

Another Way, A New Equation

Analysts concur that Mexico has been hit hardest of all Latin American countries by the global financial crisis. Remittances from Mexicans working in the US, the second largest source of foreign income after oil, have dropped substantially. Tourism, the third largest source, took a double hit, the A1/N1 flu compounding the financial crisis. The daily reports of violence, though miniscule in Cuernavaca, weigh people down. It would be easy to fall into a fatalistic depression.



Protests after the government closed the L&FC electric company laid-off 44,000 workers

Curiously, many who live on the edge of “crisis” experience a paradoxical tension between hope and despair. In one moment rooting for the “system,” hoping that the negative economic trajectories will reverse, while scared to death they could lose their jobs, or not be unable to find one. In another moment thinking, “Maybe we’d be better off if the whole thing collapsed.” Too many people were falling into non-existence, even during recent years of internationally and professionally applauded economic

growth. Somehow “crisis” held some hope of a future actually different, even better than the past.

I think we are starting to see a fundamental change in today’s social movements. I have often observed that some groups gather simply to complain about the way things are, how they got this way, and who are the people at fault. Though I sometimes agree with their critique, their negativity rarely inspires creativity or healing. I am welcoming the privilege to work closely with social and community groups choosing to be positive and proactive, concurring that “another way is possible.”

Consider some of the characteristics of this “other way.” Blame and guilt are being removed from the equation. Debating whether someone, or no one, or even everyone is to blame wastes time. Even if one position prevails, many have come to the conclusion that staying in “that place” won’t help us move forward. Most of the communities we are working with have decided, “Let’s get on with life!”

Communities start looking expectantly toward each other, often reaching beyond traditional peer groups defined by social stratification. They begin by focusing on the community’s gifts and strengths rather than deficiencies. In the past institutions and organizations wishing to assist communities would begin by pointing out deficiencies and then “problem solving,” which became demoralizing and destructive. Communities are left feeling hopeless, dependent on the “experts” from the outside. Now people name and celebrate the resilience and strength that have enabled their survival, mutuality and the capacity to stay together. They start to “map the community’s assets” recognizing themselves and each other among them!

Non-existence revisited:

A few years ago I offered the concept of *non-existence*. My conclusion being that social unrest often results when a system fails to acknowledge the very existence of a vast majority of its population. It is devastating to lack adequate material and physical conditions for a decent lifestyle, but it is overwhelmingly traumatic to be dismissed, disregarded, virtually invisible and inaudible: *virtual non-existence*. Some theorists name *non-existence* as a specific psychological disorder resulting from the inability to fulfill two basic foundations for personal development: the aspiration to exist, and, the need to be recognized. In the global economic system, if you have no money, do not buy or consume, and have no marketable skill for the industrial production

system, you quite simply are not part of the formula: *virtual non-existence*.

Isolated communities are often spared this condition, each individual feeling recognized and integrated, valued and appreciated within the communal embrace. The difficulty arises when those communities are forced into contact, or begin to become geographically absorbed, falling under the inevitable influence of the larger society, while not being considered part of that society with which they have no affective relationship and no interest. The media, television and advertising transmit messages about the “good life” that are out of reach of these groups. Any attempts to conform to these models of existence lead to constant frustra-

tion, problems of motivation, drug addiction, violence and guilt. An “anything goes” attitude in order to reach recognition can lead to illicit activities like drug trafficking. Social uprising may actually be the healthier response to the non-existence predicament.

When the Zapatistas, who rose up in 1994, were asked why they wore ski masks they responded, “With our faces uncovered we have been invisible to you, so now we wear masks so you will see us.” This dramatic reflection is profound, naming a deep reality all humans share – the universal importance of being taken in to account, respected, and appreciated.

La Estación: Pre-school and Nutrition Center



“If You Wanna Make The World A Better Place Take A Look At Yourself, And Then Make A Change”
Michael Jackson “Man in the Mirror”

The mothers of La Estación continue to amaze me. The Karitas projects – the expanded pre-school, the feeding program, workshops on various themes – brought them together, providing them with an incredible support network, helping them and their children get ahead. Remarkably, without precedent, two children from our early years began university education this fall, unheard of for inhabitants of La Estación. When the mothers started to talk about people in the community who had not participated in this work, a couple immediately, generously, selflessly offered ideas about how to bring them in. “How about dance classes,” Sylvia called out. “The fair we had last year brought a lot of people in to visit the project,” Bernadina

added. I suggested showing movies twice a month in the patio. As we talked the mothers recognized that the quality and closeness of their relationship could be intimidating to outsiders who could see the project as belonging to “them.” And though there is a certain profile of person they don’t think fit in the character of the group, specifically those who try to promote a feeling of pity in visitors to the community and thus make no attempt to improve their living conditions, they know there are many more hardworking, dedicated people in the area who could use the support to make a difference in their lives. It will be very interesting to see how these ideas develop into action plans in the next few months.

ALEM, Autonomía Libertad en Movimiento

KARITAS MEXICO



The first run “Disability isn’t as it appears”

“Ideas shape the course of history”

(John Maynard Keynes)

What is ALEM? In the words of one of our members, Pablo Rodriguez, it is “hope, unity, friendship, coexistence, responsibility, expression, creativity, commitment, challenge, (and) growth.” It is the “opportunity to live in a society as an active member, through learning and working,” added Dalia Sotelo.

This year has been very active for ALEM. Among the many highlights:

- we have received external recognition for our work *in the press, the local government and the general public;*
- we completed several demanding and unique architectural design projects which stretched the limits of our mathematical and spatial reasoning;
- we continued to develop an communal solidarity among the members of our team by raising our political and social consciousness of the situation here in Morelos;
- we built bridges of understanding through the creation of a theater project, one which gives expression to the daily realities of living with a disability.
- we voted unanimously to become a worker/owner cooperative, the success of the business now our shared responsibility

Thank you for believing in us and believing in the value of human beings.

Current equipment needs: (1) a complete Powder coat (paint?) finishing system, (2) a Drill Press, (3) a medium-size metal lathe, (4) A bus with a wheelchair lift



“(the) opportunity to live in a society as an active member”

Estrella Torque Converter Rebuilders: the Next Cooperative

Although they, too, have been hit by the recession, Francisco Cruz and his three sons, who operate this shop entirely on their own, have successfully diversified their line of service to compensate. Extraordinarily, when the details are worked out, despite the adverse economy, they are prepared to purchase the business from Karitas and begin payments on their low-interest loan. Another worker/owner cooperative birthed!

Frisan Automotriz: Our First Worker/Owner Venture

Frisan Automotive is our oldest project starting 19 years ago, owned and operated by its employees since 1994. They finished paying-off their debts 5 years ago and should be enjoying the stability and

benefits of years of hard work. But, unfortunately this has been a challenging year for them. The financial crisis coupled with a dip in their growth cycle drove sales been down while expenses have increased.

And, realistically, partnerships have their ups and downs, especially under external pressure. We have been consulting with hoping they adopt strategies that will require a minimum of intervention.

Auto Partes Connors, Julio, Rodolfo, and Others: Contagious Generosity

These are businesses that were established, encouraged and/or financed and established through Karitas whose worker/owner teams maintain a vital relationship with Karitas, whether seeking support or offering assistance. When ALEM's bus broke down Rodolfo was there to help, refusing pay-

ment because it "was his turn to do his part" he said. When Julio needed a receptionist, he asked ALEM who had the capabilities and needed a job, so Guadalupe, a young mother – who lives in a wheelchair and used to struggle to

make ends meet selling bread on the street – got the job. And she's good at it! There are too many, many more of these little stories, everyday people showing their everyday goodness, generosity and compassion.



"There is a fundamental misconception that we are separate, **we are all one**, what I do to you I do to me"
Jakada Imani

Comunidad, Solidarity Circles and the *Awakening the Dreamer, Changing the Dream* Symposium

"To call forth an environmentally sustainable, spiritually fulfilling, socially just human presence on this planet" – the symposium offers videos, personal presentations and group dynamics to challenge and animate participants to claim that statement as an achievable goal, committing to make it a reality. Comunidad Foundation, committed to grassroots work in the State of Morelos, has adopted the Symposium as a central strategy for getting the whole community to work together to transform our world. Between May and September five Symposiums were presented in Morelos, Mexico City and Puebla. Twenty-three recently trained facilitators have committed to presenting 100 symposiums

across Mexico within a year.

The Symposium offers a possibility for bringing people together, essential in Mexico with one of the highest levels of disparity between rich and poor in the world. Even if on unlikely and rare occasions where they might talk to each other, they'll likely not understand each other. Learning to listen is not taught in our culture; There may be endless courses and seminars in Mexico that teach people how to *talk* – speak, persuade, convince and sell – but very few suggesting the need to *listen*. Listening is difficult, but to fail to listen threatens social collapse. The indigenous peoples of the world, including Mexico, are artful listeners – not only to peo-

ple but to all creation, animate and inanimate.

The Symposium offers the *motivation* and cultivates the sensitivity to become a listener. Solidarity Circles, announced during each Symposium, offer the *concrete opportunities*. A recently formed Solidarity Circle is actively working with Comunidad to develop a project to offering affordable, environmentally sustainable housing to people in the state. Solidarity Circles help participants find within themselves the natural and universal human desire to connect with others and all of creation to discern and discover what gifts they can offer. And to accompany this is a privilege of greater beauty I cannot imagine.

"To bring forth an environmentally sustainable, socially just, spiritually fulfilling human presence to our planet"
Pachamama Alliance



Celebrating our common roots

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Wellspring/Karitas Foundation (Karitas) celebrated a 25th birthday this year, a quarter century of creativity, compassion and generosity. Our work seems to manifest the principle that *effort plus grace yields faithfulness*. And which comes first? We have felt “led,” “called” or “invited” to projects; we watched for what seemed to be “trying to happen,” needs and opportunities that “beckoned.” A mysterious and compelling Grace at work, it seemed. Then we rolled up our sleeves, set goals, made plans . . . and went to work. Tireless and determined Effort. In 1983 our budget was \$22,000. In 2010 it will approach \$300,000!

We want to connect with you in every way possible. Wander our website: review our mission and vision statements, meet our board, watch an extraordinary photo essay about ALEM, and explore opening each project site in turn. Click http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HTc_NoCLEoA and watch the ALEM dedication ceremony from a year ago. We can provide our IRS tax exempt certificate, a copy of our 990 charitable organization filing in Pennsylvania. Or, give Howard Friend a call.

Dear Friends of Karitas,

Greetings and blessings for a rich and wonderful holiday season – from the ever-broadening Karitas family to yours. Despite the stiff challenges of global financial realities, which touch us all, our projects are flourishing, and the broad smiles of the dozens who lead and participate tell that story best.

Edit as we tried, we simply could not celebrate our good news on a single sheet. Even four pages can hardly contain all we want to share. If Christmas is the season of hope, even in the face of adversity, you are invited to read hearty and heartfelt “narratives of hope” bursting from every sentence. Lives are being transformed. Undreamt futures being realized. A rich spirit of collaboration and deepened community manifesting everywhere.

You are among those “key players” – you who are our partners – offering encouragement and support, your prayers, and your financial generosity. We project 2010 to be a “break out year,” to borrow a sport’s metaphor, like a rose that opens an ever broadening blossom, to tap the horticultural world. Remember that every dollar donated, without deduction for administration or fund-raising, goes directly and completely to the work.

Rosa and Felipe, Bernadina and Jose, Liliana and Enoch – and all the rest in unison, a chorus of dozens – asked me to remind you “mi casa es tu casa.” My house is your house. Why not plan a visit to Cuernavaca, where we have a guest room prepared with you in mind, and meet these remarkable people first hand? Really!

Appreciatively,
Howard E. Friend