

1/21/2002

A PERSONAL WORD FOR YOU from Mack McCarter

“On Seeing The Unseen”

I am told that there is a proverb of ancient India that says, “*A snail sees only its shell and it thinks it is the grandest thing on earth.*” The old ones could capture a great truth with a simple picture couldn't they? It is so easy for us to be hostage to the immediate surroundings of our lives. It seems that we just never outgrow the childhood predisposition for distraction. See the child set off with some resolute purpose in mind and then how easy to be turned aside by... a bug dragging itself along... or a noise... or a riot of colors dancing in the window sill...or an appetite. We grow up. But we never quite lose the penchant for allowing the urgent to distract us from the vital.

Our purposes, as we have matured, become taller. We now set off on lofty quests for hope, and goodness, and peace, and joy, and all of those other mountain tops that are as essential to us as breath. But because they stretch past the horizons of our every day vision, we get lost by looking down. The world has a way of tricking us. We start out looking for stars and we simply end up seeing only our “shells” and the distraction of the moment becomes the style of a lifetime. The world doesn't pull a blue-collar robbery on us, staging a heart-stopping holdup demanding us to hand over our dreams. No!! The world around us is a white-collar criminal. It *embezzles* vision. And we don't even know what is missing.

This happens to me over and over and over again. Does it happen to you, too? We have a pretty good saying here about this condition of humankind. It goes like this, “*We can't see the forest for the trees.*” The immediate can blur the big picture until it blots it out. This is why each year in January I sit down to refocus my attention on those unseen realities which call us out of ourselves and give us a reason to live and a hope worth dying for. I get caught in the trap of the urgent and I need to consciously “lift up my eyes to the hills.” I need to see again that “city whose maker and builder is God.” And because it is the vision of those far off places that order our steps in the every days of life, it is all the more crucial for us to constantly and intentionally refocus.

Our task is nothing less than the rebuilding of the foundation of our community. That foundation rests on the bedrock of loving and caring relationships expressed in the most profound theological reality we know and that is true friendship. To be friends with God and with one another is the end to which we strive. This task means seeing an entire community come together, working together in a fellowship of friendship which transcends all of our diversity, and each seeking to do more than merely to study love. It is a community of those committed to apply love (i.e. seeking the good of the other as one seeks his/her own good)

So let me share with you at least the roadmap of this journey to community renewal, knowing full well that you and I are pilgrims dedicated to a certainty which we cannot fully see. First we look back over the path we have trod then we will go on to the present and finally project into the mists of the future.

The Beginning Stage. From 1994 until the end of 2000, we worked together to begin building a model to bring about a renewing of our relationships in our community. Mileposts in this stage were: Funding a full time Coordinator as a catalyst for cooperation; Forming a Council

of Directors with oversight authority; Developing a concrete strategic plan for community renewal; Enlisting personnel to follow through with the strategic plan; Establishing the programs necessary to bring about renewed relationships – The Renewal Team, The Haven House Plan, and The Internal Care Unit Plan; Adding mission staff by establishing two ICU neighborhoods comprised of two teams of Community Coordinators apiece -Cedar Grove and Highland; Adding support staff to fuel the mission staff initiatives – Finance Director, Development Director, Technology Director, Director of Strategic Planning, Program Development Coordinator, Adult Renewal Coordinator, and Administrative Assistant; Budget increase from 0 to \$800,000; Capital tools – 4 Friendship Houses in operation, 2 ICU Vans, Fully equipped support office; Evaluation and measurement research component set in place for progress and results verification.

The Development Stage. From 2001 until the end of 2003 we prepare the model fully by developing each of the strategic initiatives through accountable performance and measurable results. Mileposts in this present stage are: Complete staffing and construction of three additional ICU neighborhoods – Queensboro (Jackie Dunson – Thornell Godfrey,) Allendale (Jewell Mariner – Sherry Brown,) and Barksdale Annex (Manuella Standard – Tina Sheffield;) Secure full time personnel to direct Haven House (Russell Minor) and Renewal Team Missions (Tom Watts;) Build six ICU Friendship Houses; Establish a comprehensive Development Team; Prepare manuals of operations on every aspect of the model so that others may be taught renewal methodology; Add neighborhood capacity building through Adult Renewal Academy and Friendship Covenant Team concepts, Reading Zones for children/youth, and Operation Hope (inner city college scholarship component;) Add personnel to prepare for saturation of the community through ICU, Haven House, and Renewal Team; Budget for the mission increase from \$800,000 to \$2,000,000; Groundwork laid for Saturation, Expansion, and Replication Stages; Two Associate Coordinators added – one to coordinate the mission group – one to reach out to the faith community for a united effort in applied love; Capital tools – 10 ICU Friendship Houses, 5 ICU Vans, 1 Bus, Fully equipped support office; Full research team component in place.

Saturation Stage. From 2003 until 2005 we will continue to infill the model community-wide. The newsletter will reach 40,000 homes in Shreveport and Bossier. The Renewal Team will have 50,000 members of the “We Care Team” initiative. Haven House will have 1500 active block leaders reaching 90,000 people with friendship. And the five ICU neighborhoods will be reaching over 7,000 persons with an intensely caring initiative.

Expansion Stage. From 2005 until --- we will add ICU neighborhoods each year uniting our lives in love.

Replication Stage. From 2006 until --- we will teach and learn from others as we sow the seeds of renewal in other cities in our land through The National Center For Community Renewal.

God bless each of you as we continually refocus on the things that are unseen as if we see them right in front of our face!