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Dayton Dreaming

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All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.

Sitting on a park bench watching the Great Miami River drift through downtown Dayton makes me feel like paraphrasing Otis Redding: Two thousand miles I roam, just to make this city my home. Everything still remains the same. But instead of wasting my time, I'm dreaming of a different Dayton. Sitting on the bench watching the river roll away; dreaming, dreaming, dreaming Dayton.

The early church with its practice of having all goods in common swirls around my head. After all, Christian communities of shared goods do exist in the United States. For example, there's Reba Place in Evanston, Illinois; a Mennonite congregation in an urban setting. Members of this fellowship have sold possessions, moved into shared space, and practice economic sharing and alms-giving. Our self-interest can hardly imagine an economy based on common need.

O.K. Reba Place is out of the question, but what if a coalition of churches in downtown Dayton held a summit to discuss ways to revive our city? And, for the sake of argument, let's suppose that the summit participants agreed to an action plan.

Members of the congregations move to the city. New homes are built, old homes restored, and more condos constructed.

The downtown churches purchase the 111 Building on the corner of Ludlow and First Street and the Beerman Building on the corner of Main and Monument. These buildings are converted to senior citizen housing and affordable housing for

city firefighters, police, teachers, and city employees.

The Arcade opens again – converted, not to a gambling casino, as many fervently hope, but to a multi-story shopping, office, and residential complex. On the first floor, Dorothy Lane Market opens a store. Lord and Taylor opens a store in the Arcade. Restaurants open in the building. At Christmas time the department store windows again spring to life in a reincarnation of Rike's. Children press cold noses to the glass in wide-eyed wonder.

Streets fill, day and night, with an amazing diversity of people. The sheer joy of aliveness echoes through the corridors. Downtown becomes a walking mall (no cars), with trees, shrubbery, flowers. A new elementary school, a new middle school, and an early college academy open in the city. The Miami River Chautauqua is founded and attracts thousands of visitors each summer to shows, conferences, and seminars.

As the city fills with people, doctors follow and open offices. The Miami Valley Hospital opens an out-patient clinic. The University of Dayton and Wright State University partner with Sinclair to offer additional courses in new buildings. The Dayton Daily News has to open an office back downtown to cover the excitement.

People live, work, walk, play, and worship in a thriving Dayton that is racially, culturally, and economically inclusive. Gays and straights live in harmony and without malice. Young families stroll the streets at night after attending a movie (that's right, a multi-plex cinema in the heart of the city).

People representing a montage of race, class, and culture learn how to be true neighbors. Old black-white grudges dissipate. The sound of chips falling off old shoulders can be heard on both sides of the river. Angry old black men mellow; mean old white people lighten up. An old city changes from black-and-white to a living color, multi-dimensional urban delight.

Well, I say yes! Dream Dayton! Dream, dream, dream!

