

## **BUILDING A BELOVED COMMUNITY**

**By Pierre Zimmerman**

For any community to be effective, to transform isolation into connectedness and caring for the whole, we need to shift our conversations from a focus on problems to a focus on possibilities. Social fabric is created in one setting at a time, the one in the moment. The key is focusing on the members' gifts, on associational life and insights. Small groups are usually the effective unit of transformation and provide a container for belonging.

Many existing groups tend to market fears, assign blame, and worship self-interest, with the notion that the future will always be improved with more rules or tighter norms. On the other hand, a beneficial context is one that restores community as one of possibilities, accountability, gifts, generosity, and agreeing to disagree, rather than one focusing on mistakes, blame displacement and self-interest.

Often, questions are more transforming than immediate answers in that they demand engagement that leads toward accountability. How we frame questions is decisive. They often need to be ambiguous, personal and challenging. Advice, whether solicited or not, is replaced by curiosity. So, we might ask: What declaration of change can be made that has the power to transform the group and inspire everyone?

We can reflect on how to be socially engaged by answering the following questions:

*What have I done to contribute to the very thing I complain about or want to change? To what extent am I invested in the well-being of the whole? What have I said yes to, that I no longer really mean? What is the commitment I am unwilling to make and constitutes a risk or major shift? What resentment do I hold that no one knows about? What is the gift that I am holding in exile? What is the promise that I am postponing?*

The answers support the framework of a container in which we find a deeper purpose, and our longing can be fulfilled within a beloved community.

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