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A PERSONAL WORD FOR YOU from Mack McCarter

“Looking Back And Looking Ahead”

The Holiday Season is special for many reasons. But one of the wonderful gifts that this season brings is the chance to look back over the road that we have traveled during the past year with thanksgiving for the journey as well as to look ahead with excited anticipation at the adventures that await us. I love this time most of all.

When I reflect on the year that is coming to a close, I am overwhelmed with the miraculous growth of the mission to restore and rebuild and renew the caring relationships so necessary for the foundation of our society. I take a day, and set it aside to write down the list of all that God has done through each of you to advance the cause of caring love. I go through my calendar of the year past and note the people I have met with, the events I have experienced, and the meetings in which I have participated. It is an experience in wonder!

Toward the end of the day, when everything has been listed, I begin to stretch those lists into living lines running off into the future. What will tomorrow bring? I used to keep a penciled line in the door frame of my bedroom closet when I was growing up. Every six months I would mark and date my height. I could see the progress and I could know that the next year would bring a new line. One of the greatest joys in life is to so live that you can't wait until tomorrow comes! That's how I feel about the year to come when I have reviewed the miracles in months past!

So this column is likewise a special treat for me each year. I always use it to highlight some of the gifts of growth that we have seen and I love to shine the beacon of things to come for the next year. Here are just a few of the fruits of your labor:

(We identified three major priorities for year 2000: Strengthen and stabilize the model for renewal we are building here in Shreveport-Bossier; Launch the National Center For Community Renewal to be located here in our community as a training and resource facility; and Build a funding support structure capable of fueling the local effort.)

Strengthening and Stabilizing the Model for Renewal

1) In the ICU initiative we have instituted a reporting system that standardizes our entire neighborhood penetration strategy. This process is critical if we plan to replicate this model in other neighborhood here in Shreveport-Bossier as well in other cities across the land. We let three questions guide us in this process: “How can we *show/teach others* what we are doing in the neighborhoods?,” “How can we *prove* that we are doing what we say we are doing in those neighborhoods?,” “How can we *prove the results* of what we are doing in the neighborhoods of our city?” The result of this process has been wondrous to behold. We not only have statistical data now gathered to show that we are highly accountable in our mission but we have

developed a guideline booklet to teach others this methodology. Add to this standardization process the results of an ongoing research effort in the ICU areas by the research team of LSUS under Dr. Norm Dolch with the Center For Urban Research of Rutgers University and you have a great baseline developing for showing the actual changes in attitude, values, and actions of the people in the ICU area.

Because of the success of this effort, we are now ready to launch the ICU initiative into three new neighborhoods for 2001! Allendale, Queensborough, and Bossier City, will be the sites of this new initiative. We will be training six new ICU leaders for this task. Presently we are reaching an average of 130 children and youth per week and we anticipate that by the end of 2001 we will be impacting 320 children and youth a week. We believe that we will deeply touch the lives of hundreds of parents and their families bringing hope and renewed capacity!

2) Our Renewal Team initiative centered in the "We Care" campaign to make caring people visible to one another by connecting them in common cause got off to a great start. By utilizing the media and thanks to the full page ad donations of *The Times*, over 600 people have sent in their cards and received their "We Care" pins and decals. This is a super beginning! As of the end of November, I have spoken to approximately 13,058 people in 57 different churches, groups, and organizations for the year 2000. So the word is getting out. ***Now we are securing a full time Renewal Team Director to work on all aspects of building a new consciousness of caring. Tom Watts will begin in January of 2001 to nurture the 34 different initiatives we are calling "circles of connectedness," as well as to grow the "We Care" campaign into a massive city-wide effort. Already two of the largest churches in Shreveport are asking their members to join this movement of renewal.***

3) The Haven House initiative has seen wondrous growth! Since February of '98 we have trained over 350 block leaders! These folks have turned in contact sheets for the year 2000 and we have over 6000 people documented who have received visits from their Haven House Leaders on their block. We are seeing relationships being rebuilt and renewed. ***We are now expanding Haven House into seven more cities in Louisiana! Programs are beginning in Lake Charles, Baton Rouge, Monroe, St. Bernard Parish, Bogalusa, West Monroe, and Gretna, Louisiana. This is amazing.***

Well, I am out of room. I do want to fill you in on the progress taking place on the national scene and I will share with you the incredible progress made in our funding process, but that will have to wait until our next issue. God bless you all. Thank you for the year that is past. Thank you for the year that is to come.