

Imagination, Grace & Social Regeneration

Joseph Murphy

Joseph Murphy, is the founder of the Good Grace Foundation and Graceworks, small grassroots organizations based in UK, Egypt & Kenya. He has over 20 years' experience working for social and environmental renewal as a "Reflective Practitioner" with the homeless and those in trauma.

The following edited extracts are taken from the transcript of a longer talk he presented during the World Goodwill Seminar on 6 November 2021 on the theme: Imagination and Social Regeneration. A video of the full talk is available at: worldgoodwill.org/video#jm ; further information on the theme and the seminar at: worldgoodwill.org/regeneration.

When I started thinking about imagination and social regeneration I remembered the times in my life when I started new endeavours and things seemed difficult. "This cannot be done", I would think. And people would say to me: "Why bother? Nobody cares ... don't waste your time ... it's best to stick with what you know."

But I also remembered occasions when I thought about all the things that are being used every day all around me. They did not design or make themselves. Although the components came from the earth the ideas to make them came from the imagination of people around the world through the centuries. And each one of them will at some time or other have had the thought or been told by others: "it's impossible ... why bother ... don't waste your time."

As Colin Wilson said "Imagination should be used, not to escape reality, but to create it." The understanding that energy follows thought is one of the most treasured gifts that any of us can have. If only we would sense its true power. The same can be said of the idea that as a person thinketh in their heart then so they become. For, truly, we create our own environment, our own life, our own story. And when we use the imagination to bring ideas into the world to benefit life on the planet, we also champion the collective story. In my opinion it's at least partly a question of intent. When we look at all the ingenious things that have been created, designed we need to look at the intent of the design. Was it in line with our place as custodians of life on this planet, or was it based on an insatiable appetite to consume to our hearts desire, no matter the costs to our health, our sister's health or the health of our planetary home?

For many years I worked on the streets supporting homeless people with the Community of Grace in Leicester. The founders, Rev. David Morris and Barbara Brown, created something like home and family for those who had lost their own home. They believed in whoever came to stay, and gave them the time and space to heal, to nurture, to reflect and grow. They always believed that everyone had hidden talents raw power skills yet to be used and developed and that Grace is always with us.

What is grace we may ask? It can be thought of as elegance, stylishness, poise, favour, good will, generosity, love ... as unmerited divine assistance given to humans for their generation or sanctification ... as a state of sanctification enjoyed through divine assistance.

From this divine sacredness flows the good grace of the holy spirit, the divine Sophia, as she sings through the harmony of the spheres and all creation in the unison of love.

So, from my base in the Community of Grace, working with the homeless, I began to imagine group projects to further the growth of community and right relations. Each time I was confronted by my own doubts and by the doubts of others. Once again, it cannot be done, why bother.

For years I used to walk past an old derelict playground, and after hearing that it may be turned into yet another car park, I felt we had to act. All too often we see the concrete urbanisation of our cities and the loss of green spaces. We raised over forty thousand pounds and working with a team of volunteers the space was transformed into Moira Street Pocket Park. It is now a thriving public garden, looked after by a self-help diabetes group.

Many things come from humble beginnings! The Good Grace Foundation, and Graceworks were born, and a series of programmes developed to “enable people to live and enjoy sustainable lifestyles and promote well-being”. Land behind a United Reform Church has become a community garden and land-learning centre delivering permaculture, bee keeping, aquaponics training and much more. Graceworks is now part of a network of garden-based community projects in the area, ‘Grow Together’, sharing a common aim to “help communities to act together for the common good”.

And our work has moved beyond Leicester and the UK as Graceworks have become a key partner with the African Population and Health Research Centre, delivering urban food growing and nutrition centres to those living below the poverty line in the slums of Nairobi. Right now, we are in process of developing the Jorah-Grace Complex on a 1,000 acre site in Kenya. The ground-breaking rehabilitation complex will assist individuals in recovery from addiction, while at the same time offering employment and income generating opportunities, transforming the local economies through a whole systems approach. Education and training facilities will be available as well as a solar complex and innovative green technologies to facilitate sustainable one planet living.