

CRIBB<S>NOTE – October 18, 2009

There is still time to recover community in American society. It is not too late, but the clock is ticking toward disaster. In the midst of this current economic crisis, we are witnessing the devastation of frayed and dissolved human relations. Our inattention to neighbors, families, and strangers has brought us to the brink of a severe breakdown of community life. As a result, many people feel they are experiencing this special period alone. They don't believe anyone really cares about them or the problems they are facing. Unfortunately, there is plenty of evidence to support their sense of having been abandoned.

We have a chance to restore community and build better human relations. This is an opportunity to reach beyond ourselves and touch the lives of people among us who are suffering and struggling. We can break a practice of only caring about ourselves and not worrying about what happens to families and persons who have fallen through the social cracks. In fact, the security of our community depends on our ability to help others who are in trouble.

As a nation, many of us believe we are doing what we can to assist the less fortunate; but, when we take a closer look at the increasing numbers of unemployed and homeless people living among us, we realize much more is required. It is more than any one person can do alone. We must combine our resources and organize a collective effort to address the threatening issues that break our ties to each other. This special period is a clarion call for compassion and the re-building of community.

Two questions are perennial in these days: (1) What can we do? And (2) Where do we start?

First, we can step in to the lives of people who are hurting. Get to know them by name and learn about their experiences and needs. We can work in groups to share the opportunities to serve and be with them.

Second, we can begin right where we are. We start with people close to us and broaden the scope of what we can do by reaching out to others. We can volunteer at homeless shelters and food pantries just to get us started.

One of the first hurdles we may have to overcome is fear of people we don't know. While it is prudent to be aware of where we are and who is there with us, it is better to meet new people with an attitude of care and concern for their welfare. We love them and demonstrate our love by being with them. It is amazing how much good can come from showing an interest in someone else's life.

This is not a time to be cynical. To believe a concerted effort toward resolving and addressing some of the social conditions people are facing is Pollyannaish is to dismiss human suffering. That can only lead to surrendering to forces that erode our human capacity. If we embrace the challenges of improving the quality of life for everyone who needs help, we will advance the noble ideals of American society. We will put into practice the best we have to offer. It has been said, "We are either part of the problem or we are part of the solution." We have a choice to decide where we will stand and what we will do.

In this special period, we have been handed an opportunity to do what is right, just, and good. For community to thrive, we need all of us to step up with the determination to make a positive difference.

Let us begin with an attitude of compassion and generosity. Talk with someone about how you are ready to build a strong community. Together, we can do this. Now is the time. Here is the place. When we help others, we act to save and strengthen our community.