Leadership, Transformational Church, Transformational Discipleship, and many others. These writings, I believe, demonstrate a growing awareness of the importance of coming together in smaller and larger groups in transformational ways. Since transformation is defined as, "The act or an instance of transforming. The state of being transformed. A marked change, as in appearance or character, usually for the better", they are urging communities to be transformed to cause something better.

Is community important and essential? The more I look into the importance and function of community the more I find support of its importance for our survival. It also shows that transformation is the living dynamic for a healthy community. Joining together in community is another resource for life and growth in a broad universal sense. We have seen that the definition of community is- "(ecology) a group of interdependent organisms inhabiting the same region and interacting with each other" and that the word ecology is a reference to the environment of living persons as well as the environment as it relates to living organisms.

## Is Community increasing or diminishing in this 21st century?

In studies of the development of human civilization we can trace both simple and complicated developments from small to large communities. Over centuries, as humans have expanded to cover almost all of the earth, we see civilizations that have organized into separate states and countries, both large and small. The farther humanity has spread out from the African continent, occupying different geography, climate and encountering differing environments, they structured their lives to be able to survive and flourish.

In more recent time, especially among several of the large first world countries, particularly in the United States and European nations, there is a tendency to elevate the importance of the individual. We seem to notice more, through categories of race, sex and class, how communities and individuals are viewed and treated. As this trend becomes more prominent it changes communities causing division and fear among people for living comfortably together. It is clearly described in "The Race Project" introduced below in the brief notation but can be more fully explained in the web link that follows:

"We expect people to look different. And why not? Like a fingerprint, each person is unique. Every person represents a one-of-a-kind combination of their parents', grandparents' and family's ancestry. And every person experiences life somewhat differently than others.

Yet, are we so different? Current science tells us we share a common ancestry and the differences among people we see are natural variations, results of migration, marriage and adaptation to different environments. How does this fit with the idea of race?

Looking through the eyes of history, science and lived experience, the RACE Project explains differences among people and reveals the reality – and unreality – of race. The story of race is complex and may challenge how we think about race and human variation, about the differences and similarities among people." ( <http://www.understandingrace.org/about/index.html> )

While humans are all genetically the same there are differences, as the above quote from the program on Race demonstrates. Added to individual differences there are additional varieties of differences among people as they continue to group together in a variety of geographical places and climates. Similar to our universe, in which everything shares the same basic Elements, we see a great variety of changing matter and energy over the history of time. This is also true in our observation of civilizations. Over time some have come and gone but, like our universe again, life and the way we live is always changing.

Unfortunately it appears that community may be fragmenting today for several reasons.

**Fragmentation** is not new but it may be new as to what may be happening to our community lifestyles. The dictionary gives these meanings:

1. separating something into fine particles
2. As in (computer science) the condition of a file that is broken up and stored in many different locations on a magnetic disk  
(explanation: "fragmentation slows system performance because it takes extra time to locate and assemble the parts of the fragmented file")

Fragmentation seems to become the norm as individuals tend to spend most of their time with others on their electronic devices. From large to small gatherings it is not uncommon to witness the number of individuals who are busy talking and texting their friends even when they are close by or in the same room. At the home dinner table to restaurants and even at large events individuals are often busy on their cell phones with less personal interaction with those physically around them. It is a growing habit of most people of all ages to always have their phones handy and do most of their interactions with others through email, text, and conversation.

**Inequality:** (lack of equality) While equality is the goal it probably will never be accomplished. There are three major areas of inequality that are tearing apart our communities; education, economics and modernization. These are the "trinity" of our demise as human beings in sharing appropriately in working together for a greater purpose for all living things.

- The importance of education is very obvious in this 21st century. Manual labor continues to diminish as modern electronic and mechanical devices are invented as in the previous era of industrialization. Increasing the aptitude of our minds is crucial in all forms of education, from grammar schools through higher schools of learning.
- This summary on economics from Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont speaks well to this issue: "Now, as we think into the future, we must not simply be reactive, we must be pro-active. In the midst of an obscene level of income and wealth inequality, we must develop and fight for an agenda which expands the middle class and improves the lives of those most in need. Among other areas, we should be working to expand Social Security, create millions of new jobs, raise the minimum wage, extend long-term unemployment benefits, reverse global warming, make college affordable, develop a progressive tax system and create a health care system which guarantees health care for all."
- Modernization (making modern in appearance or behavior) is probably a theme that continues from the beginning of our civilization. The need for modernization has increased as more rapid change continues to force us to move forward and not backward. Resistance to change is the primary cause for our lack in doing so but we are often trapped by our fear of change. Just acknowledging or thinking about what needs to be done will not help unless we move to a change in our behavior and move toward accomplishment.

**Acquiescence:** defined as "an agreement with a statement or proposal to do something, acceptance without protest". There are only two simple steps that are often made difficult without compromise which is the only way toward progress. When you live in a world where people as individuals or in community think and act differently and believe that their way is the only way, there is no way to grow and prosper inclusively. There first must be a statement or proposal that is thoroughly discussed and altered to be acceptable through honest compromise. Just as important is the willingness of the larger communities to accept the proposal without protest. Without a proposal and without a protest there is no moving forward and progress is stopped.

These three words - fragmentation, inequality and acquiescence - and perhaps more, can highlight what may be happening to our large populations covering almost all of our world as it shrinks through ease of travel and instant communications. In this 21st century we are just beginning to form communities in many new and exciting ways. Now that the whole world is our overall "community" we will have to form new smaller communities that will be interdependent and interact more smoothly together. It will not be easy but I hope we can do it.

In the introduction of the latest new book about these changes, "*The New Digital Age - Transforming Nations, Business, and our Lives*" by Eric Schmidt (Chairman of Google) and Jared Cohen (Ideas Director of Google) President Bill Clinton, in one of the introduction remarks, says, "Every day, technological innovations are giving people around the world new opportunities to shape their own destinies. In this fascinating book, Eric Schmidt and Jared Cohen draw upon their unique experiences to show us a future of rising incomes, growing participation and a genuine sense of community - if we make the right choices today."

It is clear to me that we need community and that community is vital to our individual transformations as well as a resource for changing our world for the better. How will we keep and maintain community as the - "(ecology) a group of interdependent organisms inhabiting the same region and interacting

with each other"? The best way may be noting that the word ecology is a reference to the totality of our environment of living persons as well as living organisms. A well balanced world is conducive to well balanced people.

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