State of the Village

Superintendent’s Corner
Dr. David Hopson
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Over the years I’ve used various reports on the global state of affairs that was started by Donella Meadows in 1990 which was known as the State of the Village (what the world looks like it was reduced to a village of 1000 individuals) to demonstrate how fortunate we are in the developed world and particularly in our hilltowns. While this report has changed over the years, it still shows a world in which inequities are great, diversity is significant, and many struggle to live.

In the 2019 study done by the University of Southern Maine’s Office of International Programs, if the world were condensed down to a village of 100 individuals, we’d see the following. A small portion (6%) own nearly 60% of the world’s wealth, 74% own 39% of the world’s wealth and 20% of the population survives on the remaining 2% of the wealth (they are essentially living on $1.25 per day or less). This leads to 30 individuals always having enough to eat (with half of those overweight), 50 would be malnourished, and 20 would be undernourished (with 1 dying of starvation). 80 villagers would live in substandard housing, 20 have no clean, safe water to drink, 18 have no electricity and 43 live without basic sanitation.

The villagers would have trouble communicating effectively as 17 speak Chinese, 8 speak Hindi, 6 speak Russian, 6 speak Spanish, 4 Speak Arabic, and 50 speak over 200 other languages. English is spoken by only 9 of the villagers. Religiously the village is a diverse group consisting of 33 Christians, 21 Muslims, 13 Hindus, 6 Buddhists, 1 Sikhs, 1 Jewish, 11 practicing other religions, 11 that are non-religious and 3 that are Atheists. Of the 100 villagers, only 30 are white and only 8 are from North America. Children aged 0 to 14 constitute 25% of the population and only 9% of the population are 65 years or older.

In this village, 12 people are unable to read and only 1 has a college degree. For access to technology, 12 people have a computer but only 8 have an internet connection. Of the villagers, 12 are disabled, 1 has HIV/AIDS, 1 has tuberculosis and a small minority have adequate health care.

Perhaps most frightening is that 48 of the villagers can’t speak, act according to their faith and conscience due to harassment, imprisonment, torture or death and 20 live in constant fear of death by bombardment, armed attack, landmines, or of rape or kidnapping by armed groups.

So, as we celebrate Thanksgiving this year, let us count our blessings, for if you translate this hypothetical village to the world, we would see that if you woke up healthy this morning – you are more blessed that the million who will not survive this week; if you have never experienced the danger of battle, the fear and loneliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture, or the pain of starvation – you are better off than 500 million people in the world; if you have food in the refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof overhead and a place to sleep – you are more comfortable than 75% of the world’s population; if you have money in the bank, in your wallet
and spare change – you are among the top 8% of the world’s wealthy; and, if you are reading this, you are more blessed than over two billion people in the world who cannot read at all.

As we consider the clean air, open spaces, stability, safety, the small-town atmosphere in our communities and the good fortune that most of us enjoy, it’s hard to imagine living a different life. Is it education that provides an edge in the world? Is the acceptance of others essential to success? Is it compassion for others and generosity of spirit that makes our towns successful even though they are essentially run by volunteers? Certainly, the idea of service to others, of shared expectations, of common goals, and of striving to make our communities better are all important aspects to improving our lives throughout our small towns and in being good neighbors to all.