

PROFOUND IMPACT OF THE TOWN MEETING CAMPAIGN

If you look at your sheet in the packet this morning, it looked like I was going to talk about India. I am not going to talk about India--I am going to talk about Gram Sabha which is part of what is going on in India. Gram Sabha is Global Community Forum and *Global Community Forum* is the basis of this talk. The focus of this talk, however, will be profound impact in the United States. I am going to read some things to begin with. These are representative responses to an inquiry sent to towns in the state of Oklahoma about a year after they held their Town Meetings. The inquiry sheets asked several questions but basically asked, "What's happened in your town since your Town Meeting?" Here are some of the responses:

I want you to know that our Town Meeting last spring was successful and we are continuing to work on several projects. Since the Town Meeting we have, first of all, established a senior citizens center which is now very active. This group staged a musical program in November to raise funds and one of their numbers was Sing to Erick, which was the song written at our TM. Second, the north end of Main Street has been partially cleared of old buildings. Three pieces of property remain to be cleared or renovated. Two of these, however, have been sold and plans are underway to take care of them. Third, a museum committee has been formed to establish a museum. Incorporation has been completed and the process of acquiring a highly desirable building is nearly complete. Fourth, plans and funds are almost ready for construction of new tennis courts. Fifth, revenues from sales taxes have increased at a rate equal to or greater than inflation. Sixth, plans for a retirement housing project have progressed to the point that it appears to be a reality.

Here's the response from the little town of Red Oak:

Senior citizens invited high school seniors and outstanding students for a special get-acquainted lunch. The program director arranged speakers, music and entertainment and a printed program as a first for the area. This was a direct result of the Town Meeting. Second, Thanksgiving dinner number 82 at the senior citizens luncheon. A retired school principal from an adjoining community attended the Town Meeting. She was responsible for the song being written to the tune of the Wabash Cannonball. During the Thanksgiving meal she spoke on the significance of the song to her.

Here's another town. This is Kaw City, Oklahoma:

First, a Chamber of Commerce was formed with Tom Trueblood as President. A bi-weekly newspaper was started with Charles Herzog as editor. The 55 Club for senior citizens is now self-supporting. There is an active Helping Hand Club—Ruth Frenk can give you the details on this. Clean up days were held and the city furnished a pick-up truck. Charles McFarron, the mayor, got new streets installed. A new Girl Scout troop was started with Clyda Gerber and Kaye Hamburger in charge. A children's corner in the library was established by J. A. Walker. A community census was done through the Chamber of Commerce. You can see Mr. McFarron and Lois Fessedon, who tallied results of the census."

Down at the bottom of this sheet, this lady says, "This town is now more open, more cooperative and has a more do-it-together atmosphere instead of staying alone." From Lawton comes this comment: "I feel that the greatest impact has been a general awakening of average citizen participation in practically every aspect of the community's life." And from the city of Lipton: "People are working together and trying to help, instead of pulling apart.

These are the kinds of responses you would receive from 3,500 towns across the United States because Town Meetings have been held in every county of this nation. This was the victory year for the Town Meeting campaign. I want to point out two major advantages that allowed this year to be one of victory for this phase of the TM campaign.

First, something new was going on in the last year in this country. Town Meeting was in the air. People were talking about Town Meeting. What they were really talking about was a move towards local responsibility. We will mark this year as the time in which communities across this nation decided that they would chase no more false hopes. The programs that had been promising relief, a new future for their towns, could not be trusted; they would not wait for them. A new interest in local responsibility and local initiative began to emerge. This year, we were in the right place at the right time with the right program. That was a major advantage for victory this year.

The second major advantage was that late in the last program year in the spring of 1977, we discovered the small towns of America. We will look back and point to Oklahoma as the place we discovered that the small town was the soft underbelly in relation to renewal of American society. There is an acknowledged crisis in the small towns of America. People know their future is uncertain. An erosion of autonomy has occurred along with the disappearance of the primary services and functions that towns from time immemorial have provided. So many of the functions of the communities have been assumed by counties or large metropolitan areas nearby that small towns have suffered a tremendous collapse of identity and symbols. One sign that the symbols are gone is that mayors these days, more often than not, do not understand themselves as having any powerful symbolic role in their community. They are apologetic for their role in many many cases. Small towns are in crisis and Town Meeting comes most powerfully into a community where there is already an acknowledged crisis. In this nation, it has been the small town. This was a major advantage.

This year is the concluding year of a four year campaign. On June 8, 1974 the first 39 Town Meetings, called *Local Community Convocations*, were held in cities across this land and, symbolically, on June 8, 1978, the last county was done. No one has yet determined which was the last county but it was probably in Alabama. This was a four year campaign and it has been a tremendous journey for us. We went through a phase, primarily during the Bicentennial when most of the Town Meetings were urban neighborhood gatherings, and they were a different kind of event. They were all day affairs with a different kind of impact on people. Then there was a stage of great struggle about how many Town Meetings we were going to do in this country. Some people said we ought to do 10,000; others said we ought to do 5,000; and we vacillated. Finally, 5000 it became. But we were so concerned about doing 5,000 that we forgot some very important things. We tried to imagine this huge number of Town Meetings and it felt like we were going to be doing Town Meetings forever. We went out and frantically started doing Town Meetings anywhere we could. There were lessons learned from that. We would not be celebrating this victory today if we had not gone through the struggle with urban Town Meetings or learned from trying frantically to do the 5,000.

What happened at last year's Global Research Assembly was the key to the victory year we are now celebrating. We decided to take the revolutionary principle of geographic coverage seriously. We started the Town Meeting campaign with a plan to do Town Meetings according to the Movement's grid. First, one per region; one per metro; then one per polis, and then one per micro. There are about 5100 micros in the USA! In the process, we forgot the one per micro decision, and remembered only the 5,000. It was a painful lesson. But last year, we played a little trick on ourselves and on society at the same time. We decided that society already had a grid and that it would be very smart to use that grid—that of 3,100 counties. In the course of the next 12 months, we decided we would be sure that at least one Town Meeting was held in every county. I say that was a trick we played on ourselves and on society, but it was a serious trick. A county is a sheer fabrication. A state is also a sheer fabrication and so is a nation. The only real thing is the local communities. But, in order to push ourselves toward geographic coverage, we said one per county and we succeeded. It was really quite an experience. Any company that made yellow marker pens experienced a fine year. Everywhere maps blossomed with counties colored yellow as the campaign swept across this country. That was motivity. Some people called it "turning the nation gold." Someone talked about the *gilding* of America, and that isn't bad when you look at the word "guild" from several different angles. That's what has happened this year.

There is a new and interesting Town Meeting map. It has the movement's grid on it but right now I am particularly interested in all of those little dots. Earlier this year, someone suggested that we were going to see all the yellow shrink into 4,000 dots and there would be all that white area in between. Well, we kept the yellow and we put the dots on. If you look at those dots you see them coming alive because they *are alive*. Every one of those dots is a pulsating dot. Sometimes it calms down and it is just a microscopic little dot in a microscopic little town. Other times it pulsates and reaches out, beginning to touch other towns that held Town Meetings and influencing the untouched areas in between the towns. This is our situation at the end of this year of victory. The pulsating dots on the map indicate the future, when the dots begin to interlink and every last human being, every last community, every crossroads and every human settlement in this country has had the experience of a Town Meeting.

What is sweeping across this country as a result of these events? One of the traditions of American society, especially in the 19th Century, is that of the revival that starts and spreads like wildfire. In those days of religious revivals, you could hardly be a town if you hadn't had a religious revival! There were travelling bands of revivalists who went from town to town, set up their tent and held a revival. It got into the air and swept across the country. A similar kind of revival is happening today only these days it is a *secular* revival. It is a revival of the human spirit—of human vitality and human initiative; it is a revival of primal community, and it is sweeping this country.

This year we made a corporate vocational resolve that transformed the lives of more people than you could ever imagine. The corporate vocational resolve had to do with experiencing transparent audacity. That is a fancy term to stand for the death of timidity. Transparent audacity is the other side of that coin. We've been timid in the past, going to towns and gently pleading with them to hold Town Meetings. This year that stopped. We decided we were going to do Town Meetings.

In the midst of that, there was born a passion for awakening local man. It was a consuming passion! Look into the eyes of our circuiters and you will see a consuming passion. They are not timid anymore. They are audacious. They did Town Meetings according to our plan and timeline. You can do a Town Meeting, we decided, in any community, in any county, even the county in the Southwest corner of Texas that has only one town of 200 people. That's audacity. We can go anywhere and do a Town Meeting because there is within our being a passion for awakening local man. It's a non-programmatic posture. You're not going there to sell a program. You're going to touch the lives of local people. In the midst of that, we are beginning to see the third campaign. That campaign is all about a band of people across this world who have decided to be a global servant force, and you do not decide to be a global servant force until you put aside your timidity, your reservations, your selfhood and your sense of importance, and become transparently audacious about awakening local man. That happened on this continent this year.

Several things came out of that corporate resolve. For one, we finally dealt with the authorization problem. For years, ever since Town Meeting started, we worried about authorization. Can we get letters from important people who say that we are really fine people? Can we get the blessings of this council or that body? In Texas, we had a running battle for a long period of time with the Texas Bicentennial Commission. We thought we could not do Town Meetings in Texas if we did not receive the official blessing of the Bicentennial Commission. We never did receive their official blessing. This year, we decided that authorization was not a problem. In any situation, you could do a sort of authorization flim flam. All we needed to do was to trick the world into saying, "Okay, go ahead and do your thing." We discovered that you could go into any state and get a letter of affirmation from the governor. I have personally written seven governor's letters over the last couple of years, and the best one was the one that George Wallace signed. We also learned how to put together a committee for the back of the brochure. Some of these committee people had been to a Town Meeting, some hadn't; some knew who we were, some didn't; but they all lent us their names, and we put together the nicest brochures you could imagine. Now that's authorization flim flam. We put the authorization issue behind us and that allowed us to move.

Another thing that let us move was the style that emerged out of the Town Meeting maneuvers across the country. A maneuver is a group of people, with some thought-through ways of moving, relying on corporate power to create corporate courage to go ahead and complete the task. Getting ten or twelve people together to do a state was not the best demonstration of who we are. A team of two from one region, going from town to town and doing the job is the best demonstration of who we are. I think we could do that now. A few months ago we couldn't do that, so we created maneuvers. We'd assign ten or twelve people together. They would create songs and rituals, put up charts on the wall, in-kind McDonald's breakfasts, and they'd have a grand time; but it would get them out on the road, and moving, and that allowed the campaign to succeed in the last year. The important thing, however, in the maneuver style is what happens when a team of two people does go into a town. It was Dr. Lao this year. Do you know those little towns are bigger on the inside than they are on the outside? When Dr. Lao went into a town to hold this circus, he didn't take "no" for an answer. He held his circus. That happened this year. It was a tremendous experience. The circuiters would tack up posters on the telephone poles and in the store windows, they would assemble ten or twelve people or 100 people, and hold a Town Meeting. That was the style that emerged out of this year. It was the style of transparent care, and that allowed us to win. People began to operate so that when they rode into town, the townspeople didn't see them; they saw transparent care, and they responded. They said, "yes", and Town Meetings were held.

Another happening of this year was a miracle. We learned to live off the land. That may not seem very important to you, but if you are going to be a Dr. Lao, if you are going to be a secular evangelist, you also have to learn to be a beggar, and to live off the land. This year, we came close to being able to in-kind everything. The only thing we didn't in-kind was gasoline. That was attempted, and I still think there is a way of doing it, but we didn't quite win. We lived off the land, and we found that the only reliable resource to support Town Meeting is local man. Corporations had a hard time with Town Meeting, and, frankly, not very many of them gave money. Foundations couldn't see it. They wanted to see bricks and mortar going up in the middle of the town. Town Meeting doesn't do that. A few wealthy people saw the vision, but not very many. The primary support for the Town Meeting campaign in this country came from local man, penny by penny by penny, passing the hat at the end of a Town Meeting. That was a miracle, and a victory, and in the future we know that you can do Town Meetings anywhere and that they can be self-supporting.

Now, what is the profundity of this campaign? Perhaps the key question is what is a Town Meeting. Let me suggest a definition: A Town Meeting is an awakening event focused on care for the whole community. That means that a Town Meeting is an event where the people of a community get together for a workshop, focusing on the whole town, every soul in the town and the life of that community. That's what makes it a Town Meeting. That was a difficult insight because the very term, "Town Meeting", as it is traditionally used in this country, means something like the whole town gathering in a quasi-political meeting in order to make decisions. That is not what we mean by Town Meeting and until we killed that image in our own minds, Town Meeting didn't really move. We discovered that you could have a Town Meeting anywhere with any group of people as long as the meeting focused on care for that community. You could have a real Town Meeting in a school classroom because the kids were wrestling with what it meant to care for their entire community. Or, as some people did, you could walk into a grocery store, and say to the proprietor, "Hey, do you suppose you could get a few people together, and we could stand around here and talk a little bit about your town?" He would say, "Sure", and call ten or twelve people to gather around the cash register. The circuiter would get out his notebook, start asking questions and taking notes, and it became a group of people struggling with the question of what it meant to care for their own town, and it was a Town Meeting, an awakening event that focused on comprehensive community care.

It's important to say that because this awakening event is different from the traditional Town Meeting and different from the Global Women's Forum, the Community Youth Forum or LENS. This difference makes Town Meeting the key to the impact and awakening campaign. It is rooted in geography. It is rooted in care for the local community. If you allow *Those Who Care* from a particular geographic area to experience a workshop together, you've got a Town Meeting. It doesn't make any difference how many people are there, where they are, or when they do it.

Town Meeting does some very simple things. First of all, it exposes the bondage that people are living under. They discover that there are external powers to whom they have surrendered their decision-making powers. They experience that bondage. They also see that there are certain internal tyrannies in their communities that they have submitted to. Secondly, Town Meeting, on the other side of that bondage, illuminates the human freedom that nobody can take away. They see that they have entire cosmic permission to do anything in their community regardless of anyone else, and they experience utter human freedom. Permission is granted. They are reminded of the permission that they have always had to act in their community. Thirdly, since it is always a representative group in a Town Meeting, they discover once again the permission to act on behalf of their community. Because Town Meeting does these three very simple things, it is a universal tool that works anywhere in any kind of culture, and in any kind of community, and always will. It is based on a human dynamic that is absolutely universal. Town Meeting has to do with profound humanness. I was thinking it would be very interesting to pull our experience with Town Meeting through the Profound Humanness Chart. It has to do with birthing, allowing, catalyzing the experience of Profound Humanness.

Town Meeting is a very impractical event. That is another little trick we play on society. We say that it is going to be a very practical event, dealing with all the community issues. But finally, it is a very impractical event. Have you noticed that most of the proposals written at a Town Meeting are really a little silly? I don't know how many of them are implemented. I don't care! It's not intended to be a community planning event; it is intended to be an awakening event, and it is an impractical kind of happening. Because of that, the key to a Town Meeting is the story, song and symbol. If nothing but the symbol, song and story workshop happens, you have a Town Meeting that's got power behind it. It is a "spiritual" kind of event, and it has to do with awakening. Town Meeting comes

COLLEGIUMS Summer 78

COMPREHENSIVE HUMAN CARE		EFFECTIVE HUMAN ENGAGEMENT	
IMPACT THRUST	GEOGRAPHIC WEBB	MOVEMENT FORCES	PROFOUND DOING
COMMUNITY YOUTH FORUM	ADVENTURE CIRCUITING	GLOBAL REPOSITORY	DEMONSTRATE 8 24
GLOBAL WOMEN'S FORUM	MUT GRID + REGION	DEVELOPMENT	SPIRIT TOOLS
LEWS	T.M. SATURATION	GUARDIAN NET	CATALYTIC SIEWS

pretty close to being pure awakening. The only purer awakening I can think of is somebody who walks down Main Street and says, "Wake up! Wake up! You can live! Take care of your town!" And then leaves town. That would be a pure awakening event. But our version is pretty close to being pure awakening.

Town Meeting is about the Other World. They are very mundane meetings. They are rooted in the particular geography, the particular place, but they are a dramatic experience of the Other World in the midst of this world. If you sat down with people after a Town Meeting and talked about the Land of Mystery, the River of Consciousness, the Mountain of Care and the Sea of Tranquility, I believe they would understand. That is an indication that the box in our summer task force plan called *Retreat Construct* is exactly right. A retreat in which people work through Profound Humanness and the Other World is exactly right and anyone who has been to a Town Meeting would understand that.

Town Meeting is a surprise. I have not been to as many Town Meetings as many of you but I confess that every Town Meeting I have been attended until now I have gone to unwillingly. However, when I arrived, I got sucked into it, and when it was done, I was surprised. At every single one of them, the surprise was always there at the end. Why do people become excited? Why does this Town Meeting do to people, what it does? I don't understand it and I am always surprised. There is a deep waiting in society; and all you have to do is say that the waiting is over and people get excited. It is that kind of profound event. The follow-through is a surprise also. We were really surprised when those responses came in from Oklahoma. Some of you participated in Oklahoma 100. We had all kinds of Town Meetings that day. Some of them were big, some were little, some were good, and some were bad, but the responses affirmed all of them. People are doing things in their communities, and that was a surprise too. As a matter of fact, there is a growing legacy represented by the dots across this nation. Doing the Town Meetings is the same as sowing the seed. All over this nation and all over this world, the legacy is alive and growing and we are going to build on that legacy.

One of the great events in Area Houston this year when Town Meeting gained momentum was our realization that local man is also global man in our day. He lives out of the whole globe, and he is looking for a way to establish a connection with local man elsewhere. He does not want to go up the ladder to a bureaucrat and over a bridge to another bureaucrat and then down that ladder to another local man. He wants to go directly to local man. One of the best illustrations of that was the response in states like Alabama when Sushila Joshi was on a circuit team. Sushila is radically global. When you see Sushila, you know the globe is there. She traveled to some of the smallest, most remote towns in one of the least progressive states in the United States, and they loved her. First of all, they had to figure out where she was from. She'd say she was an Indian, and they wondered which tribe. When they understood that she is from India they would say, "Why are you here?" and she would reply, "I am training to do Town Meetings in India." Then she would sing the Maliwada song, and now Alabama knows about Maliwada. That's a clue to the future regarding what these Town Meetings are going to be able to do.

In the communities, we discovered a set of yearnings which indicate that the social demonstration campaign, shoulder to shoulder with the community forum campaign, is right on target. People in these small towns want healthy, vital community. They are experiencing a deep yearning for a new kind of neighborliness. They want to see their particular location be a place in which full human life can be lived out. They would say a strong "yes" to seeing their towns self-sufficient, self-reliant, and self-confident. That is exactly what is happening in every single community. They would strongly agree that "our town needs to have a whole new identity." "We want to be proud of our town; we want to expend ourselves for our town; we want to put our roots down in creation itself in this particular spot." These are the yearnings in the towns of this country and across the world. The map of the United States with the circles indicating the twelve United States projects is right too. In the months and years to come, the immediate working dynamic relationship that is going to be established between the HDPs and hundreds and thousands of towns is going to be something to see. Envisioning this dynamic, I see people in their cars going to the Human Development Projects every weekend to participate in various kinds of training, including working with a pick and shovel. I also see motion going the other way, people from the Human Development Projects going out to towns for hundreds of miles around to tell the story and to hold Town Meetings. I see more circles than that. We haven't got enough. Sixteen is not enough. I think something like two per region or 48 in the United States is about right. The projects would be close enough for people to travel there often. Those projects are all a direct response to exactly the yearnings present in every single town. That is why you can set up that kind of dynamic relationship.

One last thing — we discovered this year that the dispossessed, the poor towns, are always the key. I frankly don't care whether we ever do another Town Meeting in an affluent suburb. We'll do them, of course, because our concern is for every human being, but they are not the key. The key is the poor towns where the future has been smashed by the winds of the new reality at hand, and they are open to the new possibility that only our century has. Those people are the key. This promises a local man movement of the future. It is going to be local man to local man, and people from the small towns will get in their cars and go and become the evangelists. That's what's going to happen. It's a local man reality. There's a new wind blowing, a new reality at hand, and Town Meeting is but one manifestation of it. This new wind is the wind of the future. Whatever stands between local man, a fulfilled human life, and a healthy vital community — this new wind will blow through into the future.