



The Common Good News
Regis University Institute on the Common Good

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DIRECTOR'S NOTE



One might look at the world today and feel only despair: ongoing violence in the Middle East, terrorism striking throughout the globe, students struggling to get a good education, rising world temperatures. But there is much beauty as well: incredible acts of love, generosity and sacrifice, and still simple sunsets that take one's breath away,

At the core of the Jesuit experience, there is an understanding that one can find the Divine in all things and all people. This belief is world-affirming, recognizing the essence of goodness and beauty of all things. In the Navajo tradition, the blessing way speaks of walking in the beauty all around us. It is begun in beauty, it is finished in beauty. Thich Nhat Hahn, the Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk, has a penetrating walking meditation that says simply, 'walking in this present moment, I know it is a beautiful moment.' In affirming the good, we do not deny the evil or the injustice, but we do open a path to beauty. By opening our hearts to the "other," we open up new ways forward together. This is the way of dialogue and discovery.

~ Paul Alexander, Ph.D.

ICG HIGHLIGHTS

What is happening at the Institute on the Common Good?

ICG's Public Deliberation Initiative

This spring the Institute on the Common Good formed a new partnership with the Council of Public Policy Education (CPPE), a program of the Charles F. Kettering Foundation, to offer workshops, forums and other activities based on a National Issues Forums (NIF) approach to discussing critical community and national issues. ICG joins several organizations across the United States and Canada in engaging students and community members in dialogue about issues that affect their daily lives. Using non-partisan issue books, trained moderators help participants weigh possible ways to address issues, analyze different approaches, and discuss the arguments for and against. National Issues Forums range from small study circles held in peoples' homes to large community gatherings modeled on New England town meetings. Each forum focuses on a specific issue such as health care, immigration, social security and Americans' role in the World. Through deliberation, people broaden their understanding of the issue, find common ground with others, and begin to imagine new and creative ways to work on solving these difficult issues.

During the inaugural year of the Public Deliberation Initiative, ICG will offer a moderator training September 22-23, 2006 and will partner with the newly established Center for Public Deliberation at Colorado State University to offer student-led moderator trainings and public forums. Additionally, ICG will host public forums throughout the year on various community issues. The Institute on the Common Good Public Deliberation Initiative is supported by seed money from CPPE. CPPE provides three-year contracts to institutions of higher education and other organizations that seek to encourage public deliberation through deliberative forums on local, national and international issues. For more information regarding the Public Deliberation workshop, please view the "Upcoming Events" and stay tuned for upcoming community forums.

New Voices at the Civic Table

In January, 2006 the Institute on the Common Good and Turning Point Center were awarded a "New Voices at the Civic Table" grant from the Alliance for Children and Families to increase civic engagement among youth through dialogue. The purpose of the New Voices and the Civic Table Initiative is to provide former Turning Point clients and their families with the tools to be successful and engaged citizens who contribute to their communities in positive, meaningful ways.

The Turning Point Center has provided mental health services to high-risk youth and their families since 1967. The agency mission is "to provide a high quality, structured, and therapeutic environment with growth and change opportunities for everyone involved." Their purpose is to help create a community of empowered, healthy, and responsible families and adolescents. Turning Point's residential programs include adolescent residential care, independent living services, therapy (individual, group, and family), substance abuse treatment, and individualized education. Over the past five years, agency efforts have grown to include



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Illustration: Dreamstime.com

DIALOGUE TIP OF THE MONTH

The Inquirer's Mind

At the core of good dialogue is the paradoxically simple tool of inquiry. We learn and grow by asking questions. The world has been changed countless times when a man or a woman has asked some fundamental question. So we recommend, before stating your own viewpoint or trying to convince another of what you believe, put on the inquirer's mind. Move into a place of wonder and curiosity. Once you have exhausted your questions, move into advocating your position. (You might find your position shifts in listening to another's answers.)

What does good inquiry look like?

- Be truly eager to learn and to listen to another's perspective. Your questions must be sincere.
- Suspend temporarily your own judgment about what is right or wrong. Be momentarily open to new viewpoints, new world views.
- Explore the underlying assumptions, and thinking behind another's words. This will open up a space for both of you. Your questions might be:
 - What leads you to believe that? What experience in your life leads you to that conclusion or observation? Or what data or facts do you have that lead you to that conclusion?
 - Help me to understand your perspective better
 - What core values do you hold that lead you to see it that way?
 - Can you give me some specific examples to illustrate the point you just made?
 - What do people who disagree with your view say?

Often we mask our beliefs or feelings as questions "Don't you think that the recent hurricanes are a result of global warming?" may sound like a question to you but it is really a statement of what you believe. Be careful not to ask questions that are really advocacy in disguise. And don't use questions to mask what you believe either.

And ask questions of yourself as you listen. For example:

- What am I not seeing here?
- What am I feeling here? Why am I so angry at what is being said? What core values of my own are being violated here?
- What in my own life leads me to think differently?

Ask, seek, and gently knock at the door next time. You might find it opens to a whole new world.

DIALOGUE RESOURCE OF THE MONTH

The Public Conversations Project has recently released an excellent guide to dialogue. Entitled **Fostering Dialogue Across the Divides**, it incorporates the learning acquired by PCP over its 17 years of excellent work. You can download it directly at <http://www.publicconversations.org/JAMSGuide.pdf>. Print copies may also be ordered.



**Public
Conversations
Project**

COLLABORATION AT WORK AROUND THE STATE

The Power of Dialogue Behind Closed Doors

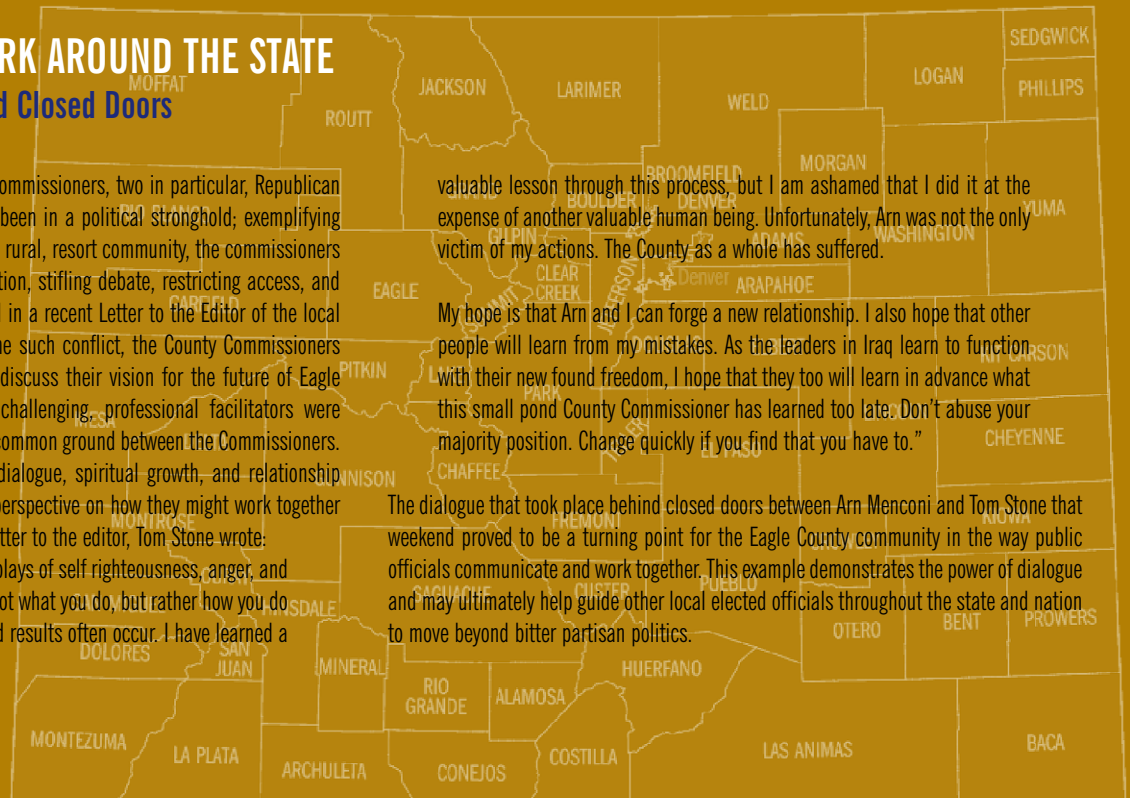
For the past several years the Eagle County Commissioners, two in particular, Republican Tom Stone and Democrat Arn Menconi, have been in a political stronghold; exemplifying typical partisan politics! At the expense of the rural, resort community, the commissioners have participated in "non-inclusion, intimidation, stifling debate, restricting access, and just being a general jerk" as Tom Stone noted in a recent Letter to the Editor of the local daily newspaper. In order to try and overcome such conflict, the County Commissioners came together this summer for a retreat to discuss their vision for the future of Eagle County. Understanding that this would be challenging, professional facilitators were brought in to help guide the retreat and seek common ground between the Commissioners. After an intense weekend of self-discovery, dialogue, spiritual growth, and relationship building, the commissioners left with a new perspective on how they might work together for the better of the community. In a public letter to the editor, Tom Stone wrote:

"There was no excuse for my public displays of self righteousness, anger, and condemnation. Many times in life it is not what you do, but rather how you do it. When passion takes over reason, bad results often occur. I have learned a

valuable lesson through this process, but I am ashamed that I did it at the expense of another valuable human being. Unfortunately, Arn was not the only victim of my actions. The County as a whole has suffered.

My hope is that Arn and I can forge a new relationship. I also hope that other people will learn from my mistakes. As the leaders in Iraq learn to function with their new found freedom, I hope that they too will learn in advance what this small pond County Commissioner has learned too late. Don't abuse your majority position. Change quickly if you find that you have to."

The dialogue that took place behind closed doors between Arn Menconi and Tom Stone that weekend proved to be a turning point for the Eagle County community in the way public officials communicate and work together. This example demonstrates the power of dialogue and may ultimately help guide other local elected officials throughout the state and nation to move beyond bitter partisan politics.



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“community based” or “post-residential” services to youth who have left the facilities. Some progress has occurred in the delivery of professional services, but there is a critical need for improved civic engagement. Because the Turning Point Center’s philosophy incorporates and encourages students to build on their success through service learning and volunteerism, the ICG - Turning Point partnership has built on this strong foundation to further civic engagement and community involvement among clients.

Over the past six months ICG and Turning Point have worked with youth and their families who have graduated from Turning Point’s adolescent residential treatment programs by facilitating dialogues and offering trainings to build their civic capacity. Through group dialogues and trainings in self-advocacy and community organizing, the Turning Point Center staff, former clients, and their

families have had the opportunity to voice what is important to them and begin to civically engage in social issues within their communities. Throughout the dialogues, the youth expressed the need for ongoing peer support to maintain their sobriety and help them to be contributing members of their community. As a result of this initiative, the youth are developing a peer support group and mentoring program for both current Turning Point clients and their families. These programs will provide former clients the opportunity to give back to their community and share their successful experiences with current clients. ICG will continue to offer trainings and facilitative support as the peer support groups and mentoring programs are developed. For more information regarding this initiative and others please visit the ICG web-site at <http://icgregis.org>

GUEST COLUMN

Registered Neighborhood Organizations in the City of Denver: An Underutilized Resource for Building Civic Health

Drew O’Connor is Executive Director of Capitol Hill United Neighborhoods, a 40-year-old registered neighborhood organization with the City of Denver. He can be reached at 303-830-1651 or drewoconnor@chundenver.org.

Neighborhood-level challenges in the City of Denver have long been the purview of well-developed and skilled registered neighborhood organizations (RNOs) that have been successful at impacting many issues such as liquor licensing, in-fill development, neighborhood and business district zoning and historic preservation. With over 205 neighborhood organizations registered with the city’s Community Planning and Development Department, they are the one of the richest available resources of personal and associational connectivity in the city.

RNOs emerged in Denver about 40 years ago around concerns about one-way streets, traffic, parking and residential zoning. As fledgling resident groups attempting to influence an established city bureaucracy not designed for active community participation, oppositional community organizing became their operating principle out of necessity. Over the years, these skills have been honed by RNOs and commonly continue to be the tools of choice for engaging residents and affecting policy. But now 40 years later, does the current climate demand the same approach? And are RNOs utilizing the full aptitude of their capacity to strengthen the civic health in Denver’s neighborhoods? The answer to both of these infrequently asked questions is most probably not.

Rather than going into a full analysis of how the environment in Denver has changed from the time when RNOs were first established and therefore requires a new approach, I’d like to instead paint a picture of what would happen to registered neighborhood organizations in the City of Denver if they were to, wholly or in part, adopt the practices of dialogue and deliberation as a fundamental component of their work. First, let’s provide a working definition of these terms. Dialogue is a process of genuine association through which people listen to each other deeply enough to be changed by what they learn. Each makes a serious effort to take others’ concerns into her or his own picture, even when disagreement persists. Bringing together various viewpoints on an issue is an inherent characteristic of dialogue in this context. Deliberation is group reasoning and choice-making based on values deemed most important by that group. When paired, dialogue and deliberation complete a loop of human interaction which leads from increased understanding to shared decision-making.

So how would RNOs and the neighborhoods they serve be changed by the adoption of dialogue and deliberation as a working philosophy?

Inclusivity

The issues and structure of Denver’s neighborhood organizations have evolved from the participation of the dominant group involved – homeowners. Over time, this has resulted in a form of civic self-selection that attracts those with homeowner-driven concerns who are comfortable with traditional styles of engagement such as Robert’s Rules of Order. This has resulted in the exclusion of other neighborhood members such as renters, business owners, and social service agencies. The current dynamic can be described as “the same issues with the same approaches bring together the same people”. In a dialogue and deliberation approach, RNOs would take active steps to engage diverse people, perspectives and ideas in their conversations about neighborhood vitality. Because of the inherently respectful nature of D&D, methods and forms of engagement would evolve to fulfill the well-being of the group. With higher degrees of understanding among diverse perspectives fostered by a D&D approach, dynamic notions of neighborhood vitality would result and a more broadly reflective set of neighborhood interests would emerge.

Proactivity

Denver’s neighborhood organizations are primarily constructed to react to a problem or occurrence such as crime, a new development project or a liquor license application. Its not typical they look upstream at challenges and attempt to think and plan in advance. This modis operandi triggers two results – RNOs are placed in a yes or no situation due to a lack of planning and forethought and are tagged with the NIMBY (Not In My BackYard) label often heard. Further, they are apt to miss opportunities to address larger trends in neighborhoods because of a lack of deeper analysis and discussion. If neighborhood organizations were to adopt D&D methods, decision-making would be expanded from a narrow “yes or no” resolution to offer many more options for addressing issues. The probing and exploratory quality of good dialogue would unearth deeper challenges and conflicts that could be worked on before they turn into the latest hot button issue. In Denver right now, neighborhood organizations are concerned about the preservation of historic neighborhood character, affordable housing advocates are promoting fair distribution of mixed income housing and sustainability experts are espousing urban density. Their values and visions both overlap and conflict. But they aren’t talking to each other.

Civic Health

While Denver’s RNOs do provide an avenue for civic participation in neighborhood and city-wide policy issues, they are not organizations with the specific goal of enhancing civic health in neighborhoods. The “same issues, using the same methods with the same people” syndrome in which most find themselves indicates a narrow set of interests drives their agenda, rather than an interest in improving civic infrastructure of the broader neighborhood. With the implementation of dialogue and deliberation strategies, neighborhood organizations would engage diverse perspectives, attracting more people to their membership base creating the kind of bridging social capital that is vital in urban communities. D&D methodology would help to develop deeper connection and trust among neighbors and a clearer sense of shared values. People would be more bound together, which is in itself, a worthy outcome for a neighborhood organization.

Broader Implications

Certainly, no neighborhood organization would be able to wave a magic wand and suddenly become adept in dialogue and deliberation tools and methods. The adoption of D&D would require gradual learning and implementation that includes training, on-going coaching, and the creation of the necessary space to address the organizational change likely to occur with a new approach, new people and new issues. But the RNOs that are able to move degrees in this direction would become more powerful organizations in the City of Denver, convening not just homogeneous interests, but divergent ones and representing more fully the people of their community. The direct pipeline registered neighborhood organizations currently have to city departments and city council could potentially change the way the City responds to neighborhoods, impact the issues they choose to prioritize and influence how the issues are framed. With a shift towards dialogue and deliberation, Denver’s registered neighborhood organizations could move from success to significance, leading the way on complex challenges rather than responding belatedly with a yes or no vote.



MARK YOUR CALENDARS Fall 2006 Upcoming Events

Public Deliberation Workshop September 22-23, 2006

The Institute on the Common Good at Regis University will host a two day Public Deliberation Workshop September 22nd and 23rd, 2006. The workshop will equip new moderators with the skills and materials necessary to introduce deliberative public forums to their neighbors, groups, organizations, or community. The workshop will introduce and extensively explore the deliberative process used by the National Issues Forum (NIF), a nonpartisan, nationwide network of locally sponsored public forums for the consideration of public policy issues. NIF is rooted in the basic idea that people need to talk and to reason together — to deliberate — about how to respond to matters of shared concern.

Workshop participants receive training and practice in moderating deliberative forums, become acquainted with NIF materials, learn how to organize forums, and acquire a thorough understanding of the importance and effectiveness of community deliberation in developing a civic (community) perspective on public policy issues. An actual forum focusing on immigration will be incorporated into the workshop to enhance participants' learning and skill building.

The workshop will take place at Regis University from 8-5pm. The cost is \$70.00 per person with scholarships available.

If you are interested in attending this workshop or would like more information, please visit our website at <http://icgregis.org> and click on upcoming events. Or please contact Katie Bruen at 303.458.4967 or cbuen@regis.edu

For more information regarding any of the upcoming events or for a list of other future events visit our web-site at www.icgregis.org or contact us at (303) 458-4967.

Immigration Forums:

September 21, 2006

National Issues Forum Dialogue

Mountain View Room, 6:30 to 9:30pm

September 26, 2006

A Catholic Dialogue on Immigration with panelists:

Regis University St. John Francis Regis Chapel

7:00 p.m.

Sr. Kathleen Erickson, Co-founder of the Women's Intercultural Center

Cheryl Martinez, Director of Catholic Charities Immigration Services

Mar Munoz-Visoso, Executive Director, Centro Juan Diego



David Trimble

Transforming Religious Conflict Into Lasting Peace

October 19, 2006 | 7 p.m.

Regis University, Denver, Colorado
St. John Francis Regis Chapel

Mr. Trimble was awarded the Nobel Prize for his role in negotiating the Good Friday agreement in Northern Ireland, which provided a formula for power-sharing in the civil-war torn province and set it on the path to the relative peace it currently enjoys. Mr. Trimble's courageous and visionary decision, as the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party to engage in dialogue and negotiation with his nationalist counterpart John Hume (who spoke at Regis in 2003) is rightly recognized as a decisive step in the resolution of this seemingly intractable conflict.

Need Help?

If you believe you may be in need of the collaborative dialogue resources of the Institute please do not hesitate to give Katie Bruen a call at 303-458-4967, e-mail us at icg@regis.edu, or visit our website at www.icgregis.org.

MISSION STATEMENT OF THE INSTITUTE ON THE COMMON GOOD

To promote the common good through the use of dialogue, discernment and democratic deliberation.



Institute on the Common Good

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