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November 2018

*The Dawning Era of the Transformative Community*



*...offering systemic and innovative approaches  
to shape an evolving society.*

## *The Dawning Era of the Transformative Community*

Society needs transformative communities that seek the common good, as the rhetoric and choices of many nations is becoming more tribal. Transformative communities are imperative because they embody the spiritual journey of incarnation or relationships with the resurrection or transcendence. This collective spiritual journey is critical in a world of both advancement and struggling with cultural identity. These communities are called to live Teilhard de Chardin's words, "There are two types of energy in the universe: tangential energy (energy of attraction) and radial energy (energy of transcendence)." He illuminated these energies regarding love and consciousness, indicating these energies "undergird the inner and outer dimension of nature."<sup>1</sup> Transformative communities embody both of these energies as they discern and explore their future in the mystery of these times.

At this historical moment and into the future, information, biotech, artificial intelligence, and a myriad of other technological advances are shifting every fiber of our culture. This paradigmatic shift offers extensive opportunities and fosters economic and emotional dislocation. For many, this feeling of alienation is causing a range of emotions from hope to despair. For this reason, the role of transformative communities is to be a beacon of realistic optimism in the midst of emotional change.

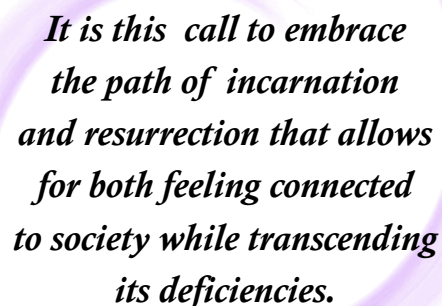
Transformative groups enter into the mystery of change that seeks to create healthy societies grounded in a more interdependent societal framework. They experience themselves as pilgrims on a profound and holy spiritual

journey. Transformative communities understand the importance of systems thinking and collaborative relationships that transcend themselves, discovering meaningful solutions to approach critical issues such as environmental degradation, poverty, immigration, and human trafficking.

Transformative communities balance the importance of relationships with the realization that life is about transcending this moment. It is balancing the organizational ego and the common good. God is always calling us to move beyond this time. In his book, *A Future of Faith: the Path of Change in Politics and Society*, Pope Francis states,

*This is the secret, dear friends, all of us are called to share in it. God expects something from you. God hopes in you. He comes to open the doors of our lives, our dreams, our ways of seeing things. God comes to break open everything that keeps you closed in. He is encouraging you to dream. He wants to make you see that, with you, the world can be different. For the fact is, unless you offer the best of yourself, the world will never be different.*<sup>2</sup>

These messages from Chardin and Pope Francis establish the context and foundation of all transformative communities.

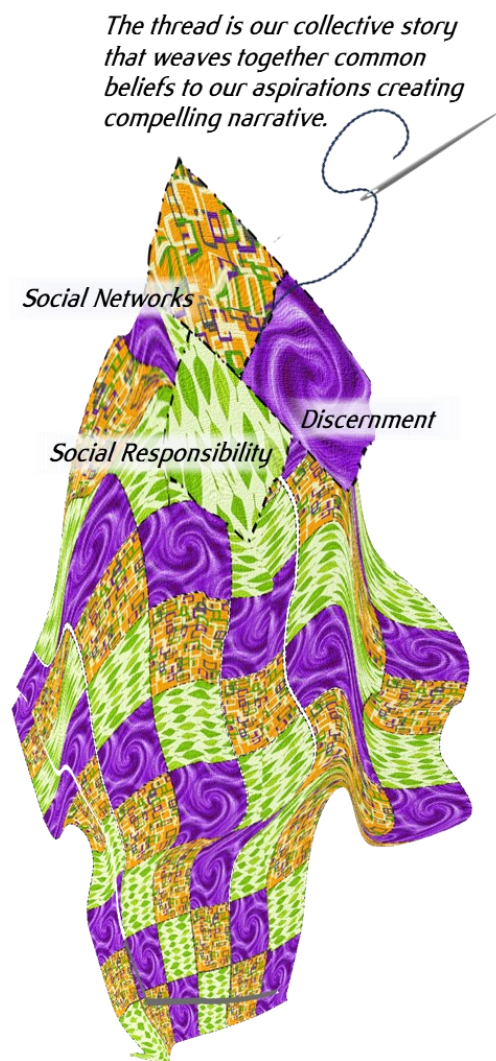


*It is this call to embrace  
the path of incarnation  
and resurrection that allows  
for both feeling connected  
to society while transcending  
its deficiencies.*

<sup>1</sup> Delio, Ilia. *A Hunger for Wholeness: Soul, Space, and Transcendence*. Paulist Press, (2018), Print. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, et al. *A Future of Faith: the Path of Change in Politics and Society*. St. Martin's Essentials, (2018), Print. Back cover.

As a discerning community integrates its networks for greater social responsibility, it's essential to be grounded in a compelling narrative. These four disciplines of discernment, social networks, social responsibility and story create the capacity to be spiritual leaders for social change.



Transformative communities are fundamentally pioneers offering systemic and innovative approaches to shape an evolving society. Their spiritual commitment is the continuous offering of concrete solutions allowing them to internalize the gospel message of placing “new wine in new wineskins.” This pilgrimage is the essence of their collective spiritual journey.

At the same time, they are critically aware and reverence both their gifts and deficiencies. These entities embrace the divine call to transcend their momentary limitations. Yuval Noah Harari in his book, *21 Lessons for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, states, “The global dimension of our lives means that it is more important than ever to uncover our religious and political biases our racial and gender privileges and our unwitting complicity in institutional oppression.”<sup>3</sup>

The reflection and healing of these internal mental models liberate the transformative community to evolve as “wounded healers.” They embrace a worldview based on sharing gifts rather than diminishment. For these transformative communities, it means walking both an exciting and often frustrating path of discernment. Their continuous discerning approach opens them to seeing social networks that expand their capacity for increased social responsibility.

### Discernment

Transformative communities are lifelong spiritual practitioners that reflect both an inward and outward rhythmic dance. Sister Joan Chittister’s words powerfully depict this dance.

*The deep down spiritual truth is that time is always and forever an invitation to growth. Whether the wisdom of the ages shapes us or not it determines the nature of our civilization, the depth of our culture, the spiritual filter through which we, in our own time, mold the character of the world around us.*<sup>4</sup>

Author, Judith Valente, in her book, *How to Live: What the Rule of St Benedict Teaches Us about Happiness, Meaning, and Community*, prefaced these words as the foundational journey for the discerning Transformative Community. Members of these communities recognize that discernment calls them to this timeless choice of risk-taking through an action for

<sup>3</sup> Harari, Yuval N. *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*. Spiegel & Grau, 2018. xvi

<sup>4</sup> Valente, Judith. *How to live: What the Rule of St. Benedict Teaches Us about Happiness, Meaning, and Community*. William Collins, 2018.

the common good. The decisions and choices will not always be applauded and could potentially leave them isolated and alone.

Transformative communities recognize the call to holiness through active participation at the crossroads of our evolving culture. Their nurtured by developing the spiritual capacity to move from an either/or position to respecting the polarities of life. There is an intentional commitment to struggle with and embrace the concept of *both/and* rather than *either/or*. They intentionally hold polarities such as individual and community, contemplation and action, and individual and systems. By living in this dimension, it heals patterns of the collective ego allowing them to provide wisdom in the midst of historical moments of chaos and instability.

Genuine prayerful collective discernment is grappling with the profound societal questions that cause our hearts to ache. It is not collectively seeking the safe way. Instead, it embraces the divine invitation to become instruments of hope in the midst of shifting sands. A transformative community is a living witness that encompasses the change they desire for the world.

For discernment to transpire, it means that both the individual and the collective have a robust contemplative discipline. The individuals within the community are committed to a daily rhythm of meditative practice that leads to ongoing personal transformation. As the members bring this inner experience to the group, it fosters transformative dialogue leading to shared risk-taking action. This depth of thoughtful reflection is expressed Pope Francis who stated, *"We come closer to one another; we find points in common; we forge ahead for the good of all; we do charitable works; we perform educational actions, together, lots of things."*<sup>5</sup>

## Social Networks

Society is at a historical crossroads where traditional boundaries no longer create barriers. The explosion of social media and social network platforms is redefining conventional relationships. As with any change, it has both benefits and challenges. One of the challenges is generational. Today there are technological natives and people who still struggle with their cellphone. As technology continues to emerge, it will increase this separation between these two cohorts.

*Social networks have broken down communication barriers by simplifying the exchange of information among friends, co-workers and strangers alike, thus allowing culture to spread and influence the information around us. Not only are those members who are born into a culture able to be a part of it, but outsiders who are interested in it can also learn about it, join it and celebrate it.*<sup>6</sup>

Transformative communities see the world as a living organism. It is dynamic, and fluid which allows for powerful and connected social networks to create innovative solutions for solving critical social issues. It moves communities away from seeing the world as static or rigid. They realize the benefit of social networks as a way of creating more significant connections for social impact, an essential ingredient for embracing and appreciating diversity in its myriads of forms. They move from reflecting on diversity as a buzzword or being relevant. Instead, social networks become part and parcel of living a transformative understanding where all aspects of creation have importance. Our current temptation to be tribal inhibits us from dealing with social issues caused by nature, a disease like Ebola, and a myriad of other questions that impact the global community. These social realities by their very essence call us to seek solutions that transcend our ethnic, cultural and other differences.

<sup>5</sup> Pope Francis, et al. *A Future of Faith*, 19.

<sup>6</sup> Dempsey, Martin E., and Ori Brafman. *Radical Inclusion: What the Post-9/11 World Should Have Taught Us about Leadership*. Missionday, (2018), Print 73.



Each day, our world becomes more and more complex. The solution to pressing social issues of climate is beyond the capacity and scope of an individual entity. Thus a social network brings together multiple lenses for a higher and more profound social impact. Transformative communities recognize they are part of a larger and more connected social system. It calls them to enter into the spiritual experience of nurturing mutual relationships of engagement and collaboration for social change.

Social networks are powerful social engines for change. These shared entities exist on a local, regional, national and global level. This framework is not a new concept. The term social network is a narrative that describes communities that transcend individual silos. This concept offers a group the ability to move from one dimensional to multi-dimensional reflection and action. These social entities of connection open the door to a greater variety of solutions for a time of dealing with complex issues previously not imagined.

**Let's take a moment to reflect on social networks:**

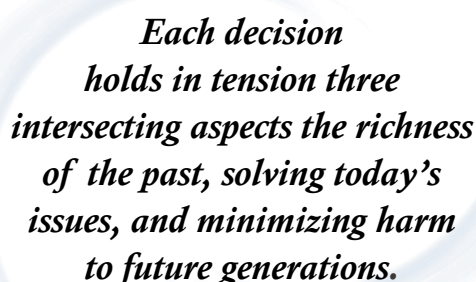
*Take a piece of paper and place a circle in the middle. Next, list all the various social networks that you participate in or impact your life. Now take a moment and reflect on the shared connections and themes you see in the diagram. This document represents a social network.*

When planning, the vital question is, “Who are our partners?” In the planning process, the groups explore their strategies and initiatives while brainstorming and deciding possible links to implement these directions. When discussed honestly, it offers the group the opportunity to own its gifts while recognizing their interdependence. As the entity embraces this mental construct, it fosters a more profound spiritual appreciation of togetherness as a community and society.

## Social Responsibility

Transformative communities believe social responsibility is fundamental as stewards of all creation. It happens through embracing their particular moment in time and each choice impacts future generations.

This principle is grounded in the Native Americans’ worldview of seeing the impact up to seven generations.



***Each decision  
holds in tension three  
intersecting aspects the richness  
of the past, solving today's  
issues, and minimizing harm  
to future generations.***

Yuval Noah Harari asks these timeless questions: “Who are we? What should we do in life? What kinds of skills do we need? Given everything we know and don’t know about science, about God, about politics, and about religion, what can we say about the meaning of life today?”<sup>7</sup>

Transformative communities recognize and fully embrace the spiritual quest of these questions. They understand the outcome of acknowledging the individual and community commitment to social transformation.

As Pope Francis states, “To understand a people, understand the values of that people, you must enter the spirit, the heart, the work, the history and the myth of its tradition.”<sup>8</sup> If we are going to resolve our most pressing issues, we need transformative agents that embody this spiritual responsibility. Social responsibility is not a brand. It is a sacred invitation to steward the spiritual and social development of enhancing the world’s quality of life.

<sup>7</sup> Harari, Yuval N. *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*. Spiegel & Grau, 2018, Print. xviii.

<sup>8</sup> Pope Francis, et al. *A Future of Faith*, 27.

## Story

Transformative communities establish an engaging story both internally and publicly that links their vision, social networks, and social impact. "Storytelling strengthens cultures and more importantly preserves the culture for future generations. The Jewish people are said to be "a nation of storytellers because they have a rich tradition of passing along parables, fables, folktales and sacred tales that are handed down from generation to generation."<sup>9</sup> A collective's story is more than eloquent words. It is an indispensable way of sharing their identity. The story portrays the heart and soul of the community as one public lens.

Transformative communities recognize their story has both a current and transcendent quality. They acknowledge the vital importance of inspirational narrative for social change. At the same time, it affirms an evolving story that aligns what gives meaning and hope for the journey.

The advent of the numerous social media tools emphasizes the importance of having a compelling message. Social media can link the transformative community's message to a more extensive set of social networks. People who have no direct connection with a community can be related to a cause or message through social media via a friend or colleague.

With the continued expansion of communication tools, having an effective communication strategy is essential. In a changing world, the continuous updating and keeping one's message fresh is imperative. Transformative Communities establish an ongoing and intentional means to have their vision and activities in the public square.

Yuval Noah Harari in his book asks the question:

***"How do you live in an age of bewilderment, when the old stories have collapsed, and no new story has yet emerged to replace them?"<sup>10</sup>***

It is the sacred pilgrimage of the transformative community to participate in shaping a new narrative for themselves as well as society.

## Summary

In these turbulent times, what is becoming clear is that transformative communities are critical. As our global narrative continues to unfold, these communities are embracing a spiritual path that seeks ongoing transformation. It is essential to embrace this spiritual journey to participate in the emerging new world paradigm.

Through their contemplative stance and discerning spirit, transformative communities offer a potential window into the creation of healthy congregations. They embrace the timeless questions:

*"Who are we? What should we do in life? What kinds of skills do we need? Given everything we know and don't know about science, about God, about politics, and about religion, what can we say about the meaning of life today?"<sup>11</sup>*

Similar to our ancestors, these questions are the spiritual quest of the transformative community called to walk this unique sacred path with honesty, suffering, and hope to create a healthy and holy world.

<sup>9</sup> Gallo, Carmine. *The Storyteller's Secret: from TED Speakers to Business Legends, Why Some Ideas Catch on and Others Don't*. St. Martin's Press, 2016, Print. 230.

<sup>10</sup> Harari, *21 Lessons*, xviii.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., xviii.



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*Author and consultant, Mark Clarke, is a Senior Consultant for CommunityWorks, Inc. He is available for consultation and welcomes a conversation to discuss your thoughts and questions about his writings.*

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