

M2/W2 Has a Vision!: AGM, November 14, 2013

As you see from the Reports by Staff in the Annual Report this year, four strong programs continue to go well: despite significant lack of funding; despite serious overwork burdens borne by Staff; despite tragic un-worked-on, unhealed hurts between Staff and Board, this agency does amazingly well.

As you saw in my written Report, I have had almost a 40-year wonderful involvement in criminal justice!

It is out of this long – and for me immensely joyful – history of international, national, and local involvement in criminal justice and in Restorative Justice leadership that I offer some reflections tonight, on the occasion of this my final Report to the Association that I have loved and have tried to faithfully serve since 1974.

Just over fifty years ago, Martin Luther King Jr. gave his most famous speech of all: “I Have a Dream”. Eight years ago Archbishop Desmond Tutu wrote a book drawing on that speech, with the title: *God Has a Dream: A Vision of Hope For Our Time*.

Almost fifty years ago, perhaps inspired by Dr. King, without doubt by Jesus, Rev. Cal Chambers called together some fellow dreamers, and with the help of Rev. Dick Simmons who had just the year before begun realizing a similar dream south of the border, M2/W2 was birthed in 1966 in British Columbia. It became model for several similar provincial programs across Canada, and wellspring of what came to be known as a Restorative Justice vision in Canada. What a legacy! Rev. Cal Chambers, now in his mid-eighties, and his wife Alice, still are active volunteers in this dream-realized agency they led in founding! I just talked with them today again about a book project of stories and history of this agency that we plan to publish as a fundraiser in time for the 50th anniversary of M2/W2 in 2016! They are geared up and raring to go, because, as Alice puts it (in my words): “The clock is ticking a bit faster for us at this stage of life.”

What these various dreams and dreamers have in common is a **profound vision** to live out Kingdom new reality *now* (with all its related human imperfections) in light of the not-yet realized *then* of Kingdom Come. This is ever the church’s call: to live out “*new creation in Christ*” *now* (II Corinthians 5:17 – 21) – what the world is one day intended to be fully – in the realized *then* of God’s inbreaking cosmic Reign through Christ.

M2/W2 has a dream: a glorious **vision** of peacemaking not warmaking in response to crime; an energizing, life-giving, not harm or death-dealing vision of restored, respectful, non-power over, compassionate, merciful and loving relationships of peace and harmony at work throughout our agency and the entire criminal justice system! We call that **vision** *Restorative Justice*, and it is part of our name for many years now.

Wow! **M2/W2 has a grand vision!**

Here are three of many more characteristics of M2/W2’s Kingdom **vision** for us to demonstrate in the *right here and now*:

- **First:** *Love of God* with everything in our being: the **first** “*Greatest Commandment*” (Matthew 23:37 – 40) according to Jesus; with the next just like the first...
- **Second:** *Love of neighbour* as if he/she were our very own self. This is the **second** “*Greatest Commandment*” (Matthew 23:37 – 40). It is a non-negotiable commandment by Jesus *that includes* “**Love your enemies**” (Matthew 5:43ff; Luke 6:27ff) *as the only litmus test given by Jesus for love of neighbour, which in turn is the only litmus test given by Jesus for love of God*. The corollary is self-evident. There is nowhere in the New Testament where there is an *exception clause* given to Jesus’ words, “*Love your enemies*” – though churches for centuries have preached and acted as if there were. We have just come through yet another “Remembrance Day” where fallen enemies, along with about two million German and Japanese civilian casualties harmed by us, the Allies, were again largely

unmentioned and certainly *not* “remembered” officially. This *absence of remembrance*, indeed its very opposite – *profound denial and forgetfulness* – took place last Sunday in the vast majority of Christian worship services across Canada! It maybe did in your last church service.

- **Third:** *Peace and just peacemaking – multi-directionally:* towards God (*theological*); towards oneself (*psychological*); towards others (*sociological*); towards the Good Creation (*ecological and cosmological*). For Jesus is the *Prince of Peace*, and *peace or just peacemaking* is the central theme of the New Testament (for example: II Corinthians 5:17 – 21).

In the first “Servant Song” of Isaiah (42:7b – quoted from a recent translation called *The Voice*), we read: *You will lead prisoners, blinking, out from caverns of captivity, from cells pitch black with despair.* What a powerful messianic Dream! What a riveting cosmic vision! What a wonderful forty-seven year history and counting of our agency’s doing that very thing! And as you may remember, in Luke 4, Jesus declared that he, *then and there in real historical time that some call “kairos time”*, was the fulfillment of that very **Scriptural vision!**: *You will lead prisoners, blinking, out from caverns of captivity, from cells pitch black with despair.* Wow! By extension, as “*imitators of God in Christ* (Ephesians 5:1 & 2)”, so are we... meant to be! And we apply this directly in our ministry work. What a privilege! What a challenge! **What a vision!**

M2/W2 Has a Vision!

Also, close to the heart of M2/W2, the very ethos in fact of M2/W2 in *how* we treat others and carry out this ministry one of full-bore compassion and mercy, are these words of Jesus in Matthew and Luke, with a subsequent commentary by Peter. (All quotations are also from *The Voice*):

From Jesus in Matthew 20:25 – 28:

*Do you want the Kingdom run [one could insert, “Do you want the M2/W2 Association run”] like the Romans run their kingdom? Their rulers have **great power over** the people, but God the Father doesn’t play by the Romans’ rules. This is the Kingdom’s logic: whoever wants to become great must first make himself a servant; whoever wants to be first must bind himself as a slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as the ransom for many.*

From Jesus in Luke 22:25 – 27:

*The authority figures of the outsiders [to the Kingdom] play this game, flexing their muscles **in competition for power over one another**, masking their quest for domination behind words like “benefactor” or “public servant” [or “Executive Director” or “Board member” or...]. But you must not indulge in this charade. Instead, among you, the greatest must become like the youngest and the leader must become a true servant... [C]onsider My role among you. I have been with you as a servant.*

From Peter in I Peter 5:1 – 5, with the Proverbs quotation from chapter 3:34:

*Now for the elders of the church [one could say “Now for the Board members of M2/W2”]. I want to encourage you. As you know, I am an elder too, like you... When you shepherd the flock God has given you... Don’t lead them as if you were **a dictator**, but lead your flock **by example**... All of you should treat each other with humility, for as it says in Proverbs,*

*God opposes the proud,
But offers grace to the humble.*

What kind of **leadership “example”** did Jesus leave us with, besides his ultimate servant-death on the Cross? Listen to the text in John’s Gospel that classically shows how Jesus led by *example* at a most *crucial* time in his life – the Last Supper. **This is from John 13:3 – 5:**
Jesus, knowing that He had come from God, and was going away to God, stood up from dinner and removed his outer garments. He then wrapped Himself in a towel, poured water in a basin, and began to wash the feet of the disciples, drying them with His towel [like servants did].

Jesus' example set for all followers is that of a non-authoritarian, non-top-down, non-prideful, non-lording-it-over, lowly, respectful, humble servant. Jesus, Very Lord of all Creation! It is a leadership style diametrically opposite and opposed to any form of power over positioning, "Robert's-Rules-of-Order" impositioning, authoritarian leadership dominating – or to use *The Voice* translation's word – **dictatorship**", **style. Is it not?** I wonder: What is the style you experience in your churches and in your parachurch organizations? **Humbly respectful or top-down dictatorial?** If the latter, a simple question: **Don't such leaders believe in following Jesus and Scripture?** Or are Jesus' words, all these texts (and so many more!), **simply too blatantly** counter-cultural to surrounding society norms, to dominant business norms, and sadly often to church norms? This all **in spite of the clarion call of Romans 12:2 that reads, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world..."** What does one do when Jesus and Scripture contradict secular *and* church societal norms? *What does one do?* **"Conform" nonetheless, or "transform," as the Romans 12 text goes on to say?**

Over the years I have been Executive Director, Staff *invariably and significantly have been, and today even more so, are tasked with too much to do in far too little available time.* This produces undercurrents of chronic stress we all live with, because we are so committed to this ministry, an agency that is as well so chronically underfunded!

I am leaving this agency February 7, 2014. I wish until then I could just look the other way and ignore the state of current agency leadership. I wish I could just blissfully ride out the countdown to my departure (the same as Sochi's Winter Olympics countdown by the way! – how nice of them!).

I cannot in good conscience do so. I am an agency member of almost forty years, besides having all kinds of other deep investments in this ministry!

[Pause] To proceed with what to say next has been extremely difficult. It has brought to the surface again great personal pain in remembering many negative experiences for Staff and for me. Consequently, I have agonized for hours over what to say next, and have written and rewritten and rewritten again the following.

I choose to continue *thus*: I have many questions that I believe have to be asked if we as M2/W2 aspire to make real even a little the **above Scriptural vision**, if we genuinely desire to come anywhere near as an agency to what Jesus' teachings are:

- Are the Staff and Board servant leaders in all the work we do?
- When we visit and work with prisoners and ex-prisoners, are we Staff and volunteers telling them what to do from a superior position of top-down authority, or are we listening and thinking "How can this person best be served and shown by example a freedom way of joy?"
- Is the Board making all its decisions in a servanthood-leading way, using collaborative, non-top down, non-lording it over ways as Jesus called for and modelled? The Board Manual obligates Board members to do so. Is the Board wanting to change the Board Manual, a MOTION already put onto the Board Agenda last year, because it wants to sidestep such a servanthood leadership model or...?
- When the Board meets, does each member recommit to the above form of counterintuitive, countercultural servanthood leadership manner, repeatedly called for in the Board Policy Manual?
- **Numerous difficult decisions that negatively impacted Staff and this agency were made by the Board last year. Are Staff and Board willing to commit time and resources and huge emotional energy** to work through the pain and hurt that consequently arose? Or do Staff and Board choose to sweep them under the carpet without accountability, without healing, and embrace instead what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called "cheap grace", claiming all is well, when all is not well? As **Jeremiah 16:4** expresses it poetically:

*To heal the brokenness of My people,
they offer superficial words.*

They say, "Peace, peace," as if all is well.

But there is no peace.

- Are Board and Staff willing to overcome the disunity between us, which is now noticeably affecting Staff? Or are we likewise sweeping this under the carpet? There have been recent statements made like, "We must give a show of unity to the membership at the AGM"; and false claims like, Staff and Board have arrived at a place of "forgiveness, healing and revitalization" in our relationships, as found in an earlier draft of the Board of Directors Report to the AGM?

M2/W2 has a vision that this agency *be led* by "servants," not by "dictators"! We are all constantly invited by Scripture to the great freedom and joy there can be in M2/W2's being led this countercultural Kingdom way.

M2/W2 has a vision expressed this way in James 3:18: "*When peacemakers plant seeds of peace, they will harvest justice (Contemporary English Version).*" We are all called, Staff and Board together, to be those kinds of seed-planting peacemakers. If we can all together rise to the challenge, we can indeed reap a fresh harvest of Restorative Justice! This is **our collective invitation right here in this kairos moment!**, to affirm Restorative Justice in the leadership and in all the relationships of this agency! Now is the "acceptable time" for us to embrace this kind of full-fledged cooperation and collaboration for Kingdom Come in the wonderful continued ministry mandate of this agency!

M2/W2 has a vision, finally, that no one would ever again be voted onto the M2/W2 Board, or become Board Chairperson, or remain on the Board **without having a genuine servant leadership heart!** That vision can be realized from tonight on! It is for us all to rousingly and wholeheartedly embrace from this night forward! It is possible! It can be done! It is Kingdom Come Vision! We are all, Staff, Board, membership, donors, volunteers, those we serve – everyone! – invited to this Grand Feast Table of unity! As **Revelation 22:17 so wonderfully has the Spirit and the Bride say to us all!:**

Come.

And let everyone who hears these words say, "Come."

And let those who thirst come.

All who desire to drink, let them take and drink freely from the water of life.

If we embrace such a biblical vision, this agency has a great, a joyous, a vibrant and restorative justice-filled future! But it will take mutual humility, it will take mutual conversion, it will take mutual hard work. It will be a long road ahead. Today, right now, is invitation for us all to rise up and set out on this way of healing – for the greater glory of God and his Kingdom! Amen!

I ask you all now to **recite quietly** in your hearts the Lord's Prayer as you **listen to it read** aloud from *The Voice* translation:

*Our Father in heaven,
Let Your name remain holy.
Bring about your kingdom.
Manifest your will here on earth,
As it is manifest in heaven.
Give us each day that day's bread –
No more, no less –
And forgive us our debts
As we forgive those who owe us
something.
Lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
[But let your kingdom be,*

*And let it be powerful
And glorious forever. Amen.]*

Amen again! M2/W2 has a glorious vision of peacemaking and restorative justice! May we all move towards its realization in the days, weeks, months, and years ahead!

M2/W2 has vision...