November 10, 2014 Layout: Role of Congregations (OMC’s) in moving toward the 2nd YES

*(Please take out your polis handout. I’ll be referring to it later.)*

I’d like to talk a bit about two questions we’ve been pondering:

First, the question we asked you to journal on: How do we collectively - including our organizing mediating communities (OMC’s) and the orgs we’re involved in - move toward the 2nd YES?

And second, What role do our congregations specifically have in moving collectively toward the 2nd yes?

So, the first question first: how do we collectively - including our organizing mediating communities (OMC’s) and the orgs we’re involved in - move toward the 2nd YES? How do we go about creating this thing we have been calling the “Biocommons” – public space, public life, public dealings and interactions that reflect and nurture the sacred life and relationships of the biosphere?

Now, what follows is going to sound a little bit like a sermon because, well, I’m a preacher so I can’t help it. But it also may sound like a sermon because in truth, it’s a fragile statement of faith. Because, you see, I don’t know how we do this. I don’t know how we stand up in the face of this captivity system, this life-destroying NO we’re in and try to create some 2nd YES that has any impact at all. I don’t know how we do this. None of us does.

Because none of us knows how or when this addictive/captivity system is going to hit bottom, or how devastating the effects of climate chaos will be, or if it’s even possible to get this 2nd yes established to a significant enough degree in the next 14 years! And none of us knows truly what this historical moment will ultimately require of us.

Is there going to be a tipping point where the system will just collapse and everything will just be local and all these little organizations we have named will become the new infrastructure? Or will there be a great spiritual awakening out of the crisis and all this manufactured wealth will finally get channeled into creating an actually sustainable economy? Or will anything we do here with our big biocommons vision and our little congregations going to matter, let alone survive? I sometimes feel like Thomas Merton, who began one prayer like this: “My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end.”

Are you with me?

So this biocommons class is more about process than product because we honestly don’t know what the product will, could, should look like, and we don’t actually know how to get there either. But we have glimmers. We have hints. We have some tools. We have the stories we have inherited from our ancestors in faith and struggle. We have the wisdom of our own experiences and the experiences of those in our communities – wisdom that is deep and rich and powerful. And we have the knowledge that there are millions of us all over this world seeking the same kind of transformation.

So it is out of that place of radical trust that we ask the question: How, then, do we move toward the 2nd YES? How do we go about creating this thing we have been calling the “Biocommons” – public space, public life, public dealings and interactions that reflect and nurture the sacred life and relationships within the entire biosphere?

What we’ve been building toward in this biocommons class is this:

**When our congregations**, whether they are well-established or brand new, **truly claim their power as Organized Mediating Communities, and actually MEDIATE, they** (in cooperation with other traditional or non-traditional civil sector organizations) **can in fact make an impact on the system and change it.**

So what does it mean to MEDIATE? Look at **page 2** of your polis handout. See how the Market Sector occupies essentially the entire public arena and shapes the worldview of it? That’s a primary source of debilitating pressure on individuals, families, ecosystems, everything.

So look at **page 4** of that same polis handout. To mediate as an Organized Mediating Community in this scenario means three things:

**1) Protects, nurtures individuals/families/households by standing BETWEEN them and public pressures that come from the coordinated power of highly organized market sector institutions.** (So for example Augustana Lutheran Church is literally STANDING BETWEEN ICE, the Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and Francisco Aguirre and his family, protecting them from being torn apart by immigration policy shaped by fundamentally distorted cultural and economic values. And other churches do the same thing in smaller, less dramatic ways. That’s what it means to mediate.)

**2) To mediate means to become a place for learning and moral development, for interpreting all of reality - not just “spiritual” reality, but economic, cultural, ecological, biospherical, cosmic reality.** (So for example, Wilderness Way tries to mediate in this way by explicitly seeking our moral grounding in both the prophetic Christian tradition and in the natural world, and by allowing the values inherent in both to shape our interpretation of reality. We also partner with other organizations like EcoFaith Recovery and Leaven to create experiences like Biocommons to give us shared language and deepen our understanding of the reality in which we are living.)

**3) To mediate means to become a place for developing relational and leadership skills and so it becomes a ground or platform for organizing.** (So LaVeta told us the story last week of how the Leaven Community began with dozens of intentional relational conversations and is moving into action toward a vision for abundant neighborhoods that emerged from those conversations.)

**THIS IS POWER! THIS KIND OF GROUNDING BUILDS CAPACITY! IT OPENS UP IMAGINATION AND POSSIBILITY and VISION! So HOW do we move toward the 2nd yes and create this thing called the biocommons? We start by re-organizing our faith communities (AND any organization we are part of!!!) to actually MEDIATE in these three ways. And then we COLLABORATE with other Organized Mediating Communities to create a real alternative to the system that is killing us and everything we love.**

Those are the primary roles our congregations (and all Organized Mediating Communities) can play in the creation of the 2nd yes.

But there’s one more critical role for our congregations to play.

You see, moving toward the 2nd yes also starts with the Intentional Relational Conversation, the 1-1. Not because it’s the foundational practice of organizing (which it is), but because it is a sacred encounter. Do you remember the first spiritual exercise we did, when we paid attention to our breath and the water and the grapes and our pulse and were reminded that in fact we are all made of the same sacred elements of life? [Draw concentric circles made of dotted lines. Center: “Sacred 1-1 encounter” Middle: “Biosphere” Outer: “Cosmos” Beyond that: Mystery]

In a 1-1 conversation, when I’m truly present, I am experiencing a sacred encounter with the biosphere, with the cosmos, with the divine, however we understand that. Because in fact, the entire biosphere and cosmos, the whole sacred universe is present in every moment, in every encounter if we have eyes to see it!

Now, that may not be your conscious experience of 1-1’s (though I hope it will be after this course), BUT the addictive/captivity system we’re in maintains its power by separating us [draw thick solid line between center circle and biosphere] from the presence of the sacred in all things, by distracting us from this original and always-present YES, and instead turning EVERYTHING AND EVERYONE INTO AN IT. INTO A COMMODITY. Into a lifeless IT that is valuable ONLY insofar as it keeps the system going.

And this commodification shows up everywhere! It shows up in our work places, in our schools, in our volunteer work, in our activist work. It shows up in our congregations despite our fervent protests that of course we couldn’t possibly see or treat people that way! And it keeps us small and powerless.

I was just having a sacred 1-1 conversation with Crystal last week and she was telling me about her many years of intense activist work, including years of organizing the May Day marches. And she told me that she has never had a 1-1 conversation like we’ve been practicing them here with any other activist in all her years of work. And while she intends to keep organizing the May Day marches, she feels that her experience is in many ways just as dehumanizing as the system they’re fighting against. And so we wondered together, what if she began having Intentional Relational Conversations with some of the other organizers, and what if they were able to include 1-1’s in their meetings. How could that simple practice change the experience of the participants and what power could it open up for the movement?

The Intentional Relational Conversation, the simple 1-1, you see, is a powerful, radical act of resistance that can help us remember the sacred connectedness and power of all life and in doing so it unseats the dis-membering worldview of the addictive/captivity system of capitalism.

It is Dick Harmon’s mustard seed faith that when a congregation orients itself to this three-part MEDIATING work, and then also takes on the role of publicly sharing the stories and awakenings that arise from 1-1 conversations, and publicly recognizing the sacredness of those stories and awakenings, that congregation makes tiny cracks in the seemingly impenetrable commodifying worldview of the captivity system. [Draw something like a sun around the center circle to represent: “Organized Mediating Communities” with rays of light going out and making tiny lines through the thick solid line.]

And when we dare to stay in that tiny sliver of a crack and push back on its distorting pressures with the power of sacred relationships and sacred worldview…well…there are no guarantees, but there’s also no telling what miracles or Mondragons God might work through us.

As Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.” And as our song goes, “If we want to move this mountain, we must move together.”

Ok. Sermon over. Amen.

“My Lord God, we have no idea where we are going. we do not see the road ahead of us. We cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do we really know ourselves, and the fact that we think that we are following your will does not mean that we are actually doing so. But we believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And we hope we have that desire in all that we are doing. we hope that we will never do anything apart from that desire. And we know that if we do this you will lead us by the right road though we may know nothing about it. Therefore will we trust you always though we may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. we will not fear, for you are ever with us, and you will never leave us to face our perils alone.”

― [Thomas Merton](http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/1711.Thomas_Merton), [*Thoughts in Solitude*](http://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/1220202) *(changed from singular pronouns to plural)*