

**10/10/2000**

**A PERSONAL WORD FOR YOU from Mack McCarter**

**“A Summer’s Revelation”**

*(The Settlement Movement Meets Social Capital)*

About six weeks ago, the past and the present came crashing together in my mind in such shocking clarity that I can only call that integrating moment “revelation.” A truth was not just seen in my mind’s eye, it had such an active quality about it that it seemed to envelop and energize me. I guess that this is the nature of revelation, truth once seen clearly and embraced is not just passively observed, it becomes fire in the bones of the beholder. It blazes and emboldens. It jerks you awake from a daily sleep walk and sets you feet on high places. The wise sages always knew this facet of truth’s nature. I had a revelation this summer. And I must share it with each of you.

At the onset, I have to tell you that the way I have always experienced great moments of insight may be different from your way. Most accounts about which I have read, and most stories of which I have been told regarding those incisive moments, describe the mind exploding at light speed and the world shifting into double slow motion. Such is the blazing insight of folks all around. But my revelation came as usual, always like a groom late for the wedding. Slow, almost ponderous, my truth came trudging to the surface of my mind. It took weeks to show itself.

So, when I share this truth, I know it will look to you the way it looked to me. But stay with it. Turn it over and over. Ponder it. Scratch your chin as it begins to seep deeper and deeper into your thoughts. Then you will see what I am talking about and you will know that we stand at a great unfolding of historical proportions. Here is what I saw.

For about fifteen years I have had in my library the autobiography of Jane Addams. The book is called, Twenty Years At Hull House. Published in 1910, I had found it in some used book store and bought it due to one quote that had been attributed to Jane Addams, which I always loved. Jane Addams said, “If not here, then where? If not now, then when? And if not me, then who?” It is a great quote. But I knew nothing of Jane Addams or of Hull House. Providentially, I grabbed her book to read on vacation.

Have you ever heard of *The Settlement Movement*? I had not. Jane Addams was one of the leading lights in *The Settlement Movement*. In fact, Jane Addams was the first woman in the history of our country to win the Nobel Peace Prize due to her work in *The Settlement Movement (TSM.)* The life of this brilliant and committed woman is fascinating. But I must tell you of *TSM*.

In the wake of the Great Industrial Revolution of the latter half of the nineteenth century, huge pockets of poverty were created in the western nations. It is difficult to imagine the London of Dickens’ *Oliver Twist*. But the machine age begin to spin out wasted humans through sweat shops and sleaze the likes of which you and I have not seen. Imagine seven year old girls working fifteen hours a day, six days a week and sometimes seven. All over Europe and America conditions spread which were dehumanizing at best.

In London, in 1884, one Samuel A Barnett, then vicar of St. Jude’s Parish, invited a number of university students to join him and his wife in “settling” in the deprived area of

east London. *They believed that the only way to solve the problem of disintegration was to actually move into the neighborhood to live and to touch lives all around them thus lifting broken people to a new level of living and restoring their dignity and possibility.* It was wildly successful. The settlement was named “Toynbee Hall” and became known worldwide. In 1888, Jane Addams, on leave from medical school, visited the settlement and her life was changed forever.

She returned to the U.S. and with friends found a large house on the west side of Chicago where immense poverty was the order of the day. She purchased the house, named it Hull House, and moved in to stay. All over the U.S. as well as the industrial west, settlement houses were being established and with the same remarkable results first seen at Toynbee Hall. Lives were changed. Caring infrastructure was restored. And the capacity of the people to help themselves was wonderously renewed. The key was found.

***That key ingredient was dedicated people purposing to live with those whom they served.*** It worked one hundred years ago!! (You may read about it in your *Encyclopedia Britannica* under “Social Settlements”.) It worked so well that the settlement houses could not contain all of the exploding programs. So they built “community centers” to run the overflow. Every community center built in America came out of *The Settlement Movement!!* Neighborhoods were rebuilt from the inside out with astonishing success.

But what has happened? As best as I can see, they started relying on the community centers and stopped relying on the key ingredient of ***the settlers***. It is the settlers themselves that bring the key dynamic of change and restoration necessary for renewal. We should know that no mission succeeds without the missionaries!! ***So I discovered the historic rootage of the ICU of Shreveport Bossier Community Renewal in The Settlement Movement.*** We are not doing anything new. We are simply recapturing something that we now know works!!! We have historical proof that the principles of moving families into neighborhoods to live work, works wildly!! This is huge news from the past.

Now to the present: A great friend put me on to a new book called, Bowling Alone, by Dr. Robert Putnam of Harvard. His thesis is simple. We used to bowl in leagues, now more of us bowl, but we bowl alone. The book chronicles the decline of civic engagement in America and its prospect of renewal. He introduced me to the term, “**social capital.**”

Social Capital is the connectedness of people in society. Without that interrelatedness there cannot be any other kind of capital. Or as my good friend, Milton Hamel, used to say, “If Shreveport disintegrates, it won’t be good for business.” Putnam shows conclusively that social capital must be rebuilt. He gives some general ideas. But here is my zinger, my revelation based on the past of *TSM* and the present new understanding of the necessity of social capital: ***At Shreveport Bossier Community Renewal, we are constructing an engine which can successfully manufacture social capital by combining the old settlement method (our Internal Care Unit plan) with a city wide strategy of connecting folks (our Renewal Team and Haven House Plan.)*** The result is a product which meets the greatest need of our society. It is a caring and loving community. This must be grounded in the fundamental ingredient of the Love of God. The timing is historically perfect for our realization of God’s claim and call to love our neighbor as ourselves. Hold on to your hats we are riding a new wave! So come join with us.