

**Presentation to the Municipality of Vejle, Denmark September 2006**  
**by Bliss W Browne, President, Imagine Chicago**

I'm delighted and honored to be in the presence of people who help make the center of communities hold, who care about the future of communities. To mobilize communities around a healthy future for everyone requires effective collaborations, as all of you know well. There are some simple reasons for this. One is that we are smarter together than we are alone. We can share stories and learn from one another's mistakes and imagination. Furthermore, it's an illusion to think we ever act independently. An individual, a family, is a complex living system embedded within many, many layers of other living systems. So the well being of citizens, families can only be a collective responsibility. In most cultures this understanding is foundational. To care for a child is to reverence life itself. The promise of this conversation is to share learning in the service of life, to imagine more vital futures, and to lay the groundwork for moving toward them, to become more conscious and committed to aligning our strengths so our weaknesses become irrelevant.

You are helping effect a vital shift by being here, from single sector problem solving to focusing on what communities value and how to organize productive partnerships within which those values can be lived. It's a struggle because professionals have been trained to think as competent experts with answers rather than as community partners with questions. Community partnerships make clear that we are vulnerable, don't have all the answers ourselves, that we depend upon one another. Partnerships have not been the habit in our professional lives. So we need our confidence raised that partnerships can be collaborations, can accomplish more than we can accomplish on our own, in short, are worth running the risk of vulnerability because a greater good can be accomplished. Talking together about what is of most value, the life giving forces and energies at the heart of a community or organization's life, builds partnership. When connections are built heart-to-heart, mission-to-mission, the process reinforces core values, enables democratic participation and rekindles commitment to personal and institutional integrity.

As I travel on six continents, it is clear the world is unsettled, with citizens urgently seeking life within structures that often lead to premature death, communities characterized by enormous grief and loss as well as by deep hungers for hope and community. Humans are complex beings and we seem to have a lot more questions than answers right now as a species. It's a challenging time to be a human being and to keep alive a vision more transcendent than our own comfort and survival. Life for every living being, including humans, is under constant threat and has to be actively protected, nurtured, and intelligent in its adaptation in order to survive. Mothers, fathers, children, professionals, human beings at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are faced with multiple adaptive challenges which quickly conjure images in each of us:

- The global context of democratization and an interdependent world economy; (Iraq)
- Ecological imbalances which threaten the seamless web of living relationships; (Katrina)
- Knowledge and information resources expanding exponentially with the cost of communication being driven to almost zero; (email withdrawal)
- Cultural diversity and interaction increasing in ways which require new cooperation and mutual learning; (immigration marches)

- Shifting economic and organizational patterns changing the nature and availability of work (kids hanging out on street corners and frantic executives on their Blackberries)
- Escalating political and social violence caused by growing disparities between haves and have nots, massive natural disasters and global health pandemics and threats

.....All magnified by a politics of magnifying fear that threatens to shut down our hearts and close our minds, and project our own fears onto the stranger so we don't have to face them within.

Ron Heifetz at Harvard distinguishes between leadership and management by saying that leadership is required when the learning in hand is simply not sufficient to the challenge at hand, whereas management is enough when we know what to do and it's just a matter of getting it done. By definition, adaptive challenges require new learning. If no one has the answers, we need to figure it out together. We must create generative spaces, like the one today, where structured exchanges of ideas, resources and experiences nurture hope and understanding and expand what's possible to imagine and create.

Think about what others will learn from you today, what images and stories have the most authority for you, what you believe and tell your children and colleagues about life, what language you use to describe your family, your community, your world. I think the most fundamental choice we have to make as human beings is whether to live under the dominion of life or death, blessing or curse. Images of death and violence are very prevalent in our culture, and in the intimate lives of many people, including children. What happens when that becomes the only trustworthy truth about life, when that gains dominion? Detroit—used to initiate children into light and call it baptism. Now we initiate children into darkness and call it sexual abuse.

I expect all of you come today with stories of both grief and hope, frustration and triumph. Grief and hope seem to be twins often found together. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a dream" speech emerged only after speaking the truth about the deep sadness he felt over patterns of discrimination and exclusion. But as we know from his visionary witness, it is especially important, even transforming, to give voice to our hope and act from that place, to invite one another into hope, to create space for greater possibility.

What we see as 'real' is continuously generated through language, stories and symbols that give order and meaning to our self and world. Our lives and understandings are constituted by relationships, within a multi-layered interactive complexity. Imagination is a key faculty. What we believe about life and see as possible, the language we use, what we notice and pay attention to, how we connect to ideas and people, all determine what we experience. Our perceptions, stories and actions in turn influence what others see and believe is true. Interaction with others, especially those coming from a different frame of reference, is important in challenging, shifting and expanding our understandings. New words and images open up new worlds; depending on the nature of the words and images, they can provoke courage or fear, enchant, inspire or wound us, lead us in the direction of greater life or premature death.

How we speak and engage others, therefore, has moral consequences. We are responsible as creators of meaning for the world we create. To recognize that every person is a creator of reality has vast implications for rethinking leadership and the power of imagination to regenerate public life. It is well within our human power to create frames that allow for more genuine connection and vital possibilities. It is important to be conscious of ways our individual and collective imaginations get colonized by the images, ideas, and worldviews of others. The opportunity and challenge for all human systems is to design and hold life-affirming space within which better worlds get co-created, where discourse and action mobilize resources, enable learning, and help people realize and claim their astonishing capacity to create and expand systems in a more life-giving direction. Sharing stories of possibility that tune us to the frequency of hope is a radical and empowering act which stretches our spirits. We discover it is possible to understand more, to live more fully, to create more meaningful and effective connections.

It is an especially challenging time to act from hope because we are living in a time in which cynicism passes for sophistication. Cynicism is a corrosive poison in our public life; a cheap way of eroding hope by acting as if someone with experience knows better than to think that new things are possible. Since you care about building community, I would challenge you to be resolute about renouncing cynicism and listening each other into hope, sharing what is possible, what has been tried and proved trustworthy, the connections and practices with which we can move forward together to imagine and create a more vital future.

How can we listen one another into hope and what difference does it make? How can we have a conversation with the future that will reinvigorate our work, rekindle our passion for justice, renew our dedication to the health of families and communities? I'd like to share with you a very personal answer to that and some images of hope named

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that have gained great authority in my heart in the course of searching with others for answers to these urgent questions.

Fourteen years ago, I was a corporate banker running a banking division, an Episcopal priest running a black parish, the mother of three young children and active on nine civic boards. It was a complicated life not because it was so busy but because these worlds shared little common vocabulary and often function as parallel universes in our city. I began to notice the many ways our city was divided. I saw lots of young adults in despair in our city, anxious about their future, doubtful if they could find a way to make their lives count, with many young lives lost to violence and drugs. I began to talk with my friends about what it would take for many people to think about our city as a whole. As Ronald Marstin, a philosopher, once said, "Justice is fundamentally a matter of who is included and whom we can tolerate neglecting."

Wanting companions for my questions, I organized a conference on faith, imagination and public life. On the second night, people were asked to venture to describe images of Chicago's future and economy worthy of the commitment of our lives. The image that came to me was of the

recycling symbol, three simple arrows in a circle, not just as an image of ecology but as a representation of an economy in which nothing and no one is wasted, in which everyone's participation counts. I began to imagine a city...

- **where everyone is valued**
- **where every citizen, young and old, applies their talents to create a positive future for themselves and their community.**
- **where hope comes alive in the flourishing and connecting of human lives**
- **where young people and others whose visions have been discounted develop and contribute their ideas and energy.**

Within three days of the conference, I had set aside a sixteen year corporate career to begin the work of discovering ways to bring such a vision to life. That's been Imagine Chicago's work for the past fourteen years.

IMAGINE CHICAGO has worked to create meaningful opportunities for everyone to discover a place to belong and a way to contribute that links their considerable gifts to the communities in which they live. How? By serving as a catalyst for creative connections, holding people accountable to the hope that is in them, and helping people become actively identified with and engaged in creating a positive and hopeful future for the city through both discourse and action. We have challenged people and institutions to understand, imagine and create the future they value, to move from understanding and dreaming community to building it. This is mothering work in the way Sara Ruddick talks about in her wonderful book on maternal thinking. She says 'motherhood is a sustained response to the promise embedded in the creation of new life.' That for me is the challenge...how we bring worthy collective dreams to birth and honor the new life they represent by creating the structures that sustain them over a lifetime?

It was very challenging to know where to begin... We knew we wanted to create a superconductor process that gave more energy than it took. No one was looking for another meeting to attend. Two early decisions proved crucial to Imagine Chicago's success. The first was that positive communication frameworks are essential to fostering hope and civic imagination. Words create worlds. What this means in practice is focusing on positive topics, positive questions, and asking them to people who are known to care. Why? People want and need to think constructively. Appreciative questions around constructive topics serve as positive orientation points that move us forward and help us draw on best experiences that can help get us there. They reduce threatening and defensive behaviors and responses.

Much public discourse is problem and deficit oriented. To frame community regeneration in problem talk creates expertise and focus on what communities don't want and what doesn't work. To shift from deficit to visionary language opens up possibilities and energy for community renewal. When inquiry helps communities identify and name strengths, skills, hopes, values, assets and constructive ideas, a positive community image and identity grows which can inspire higher participation and attract investment. Magnifying one another's positive stories can create constructive experiences of difference that builds positive relationships even across well-established divides of age, race, class and geography. (As a priest, I think of this as fundamentally a matter of creating a culture of blessing rather than curse. Benediction is "saying

good things.” We need to find more ways to bless each other. Our language is a primary way we can do that.)

The second key insight we had was that young people should occupy a prominent leadership position. There were two reasons for this. Since we were focused on developing our city’s future, we wanted the future to be asking the questions about the best of the past, learning from that experience and holding adults accountable to the hope that was in them. We knew that in order for new possibilities to be raised up, it would be necessary to disarm the cynicism that passes for sophistication. We thought young people held the best hope for doing that.

The initial IMAGINE CHICAGO project therefore engaged area teenagers, mostly poor ones living in public housing who were then being publicly referred to as a ‘lost generation’, to interview important “glue people,” in order to understand what would contribute to a positive future for all of CHICAGO and reconnect communities that had been chronically isolated. 50 youth-at-risk interviewed 200 adult community builders in Chicago about the highlights of their lives as citizens, what they had seen as effective processes for bringing the community together, and their hopes and plans for the city’s future. One pair that met in this process was an engaging, winsome 12 year old named Tim Wilborn from one of our worst public housing projects and a 95 year old white widow of one of the pioneers of TV market surveying who lived in an affluent suburb of Chicago. Gertrude was old but forward thinking; she recognized in Tim someone who also valued hard work. They were the most unlikely pair. Tim later went to college on a scholarship she created for him after their conversation. Having grown up in the heart of Chicago’s desolation but with a resilient spirit and a newfound friend, Tim graduated and went on the found Imagine Detroit and later Imagine Serbia. A world of possibility opened.

The intergenerational appreciative inquiry proved very inspiring and motivating for many people. Adult commitments were refreshed. Hope came alive. New possibilities for engagement were imagined and shared. Asking positive open ended questions was successful in establishing a lively sense of shared civic identity, creating effective methods for constructive intergenerational dialogue, and expanding the sense among the young people that they could make a difference. And Imagine Chicago learned that we needed to structure this approach into projects which could move from idea to action.

Imagine Chicago has since developed over 100 partnerships in Chicago involving a wide range of individuals and institutions ... And the work has now spread to 6 continents.

## ●●●●●●●● **Moving from Idea to Action**

Central to all of Imagine Chicago’s initiatives is a common approach to learning which moves from idea to action:

- Understand what is (focusing on best of what is)
- Imagine what could be (working in partnerships with others)
- Create what will be (translating what we value into what we do)

## **Understand**

All projects begin with and are grounded in asking and teaching others to ask open-ended, asset and value-oriented questions about what is life-giving, what is working, what is generative, what is important. The focus is on asking positive questions that encourage sharing of best practices, articulation of fundamental values, and which reveal the positive foundation on which greater possibilities can be built. E.g. what is something your child has accomplished that you are especially proud of? What about your family, this school, is especially effective in encouraging children to learn? What questions interest you most right now?

Importance of understanding mental maps out of which people are operating---

## **Imagine**

New possibilities are inspired by hearing questions or stories that cause us to wonder and stretch our understanding beyond what we already know. When we are invited to articulate or hear from others what's important and is working, we readily imagine how even greater transformation and innovation can happen. In a learning community, our collective imaginations continually envisage more. Grass roots leaders discussing what they have helped change on their block inspires others to try and make a difference. Young parents sharing stories of how they are caring for their children leads others to good parenting practices. Oliver Wendell Holmes suggested long ago "a mind once stretched by a new idea never regains its original dimensions". This stretching of our imagination happens naturally. I still remember vividly a powerful image offered by an elderly interviewee in the original Imagine Chicago intergenerational interview process, who said, "I imagine a city where critical thinking is so common that politicians can never trade on ignorance." Hearing it started me thinking about the connections between education and democracy in a way I had not earlier considered.

Each and every human being possesses the enormous gift of imagination. Imagination is necessarily inclusive and utterly democratic: Envisioning is the realm of the future, of freedom, where new possibilities can break in if we are willing to be dream bearers. The greater the diversity of the people involved, the stronger the movement of imagination, and the more likely a balanced and just future for ourselves and our children.

Example: In 2002, I was speaking in Mandurah, Western Australia, a town on the coast south of Perth. It is town full of retirees and young people. a lovely quiet coastal community. In the afternoon I was to lead a community youth forum and in the evening speak to the town's civic leaders. I met with the 50 or so young people in the afternoon and challenged them, if they wanted, to imagine the future of their town and to come up with some concrete plans for what would make Mandurah a much better place for young people. . The topics they chose had to be affirmative and their presentations vivid and concrete enough to persuade action by them and others. They rose to the challenge. One small and wiry young man in the group named Jeff Brennan seemed reluctant to participate in the conversations. He kept himself somewhat aloof

from the group. So I was surprised that, at the end, he approached me after all the topics had been decided and asked privately if there were room for one more. “On what?” I asked, and he replied “teen suicide.” Since we had agreed that topics had to be positively stated he went on to reflect on how to present the topic constructively. I asked him why he wanted to talk about it and he mentioned that a friend had tried to commit suicide. A few minutes later he admitted that he was the friend. I responded by telling him the story of the youngest member of my board who had also attempted suicide because she had a case of the “uns” – unneeded, unwanted and unloved. But then she had had a change of heart and gotten engaged with life and become a truly extraordinary and vibrant young woman. Jeff told me he would not have the courage to share his story in front of town leaders. But he went home to think about it because he said Mandurah had the second highest suicide rate in Australia.

When he returned for the evening program, he had a paper on which he had written some notes which he gave me to read. It was his story of trying to take his life and why he had done it when his grandmother had been hurt. He also brought a CD of “Stand by me.” He told me he didn’t know if he had the courage to speak in such a large group. We agreed that he could simply give me a sign if he wanted to speak and I would include him in the presentations. The AV tech was alerted to play his CD if he came on stage. After all the other kids had presented, Jeff gave me a high sign. He told his story quietly to a rapt audience and ended it by asking, “So if a young person knocked on your door in the middle of the night and said “Why should I stay alive, what would you tell them?” He then pleaded for the development of a suicide hotline. Two years later when I returned to Mandurah, Jeff was 17 and running the hotline. Welcoming everyone’s voice can sometimes make the difference between life and death.

## **Create**

Creativity is what builds confidence in our power to transform. For imagination to help create community change, it needs to be embodied in something concrete and practical ...*a visible outcome* that inspires more people to invest themselves in making a difference. In *Citizen Leaders*, for example, grass roots leaders are invited to articulate their visions for community change and then create imaginative community development project of their own design. In the course of four months of interactive forums, they learn to recruit volunteers, design and organize a project, prepare a proposal, and implement, evaluate and sustain their projects. Learning occurs largely through community change agents sharing experiences with each other within a common framework of organizing questions. In 1996, a group of committed citizens involving 6 leaders and 25 team members, from the same low-income Chicago neighborhood, participated together in this program. They created projects including block clubs, community gardens, intergenerational sports programs, and a youth club. With support from a local community organization, these emerging block leaders helped launch a neighborhood-wide program to bring residents together to collectively address important issues. The *Every Block is a Village* program

they started is now an organization of 60 block clubs, each with resident ‘citizen leaders,’ which organizes around community issues like community cleanliness, economic development, and youth opportunities. The process is continually strengthened by sharing stories weekly about what has happened and how and lessons learned. As their successes grow, so does their confidence and skill level. The visible outcomes and growing volunteer effort attract the commitment of other individuals who see it’s possible to make a difference. Last year quarter the BBC came to Chicago to filming EBV as a story of possibility broadcast all over the UK.

To see the future as viable, we need an active sense that our lives and contribution count, that our choices make a difference to the outcome. When our ideas are listened to, when we begin to share what we see, what we hope for, what we care about, what we see as possible and important, something new happens. Latent ideas come into clear consciousness. The sharing of ideas inspires deeper thinking and questions and innovation. Communities of interest become identified to one another. Democracy gets re-discovered as a creative activity. Government becomes more creative and accountable.

As Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk and social activist, once said, “Living is more than submission; it is creation. Once we begin to change this street and this city, we begin to discover our power to transform the world.”

In 1996, Tina B. had just finished at an alternative high school and was living in public housing in Chicago’s Uptown neighborhood. Someone who heard about Imagine Chicago’s Citizen Leaders program brought Tina to participate. She was shy and rarely spoke in the opening meetings. By the fourth meeting, everyone was to have an idea of the project they wanted to create and who might work with them. Tina cared that there were unemployed young men in her neighborhood, some in gangs, who needed something worthwhile to do. She knew they liked to play basketball. The Park District said they didn’t have a basketball league because not enough people were interested.

So Tina did something very simple. She put up a notice asking young men to sign up if they wanted to play basketball. Over 200 people signed up. She decided to organize a league as her Citizen Leaders project. Overwhelmed with interest, but with limited funds, Tina had to solicit donations from local businesses (uniforms, balls), court time from the parks, and find referees. She recounted, “Now, I can hardly walk down the street anymore ‘cause of people yelling ‘Tina, Tina’ ... everybody wants to talk to me.”

By the end of the summer, there were hundreds of people playing basketball in the Uptown league. Rival gangs played together without fighting. The league led into a job-training program for young men. The Park District built it into their program. It inspired the starting of other leagues. Tina, who had been unemployed, got job offers from the Park District and a local high school as a community outreach worker because the project had brought out and made visible her commitment and leadership skills.

Where had Tina begun? With the simple hope that she could make a difference to some friends of hers. Such acts distinguish us as human beings. As it turned out, Tina made a difference that transformed the neighborhood as well as her. She discovered gifts in herself she didn’t know she

had. She brought out gifts in others. Her own commitment got leveraged many times over by other people who got inspired by her own enthusiasm and got involved themselves. Being part of a visible community project nurtured hope because it provided her an opportunity not only to give of herself but to broaden and deepen the community to which she belonged and from which she could learn. That learning community encouraged her to take the necessary risks that making a difference requires.

Using this process of Understand-Imagine-Create encourages discourse about the community not as a given but as a set of systems constantly under construction governed by the choices and activities of individual citizens and collective citizens. A vivid example of this is the Urban Imagination Network's civic literacy program, *Reading Chicago and Bringing it Home*. IMAGINE CHICAGO offers public school parents, who have often been objects in a depersonalized system of education and welfare, the opportunity to understand and shape the systems at the heart of a city's life and a family's budget--transportation, energy, education, food, communication, wealth creation, recreation, housing, health.

The parent program's different components help develop systems thinking in multiple ways. The program has multiple levels of geographic focus: monthly workshops at downtown museums, monthly workshops at school sites in neighborhoods, and home-based activities. The program helps parents develop mental maps that include the past, present and future; parents build understanding of systems over time by looking at what has been as well as what is and what can be. For example, when parents studied transportation issues, they did so at the Chicago Historical Society, beginning with an exercise deciding what items they would have chosen to put in their wagon as a pioneer to go on a long journey (an exercise in setting personal priorities). They heard first person narratives of a pioneer journey to help build a more personal connection to the artifacts in the exhibit hall on pioneer life in Illinois. They discussed why studying history matters. They thought through the relationship of refrigerated railroad transportation and farming to the development of Chicago as a stockyard and mail order center. They examined the citizen action transportation plan currently being debated in the state legislature. They discussed map skills as a core competency required to understand any transportation system.

Parents also think through the relationship between individual and collective change by reflecting on their role as a parent within a family and as a citizen within a city. Imagine Chicago draws out and reinforces those connections in the curriculum frameworks and emphasizes the vital importance of an individual's role in changing a system. Parents learn about city systems in a location outside their own neighborhood; they design activities each month at a local school location; they teach those creative activities to their children at home. So they are constantly moving between different levels of systems as they learn to read their city, their community, their school and to bring that learning home to their children. And they are learning within a community of caring parents with whom they can share ideas. By further encouraging them to save money for educational purposes and leveraging their investment with matched funds, many have now bridged the "digital divide" and connected their whole family to the ongoing learning and job opportunities computer technology provides.

Active citizenship requires both confidence and competence—confidence that peoples' highest aspirations are possible to translate into action and competence to do so. IMAGINE CHICAGO not only *equips* low-income parents as subjects who can contribute through skill building activities, we *treat* them as subjects by respecting their intelligence and interest in learning and their commitment as involved parents. By learning to read their city, they re-envision themselves as educators, community leaders, thinkers, parents, citizens, not objects or victims. As they construct meaning out of information, and exercise civic rights and responsibilities, they become better citizens. Acting as agents of change within their families, their schools and their communities engages them and reshapes their self-understanding as citizens. Re-imagining, reorganizing their relationship to the city and its systems shifts power from unresponsive bureaucratic structures to parents who act on behalf of what they value.

In this and other initiatives, the consciousness of participants changes from being “objects” of city life, in a city which is an IT, to being “subjects” (I decide, I create, I connect, I think) within a city which is a WE. How can we help individuals and institutions learn to think ‘WE’ to think as partners and to live this way, acting together to create a positive future that otherwise would not exist? to be able to say “Chicago is my city. I belong here and I can make it better.” A parent living Pauline, living in public housing, wrote this as her evaluation at the end of the parent program:

*I thought to be alone this year  
to worry about the world and what harm it will bring.  
But I stopped and said no!  
I will break that cycle for my namesake.  
I have been traveling with some friends of mine.  
Their names are Imagine Chicago.  
They taught me many things about the world.  
How it's made up of people, color, beauty, places and opportunity.  
Now I seek to be united, and what greatness I will bring to the world.*

As meaning-making people, we need transcendent connections and a sense of purpose. That requires connecting to generative sources, life giving sources that call us beyond our fears and failures. And it requires communities, from which we can learn, draw courage and recognize that our individual effort is leveraged and exalted when put together with others. We learn to trust people to own their own issues and resources, to do our share but not more than our share, to encourage everyone to play their part in a way that gives life to the whole. Imagine Chicago lives out of an imagination about human life and community that says everyone's gifts are necessary to our common life; we cannot live without each other and thrive.

People find hope and inspiration by being connected to things that are bigger than we are. Hope alone is realistic; it perceives the scope of our real possibilities. Hope does not strive after things that have no place but after things that have no place *as yet* but can acquire one. **Hope is a choice not a feeling.**

I think all of us are called to be mothers, to bear and sustain hope in the world, to see what is in front of us as growing and full of promise. In a time of cynicism and distrust, it takes all of us, women and men, rich and poor, to embrace a collective vocation of being dream bearers and dream keepers of positive family and community futures. What will enable us to open our minds, hearts and wills to see one another as unique creators, to trust one another and the 'freefall' of giving birth to something new? What will nurture our willingness to work together on behalf of a community future in which life flourishes for everyone?

You are here today to help give birth to and nurture some collective dreams...dreams for a healthy Vejle. The invitation is to something deeply worthy, a collective dream worthy of your wholehearted attention. Imagine Chicago has found so far that to give birth to *collective* dreams first requires shifting how we speak and see, where our attention is. Many people live, some by choice, in isolated communities, which has led to a loss of imagination and connection. This can be as true of professional silos as it is of poor communities isolated by structural injustices. We must risk moving to the edge of established comfort zones, share our stories, encounter people different from us who challenge our worldviews and language and open our minds.

The next move is to listen carefully, to 'walk a mile in someone else's shoes.' Hearing what others have lived, what it is possible to live, stretches our imagination about life. Sharing stories around meaningful questions (across divides of race and age and clan) offers a path to empathic seeing and listening which opens the heart. Listening and respecting what gives meaning and purpose to our lives, what calls us forward, transforms us, can begin to heal our divisions. Combining stories with opportunities for creative expression frees imagination and opens up sources of inspiration. Deep change emerges once we are able not only to digest necessary information, redesign structures, and reframe mindsets but attend to and align our actions with sources of collective inspiration and will, becoming faithful to one another and the future which is trying to emerge.

Once a collective dream comes to birth, it is a shared responsibility to protect and sustain its life in the world. Bearing hope into the world is only the beginning; creating the conditions for new life to flourish on a sustained basis is work that requires the time, resources and commitment of the whole human family. Every newborn needs love, food, water, shelter, and an opportunity to learn, in order to survive and thrive. Our community dreams (and mothers) require no less. The blessing is that in this deeply ordinary human work, we rediscover the commitment, purpose, mystery, and deep magic that aligns our lives and the whole system in a more life-giving direction. Listen and love. That brings hope alive.