

In our last issue of Renewal News, I addressed the often asked questions: What is CRI? What do you do? And how and why do you do it? And I began to lay out the fundamental concepts that form the underpinning of both our model and our method for addressing what I believe is the pivotal challenge facing every one of us. Let me briefly recap that last issue:

*Every major society that we have produced in the history of our human journey has collapsed. We have never produced a society that gets better and better with each generation improving the last. This led Lewis Mumford to exclaim, "The chief enigma of history is, 'Why do we keep collapsing the societies we construct!'" CRI's conviction is that we can stop the collapse cycle and more importantly we can grow societies that are capable of unending betterment.*

Wow, what a challenge! The forces of dysfunction are so immense! (I am reminded of the poor fellow who stood shuffling and empty-handed before the High Bench hearing the sonorous pronouncement: "The State versus Willie Brown!" and he muttering, "Lord, what a majority!") But this is a challenge that I am convinced we can overcome!

It all begins with understanding the basic nature of what human society actually is and then proceeding to grow a healthy society. CRI launched based upon the great historian of civilization, Arnold Toynbee's definition of society as "a system of relationships." That was the "AHA moment!" Society can only get better and better as people get better and better. And folks can only do that through positive and caring relationships.

We all know that human friendship is the vehicle which carries us to higher and higher levels of well-being. We all know that to be a friend and to have a friend means that you must act and react in certain careful ways as well as consistently sustain that behavior and mindset. We also know that there are things you must not do or violate as friends. And finally we know that even if we let each other down, then there is the trump card of forgiveness which restores the relationship if both are willing.

So we all know how to participate in the basic building block of living that gets better and better (and makes us better in the process!) We call this societal molecule, "friendship." The key breakthrough is to combine Mumford's lament with Toynbee's insight! To wit: We keep collapsing our societies over and over because we forget that all human society is by its very nature composed of and stands upon positive human relationships! You cannot ignore friendships and expect them to grow! But we can conversely grow better and better societies by growing and connecting ALL positive relationships in a systemic and dynamic way! This means giving intentional attention to the Relational Foundation of our common existence.

The major breakthrough for CRI is seen in our model and method for taking these "thoughts" and translating them into an actionable prototype that works for whole cities.

The best analogy here is that of utilizing the properties of the particles of light which we call, "photons." We can now capture "light" by flipping a switch. It is a great advance for us. We can make a dark place now bright! The room is filled with "photons" but they are quite diffuse and meandering, (not a bad thing if you want to fill a dark room with light.) But someone had an idea to take all of these diffuse photons and siphon them through a prism which makes them all march in a straight line and now we have "lasers" which can produce all kinds of great benefits from dental drills to gps to playing dvd's etc. etc.

So with reconstructing the foundations of society! We already have existing caring relationships filled with millions of caring human beings. But we are diffuse and meandering in our heartfelt acts of caring thus we have not met the invasion of societal dysfunction in a united way and have lost over and over in our history.

But if we now coordinate our caring in a systematic way, then the power of that caring can be so concentrated that it can transform our cities and sustain generational betterment. Here is our belief: Caring alone cannot fix our cities, but caring together can! The prism that we use is the only humanly connected collectivity that has NOT collapsed: the village.

The village was the wonderful and unique invention of woman. And it transformed human existence. We have existing archeological roots for the village that go back to about 15,000 bce. But it must be much older. It was nourishing and nurturing for the human beings who lived together thus. In essence we

must recapture the strength of caring so shown in the village. We must re-village-ize our cities. If we don't pull together, we will keep pulling apart.

So we start with the whole city. That includes everyone. We blend together three initiatives for the overall strategy of connecting caring people. First, we have The Renewal Team with its major group called "The We Care Team." Rich and poor; black, white, brown; male and female; young and old; all have the capacity to care. So we just "connect" those already existing caring folks. Sign a "I Care" card and tell just one thing you are doing to help another. Then put on your "We Care Pin", put your "We Care Bumper Sticker" on your car, and place your "We Care Sign" in your yard. This makes you and all the others "visible" to one another so you can begin the first step of connection-recognizing folks like yourself from all walks. More than 50,000 people are on the "We Care Team!" and it's growing every minute! Our goal: 130,000 "We Care Team" members in Shreveport/Bossier City.

Next, we must go block by block, apartment by apartment, high rise by high rise to reconnect caring folks intentionally. We call this initiative, Haven House. The idea is to enlist, train, and enfold ordinary folks to be the catalysts for reconnecting the people who live around them. The first step is to just get to know those folks. And then help them get to know each other. (When I grew up, we knew everyone on our street and they all knew us. Now, we can email folks all over the world and not know who is living and dying just three houses down, or three doors away. We have become disconnected and this brings dysfunction. It is really no enigma why we collapse after all.)

We have trained more than 1,200 Haven House Leaders. They meet together in our Care Clusters in groups of 20 each month. Our slogan is: "We are remaking our city by making friends on our street." Our goal is 5,000 Haven House leaders in our city.

Finally, how do we help those friends who have found themselves in high crime and high poverty areas of our cities? We must go to them and live with them and work with them to transform the darkness into areas of light! We call this our Friendship House initiative. We recruit, train, fund, and send remarkable folks we call "Community Coordinators" who move, with their families, into high crime, high poverty neighborhoods to live. Their task is to regrow the infrastructure of caring relationships. And we build "Friendship Houses" which are large houses with a "community room" to launch this process.

Our Community Coordinators begin by rebuilding trust through serving. They start by serving the most precious possessions of the neighborhood, the children and the youth in after school "Kid's Club" and "Youth Club" in the middle of the neighborhood at the Friendship House. Then, with trust growing in the adults, education, health, jobs, housing, leadership, safety, and loving common values are centered and launched from the middle of the neighborhood itself. The Friendship House is leaven for caring. We now have 10 Friendship Houses in 5 neighborhoods. Our goal is 60 Friendship Houses in 30 neighborhoods in Shreveport and Bossier City.

Our cities are like our swimming pools. You cannot just have a healthy swimming pool in some sections and not other sections of the pool. The whole pool must be addressed. So it is true what John Donne spoke so long ago, we are inextricably bound together in bonds of common humanity. If one speck of sand is washed away, then, he said, Europe is the less.

We are embarked on a tremendous journey. It is a High Cause to give our children and those who follow a way to grow a new world where caring for one another reigns supreme. We call it Community Renewal and we invite everyone to join this march that steps right off the map of history and into a new land of loving. Thank each and all of you for keeping the cadence of caring!