

Challenge and Hope at this Kairos Moment, September 20, 2009

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30 years ago the Spirit turned my life upside down when, at a Simple Living retreat, I first learned of the massive suffering of sisters and brothers living and dying with hunger as a daily reality. This is when I also first learned that our U.S. lifestyle was directly connected to that poverty and to militarism and environmental damage. I was 25, an active Catholic from childhood, and this was the first time anyone helped me connect my spiritual and religious life to action for justice.

I have been active ever since in Pax Christi, small Christian communities, and church groups working for justice and peace. Over the years PCF has challenged me to further steps in care for all of God's creation, through retreats, assemblies, and special members (e.g. Phyllis Jepson and John and Martina Linnehan). And, now at this September 2009 Assembly we have another opportunity to learn to "listen to Earth", using the marvelous packet created by our presenter, Diane Lopez Hughes, along with our own PCFer Carol Ann Breyer and others.

During the last 3 years I have been waking up to the reality that we are facing imminent, interlocking crises of global climate change, resource depletion (notably peak oil), economic contraction, and the possibility of the collapse of what we have been calling "civilization". **It is the convergence of these crises that is deeply unsettling.** My concern for Pax Christi, and other justice and peace groups, and for the church, is that we might stay so focused on discrete issues and concerns that we don't see these huge changes racing toward us. In the past, my vision was one of a lifetime of slow, steady work of justice and peace that would hopefully help the next generations to continue the slow, steady work of justice and peace (if, with God's empowerment, we averted nuclear war). During these 3 years of study, prayer, writing, and organizing I have become convinced that we no longer have the option of slow, generations-long change. We are truly in a kairos moment. In Greek *kairos* is the word used for time to designate critical times, decision points, and in the New Testament to indicate special times of God's action in human history. The decisions and choices we make in the next several years (maybe decade or so) especially here in the U.S., will mean the difference between a livable future for our children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews, and much of the earth community, or one full of tragedies. Our choices already are affecting our impoverished sisters and brothers, human and other species, all over the planet and their sufferings will only increase horribly unless we allow God's Spirit to transform our hearts and our life choices.

I have been pondering Johnny Zokovitch's recent editorial in the *Catholic Peace Voice*, about each of us in Pax Christi having specific areas we are called to address. "Whatever it is, we each do our part, bound together in our common longing for, and loyalty to, the peace of Christ." What I would add to Johnny Z's words is a plea that each of us take time to study the inter-connections of climate change, resource depletion and economic contraction, and then weave those awarenesses into everything that we do. No matter what other issue we are addressing, every single one will be deeply impacted by these converging crises.

Resources for your Study

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I understand that Sharon Astyk spoke on these crises at PCUSA's conference this summer. Out of all the books I have studied so far, I view this as one of the very best if you are looking for a concise overview of our situation and a vision of what might be possible if we step up to the challenge. She is a strong voice for integrity and morality, drawing upon her Jewish tradition. She also writes with humor, wit and humility, and offers practical, concrete fruit from her own experiments in making deep changes with her family and friends. ***Depletion and Abundance: Life on the New Home Front: or One Woman's Solutions to Finding Abundance for Your Family while Coming to Terms with Peak Oil, Climate Change and Hard Times.***, 2008. I also learned a lot from her ***A Nation of Farmers***, 2009, which she co-authored with Aaron Newton.

Another excellent book addressing these crises, for those who might prefer an environmentalist, journalist's approach :***Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future***, Bill McKibben, Times Books, 2007

Both Astyk and McKibben (as well as nearly all the other authors I have read) point to the reality that the way **through** the crises is also the way **to** creating a new, more abundant way of life.

"Re-localizing," creating or recreating local communities which are resilient and sustainable. One governmental initiative in Florida which has taken some notable steps in this direction is Alachua County: http://postcarboncities.net/place/alachua-county_fl.

As I wrote in my summary of my research: Action Step 10 is to Join with others to create local communities of mutual support. "Family groups, faith communities (especially smaller circles within large congregations), neighborhoods, small towns, co-ops, community gardens; communities who work together to address our basic life-support needs (food, shelter, etc), and social and spiritual needs. It will become crystal clear that our individualistic, narcissistic, "me-first", consuming, frenetically busy culture actually works against our survival. When Jesus taught about the Reign of God in our midst, most of the people who followed him were struggling under the weight of poverty and Roman occupation, dealing with basic survival issues. So, perhaps his words will have new meaning for us as we begin to face some basic survival issues. His words of assurance of God's provision are connected to his calling people into a community of caring and sharing. (For example, in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 12, verses 22-34, and the Gospel of Mark, chapter 10, verses 17-31.)

On-line primer on peak oil: <http://www.energybulletin.net/primer#next>

Here is a web-site for some great **DVDs** on these topics: <http://www.peakmoment.tv/> (though they don't address the spiritual-religious dimension for the most part).

For a short, **really, really helpful article** *The Waking Up Syndrome* written by 2 therapists, along with an interview with one of the authors: <http://www.wordpress.peakmoment.tv/conversations/?p=339> . These therapists help us understand that this waking up is a grieving process.

And for grounding in contemplative hope: Thomas Berry's ***The Great Work: Our Way Into the Future***, Bell Tower, 1999; Andrew Harvey's ***The Hope: A Guide to Sacred Activism***, Sept 2009. Harvey shares some marvelous insights of Fr. Bede Griffiths, the contemplative Benedictine monk who lived in a Christian ashram in India. Bede's vision is a key inspiration for this book ; at the same time Harvey also draws on his own training in mystical traditions of four world religions.

To read my **Summary of Study of Resources Related to Current Global Environmental Crises** (Written July 2007 with Additions April 2008) and my work-sheet / hand-out **Ten Action Steps for Individuals and Families Responding to the Current Global Environmental Crises** go to <http://paxchristiflorida.org/resources/> and click on the link in the Environmental Resources section. I am currently working on another update, so brief summaries of all 33 books, plus lots of web-sites and DVDs which I have studied over these 3 years will be included. To receive a copy of it when I have completed it, email me at walt231@mindspring.com.

