

A PERSONAL WORD FOR YOU from Mack McCarter

“A MOST CRITICAL NEED FOR OUR NATION”

When the local landmark building, the Petroleum Tower, was donated to Shreveport-Bossier Community Renewal in August of 2001, we were ecstatic! Here at long last was a sixteen story building now in our hands to use as our National Center For Community Renewal! Here we would train folks from all over our country and even from other nations in the philosophy, concepts, and methods walked out in the streets of Shreveport and Bossier City! Here people would learn from our failures and successes and take those back to their communities to restore the relational foundation of their own cities across our land! We were ecstatic...for an afternoon!! Then it hit us. What do we do now?

You know the story of the dog that kept chasing trucks until it caught one!! Yikes!! The donors were great. The idea is so necessary. The adventure is so compelling. We caught our building! It is big. Real big! Yikes! What do we do now?

Hitting this wall of practical reality actually launched a deeper understanding of our calling and birthed the analogy I now want to share with you about what I believe is a most critical need for our nation and the world in which we live. So let me nudge you to please read what follows carefully and reflectively.

When the shock began to wear off, we looked up the professionals. How do we turn an vintage office building of the early sixties, with concrete construction (not steel) that makes it actually stronger now than it was forty years ago, and containing the ubiquitously annoying issues of asbestos, into a hotel with classrooms for a state of the art training center. Better yet, how do we make this huge building a premier “green building” that becomes a living parable of renewal in the middle of downtown Shreveport? Something old becomes something ever new ... now that is a great parable of community renewal! But how?

So we went to the pros. They never hiccupped!! They never blinked!! They just went to work. Here were dreams into drawings. Here were plans for new walls and new wirings. Here was a new inside and a new outside. Point made: the human race (at least some of the human race, this writer excluded) has progressed to the place where we can renew buildings almost at the drop of a hat. The knowledge and skills have long been acquired and used productively. Big buildings can be renewed.

But it was not always so. Now suppose by some science-fiction stretch we could reach back in the early morning of human history and transport the best cave engineers from the Neanderthal era. And if we could gently stand them up next to the Petroleum Tower, give them their favorite writing chalks for the cave wall “dry erase” board and charged them to give us the plans to renew the building, they would be stupefied!! How cruel would that be? We know that they lack the capacity to renew a modern skyscraper.

My friends, stand us up next to any modern complex city. Show us the intricacies of economic life, social life, and political life. Let us glimpse the unraveling fabric of fragile security. And unveil for us the curtained pockets of horrific poverty and privation. Then charge us with renewing the foundation of relationships called community for that city and we will stand stupefied. We are like Neanderthals when it comes to effectively, efficiently, and scientifically stopping the disintegration of our cities and growing a transformed and transforming community in its place. We need a social technology.

It is a most critical need. And we all are dedicated to meeting that need!! It is not only going to happen. ***It is happening*** by design and dedication right here at SBCR!! And we are going to train a whole generation of social architects capable of channeling the love of God into communities that will become cities set upon hills. ***And we are not alone. All over the world a new cottage industry of community renewal is springing forth. Many hands are being put to the plow to meet this most critical need. God bless you all for your partnership in this great step forward!***