

March 29, 2019

Dear Friends of the Arizona Mission Center,

Over the last several days, I have tried to capture thoughts that I could share with you as the transition is almost complete for me to be relieved of the responsibility of Mission Center President. In just a few days, I will move into the role of being a supportive member of the leadership team and not the convener of the team. I am full of gratitude for having the opportunity to serve in the role of Mission Center President but I'm also full of gratitude for the willingness of others, especially Sara Tubbesing, to assume that responsibility.

Many of you know that I am always reading a book that in some way is connected to ministry and ways we can explore the future. A couple of months ago, I finished a book by Peter Block called *Community; The Structure of Belonging*. In chapter two, he began to address the issue of shifting context of community. He began to outline some of the shifts he's experienced and believes they are trends for the future. One sentence stood out and I kept coming back to it over and over again. He wrote, "The following are the shifts in context that would precede the movement into authentic community: We are a community of possibilities, not a community of problems." (p 30) That statement grabbed me and lingered with me throughout the rest of the book. He followed it up with, "Community exists for the sake of belonging..."

These two statements and ideas continue to rest on me as I write this letter. They affirm what I believe but with which I have struggled. It's easy to be consumed by the problems of life, of family, of our faith community, of our neighborhood, city, nation. The list of things to "take care of" by leaders is often exhausting. So, how can Block have the courage to say, that a shift in community will be one of becoming a community of possibilities and not a community of problems? It is because of his fundamental belief that authentic community is where our future lies and not a lost expression from our past. However, we must choose that path and belonging is essential. Both of those ideas affirm my journey, and our journey of Discover and Live Your Future.

I do believe that we are becoming communities of possibilities and not problems. I believe we are wrestling with what it means for people to belong to community and not simply have membership. I believe we have significant questions before us as we wrestle with changing dynamics of culture and faith. But the questions are leading us to new imagination and experiments; communities of possibilities!

My family and I are grateful for the welcome and hospitality we have experienced. We love being in Arizona and are grateful for the opportunity to continue to live here. My role will shift to allow me the time to give full attention Congregational Leadership and Innovation which includes Discover and Live Your Future. I anticipate continued ministry as a President of Seventy and a member of the Council of Presidents of Seventy. I will also enjoy spending time supporting the mission center leadership and congregations in Arizona. Each role is filled with possibilities and opportunities!

Last year, I began to wrestle with a passage of scripture that became the focus for our mission center leadership team, our conference and continues to guide me. It is from Colossians 3 and I want to remind us of the words:

¹² “As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. ¹³ Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord^[f] has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ^[g] dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.^[h] ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

My friends, I pray that the words of this passage continue to guide each of you in your daily discipleship. That we will continue to wrestle with what it means to clothe ourselves with qualities and decisions that bear witness of Christ. That as we seek answers about the future, that we will have the courage to imagine the possibilities before us rather than the problems of the moment. We don’t know where it will lead but we know that the future is full of possibilities. May we experience the blessing of belonging to one another and to God in ways that create healthy and safe communities of joy, hope, love, and peace.

Continued blessings of gratitude and for becoming a community of possibilities!

*Grace and Peace,
Larry*