

## A Discerning Piece of Mike's Mind... by Rev. Mike Morran

By request, my column this month is a portion of my sermon from April 18th:

...Jem Bendell advocates for what he calls Deep Adaptation, capital A, and he lays out four principles as a framework that everyone can begin talking about, developing, and doing right now. The four principles are resilience, relinquishment, restoration, and reconciliation.

**Resilience** for Bendell is a deeper concept than the typical notion of bouncing back from adversity – it's about intentional discernment and cultivation of capacities that will serve us going forward. Capacities like love, generosity, sharing resources, building community, developing alternate economies, and the basic survival skills of making things, fixing things, growing food, purifying water, and so on. Cultivating these capacities, not just as individuals, but as communities. Resilience.

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## Keeping a Sense of Awe by Erin Kenworthy, DRE

*"Children see magic because they look for it."* – Author Christopher Moore

*"Only where children gather is there any real chance of fun"* – Journalist and Author Mignon McLaughlin

The pandemic has been a stress across generations, even for those resilient and emerge children and youth who will be forever impacted by the personal and cultural shifts experienced since mid-March of 2020. And still, our children and youth retain a sense of awe and connection. They still notice the sounds of birdsong, and delight in spotting new nests in neighborhood trees. As the snow melts, there is plenty of mud to stir, sticks off of trees to wave, and green shoots and buds to inspect. Spring springs forth, excites our senses and our hopes for emerging from the isolation of pandemic, isolation we have practiced in good faith that our friends and family will be able to rejoin us again for worship and shared moments of awe.

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## Discerning from page 1

Second is **Relinquishment**. Letting go. The opposite of cultivating. Letting go of capacities, attitudes, and behaviors that may have served us in the past, but will no longer do so – in fact, might make things worse. On a concrete level, buildings along coastlines, on flood plains, on hillsides made of mud. Houses with thousands of square feet. Products made by child or slave labor. Trips, vehicles, even pumpkin spice lattes that are unnecessary. Access to foods from halfway across the planet or out of season locally. Get used to the idea of no more bananas here in Colorado, peaches only July through September. On a deeper level, relinquishing the cultural assumption that you are the center of the universe.

Third is **Restoration**, rediscovering attitudes and approaches to our lives that have been largely, or wholly, left by the wayside in our fossil-fuel-saturated, growth-based society. Waking with the sun, sleeping with its setting. Moving away from a linear economy of take and use, win or lose, to a more circular economy that values reducing, reusing, and recycling everything it is possible to reduce, reuse, or recycle. Not valuing things, products, or services designed to be disposable, single use, or planned obsolescence.

**Fourth, maybe the most spiritual of the four principles, reconciliation asks,** “What could I make peace with to lessen suffering?” What can I make peace with, that will lessen suffering? Reconciliation is an invitation to make peace within ourselves and with others - in our personal lives and in our cultural circumstances. To practice reconciliation is to take healing seriously; healing ourselves and our own wounds, healing our relationships, healing systemic racism, healing the violence of poverty, calling on whatever divine source in our lives calls to us.

Reconciliation as a guiding principle is essential, because without it, we risk tearing each other apart when things get tough.

The difficulty of Bendell’s vision is accepting, facing, internalizing, very painful truths about where humanity and the planet are headed. The beauty of Bendell’s vision is that these four principles are available right now, no waiting required, are life-giving no matter what happens.

In other words, if Bendell is right, adopting the principles of resilience, relinquishment, restoration, and reconciliation will help to mitigate the suffering. And if he’s wrong, those same principles will make us better people, more connected, more aware, more whole.

He’s not saying we abandon all the work being done on sustainable energy, agriculture, green new deals, carbon collection and so on. He’s saying that personally and collectively, we are not helpless, we are not powerless, and we are not bystanders. This is our lives, our children’s lives, and their children’s lives, and we can engage this out of love.

In faith,

Mike

## Awe from page 1

Many of us, myself included, have been awed by the science-based response to the pandemic, which has resulted in a vaccine that will help us back into the presence and arms of those we most miss. How amazing the speed, the efficacy, the collaboration that has brought vaccinations into our arms in growing numbers! I am grateful for the curiosity, the imaginations, and the dedication of scientists who once were children looking for magic, grown to adults who work to manifest “magic” in our world and in our lives. Since my last Ploughshare article, the state of Colorado has opened vaccinations to anyone over the age of 18, and even to some 16 and 17 year olds who can obtain a dose of the Pfizer version. This is exciting news! Though we know that not everyone will want, or will be able to receive a vaccine, perhaps enough will get their dose to effectively control the spread and the impact of Covid-19.

What fun we will have when we are once again able to gather! And I implore us to remember the wisdom that Author Mignon McLaughlin imparts. Let us not leave behind those among us who are full of fun and possibility. Let us remember that while vaccines become more accessible to adults, a significant portion of our congregation remain unable to receive the awe-inspiring doses of science “magic” that bring peace of mind and a sense of improved safety. Let us find the patience to be fully inclusive of all our vulnerable community members. Because that is where the real magic and fun will be found. Progress is being made on vaccinations for children, and it will rightly, take time to run trials, evaluate data, and complete the due diligence to keep our kids healthy and safe.

When we do fully and safely gather, I encourage you now to think about how you will engage our community with your enthusiasm, your gifts, and your own sense of awe and wonder. Our babies, toddlers, children, tweens, and youth are fun, magical, thought-provoking, and full of awe. Might you be willing to foster relationships, rather than keeping that awe at a distance? Might you get proximate by volunteering to spend a few hours within the joy of their presence? Think on it. We don't have a specific ask, nor are ready to receive your answer quite yet. We are not yet arrived at the time to organize classes, but I offer you the invitation to consider how you might get to know these vital members of our community. I am beginning to plan what could be, but I will not be able to deliver programming alone, or by staff alone. Soon, we will ask for volunteers. We have an awesome fun time.

Be well, be vaccinated, be patient. We shall be together again.

## Migration by Joe Verrengia, Vice President, First Unitarian Board of Trustees

I only read fiction.

Ok, that's not entirely true based on the documented hours I spend reading sports online (up 2.3 hours over last week!) I also get paid to read a ton of emails and reports. That, and my son's texts from the basement because he doesn't care to walk upstairs.

But when I have a choice, it's fiction. I'm looking for escape and meaning. Humans are storytellers. Stories teach us about relationships, equality, and fairness – and the price we pay when we don't have enough of those things.

I suppose I could read more reports and research papers on the same, or maybe watch more cable news. But I prefer to be entertained rather than lectured, and perhaps be emotionally changed for the better along the way.

After Reverend Mike's Earth Day sermon in April, I realized I had been neglecting my environmental concerns for a long time. Other issues – white supremacy culture, for example – had taken priority. (Which is why, I was reading "The Nickel Boys" while we drafted the covenant...)

For Earth Day, I resisted any urge to re-educate myself through data on our planet's actual health. Instead, I wanted to feel it. That requires a good story.

The book I selected was "Migrations," the first novel by Australian writer Charlotte McConaghy. I didn't have to travel far to find it. It had been sitting on my nightstand, unopened and scowling at me, since my birthday last summer.

It's a climate novel. An extinction novel. An adventure tale. A murder mystery. A chase. A horror.

Some reviewers suggest it is a modern Moby Dick since it describes an obsession that slowly unfolds on a fishing boat. Others say it reminds them of Thoreau because it examines the loss of nature.

Mostly, it's kind of a mess. Like much of modern fiction, the main character Franny Stone is nobody you would care to spend time knowing.

And because I have been to many of the remote locations in the novel, I am here to tell you that a lot of what McConaghy needs to make happen in the book would be pretty much impossible.

But hey, it's a story.

And the future Earth that McConaghy envisions in Migrations is both dystopian and utterly plausible. It's the imagined extension of the mass extinction event that scientists are documenting today.

And because it's a story rather than a report, I was willing to read it.

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In Migrations, the seas are empty of fish. The forests are devoid of monkeys, big cats, bears, wolves, and most of their food chains. Our own food supply is entirely industrialized. Governments remind citizens to join waiting lists for the chance to see key habitats for the last time.

All of Franny Stone's decisions, relationships, and tortured thoughts are tied to the final migration of the Arctic tern as it flies towards extinction. This 4-ounce seabird traces the world's longest annual migration from Greenland to Antarctica. A single bird will fly 44,000 miles per year and nearly 1.5 million miles in a lifetime.

I am not spoiling the ending by telling you that Migrations does not end neatly. Or well.

Franny does not have a plan for environmental salvation, much less restoration. Her only intention is to find the Arctic terns and join them.

The terns are screwed. The planet is screwed. So is she, and so are we.

Migrations is a story that takes place in the future. McConaghy doesn't bother to show how humans in our lifetime refused to accept that we are part of nature and actually need it. She doesn't show how we chose development over sustainability and biodiversity. She picks up the story decades from now but not so far into the future that people (other than Elon Musk) had the option to go live on another planet or something.

She shows what it will mean to be alive – alone - in a natural order that we willfully destroyed. It's as if we were sitting in the crown of a giant sequoia and sawing off the branches supporting us, until all that was left was a towering dead stump beneath us.

And as any good story should, Migrations shows us a lot about ourselves as well as the larger world. As we eradicate the wildlife, Franny is desperate not to lose the wild within herself. It prompts her to do some mad things. And some bad things.

Not everyone in the book becomes an outlaw. But they all have real trouble connecting with one another as the threads of nature unravel and snap. People live grimly, becoming both predator and prey, as life gets harder and harder.

When I closed the book, I was back in 2021. It's not too late. But in Migrations, Charlotte McConaghy gives us a pretty good feel for what too late will be like.

## Treasurer's Report April 2021 *by Karl Jonietz, Treasurer*

With sincere thanks all around, FUSD is in fine financial shape. We have entered the fourth quarter of our budget cycle with healthy balances, growing endowments, and an on-track pledge campaign to fund the coming year. The Board and Finance Council are working to finalize a budget for the 2021-2022 fiscal year for adoption at our June 6 Congregational meeting. Drafting a budget has been even more fun than normal because we do not have a definite date to resume "regular" services. We know our expenses will increase, but not by how much, and we have no idea about our ability to rent church space to outside groups. Fortunately, thanks to our loyal members and friends (and a PPP loan), we will enter the coming year with a healthy operating account balance. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to get in touch and remember that, in the church finance world at least, dull is good.

### Experience Sunday Service Online Without a Computer

People can attend our Sunday service virtually even without a computer. From a telephone dial 312-626-6799, 646-558-8656, or 301-715-8592. When prompted enter the meeting ID 466 677 668 and the password 454623.

## Whole Souul Living

**Vocation** comes from the Christian tradition and refers to an internal calling or summons to do holy work. A traditional and corollary assumption is that neary everybody has vocation whether they know it or not. Philosopher Sam Keen wrote: *A society in which vocation and job are separated for most people gradually creates an economy that is often devoid of spirit, one that frequently fills our pocketbooks at the cost of emptying our souls.*

One of the often-overlooked aspects of vocation is that although we think of the work we do as shaping or changing the world in some way, in reality the world changes us in equal measure through the interaction. Or, as Rainer Maria Rilke wrote; *In the difficult are the friendly forces, the hands that work on us.*

Some questions for individual and communal reflection:



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- Given the unique set of skills and limitations you possess, what were you born to do or to be?
- As a teenager or young adult, what did you want to learn when you started working?
- What did you learn in place of what you wanted to know?
- If given the task, what and how would you teach a child about work and vocation?
- Do you consider anything you currently do as “Holy work?”
- What, very specifically, do you sell when you go to work?
- What wouldn't you sell under any circumstances?

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