Preface

The Community Peacebuilding and Cultural Sustainability (CPCS) Initiative provides research and analysis for critical challenge alerts, and research and support for collaborative problem solving and community education initiatives which seek to maximize citizen participation, and accelerate solution-oriented activity.

Unprecedented Challenges Ahead…

Using a selection of statistics and observations gleaned from thousands of sources and decades of research (see links to longer CPCS Initiative documents on CPCS website homepage at www.cpcsi.org), this writer has identified ten challenges as the most critical challenges of our times (there is a list of the ten challenges identified on p. 9). Careful arrangements of representative excerpts from such sources provide supporting evidence for each of the ten challenges (see Section II), encourage "connecting the dots" moments, and illustrate that there are unprecedented challenges ahead (Ex: Global Warming; Cultures of Violence, Greed, Corruption, and Overindulgence; The End of the Fossil Fuel Era).

Much emphasis is given, in this summary paper, to the challenge "A Marginalization of the Treasured Wisdom of Religious, Spiritual, and Moral Traditions"—which is singled out as a root cause of all the other challenges (see six point summary of supporting evidence in Section III).

The dual imperatives of "recalibrating our moral compasses" and responding to unprecedented challenges—at the same time—will, this writer believes, require collaborative problem solving and community education on a scale most of us have never known before.

… Call for Unprecedented Solutions

In Section IV, this writer describes four collaborative problem solving and community education approaches—"Recalibrating Our Moral Compasses" Surveys, Community Visioning Initiatives, Neighborhood Learning Centers, and Neighbor to Neighbor Community Education—which are offered as examples of what we will need to accomplish the unprecedented cultural transformation ahead.

"Recalibrating Our Moral Compasses" Surveys:

1) are a very careful and conscientious approach to identifying critical challenges and solution-oriented activity—and to comparing that input with working definitions for "right livelihood" and "moral compasses" (to increase consensus on such definitions)—which could do much to increase the reliability of our "moral compasses" at this critical time.
2) can help citizens in every variety of circumstances to understand and appreciate the need for Community Visioning Initiatives and Neighborhood Learning Centers
3) can provide starting point input for the kind of workshops needed in Neighborhood Learning Centers

Community Visioning Initiatives can be described as a series of community meetings designed to maximize citizen participation in identifying challenges, and in solution-oriented activity.

The more comprehensive Community Visioning Initiatives (which may last 6 months or longer) require steering committees; preliminary surveys or assessments; workshops; task forces; and collaboration between many organizations, government agencies, businesses, and educational institutions—and seek to build up consensus in the community for specific goals and action plans by encouraging a high level of participation by all residents.

This writer's interest in Community Visioning Initiatives was inspired instantly when, in 1994, he watched a video documentary titled "Chattanooga: A Community With A Vision" (https://vimeo.com/9653090) (13 minutes). The video includes many interviews and how-to details, and documents two very successful Community Visioning Initiatives organized by the non-profit organization Chattanooga Venture (Chattanooga, Tennessee USA)—one in 1984, and a follow-up in 1993. The 1984 Chattanooga Community Visioning Project ("Vision 2000") attracted more than 1,700 participants, and produced 40 community goals—which resulted in the implementation of 223 projects and programs, the creation of 1,300 permanent jobs, and a total financial investment of 793 million dollars (see footnote 6 for Section IV, in "Notes and Source References" section).

We have the resources necessary to overcome the challenges of our times. What we need more of now are collaborative problem solving processes which help citizens understand that the investments of time, energy, and money (the "votes") each of us make in our everyday circumstances become the larger economy. And that wisely directed, such "votes" can result in countless ways of earning a living *which contribute to—rather than impair*—the peacebuilding, community revitalization, and ecological sustainability efforts necessary to reach positive tipping points on many critical challenges at the same time. Citizens from every variety of circumstances can learn how to wisely cast such "votes"—through workshops and meetings at Neighborhood Learning Centers during a Community Visioning Initiative, and through other local learning experiences.

Creating many Neighborhood Learning Centers can provide places—in local neighborhoods—for discussion, information sharing, mutual support and encouragement, and fellowship and friendship, so that the exchanging of information and resources can also make significant contributions to the process of building "close-knit" communities of people... communities with a healthy appreciation for each other's strengths, communities with a well-developed capacity to resolve even the most difficult challenges—and communities which demonstrate a high level of compassion for their fellow human beings.

In this time of unprecedented challenges—and especially in the context of collaborative problem solving on a scale most of us have never known before—there are going to be countless opportunities for reconciliation. There are going to be countless opportunities for arriving at a new appreciation of the personal qualities, skills, and beliefs of our neighbors and fellow citizens—personal qualities, skills, and beliefs which we once might have thought were only being directed towards outcomes with serious negative consequences for many people. And there are going to be countless opportunities for all of us— ourselves, our neighbors and our fellow citizens—to become part of a system of mutual support and encouragement in our local communities, as we respond to multiple, unprecedented challenges.

Organizers of collaborative problem solving processes who believe that the exponential increase in compassion which needs to happen will happen, and the unprecedented level of problem solving that needs to happen will happen, will be focusing more on building a collaborative problem solving approach which people from every variety of circumstances can trust and believe in… trust and believe will make best use of the knowledge, skills, and resources each one of us has.

The thinking behind bringing "discover our collective spiritual destiny" into the discussion

As a conclusion to this shorter introduction, here are some thoughts about the subtitle of this Summary Paper: "to resolve unprecedented challenges and discover our collective spiritual destiny".

It has taken a lot of being confused about the cardinal directions on our "moral compasses" to get where we are (global warming can be understood as the cumulative result of many other unresolved issues which have, by themselves, become critical challenges)—and many of the unresolved issues contributing to global warming have been around since the dawn of civilization (Ex: cultures of violence, greed, corruption, and overindulgence). This writer believes we will need to make unprecedented progress towards resolving these timeless challenges of human nature—*even though these challenges have become so common that many of us accept such as inevitable.* Thus, we are in uncharted territory, for there is no culture or association of societies that ever existed on planet Earth which has had to resolve the kind of challenges the next few generations of people will have to resolve.

At this critical time, this writer believes we cannot afford to exclude from our "tool box" the time-tested sources which have helped people learn wisdom and compassion over many centuries. Even further, this writer believes it is now essential for us to access the storehouses of wisdom and compassion which have accumulated over the many centuries of human experience, and which have been confirmed again and again as essential to individual well-being and social harmony by the saints, sages, spiritual leaders, and sincere practitioners of all religious, spiritual, and moral traditions. And yet… this is the very treasured wisdom which is now marginalized in our fast-paced modern world… in the most complex cultural landscapes ever created. [Note: If readers carefully explore thirteen of the most representative and most well-known critical challenge assessments and solution guides from the past fifty years (see p. 25 for a list of the thirteen), they will find that these critical challenge assessments and solution guides do not give serious attention to variations in human morality as a significant factor affecting the nature of the challenges of our times (even now, when we are in uncharted territory, in the most complex cultural landscapes ever created).][See also the description and supporting points for "Neighbor to Neighbor Community Education" Projects (p.43-45)]

That there has not yet been much attention given to designing collaborative problem solving approaches as comprehensive as the ones described in Section IV can—most likely—be attributed to the fact that *the need for problem solving on the scale this paper is advocated for is far from being widely recognized.* However, once the need for unprecedented forms of collaborative problem solving and community education become more commonly accepted—and the natural creativity and capacity for innovation which we human beings have shown ourselves capable of becomes more focused on designing collaborative problem solving and community education models—and even more so, once we, collectively, have gone far beyond the kind of collaborative problem solving and community education

most of us are familiar with—we may feel that we cannot easily set aside the opportunity to know, one way or the other, whether we can achieve goals which, for the longest time, many of us have dismissed as far beyond our levels of experience, and the leanings of our aspirations… goals like world peace.

Can we have unprecedented access to the storehouses of wisdom and compassion which have accumulated over 5,000 years of human experience—and make practical application of such wisdom and compassion to overcome the most unprecedented challenges ever faced by humankind—and then _not_ explore what our collective spiritual destiny might look like if such wisdom and compassion was integrated into the everyday circumstances of community life, in communities around the world?

Confidence (not just confidence in financial markets, but confidence in our viability as a species) will be dimmed by a lack of clarity until there is truthful public discourse on the full dimensions of the critical challenges ahead.

If we have serious concerns about the nature and reliability of our "moral compasses" at this critical time, *and let those serious concerns go unresolved* (even now, when we are in uncharted territory, in the most complex cultural landscapes ever created)--

a) we may lose significant traction and critical momentum on challenges for which there is an urgent need to reach positive tipping points
b) we may do more to create widespread cynicism, rather than confidence, about our collective capacity to resolve the unprecedented challenges we face.

We can, instead, arrive at the kind of collaborative problem solving and community education initiatives we truly need: initiatives which carefully and continuously (through ongoing monitoring) seek to achieve a meaningful balance between the urgent need to "frontload" specific issue-related agendas, and an even more serious priority: for all of us to understand--

> a) how much we need to be learning to so that we can be part of the solutions
> b) how much we need to be making best use of the knowledge and skills each one of us has
> c) how much we need to be on the same side, helping each other
> d) that—wisely directed—the investments of time, energy, and money (the "votes") each of us make in our everyday circumstances can result in countless ways of earning a living which *contribute to—rather than impair*—the peacebuilding, community revitalization, and ecological sustainability efforts necessary to reach positive tipping points on many critical challenges at the same time

This writer believes that if many people could see and feel the practical value of carrying out the kind of collaborative problem solving and community education initiatives advocated for by this paper, such collaborative, solution-oriented activity could become a common experience… a common cultural tradition… a cultural tradition which can link many diverse communities of people together, in a fellowship of people working towards the greater good of the whole… and a cultural tradition which can help pass on to future generations the most treasured wisdom human beings have accumulated in more than 5,000 years of human history.