



Thinking Outside the Box (While Loving the Box)

August 8, 2022

Last week we started a reflection on possibilities vs. problem solving in community. Peter Block in his creative work, *Community: The Structure of Belonging*⁺ contrasts restorative versus retributive community conversations. A retributive community conversation focuses on problems and who is to blame for them, a past oriented approach. Restorative community conversation focuses on what we can create together, a future oriented approach.

In a retributive context, the values of scarcity, leadership, individualism, fear, and fault predominate. We are all too familiar with the scenario—choose a leader we believe has the strategies and skills to solve the problems we face, wring our hands about all we lack that, if we had it would solve the problem, fear innovation and failure, and then blame the leader when he or she does not lead us to solutions. Our current culture sways in this context like a dingy in a squall.

In a restorative context, we band together and take responsibility together for the failures of the past and our share in responsibility for the current situation. We hold ourselves accountable for the current situation rather than blaming someone else and trust that together we can commit to creating an alternative future. We keep discussion focused on questions like "What can we create together that we cannot apart from each other?"

Our Holy Conversations were an example of a community assessing its strengths, taking responsibility for its past, especially in the healing liturgy, and dreaming together about a different future we can create together.

It is not that we ignore our problems. Rather, we set them in a new context of hope for transformation and creative possibility. We do not blame others; rather, we take responsibility ourselves and persist in looking for the new and lovely possibilities we can hold together and live toward. Ongoing conversation set in that context is key to something new emerging.

Block talks about a community making". . . a declaration of a future that has a quality of being and aliveness that we choose to live into." *

Peace,

David W. Perkins+, Interim Rector

⁺Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging*, 2nd. edition (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 2018). See especially chapter 4, "The Restorative Community," pp. 49ff.

*Block, p. 131.