



information

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ADVENT'S DEEPER INVITATION WALKING THE ANCIENT PATH

By Ted Dunn, PhD

This is what the LORD says: "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. But you said, 'We will not walk in it.' (Jeremiah 6:16)

Advent is a time of celebrating the birth of Jesus and preparing our hearts for the coming of Christ through the virtues of hope, joy, love and peace. It is a time of waiting, but not the kind we do while waiting for

This inner work of transformation is our proactive way of cooperating with grace in order to bring Christ into the world. There is nothing passive about it.

This Advent season is situated within a backdrop of our world racked in pain and poised on the brink of either promise or peril. There is a Great Turning taking place across our planetary home that is bringing all earthly life to a crossroads. Some are waiting passively

remains to be seen what path we will ultimately choose, but the hour of our existential crisis is at hand.

Religious Life itself is situated in this same Great Turning and each community is facing its own graced crossroads. Grace, of course, is in every nook and cranny of creation. But when we as individuals or communities of faith hit bottom, we have a unique accessibility to grace that otherwise eludes us in ordinary

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an Amazon package to arrive. It is not a passive waiting. It is an *active* waiting wherein we are fully engaged in prayer, fasting and the labor of giving birth. It is a time when we consciously attune ourselves to the divine Presence in our lives. It is a time of listening and responding to that deeper invitation to love and live more fully.

to see what happens, while others are actively participating in shaping the future. Humanity might choose the path of least resistance, which we know will lead to death and destruction.

Or we, together, might choose an ancient path, a path of deep change and transformation that could potentially lead us to humanity's next evolutionary leap. It

times.

In the darkness, with all of its ambiguity and loss of certitude about the future, we are left to rely on instruments of faith. During times of transition, the veil between ordinary life and the Divine Presence becomes thin, and grace does more abound. Here, at this graced crossroads, there is a deeper invitation.

Some communities will actively listen for the deeper invitation and respond to it, while most will not. Why not?

Most communities will approach these crossroads by employing conventional change methods like strategic planning. Unfortunately, research tells us that conventional approaches are not suited for unconventional times such as these. These methods are woefully inadequate in bringing about deep change in a community's culture. Even so, most communities will engage in conventional planning, hoping to transform their lives. Out of fear, however, they will avoid the chaos, ambiguity, intimacy and inner work that is integral to transformation.

Communities will need to use some form of strategic planning when it comes to the pragmatic changes that demand their attention (e.g., buildings, property, healthcare, etc.). However, such methods, alone, will not suffice in transforming communities. These approaches will need to be adapted,

used flexibly, and incorporated creatively into other processes. In order to transform your lives, you will need to integrate these conventional planning and visioning methods into processes aimed specifically at deep change and transformation.

Toward this end, I have offered communities an approach that relies on the principles and processes of transformation as a means for cooperating with grace described in my book, *Graced Crossroads*. The foundation for this approach rests upon three sets of knowledge:

- 1) *empirical knowledge* acquired from contemporary science and the humanities;
- 2) *experiential knowledge* gleaned from our own life experiences of transformation; and,
- 3) *soul knowledge* gathered from ancient and contemporary faith traditions, shedding light on what it means to embrace a faith journey.

It is from these foundations that

I propose five key principles of transformation.

1. *Maturation is a lifelong opportunity*
2. *Growth and transformation move in spirals*
3. *We plateau for a time, then transform*
4. *We breakdown to breakthrough*
5. *It is pain that brings us to the graced crossroads, but it is Love that pulls us through.*

I further propose five dynamic elements that when woven together constitute the key processes used in a communal journey of transformation:

1. *Shifts in consciousness: creating a new narrative*
2. *Reclaim our inner voice: the seat and soul of everything that lives*
3. *Reconciliation and conversion: the womb of our becoming*
4. *Experimentation and*



learning: acting our way into a new way of being

5. *Transformative visioning: listening to our deepest longings*

These five dynamic elements comprise the inner work of transformation in which communities will need to engage, as this empowers them to cooperate with grace and transform their lives. These five dynamic elements are the transformative processes into which the more conventional processes can be incorporated and used to shape a vision for a community's future.

This approach addresses your entire life and mission, not just the bricks and mortar of your lives. It engages

of your community. The Divine Mystery of transformation can only partially be understood from our human perspective; the rest is left to mystery. The parts we can't see (grace of ambiguity) and can't control (grace of chaos) are integral to any faith journey.

These underlying and unnerving aspects of a transformative journey require that communities grow in their capacity to use their instruments of faith (e.g., prayer, contemplation and discernment). Even so, at the end of all of your planning, praying, organizing, discerning, implementing and evaluating, transformation will require that you choose to take a leap of faith. The rest is grace.

a hand in determining the eventual fate of Religious Life and of our planet. You could choose to sit on the sideline and wait and see what happens. Or, you could choose to participate as proactive agents of transformation. You could listen for that deeper invitation and choose the ancient path of faith, a heroic journey.

Richard Rohr reminds us: "The 'Second Coming of Christ' ... should more accurately be spoken of as the 'Forever Coming of Christ'.... the ongoing promise of eternal resurrection."

During this Advent season, at these graced crossroads, there exists a profound opportunity to engage actively in the Divine Mystery of transformation and

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and integrates the heart and soul of your members as you plan and shape your vision for the future. It goes beyond what you can see on the surface to also address the patterns, structures, worldviews and, indeed, the very culture and soul

This leap of faith and the path of transformation are ancient paths of peril and promise. I, and others, can offer guidance, but the choices are yours to make. Your choices will determine, not only your own future, but will have

respond to God's call to new life. We can choose to participate proactively in this eternal resurrection. We can cooperate with grace by doing our own personal and communal inner work of transformation. We can give life to our deepest

longings called forth by the lure and love of God, thus enabling humanity and Religious Life to take the next step along the evolutionary spiral. Stand at the crossroads and discern the ancient paths where the good way lies. Walk in it and find rest for your souls.

Dr. Ted Dunn provides consulting, training and facilitation services to religious

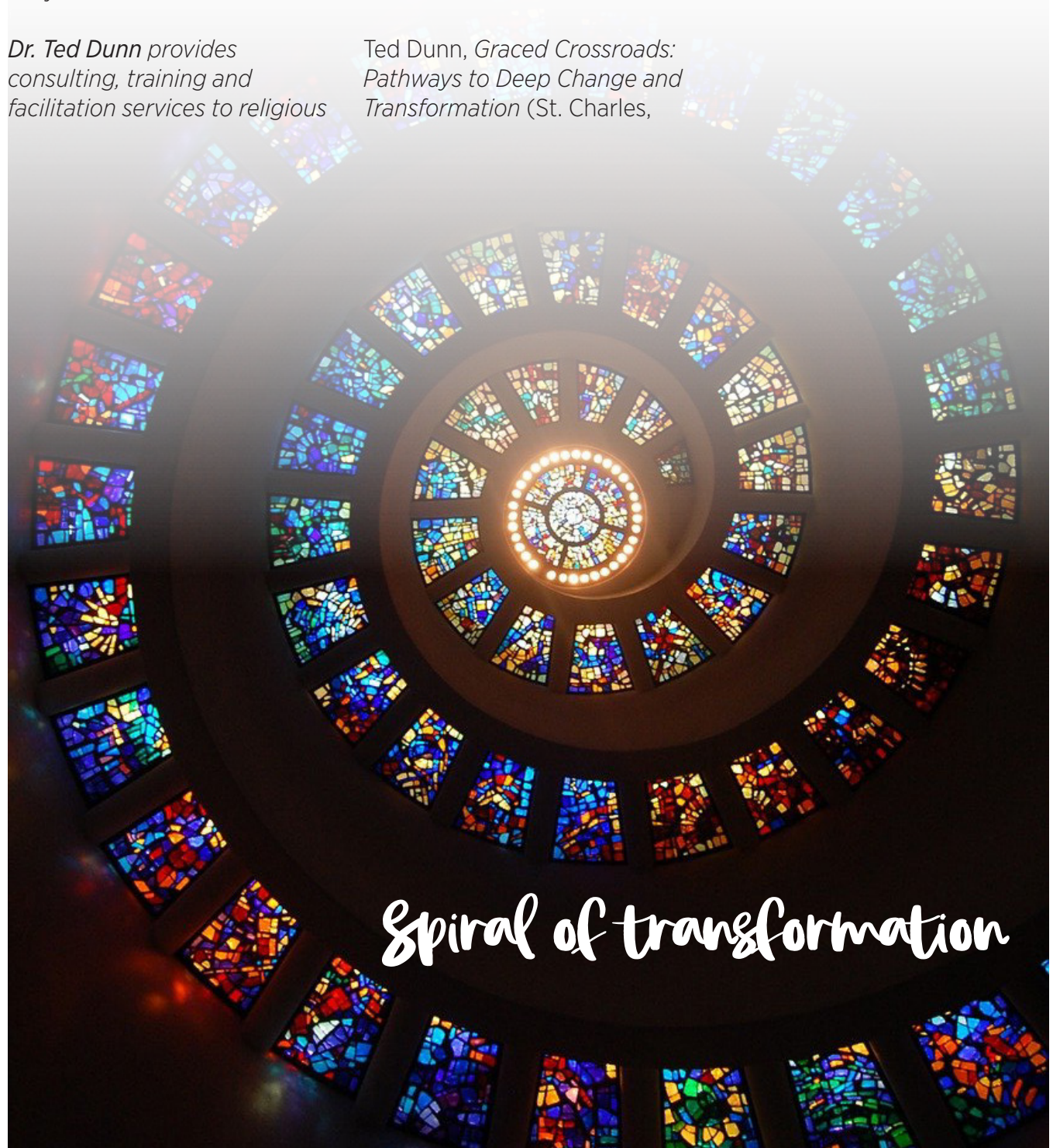
communities and other value-based organizations throughout the United States, Canada, Mexico, Central America, Africa, and Europe. His consulting website is www.ccsstlouis.com.

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Spiral of transformation