

NATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION MEETING

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NSC/IERD March 16-18, 1984

CLOSING TALK

My name is Jim Troxel and I became a member of The Order: Ecumenical 16 years ago in 1968. My first assignment that summer was to the Fifth City Human Development Project and specifically to the Neighborhood Youth Corps program which was the young teenagers of the community. In Fifth City, as well as all across the cities that summer, our primary job was to try to keep the lid on things. Some of you recall those summer days following the April riots. We had about 150 youth in the NYC program and we had a small staff that worked with them. We tried to engage them in helping in the preschool, working with the environment program or other kinds of community activities. We had them come in everyday for lunch. One day, about two-thirds of the way through the summer, I discovered as I looked around the room that I was the only staff there. I had this gnawing feeling come over me and I hoped no one else had noticed that I was the only white person in this crowd of 150 Black youth. I had to go into our walk-in closet to get some extra napkins or something. Upon returning from the closet I discovered that the door had been shut on me, in fact it had been locked. I prayed that it was an accident. It became very quiet on the other side of the door and I was hoping everybody had left. I must have waited for what was about an hour, but probably more like a few moments that felt like an hour. I got up my courage to open the door to see if it was unlocked. You know how it is, you turn it before you open it. I found I could turn it, and I said, "Whew!" So as I held it there with it turned, I took a deep breath, not knowing what would be out there but hoping nothing would be out there and as nonchalantly as possible I swung the door open. There standing before me and gazing at my very white eyeballs were these 150 youth. In the summer of '68. I said to myself, "Well, if I have to be the token...OK." I thought it had been great that I had been assigned to the youth program that summer. After all I had worked during the summers at the YMCA; I had been a camp counselor at church camps. So I thought it was befitting that if someone had to be rendered up, I'd been well prepared for this moment. In that instant, waiting for these youth to make their move, a bucket of water came down over my head and I was drenched from head to toe. The most uproarious laughter that I have ever heard in my entire life broke out and lasted an eternity. I was humiliated. I was so angry that I hadn't been killed because that would have been a symbolic way to go. No, it wasn't going to be that easy. I'd have to come back and face these kids again. That began my journey in local development. That was my baptism.

It seems appropriate that 16 years later - and I'm speaking somewhat personally but I think somewhat on behalf of us all - that the IERD occasioned (especially in the Central International Event that I had the privilege of participating in) what I think is a watershed in our efforts in local development. I think from whatever point any of us began our journey in local development until now is like being on one side and as I look at us in 1984 through the next 16 years to the year 2000, we're on the other side. This watershed event and our weekend together since the International Event in Delhi is what I want to give witness to at this time.

I want to try to summarize this weekend around four questions I've heard asked more than once by the NSC members, the delegates, the volunteers and the ICA staff. These are the questions that need to be given more attention in the months ahead. The first one which I'm sure you're clear we need to ask is "Who are we, anyway?" Who is the who that is going to be doing this thing we are going to be doing? The second question is "What is our story?" What is our message? I think we all feel like it's something other than there was this event in India. What is the story that we have to tell to the world? Third, "What is our vision?" In many ways I'd like to talk about the next 16 years but I'm not capable of doing that, but I do think we have some inklings to the next four or five months. The last question is "Well, why bother in the first place?" So what; who cares; what is the difference?

Let me begin by sharing one of the things that I discovered in India - a poet named Kabir from the 15th century.

"Between the conscious and the unconscious the mind has put up a swing:

All earth creatures, even the supernovas, sway between these two trees,

And it never winds down.

Angels, animals, humans, insects by the millions,  
Also the wheeling sun and moon;  
Ages go by, and it goes on.

Everything is swinging: heaven, earth, water, fire  
And the secret one slowly growing a body.

Kabir saw that for fifteen seconds and it made him a servant for life."

My assignment for the last 4 years has been back to Fifth City and most of you know that my responsibility, among others, has been to bring to fruition the Fifth City Automotive Service Center project. It was conceived at the planning consultation back in 1976. I joined the efforts in 1980 after we had secured the major grant from the federal government which was to construct the auto center. Now we needed to find some injection of our own money, probably from some bank, that would take the strong equity position we were offering in the form of this grant and try to leverage a bank's participation. We went to one bank after another bank after another bank. They never really said "No". They kept saying, "This really looks great, but we need one more thing in order to decide." And after a year of providing them "just one more thing", it began to dawn on us that they were really telling us "No". Finally, after six banks, we found a bank that was going to give us the money we needed. Unfortunately it wasn't at the most favorable rates and it wasn't everything we had hoped for, but we got the money committed. So we let the contracts, broke ground and began construction. There have been many, many snaffus, minor delays, disappointments, setbacks, some of which you are familiar with through your own experiences of dealing with your programs. Six months after we had finished the building of the auto center, the bank which was going to provide some interim construction funding finally

gave us the money they had promised. And on and on. I am proud to say that we now have the auto center open with the car wash and service garage operating. We plan to open the parts store soon. There have been a lot of people, many of whom are in this room, who have helped bring this about.

During our efforts on the Auto Center, we became aware of a group west of Fifth City called the Bethel New Life, Inc. They had just been going blazing saddles, doing all sorts of things: housing redevelopment, new housing, housing rehab, housing co-op, and a new sewing industry for the women. But their real "coup de grace" came with the new sidewalks they got in from the city of Chicago. You know what it's like to get sidewalks in for a residential area, particularly in a city like Chicago. That is something like a miracle. Upon hearing about their success, frankly I got angry. You know, here we were, just busting our tails to do one thing and they have been going like a house afire, getting all these things done. You start to doubt that what you are doing is really on target. Maybe we should have given up the auto center and started working on housing or something else. We began asking ourselves, "Is this worth it, anyway?" I mean, is it really worth it, all this time and energy? All of us in Fifth City working on this could be doing other significant things like earning a living, if nothing else. Verdell Trice who has been working on this for all eight years could have been doing other things. Well, then we had the people come over from Bethel and talk about how they were able to do all that they've done. You know, we finally got up our courage, screwed up our humiliation and said maybe we should share some approaches that work and hear what these people are doing. And, you know what? They told the same exasperating stories we had to tell! You know those sidewalks? It was the fifth year they had applied. They just kept applying year after year to get those sidewalks. And we said to them, "How do you do what you do? How do you keep doing? How do you keep on the journey?" You know what they said? "Well, we keep looking at you!"

The story of Bethel and Fifth City's determination to win can be told time and time and time again across this country, far beyond what all of us together are able to document. We're discovering that what we all have wanted to see happen, has indeed come about. Was it Marie who said on the opening night, "I don't know what we're doing or what it is that we are, but I sense we are a part of something that is going to take us somewhere that's better than where we are." That kind of story by itself is enough. Local development has won! Now we have a lot of mopping up to do. We've got a lot more people to wake up. We have a lot of communities out there that haven't yet quite figured out that they are the keys to all their problems. But the FACT is in history. We are witnesses to that fact. Now we ought to document what we know. But, all we need is the fact that we are here today telling the stories of local development on the move.

We need to ask ourselves then "Who are we?" I have heard one of you say, "We are at the brink of history." Someone else said, "We are at the cutting edge." Local initiative is the fact of our time. That is very clearly seen in this country. Self-help is right next to motherhood and apple pie in American culture. Time-to-time, however, those people who are engaged in this activity run into the kind of complexity that I was describing earlier. We run into the complexity when we try to see our initiatives come to fruition. We run into

complex economic systems and complex political systems that impede and thwart our efforts to bring about self development at the local level. We get paralyzed. We have a gnawing sense of sociological doubt and we turn in upon ourselves as we run into frustration after frustration. Many people are aware of this complexity and so they try to entrench themselves in some sort of simplistic approaches like the "good guys/bad guys" understanding of everything. But the truth is far more complex than that. Some try reductionistic responses or try outmoded ways or simple ethical responses. Yet you and I are aware that it's only the local people acting on behalf of the whole - day after day - that can, in fact, bring about the New World that we see coming into being and that in many ways we already are. One of the teams who met on the first night, in trying to summarize what Phase II of the IERD was all about, said that "Phase II was about making visible the concrete signs of hope in the midst of the overwhelmingness of the task of creating the New World." We are constantly reminded that it is only local people that change history - the "underdogs of history" if you please. That's kind of a corny image, but there's a lot of truth in it. Lech Walensa is an electrician. The Pope is from Poland, not Rome. Mother Theresa comes from Albania. Have you ever heard of anything good coming from Albania? I mean local people have been about this task.

Whatever it is that we are, we are a different breed. We are beyond just simply rural, we're beyond simply development. There's nothing like us that has ever been before.

In Fifth City, many ask, "How'd you get your name? How'd you decide your name?" When you have only about ten seconds, you simply tell people, "Well, Fifth Avenue runs through the community; that's how we got our name." But actually there's another story and that comes out of a grid of reality that says there's the "first city" which is the inner city. And then there's the "second city," the people coming back to rely on the cultural benefits of the large metropolitan areas; then there's the "third city", the blue collar, second generation, white Anglo-saxon protestant, the Ciceros. There's the "fourth city", the suburban ring. And there's the "Fifth City" which is anybody working in any community, anywhere, that's daring to improve their neighborhood on behalf of the whole city. And that's what we've been about. And someone said, "Well, there are the four sectors: the local sector, the voluntary sector, the private sector, and the public sector." Well, there's a Fifth Sector. There are those people who show up in whatever sector they are going about the task of building the New World within the midst of their sector on behalf of all. That's the Fifth Sector. In many ways, that's us.

We are many perspectives. We represent many projects, many backgrounds. Somehow, we have found a way to honor the immense diversity that we are. Because somehow or another we have discovered, in the midst of our doing our work, a unity. We have discovered the fact of the One World we are a part of, the one globe, the one fragile planet, the one little blue marble, the one precarious Spaceship Earth that we are all a part of. We can be located in our particularities and at the same time, be aware of the fact that we are all a part of one cloth, so it seems. The source of our efforts seems to be the same kind of spirit consciousness around the world. We are, if you please, the few who have been called apart to be about the task of caring for this planet - the "Those Who Care." We are the few who have

been seized by the oneness of life in all of our many expressions of humanness, to be those who bear the secret of life. Now, how do you grasp that? How do you symbolize that fact?

Many here have given witness to the fact that no longer can they return simply to their local projects to do just their local projects. An enormous weight was placed upon those projects that had a chance to share their approaches that work because we discovered that they're in fact people who are ready to listen, ready to learn, ready to hear. No longer can they just simply return to their local project, engaged only in their local, but they're there, so to speak, assigned to be there on behalf of us all, on behalf of all the local communities everywhere who are waiting to unlock the secrets of human development. I don't know what this practically means. I sense that an avalanche has begun. I'm glad I'm not a member of the National Steering Committee. How could you steer an avalanche? I would like to remind you fortunately, that we have a little time to answer this question. The IERD is a three-year project. We have another eighteen months to go. And during that time, we can use the aegis, if you please, of the IERD to give us some time to figure out who we are as delegates that returned to local projects, as National Steering Committee members who are charged with overseeing the direction of the next eighteen months, as volunteers of local efforts who come together for Regional Development Symposiums, and as staff of the ICA. Someone suggested that perhaps what we are is a national movement of local development. And that's not too bad. But let's ne'er forget that what we're a part of is something far beyond just the borders of our own nation. We're a part of a global phenomenon. And I don't know what it means for Betty Appleby to return as a representative of the whole globe acting out responsibility in the local. I don't know what it's going to mean for Alex Riggs, I don't know what it's going to mean for Dora Collazo-Levy back in Loisaida, but we're going to have to figure this out. You know you just can't go home again in the same way.

The story we have to tell, somebody referred to it as the story of the "Grassroots Gumption". That's not too bad. Others have said, "Our story is that local people can and will do it." That's not too bad. Other people have said, "We're going to demonstrate that we're going to take control of our lives". That's not too bad. And all of that is true. And yet, our story of what we have to share with the globe, with our nation, is something even more than that. Many of the people in our group talked about it as "We are the conscience of our nation" as our nation dares to be a member of the global enterprise. We are the conscience of local community and local initiative and local people involvement. We have a common awareness. I would remind you that, to the degree that this kind of awareness becomes a consensus across the nation and across the planet, that there won't be any new public policy. We have the responsibility of telling this story before it will be recognized in any form of public policy.

Therefore I would like to suggest that what we need to be about is the creation of an alternate consciousness for our nation and this planet as a whole. One of the reports this morning referred to the story of the Hundredth Monkey. I don't know if you're familiar with that story or not. It seems that a group of Japanese scientists were investigating the habits of a breed of monkeys on an isolated island



back in 1952. They had this experiment where they took this sweet potato and they threw it onto the sand to see what would happen. Monkeys like sweet potatoes, but they don't particularly care for sandy sweet potatoes. One monkey, some monkey, who knows who it was, when it was, how it was, it always happens this way, decided to wash the sand off the sweet potato in the stream. And this monkey taught her immediate family, who in turn taught their friends and neighbors. Over a period of six years more and more monkeys washed off the sandy sweet potato before they ate it. But there were a lot of monkeys who didn't, though. And this six year process of having one monkey at a time catch on to washing off the sand was a slow process of creating an alternate consciousness among those monkeys. But one day, apparently something happened. One day the hundredth monkey learned to wash off the dirty sweet potato. And then, BANG! Just like that, this consciousness, this awareness, just spread, replicated itself across the whole island; and not only that, somehow managed to jump to other islands where this same kind of awareness just took off. One person in our group called this reaching the "critical mass consciousness". How much longer do we need to go about "washing off the sweet potatoes" before others catch on?

What is the consciousness we want to impart in every local community around the world? What is the story we want to imbue in every nook and cranny of history? I like the poetry from the song: "All the earth belongs to all the people." I don't know what kind of ethical posture comes out of that, but I know that kind of mythology, that kind of story, is nothing less than what we can stand before.

Consequently, I want to suggest that our vision for the next few months has three aspects to it. The first is this: We have to continually find ways to make manifest this new society. We have the Spotlights on Local Approaches highlighting the successful enterprises. We have the Showcase Forums. We desire to accelerate local development. We sense that our job now is beyond simply focusing on single projects, but finding a way to reach this "critical mass". How do we do that? We need to continue to experiment with ways to make manifest this new society. Because there are a lot of people out there who have not quite caught on to what it is that this vision is about. What if in the next few months we designed some sort of intentional experiment that we'd try. We'd band ourselves together and try, for lack of a better term, something like doing a Zone of Human Development, whereby not only do we simply interchange approaches that work, but we go about the task of waking up those local communities and those sectors in that zone to the possibility of local initiative. What if we went about within that zone the task of training local leaders in each of the nooks and crannies of that zone in methods that work in human development? What if we found a way to interchange not just among those that are already successful but with those who are just getting started? What if we had a way to spotlight and interchange and involve various sectors of society in that zone to bring about a "critical mass" within that zone? Let us look at the state of Iowa or California or Colorado or some of these other places you are talking about and assign you to break open something for us that we could come back to and see. What if in these zones we could find the story of the felt need? What if local people in that area located the contradiction of the regional bottle neck that is blocking local development from continuing to accelerate in that area? What if we bound ourselves in guilds of local action in that area? What if we

could band ourselves together in cores of missionally committed groups that could go about the task of experimenting intentionally with this kind of a charge? I do not know what that would mean but those of us who are working in Chicago thought we needed particularly to work on this. Because all across Chicago there are a lot of communities that have broken loose and yet we are still waiting for the "critical mass" to happen. You may grasp ourselves assigned to figure that out.

The second part of our responsibility seems to me in our vision this next few months is to continue to find ways of declaring our message; telling our story. One of the things that has come clear to me has been we have got a whole arsenal, a whole battery of tools ready to be broken loose. Not that in any way we could control the proliferation of the story of the IERD. But it seems to me that we have to make sure that every time we tell that story, we are telling the "hidden story" if you please. The "story behind the story". Show and tell is easy but what we have got to find is a way to tell about the spirit resurgence of local people, about designing the spirit environment of profound living. What if every time we tell the story, every slide show in every local church, in every news interview and whatever media events we get invited to, we get said that "All the earth belongs to all the people". Now that is not probably the way you would say it and I charge us to figure out what the "one liners", the short courses are, to be popular preachers, if you please. To bear witness that it is changed lives that change communities. That it's changed people who change history. That is the discovery of the IERD that has once and for all been revealed to all of history. Now we have to find ways of taking this to our whole nation in some sort of a media blitz. I suspect this will take off on its own and yet at the same time we need to design some intentional modes of media expression. One of the things that came clear to me in India was: sure there is poverty in India and poverty in the third world, but I believe that relative to the future it's this nation that is the key to our planet. It is this nation that holds the lynchpin to the resources. Watching everybody tracking down Cyril Venner and Bob Dunsmore in the IERD exhibit hall made me believe that we have a lot to share with the rest of the world. In fact the rest of the nations in this globe are waiting for this nation to take a leadership role. It's our responsibility to find a way to bring about the 100th Monkey - to catalyze that kind of awareness across this nation for the sake of the globe.

Probably therefore we need to do one more thing and that is to find ways to form ourselves into whatever it is that we are. I am not interested in any sort of structure or legal form. Yet we need to be able to take care of ourselves in order to care for others. If the National Steering Committee would not mind, why don't we use you as a temporary mechanism that gives us a reason to come together. I would like to suggest that this group come together again sometime next October to share what it is we have been able to discover on these strategies. For our job is to find ways of sustaining the caring people of this whole earth and in particular in our own nation and in the communities next door to us. To find ways to meet with the leadership of a group like Bethel to discover what is it that kept them on the road of human development and to find those ways. I was impressed by the way many of you felt the field visit dynamic was extremely critical not only to the interchange but to being sustained in what it is that we all know. Because it was in the field visits

that we saw all the possible "approaches that work" working. The secret is that there are a lot of approaches that work depending on the situation you are in. But the key to the approaches working is the people who keep going on and going on. How do we sustain those people? How do we find methods of sustenance and care and nurture? What if, therefore, we took an oath - a sort of a secret oath? And the secret is that it is people changing people who change history. The second part of the secret is that each situation requires its own separate approach and the key then is to know which approach to use in each situation. There's not one set of approaches that are going to work in every situation. But you already know that. It's nothing that we had not already said in the last plenary. Sure, we need to document our learnings from the IERD. And of course we have to guard our flank with all the funding agencies and NGO's and all those other groups waiting to see the documentation, which we need for ourselves as well to give us the kind of confidence and courage to help us keeping on keeping on. But let's not let anybody get fooled. Let's not think that we could take back some manual and that will do the trick.

So now you know the secret that as long as there is one starving child in this planet or one woman who finds herself unengaged in the historical process or one elder that has not got his wisdom out into history or one despairing unemployed factory worker, then your life has possibility. Then you still have a chance of living a great life. That was what the IERD made clear. I charge us then with finding ways to be sustained in this oath, of finding ways of accelerating the manifestation of the new society, and of finding ways of telling the "real" story of the IERD. It's making visible the invisible and telling the hidden story of hope in the midst of the overwhelming task of creating the new world that is our job.