



Active Hope In a Challenging World

By Rev. Dr. Marilyn Cornwell,
Francie Rutherford, and Rev. Terry Teigen

As we write this in early May, we are still in “stay home, stay safe” mode, along with most everyone around the world. We can only hope that by the time you read this we have begun to re-gather, even as we remain vigilant in our care for the most vulnerable among us.

Last fall, when the three of us partnered with Earth Ministry to host an experiential gathering based on Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone’s book *Active Hope*, we began our presentation by saying “It’s an understatement to say this is a difficult time.” We were referring to our collective anxiety and grief related to climate disruption.

As we look back on those words, we realize we could never have predicted the painful and disorienting upheaval we’re experiencing with COVID-19. Our recent communal trauma, both viral- and climate-related, has been isolating – physically, emotionally and spiritually. The question we raised last fall resonates even more so now: how do we sustain resilient communities as we work together to build a more healthy and sustainable future?

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ABOUT US

Earth Ministry transforms faith into action for the well-being of communities and the environment. We organize people of faith to advocate for strong environmental policies and provide strategic guidance to religious communities working toward environmental justice.

Founded in 1992, Earth Ministry has a long history of leading the way in caring for the environment from a faith perspective. Our Greening Congregations program was the first in the country to help houses of worship implement sustainable practices, and our Faithful Advocacy program is on the cutting edge of empowering clergy and lay leaders to speak out on public policy issues.

Earth Ministry is also part of the Interfaith Power & Light coalition of faith-based organizations working together on a religious response to climate change in 40 states. We use the name Earth Ministry/Washington Interfaith Power & Light (WAIPL) to show our affiliation with this powerful national network. Learn more at www.earthministry.org.

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

What a year 2020 has been so far, with seismic shifts reshaping the world. COVID-19 has completely changed how we connect with each other and work together toward our common goals, and the global movement to dismantle systems of white supremacy is gaining powerful momentum.

In this time of adaptation, Earth Ministry has been centering justice in our organizing efforts. The disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on Black and Indigenous people, the health disparities of people of color due to pollution, and the significant impact of the climate crisis being felt by these communities are all symptoms of the institutional racism that permeates our nation's past and present. We are following the lead of community of color-led organizations as we advocate for equitable pandemic recovery and investing in frontline communities.

Ours is community that comes together around shared values that compel us to protect and improve the health of our neighbors and the planet. Putting our faith into action is not a task we take lightly, but a deep conviction – and one I've seen you live out in new ways over the last few months. Your resilience and dedication give me hope, and our work together is making a difference.

Since we don't know how long the coronavirus will impact our ability to gather in person, this issue of *Earth Letter* focuses on sustaining community. Earth Ministry is committed to crafting new ways to engage you and our broad network of supporters in the work of environmental justice. You are the heart of our community, and as we live into Earth Ministry's new strategic plan (see page 6), we look forward to being on this journey with you.



Blessings,

GOINGS-ON at Earth Ministry

Earth Ministry relies on donations from individuals like you to make this important work possible. Join or renew your membership in Earth Ministry, sign up for monthly giving, or make a special gift at www.earthministry.org or by calling (206) 632-2426. Thank you for your support!

Outreach and Education

Before the pandemic began, Earth Ministry/WAIPL made presentations in houses of worship across the state. We spoke at Shalom UCC in Richland, First Lutheran Church of Richmond Beach, Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Olympia, First Congregational UCC in Walla Walla, Peninsula Lutheran in Gig Harbor, and First Lutheran Church of Bothell. In Seattle, we taught adult education classes at University Temple United Methodist, Seattle Japanese Baptist Church, Phinney Ridge Lutheran Church, Seattle Unity, Queen Anne Lutheran, and Epiphany Parish. Last fall, staff hosted a clergy gathering and Colleague happy hour in Walla Walla, met with clergy in the Tri Cities, and supported a meeting of the Capitol Hill Earth Ministry Colleague Connection.

Earlier this year we were glad to co-sponsor Nigel Savage of Hazon as the keynote speaker for Seattle's Jewish Climate Festival, organized by the Kavana Cooperative. We led advocacy trainings for Interfaith Advocacy Day, Environmental Lobby Day, Eastern Washington Legislative Conference, National Interfaith Power & Light Conference, and University Unitarian's Justice Summit. We also presented to Whitworth University's Calling Community, an ethics class at Pacific Lutheran University, Bellingham Multifaith Network for Climate Justice, Jesuit Volunteer EnCorps, and the Faith Forming Faith Pastoral Conference.

Earth Ministry has now begun offering online meetings and presentations for congregations, starting with First Congregational UCC in Bellevue and St. Mark's Lutheran in Spokane. Contact jessica@earthministry.org if you would like to schedule a time to meet via Zoom.

Earth Ministry/WAIPL Community

In response to our new reality of social distancing in the time of COVID-19, Earth Ministry is providing avenues for our community to remain connected. We invite you to send a photo that captures creation, caring, or community which we will share on Earth Ministry's social media. You are welcome to send your photos to emoffice@earthministry.org.

Early on in quarantine, we shifted our plans for the 50th anniversary of Earth Day to go online. We hosted two Zoom calls on Earth Day, during which nearly 70 Earth Ministry members gathered to connect with one another and share sources of hope for creation. We also worked with faith leaders from local Jewish, Muslim, Christian, and Unitarian Universalist communities to produce a short multifaith Earth Day video message, which can be viewed at www.earthministry.org.



In the last six months, Earth Ministry hosted two events based on the book *Active Hope* by Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone (see cover article). Last fall, community members gathered for an experiential event called Active Hope, Embodied Hope where we processed our climate grief and envisioned the future we want to bring into being. Earth Ministry brought the event to a broader audience this May by hosting an online webinar. Together, we are fostering spiritual resilience so that we may put our faith into action toward a more just and sustainable future.

2020 Washington State Legislative Session

Thank you to everyone who put their faith into action in Washington State's 2020 legislative session. Together we passed three bills that will protect our health and Earth's air and water.

The Climate Pollution Limits Act (HB 2311) will update the state's greenhouse gas limits to reflect current science and lay groundwork to reach net zero carbon emissions and beyond. The Safer Firefighting Foam Act (HB 2265) will remove exemptions for oil refineries and chemical plants in Washington's first-in-the-nation-ban of firefighting foam containing toxic PFAS chemicals. The Reusable Bag Act (SB 5323) will eliminate thin carry-home plastic bags at all retail establishments to help us address a growing recycling crisis.

Unfortunately, our top priority, Clean Fuels Now (HB 1110), did not pass this year. This statewide clean fuel standard would reduce pollution of transportation fuels by 20% by 2035. While we are disappointed that it did not pass, we are grateful that the Washington State Catholic Conference joined us in supporting the bill with an official endorsement from the Bishops. We plan to pick up this important policy for climate justice as part of a transportation package in the longer session next year.

Fossil fuels

Earth Ministry/WAIPL is standing with the Puyallup Tribe and working with local activists and the Power Past Fracked Gas coalition to halt Puget Sound Energy's fracked gas facility in Tacoma.

Last December we were disappointed that the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency (PSCAA) granted the Clean Air Permit, the last required for the LNG project. In response, two legal appeals were put in motion: one filed by the Puyallup Tribe and

another by environmental partners. Our coalition asked for a stay motion to halt construction during this legal process, but that request was denied. The appeal hearings are scheduled for October 2020, so plan to join us to speak out. Disregarding the Tribe and investing in fracked gas is a moral issue!

This spring, Tacoma's interim regulation regarding fossil fuel development on the Tideflats was once again up for renewal. Earth Ministry and our partners in the Protect Tacoma Tideflats Coalition asked for this protection to be expanded to not only prevent new facilities but also halt expansion of existing facilities. In preparation for the hearing, Earth Ministry co-hosted an advocacy webinar and facilitated the testimony training portion with example video testimony from a local pastor. Unfortunately, the City Council did not strengthen the rule but did renew it in its current form.

Restoring Salmon and Orcas

The faith community is envisioning a future for Northwest rivers that honors treaty obligations, saves salmon and orcas, and ensures the health of farming and fishing communities.

Columbia & Snake Rivers

In Southeast Washington, Earth Ministry continues to stand with the Nimiipuu (Nez Perce Tribe) in calling for a free-flowing lower Snake River. In a stance of solidarity and support, we attended the Nimiipuu River Rendezvous in Lewiston, ID last fall where we hosted a prayer and action table. We also were honored participants at Lummi Nation's *Netse Mot: One Mind for Xw'ullemy*, focused on our shared responsibility to protect Northwest waters, salmon, and *qwe'hol'mechen* (orcas).

Earth Ministry/WAIPL and activists from the 42nd district met with Rep. Sharon Shewmake during Environmental Lobby Day



Earth Ministry hosted another Loaves and Fishes gathering at Spokane's Episcopal Cathedral last October to foster dialogue and work toward solutions that will benefit all stakeholders. We brought together a panel with a tribal representative, a local priest, wheat farmer, and fisherman who shared their perspectives and held space for community input about a collaborative path forward.

In January, faith leaders participated in a series of three workshops and submitted online comments as part of the Governor's Stakeholders Process about the future of the lower Snake River. Earth Ministry also delivered over 100 postcards from Eastern Washington residents to US Senator Maria Cantwell asking for her support. Our message is that we want a path forward that works for both fish and Northwest communities.

This spring, Earth Ministry engaged people of faith during a federal draft environmental impact statement comment period on future management of the entire Columbia River Basin. Though it was at the beginning of our state's shelter-in-place order and hearings were moved to teleconferences, we mobilized clergy and lay leaders to testify at six public hearings and sent in over 120 comments from people of faith.

Chehalis River

A new dam has been proposed on the Chehalis River, the ancestral homeland of the Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis. This river also supports vital salmon and steelhead runs that

are a treaty-protected resource for the Quinault Indian Nation and a food source for endangered orcas.

Earth Ministry is following the lead of these Tribes and our partners in the Chehalis River Alliance who are opposed to building a new dam. We are calling for common-ground solutions to manage the Chehalis River system for both wild fish and flood reduction. In response to a draft environmental impact statement, 140 people of faith across the state signed on to an Earth Ministry letter asking the Department of Ecology to deny the proposed dam and seek more inclusive solutions.

Safe Chemical Reform

Earth Ministry continues to advocate for strong safe chemical policy in Washington State. Our focus is on the class of chemicals called PFAS, which, though deemed toxic "forever chemicals" tied to many health issues, are widely used for their nonstick properties.



Throughout the fall and winter, we partnered with 25 congregations to host 13 screenings of the documentary, “The Devil We Know,” on the topic of PFAS chemicals. Having connected the moral issue of these toxic chemicals to faith values, the Earth Ministry community then spoke up in state agency processes regarding PFAS in consumer products and drinking water.

Faithful advocates attended hearings and commented in response to a draft drinking water standard for PFAS. We also sent over 150 comments to Department of Ecology regarding implementation of the Safer Chemicals for WA Act that we passed last year. Our advocacy led to selection of carpet as a priority product to address for PFAS contamination, due to high exposure for children who spend more time on the floor. In addition, our efforts to add upholstery as an additional product category was successful.

Washington is leading the nation in phasing out these dangerous chemicals that contaminate our homes and ecosystems. Thank you for helping to create momentum toward toxic-free and sustainable consumer products!

A Vision for the Future: Earth Ministry’s 2020-2025 Strategic Plan

The Earth Ministry board recently approved a new 2020–2025 strategic plan that sets out an exciting and ambitious vision for the future.

We’ve updated our mission, vision, and values to better reflect our commitment to community, collaboration, and justice. We recognize that environmental, social, and racial justice are interlinked and that the faith-based movement is strongest when all people bring their unique strengths and diverse experiences to the table.

Our new strategic plan commits us to formally transition from an organization based in the Christian tradition to a multifaith organization that encompasses diverse religious identities in programs, outreach, board and staff leadership, and partnerships. We’ve begun that process by welcoming our first Jewish board member and rebranding Earth Ministry/ Washington Interfaith Power & Light with a new, more inclusive logo. We will fully live into this multifaith commitment over the next five years, learning and growing with all of you.

Looking forward, Earth Ministry/WAIPPL will continue to educate, support, and strategically mobilize the faith community to protect the health of our communities and the environment. We will connect with people of all faiths through outreach and education that inspires action, assist houses of worship in taking on efforts that protect both people and the planet, train and organize people of faith to engage in advocacy for environmental justice, and foster systemic change through adoption of strong environmental policies. Our full strategic plan can be found at bit.ly/EMStrategicPlan.

Earth Letter Summer 2020
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Community as Sacred Interconnectedness By Reuben Gelblum

Have you experienced the unknown of moving to a new place? When my partner Rachel and I moved to Seattle from North Carolina in the summer of 2015, we hardly knew anyone. We had just finished graduate school and were coming out west for Rachel to complete her medical residency training. I had just finished a year-long internship working three days a week with North Carolina Interfaith Power & Light (NCIPL) for my social work program. I knew LeeAnne and Jessica through the national IPL network, but only distantly.

In the midst of this large transition, moving to a place where we had very few connections or sense of belonging, I was touched by how warmly we were welcomed by LeeAnne, Jessica, and the community of Earth Ministry/Washington Interfaith Power & Light (WA IPL). Within literally our first few months here, they were sending me job opportunities, helping orient us to the area, and I was invited to join the board.

I share this as an example of what I see as the beauty, and significance, of Earth Ministry/WA IPL's work. I view many of the challenges we face, including environmental ones, as ultimately being about our difficulties being in right relationship with ourselves and with others. Earth Ministry stands as a testament to the power of working together with others, whether through its decades of support of local congregations interested in lowering their carbon footprint, bringing together diverse and often at-odds groups in Eastern Washington to restore rivers, or fostering reconciliation between Northwest Native tribes and the faith community, work borne of trust developed over many years of engagement.

This *Earth Letter's* theme of sustaining community is a timely one. Relationships can be challenging to nurture in the best of times. We humans are capable of deep love and generosity as

well as fear and violence, and our current circumstances are putting all of this on display.

I trust that a reason so many of us are drawn to Earth Ministry/WA IPL is our hunger for a community that values not just honoring and protecting the environment, but one that does so while also emphasizing our care for people as well. We honor our sacred interconnectedness as we articulate and live out our faiths' calls to seek to live in harmony with others and with all creation.

Just as Jess, LeeAnne, and Earth Ministry/WA IPL helped us feel welcome in our new home of Seattle, I now take inspiration from being a part of Earth Ministry's larger community of fellow people of faith who believe in a more sustainable and just world. I am grateful to this community for helping me find purpose and belonging in my new adopted city. Earth Ministry's long history and vibrant network demonstrate the power of working from spirit and love, reminding us of the importance of coming together to get through our current public health crisis and our long-term climate crisis.

May we all find ways to sustain ourselves and our loved ones right now and remember that our bonds are stronger than our fears.

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Reuben Gelblum is a clinical social worker and a member of the Earth Ministry board.

"True community is based upon equality, mutuality, and reciprocity. It affirms the richness of individual diversity as well as the common human ties that bind us together."

– Rev. Dr. Pauli Murray



Extending an Ethical Web from COVID-19 to the Climate Crisis

By Rabbi Avi Fine

*“Why do people keep asking to see
God’s identity papers
When the darkness opening into morning
Is more than enough?”*

– Mary Oliver

A herd of elk stroll on Cannon Beach. Goats take over a town in Wales. Sea turtles cover the beaches in Brazil as they lay eggs. As I sit at my kitchen table, which has become my makeshift office, I open my computer and scroll through the news, where videos of animals reclaiming their spaces bring a smile to my face. They remind me of the resiliency of nature.

The collective efforts of humankind to stay at home amidst COVID-19 provide an opportunity for nature to recover. Refraining from driving, flying, and shipping so greatly reduced pollutants in the air, that the Himalayan Mountains are visible in Indian cities for the first time in decades.

As the air clears of our exhaust, we have an opportunity to look at our world in new ways, seeing the ways in which our religious traditions are rooted in the natural world and call on us to build an ark that keeps everyone afloat.

It feels quite fitting that in April we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the first Earth Day, coinciding with a reduction in our carbon-producing activities. In May, Jews around the world read a section in the Book of Leviticus (25:8-13) about the Jubilee year. Leviticus teaches that every 50 years we are commanded

to refrain from sowing the land and from harvesting it. In addition, all property must be returned to its original owner.

In a Western context of landownership, it is a radical law, as it was in its time. By requiring land to be returned, the law ensured people who endured economic hardship and sold their land had opportunities to regain the status of a landowner. It served as a reminder that ownership is temporary and that ultimately, the whole Earth is God’s.

In Genesis, we read that God created the natural world and we humans have merely been granted use of it. The rabbis of two thousand years ago imagined what took place in Garden of Eden. God toured the first person around, marveling at the beauty of creation. God instructs the human, saying “pay attention that you do not corrupt and destroy My world: if you corrupt it, there is no one to repair it after you.” (Kohelet Rabbah 7:13)

Judaism remains rooted in the natural world. Our months are determined by the cycles of the moon; on a clear night you can look up to the sky and using the size of the moon, gain a sense of where we are in the month. During our morning



prayers, we offer our gratitude for the emergence of light. In the evenings, we pray at the marvel of the light fading into darkness. We encounter God's presence as we encounter the natural world.

We also encounter God's presence in other people. Emmanuel Levinas, a French Jewish philosopher, teaches that when we recognize the divinity inherent in others, we are called to care for them. In a recent OpEd in the New York Times, the philosopher Todd May outlines ethical lessons from this moment in time. He writes that, if we understand it is our ethical duty to stay home to prevent transmission of COVID-19, then a few ideas follow – our everyday actions have effects on others and we have a responsibility to minimize harm to others that can arise through our actions. He calls this an "ethical web."

May's ethical web clearly has implications much wider than COVID-19. It comprises a vital aspect of living in a community: we are all responsible for caring for each other. My hope is that this pandemic breaks down the facades we erected to draw boundaries between ourselves and others. The only way to make it through is by joining together.

Without a doubt, the very same is true for the climate crisis. Our actions affect others and we each have a responsibility to minimize harm to others. But, when it comes to the climate, what differs is the power of collective action. Yes, we must make individual choices to reduce our carbon footprint. And we must fight for environmental protections, create more renewable energy sources, and hold high-polluting corporations responsible.

This pandemic amplifies the interconnectedness of people, showing us what we knew all along. The problems of our society and world are each of our problems, and they affect marginalized and poor communities disproportionately.

Across the Earth, people are instructed to physically distance themselves from others to slow and limit the spread of COVID-19. Each person is called upon to care for others by limiting their contact. But, while some people can shelter in place in comfortable mansions, others lack stable living conditions or the financial reserves to stay home from work.

Similarly, when it comes to our climate crisis, rising sea levels, raging wildfires, and increasing temperatures will continue to impact everyone living on our planet. Research shows the hardest hit communities are people living in poverty and poor countries. We have an ethical responsibility to take action to address this disparity and create a more healthy and just world for all.

As we recover from COVID-19, let us continue to make space for the sea turtles to lay eggs and for goats to roam free. Let us learn to build a society that prioritizes our health and the health of our planet. And let us see God in every interaction.

Rabbi Avi Fine is the Assistant Rabbi at Temple De Hirsch Sinai in Seattle.



Apocalypse and Community: Sustenance for the Climate Justice Fight

By Avery Davis Lamb

In these days of COVID-19, “apocalypse” seems to be getting a lot of airtime. It makes sense, I suppose. The word resonates with our lived experience: most of us are trapped inside with a global pandemic spreading around outside, disconnected from much that we love and cherish, and little knowledge of when the light will emerge. It feels like a completely different world. For some, it feels like the end of the world.

What if there’s more to apocalypse though, than simply the end of the world? After all, much of the Bible is apocalyptic literature. While the apocalypse is culturally understood as the end of the world — God’s fiery inferno of rage (thanks *Left Behind* books!) — the Greek meaning of the word is more nuanced, full, and hopeful.

The word apokalypsis means an unveiling or a revelation. It uncovers something that we were unable to see before. The coronavirus is unveiling broken systems of healthcare and economic support for poor families. It is unveiling the inherent unsustainability of oil, the price of which has plummeted.

However, this time of precarity is also unveiling beautiful networks of support and the goodness of human communities. My neighborhood listserv is full of students offering to deliver groceries for older neighbors, mutual aid efforts to ensure that all are able to pay rent, and political organizing for rent freezes.

For us climate activists, COVID-19 is not the only apocalyptic crisis. The climate crisis is looming at a scale much larger and longer-lasting than the coronavirus. Its curve arcs higher and unfortunately herd immunity to greenhouse gases is not something our atmosphere can develop. The labor toward climate justice will persist for decades, while ecological and social disasters continue to unfold around us. So how might we cultivate hope, inspiration, and beauty that can sustain our community for the long work of justice?

While apocalyptic literature may not naturally be the first place to look for inspiration in a crisis, it shows us how, even in the midst of devastation and hopelessness, the world is yet moving toward hope and beauty.

The book of Revelation in the Bible is the quintessential apocalyptic writing for Christian communities through the ages. There are images of dragons and wars and burning cities, as expected, but the direction of the Revelation narrative is toward redemption and rejoicing.

While systems of empire and oppression are being destroyed and dismantled, the kingdom of heaven on earth is being unveiled. The earth is restored, relationships are made right, and God comes to reside in God’s home among mortals. In the midst of destruction and despair, there is a new world being created in our communities, where love and hospitality reign, and our relationship with all of creation is made right. In the midst of the climate crisis, new modes of relationship are being developed, and must be sustained, to care for each other as we seek to create a world of justice, love, and hospitality.

It is precisely in the midst of apocalypse where we can begin the process of building a better future and





sustaining our community. The skills of community-building we are cultivating now in the midst of the coronavirus crisis will sustain us in the long-term fight for climate justice around the world. We ought to pay attention to our ability to connect with a global network of allies online and our cultivation of mutual belonging with the natural world.

While the era of globalization has brought its fair share of maladies, it has also created an interconnected network of human life and sympathies. This is a network not unlike one dreamed of by French Jesuit priest and paleontologist Teilhard de Chardin in the early 1900s. Teilhard dreamed up the “noosphere,” the culmination of human social development where human consciousness is interconnected and interrelated with the world of the nonhuman.

While the 280-character circus that is Twitter may seem far-fetched from Teilhard’s noosphere, it does not take long to find beautiful human relationships cultivated over the social media network. Climate activists from around the globe who have never met, and likely never will

meet, are cheering on mutual victories and mourning shared losses. Simply look at the Sunrise Movement’s Twitter feed to understand how young people in particular are building community online.

What happens on the internet is a reflection — a magnification — of who we are and what we value. In this era of the climate crisis, we activists need to value each other and our mutual connection. Today, that might just begin on Twitter.

In my community in North Carolina, parks, trails, and greenways are seeing great use. People are pouring out of their homes (in a socially distant manner!) into the natural world because, in the midst of crisis, connection to nature is a core spiritual need.

One of the many ironies of the climate crisis is how our warming world will disrupt precisely the natural life and beauty we need for spiritual sustenance. Still, it is as important as ever to strengthen bonds with the nonhuman world, loving what still persists and grieving what has been lost.

Grief and lament have a long tradition in every religion and are an integral part of sustaining hope in the midst of crisis. We must grieve for those things we are losing. The scale of traumatic loss will be immense over the next century and the need for rituals of lament and grief ever-present. Practices of grief and lament are helpful on a personal level, for processing both material and non-material loss.

These rituals also sustain our communities, becoming, as author and scholar of contemplative ecology Douglas Christie writes, “part of a restorative spiritual practice that can rekindle an awareness of the bonds that connect all life-forms to one another and to the larger ecological whole.” When we place ourselves and our grief in the network of all creaturely life, we can’t help but be sustained by the bonds of support and interdependence that intersect all that we are. It is through these bonds that we can sustain the long fight for climate justice, being supported by our creaturely companions.

We are in the midst of two apocalypses, but it is not the end of the world we face. On the contrary, we look forward to the creation of a new world, one sustained by community and mutual connection. The fight for climate justice will continue for decades. Corporations may be fueled by money and political power, but if apocalypses throughout history have unveiled anything, it is that the power of creaturely community can outlast empires. Thanks be to God for that.

Avery Davis Lamb is a scholar and activist, studying the intersection of Christianity and the environment at Duke Divinity School and the Nicholas School of the Environment.

The Unexpected Efficacy of Love (When Dreams Fail)

by Sister Clare Josef-Maier

“The person who loves their dream of community will destroy community, but the person who loves those around them will create community.”

– Dietrich Bonhoeffer

From a young age, I grew up listening to my grandmother’s stories about her years of service in community as a Catholic nun. In my unconscious mind, her story intertwined with my vague awareness of Mother Teresa, Francis of Assisi, and other figures who represented to me a life of humble service from within intentional religious communities. I never really got into superheroes, but these lives represented a kind of heroic journey on which I wanted to be.

Decades later, I am a sister in the Lutheran tradition – a deaconess – serving an intentional residential community of University of Oregon students in Eugene, OR. It may not be a hero’s journey, but as COVID-19 has swept the globe, it has been a unique position.

As we shuttered our towns and cities and followed states’ protective “stay at home” and “shelter in place” orders, I have found myself attentive to multiple communities whose sense of identity was suddenly quite shaken. Amid the ambiguous grief and loss brought about during a global pandemic, the strain of lost connection and communal identity is

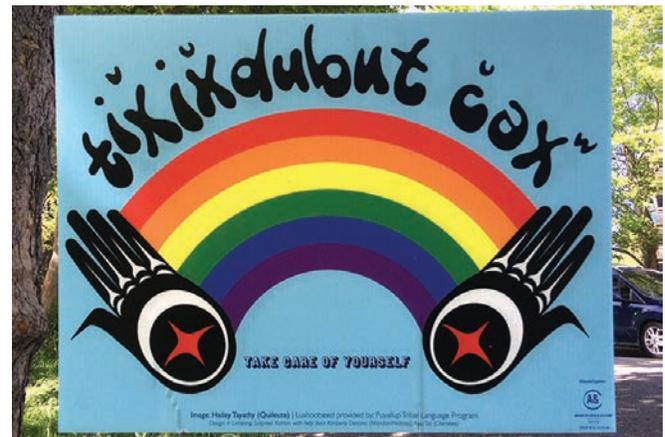
profoundly present. As author and activist Grace Lee Boggs says, “Building community is to the collective as spiritual practice is to the individual.” What do we do when that practice feels lost to us? How do we build and sustain community in a time like this?

Again and again, my mind has come back to Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s caution about loving our dream of one another more than one another. His words have successfully reoriented me dozens of times when I’ve become disillusioned about community life (or life in/as community).

When I feel betrayed or let down, it’s often my *dream* that has been betrayed in some way. I would never dismiss that grief, anger, or pain of loss when a dream is challenged or destroyed. Part of my dream of community, for example, is in-person connection – there’s nothing wrong or particularly selfish about that. But that dimension of what I love about community is not the community itself.

Shifting to a virtual context does not actually destroy community; it merely puts on hold that part of my dream. If I refuse or find myself unable to adapt, my thread in the community tapestry becomes unstable, and indeed it is the community itself that suffers.

Or, an example on a more intimate scale: my vision of what being a spouse and parent should be has been severely compromised in recent months (not for the first time, mind you). Many families are experiencing the impact of job and childcare/school loss, financial strain and uncertainty, and relationship



strain as our emotional and mental health swan dive. Our current lives are not all that we have dreamed them to be. Others like me are wondering whether there is a way to love one another through this “undoing” of what family looked like before the pandemic into the evolution of what our family life is now becoming. Does our inability to let go of the ideal dream of family threaten to do harm to the actual human persons of our family, who now more than ever need our love?

Love as a practice rather than sentiment is a slippery, sometimes unfamiliar-feeling concept. Love begins in curiosity, interest in, observation of, and deep listening to the other. From this posture, we begin to learn how to love them. It is not sentimentality, though in opening ourselves to love, we often feel the warmth and affection this kind of intimate humanity brings. But beyond the warmth, it is a commitment to right relationship, which requires our work.

In both the Deaconess Community and the student living community I serve, community members engage in this listening practice and then create a covenant to help capture and articulate their learnings. If we are attached to the fulfillment of those covenantal promises, we fall again into the trap of loving “the dream,” but our efforts to live into our covenant is one way to see our work of loving one another.

Ultimately, intimate or intentional communities act as microcosms for our larger communal realities. Now more than ever, I ponder what it means to choose loving people (and allowing oneself to be loved) over our idealistic dreams, for the sake of all our communities. I don’t have a covenant with the people of my neighborhood, my city, or my state. I don’t have a covenant, exactly, with the millions in

my nation or billions on this shared planet. I have inherited a number of dreams, including the fabled “American dream.” Perhaps now more than ever, the path of destruction behind the pursuit of these dreams lays bare to be seen.

Dreams can be well-intentioned without being loving, because their creation does not rely on the work of listening to the other. Living covenants, however, cannot be created without mutual listening. Where love of the dream destroys our communities, love itself can and will bring new life.

Consider your communities, small and large, intimate and yet-unknown. What dreams of community are slipping away from you, or what dreams have you lost? What of those dreams can be named and released peacefully, and what are you not ready to let go? If we accept Bonhoeffer’s challenge to hold our dreams gently, but lean more heavily into loving one another – and, again, in accepting one another’s love – what do we risk? What do we stand to gain?

As an adult, I still don’t feel much of an attraction to the superhero lore. Maybe it all feels like too much pressure. Or maybe good and evil – heroes and villains – just aren’t concepts that work for me. It’s just you and me, struggling to find our way through these webs of connection, building our communities. I love a good dream as much as the next person, but I think I may just have to decide to love you more.

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The good news is that lessons from *Active Hope* as well as insights from our shared experience as people of faith offer wisdom and a path forward.

Honoring the pain of the world

Rather than acknowledging them, many of us are more comfortable fending off our feelings of sadness, fear, and powerlessness, especially in terms of climate change and COVID-19. We usually try to protect ourselves from the depth of these feelings, especially despair coupled with deep caring for all beings. Yet, when we let ourselves drop down to really feel and name these feelings, we can experience an unexpected relief. Through exploring and opening to such feelings – especially when sharing them with others – grief can be restorative, and we can feel more whole.

Remember Talequah, the mother orca who carried her dead newborn on her nose for 17 days and 1000 miles. She stunned the world with her grief. She did not carry her dead calf all that way completely alone, the other members of her pod took turns with her. Their actions showed us the power of honoring our pain and supporting one another through it. Like Talequah, we can't shield ourselves from the pain of unforeseen events, but we can find our individual and collective ways of embracing the feelings that arise from these crises.

In his book "The End of Ice," Dahr Jamail speaks to resilience which can be found through allowing our grief to be known and expressed. He tells the story of Karina Miotto, a Brazilian woman devoted to protecting the Amazon.

With each published report of increased deforestation of her beloved rainforest, Karina lets grief consume her. Then, she goes deeper within herself and her community, letting grief strengthen her love for where she lives and repurposing herself for her

next action. Honoring our pain and the pain of the world helps to build spiritual and emotional resilience so that we can see with new eyes and dare to believe in a future yet to be seen.

Seeing with new eyes

Looking back over the last several months, it seems like threats to our health and survival, financial security, and even our relationships, were thrust upon us almost instantaneously. Yet in a time like this, resilience can spring from places beyond us, outside of what we have previously known and experienced.

While "business as usual" ways of coping once served, many of those ways have now been thoroughly discredited. As a result, we have been forced to reframe what we see, to adopt or fashion new tools and technologies, to expand our ability to imagine what is possible.

We have already learned new ways to communicate and to build and strengthen community. We have found that digital interactions, while obviously limited, are nevertheless a way to stay closely interwoven with the efforts of friends, colleagues, and like-minded people around the globe. We have also been shown new models about bravery, courage, and heroism thanks to our health care workers, first responders, grocery clerks, garbage collectors, janitors, and other essential service providers all working on the front lines of the pandemic.

COVID-19 has highlighted with decisive clarity that we are indivisible, dependent on the health of one another and equally dependent on the clean water, air, healthy fields, and forests necessary to sustain the life of all. It has also drawn attention to systemic inequities among the human family, as communities suffering the most from the pandemic are communities of color, those with polluted air, and limited access to healthcare.

Across every experience are acts of compassion large and small. Every day members of our community care for us – not just in body but also in spirit, through offering healing words and acts of comfort. Ten thousand examples of compassion



are reshaping and recasting our sense of what change might be possible. Pooling our abilities, resources, and the strength and courage we possess, we find healing. We come to see that while we may once have been motivated by desperation, we are increasingly led by gratitude and love.

All of this comes to us in community as we follow a shared sense of purpose. We see that although we are apart physically, we are together spiritually and connected integrally with all created beings. Seeing with new eyes, we bring our individual and collective energy, our ideas and creativity, our financial resources, and our prayers and spirit to move into the future that we must live into being.

Going Forth

Living into the future we want to see is the greatest adventure of our time. It is an adventure that requires a shift to a life-sustaining civilization, what Joanna Macy calls the Great Turning. It is a process that asks, "Who do we choose to be?" as well as, "What do we choose to do?"

As people of faith, we have a long history of embracing struggle and pain that ignites hope. Faith helps us hold open a wide space for the grace of Spirit to inspire the power of our imaginations and the creativity of hope. Turning toward a new and unknown future, faithful hope helps us resist easy short-term fixes and instead commit to systemic change.

Our active hope helps us turn toward one another when things fall apart. We face our fear together. We feed one another, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. We bring people together to listen to each other and collaborate creatively across our differences. We advocate for climate justice and the well-being of all creation. We live a story that acknowledges doubt and grief and courageously meets them head on with faith and hope. This is who we choose to be and what we choose to do.

The spiral from gratitude to action

Living with active hope is waking up to what is true, loving, and beautiful about where we are right now. It starts with practicing gratitude for what we do have, without denying the pain of ourselves, our neighbors, and the world. Drawing on resources that bring out the best in us, it goes forth daring to believe that a new future is possible.

Turning toward one another, we ask where each of us finds the strength to continue despite all the obstacles and discouragement. We accept that uncertainty is a companion on our journey that enhances our persistence. We learn from one another, listening for examples of what steps each of us has already taken that are making a difference in bringing about the future we want to see, and then we build on them. We commit to ways of being with one another and this planet that insure the well-being of all. We accept failure as an opportunity for reflective learning, rather than a burden of shame and blame. We construct networks of support to restore our collective community.

Active hope is a process and an intention. It is a remembering of the story we commit to living. It is the story through which we are blessed to be a blessing for our world.



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Rev. Dr. Marilyn Cornwell and Rev. Terry Teigen are retired Episcopal and United Church of Christ pastors, respectively, and are current members of the Earth Ministry board. Francie Rutherford is a licensed psychotherapist and a former Earth Ministry board member.

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