

familiar and the completely unknown. There alone is our old world left behind while we are not yet sure of the new existence. That's a good space where genuine newness can begin. Get there often and stay as long as you can by whatever means possible. It's the realm where God can best get at us because our false certitudes are finally out of the way. This is the sacred space where the old world is able to fall apart, and a bigger world is revealed. If we don't encounter liminal space in our lives, we start idealizing normalcy. The threshold is God's waiting room. Here we are taught openness and patience as we come to expect an appointment with the divine Doctor." Richard Rohr *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999), 155-56.

- A DIFFERENT WAY OF LEADING

- "A liminal season requires a personal presence that is different from leadership during stable times. Problematically, however, many church leaders invest their energy in traditional leadership activities: vision casting, advocating for big new ideas, striving for growth, and mastering new skills. These practices may provide a false sense of control and momentum; however, they don't fundamentally impact liminality." . . . "[Leadership defined by new outcomes and advancing mission] In liminal seasons, traditional leadership activities are exhausting and unproductive." p.20
- "Leading in a liminal season requires helping people manage their anxiety, embrace the freedom of unknowing, explore new possible identities and pathways, and resist the temptation to reorient people before they are ready." p.20
- "Moses' leadership during the wilderness wandering was not remarkable for the milage covered, the growth of the community under his leadership, or the productivity of the community...Moses does not enter into the promised land with the people . . . most of us will not be in leadership on the other side of this liminal era . . . like Moses, we may never enter the promised land. We are liminal leaders, charged with taking the Church through this scary season of disorientation, disengagement, and disenchantment."p.20-21
- "The work of a leader in a liminal season is not easy, and is almost never pretty. However, it may be the most important and ultimately rewarding thing that you do in your lifetime." p.21

Chapter Two — Leading with Presence: Holding Steady

- "Thus am I, a feather on the breath of God" — Hildegard of Bingen
- "Authentic leadership is especially critical in liminal seasons...liminal seasons elicit disorientation and dysfunction. They also invite creativity and imagination. To negotiate the dysfunction and tap into the creativity, an authority figure must lead as an authentic self, a self fully rooted in the Divine and free from the false constructs of the ego. The true self leads from a place of wonder, with suspended expectations about what ought to happen next." pp. 23-24

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- “How does an apple ripen? It sits in the sun. A small green apple cannot ripen in one night by tightening all of its muscles, squinting its eyes and tightening its jaw in order to find itself the next morning miraculously large, red, ripe, and juicy. Like the birth of a baby or the opening of a rose, the birth of the true self takes place in God’s time. We must wait for God, we must be awake; we must trust in his hidden action within us.” From **Merton’s Palace of Nowhere** by James Finley
- “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. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so.

But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.

And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.”

Thomas Merton from - **Thoughts in Solitude**

- “Those who attempt to act and do things for others . . . without deepening their own self-understanding, freedom and capacity to love, will have nothing to give others. They will communicate to others nothing but the contagion of their own obsessions, their aggressiveness, their ego-centered ambitions, their delusions about ends and means, their doctrinaire prejudices and ideas.” Thomas Merton **Contemplation in a World of Action**
- “Presence, then, is a leadership awareness characterized by an openness to wonder. Presence demonstrates a willingness to experiment, take risks, and learn from mistakes. It is guided by Spirit, and is willing to face failure. Presence is knowing that emerges from the intelligence of the heart and spirit—from a place of wisdom. In a state of Presence, we recognize our God-given self, interdependent with the God-given self of the institution we lead.” p.24
- PRESENCE: A QUALITY OF AWARENESS
- Expanding Awareness
 - Viewing the dance floor from balcony or the flock from the top of a ridge.
 - developing the habit of viewing from Christ-consciousness too
- False Self versus True self
 - Merton on False and true self:

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- “Everyone of us is shadowed by an illusory person: a false self. This is the man [sic] I want myself to be but who cannot exist, because God does not know anything about him. And to be unknown to God is altogether too much privacy...A life devoted to the cult of this shadow figure is what is called a life of sin... All sin starts from the assumption that my false self, the self that exists only in my own egocentric desires, is the fundamental reality of life to which everything else in the universe is ordered. Thus, I use up my life in the desire for pleasures and the thirst for experiences, for power, honor, knowledge and love, to clothe this false self and construct its nothingness into something objectively real.” *New Seeds of Contemplation* p.37
- The true self is like a mirror: a mirror in which God sees the divine self; a little world illumined by the light of Christ; an inexhaustible resource for self-sacrificing love; a special place where God’s name is written; a point of pure truth at the center of our being; a temple where God dwells; a center point or apex of the soul responsive to the Holy Spirit.
- "At the center of our being is a point of nothingness which is untouched by sin and by illusion, a point of pure truth, a point or spark which belongs entirely to God, which is never at our disposal, from which God disposes of our lives, which is inaccessible to the fantasies of our own mind or the brutalities of our own will. This little point of nothingness and of absolute poverty is the pure glory of God in us. It is so to speak His name written in us, as our poverty, as our indigence, as our dependence, as our son-ship. It is like a pure diamond, blazing with the invisible light of heaven. It is in everybody, and if we could see it we would see these billions of points of light coming together in the face and blaze of a sun that would make all the darkness and cruelty of life vanish completely.... I have no program for this seeing. It is only given. But the gate of heaven is everywhere.” — Merton, Thomas. *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Image Classics) (pp. 155-156).
- ILLUMINATING OUR BLIND SPOTS
 - open mind: suspend judgement
 - open heart: hearing viewpoints of others from a empathetic frame of reference
 - open will: first step of true discernment — becoming disinterested in specific outcomes
- THREE SPIRITUAL SHIFTS
 - From Knowing to Unknowing

- becoming suspicious of our own habitual ways of thinking / viewing things
- learning to trust spiritual intuition
- Unknowing is *not* ignorance
- people can respect a leader who offers knowledge gently without holding too tightly
- Unknowing appreciates a lot of wonderment . . . holding things in wonder and trusting the slow work of discernment rather than rushing to judgement.
- from advocating to attending — Energy follows from attention. p. 41
 - “A liminal season is different from other seasons of change, because the level of disruption is so profound. In a liminal season we don’t have a clear picture of where we are, nor do we have clarity about where we are going. We only know that a step in some direction is required for learning. Advocacy doesn’t serve well when we are living with such profound disorientation. Advocacy assumes certainty about direction and clarity about outcomes. By contrast, an attending stance invites me to love God and others in the situation directly in front of me. . . . I embrace the fulness of the present moment for all that it might teach me. . . . Attending is a capacity for deep seeing and listening. It is an act of being fully present to the moment.” p.41
 - BCJ’s “the holiness of just what is.”
- from striving to surrendering
 - “The striving self is a false self. It does not know what it doesn’t know.” p.43
 - Nouwen’s three temptations of a pastor:
 - to be relevant
 - to be spectacular
 - to be powerful
 - “To surrender is to yield, to submit to the powerful reality of what is, to take a long loving look at what is real, to welcome the situation in front of you.” p.43
 - This is a contemplative approach
 - Surrender is a hard path to sell to a church which is experiencing the twinned troubles of denial and despair.

- To surrender is not to “welcome” every situation — rather it is to yield and allow what wants to happen to emerge.
 - Coming to attend to mom understanding that no act of love is ever wasted. Instead of trying to make her clear-minded again, accepting the reality of her dementia and coming to see that she was still beautiful and admirable even when she could no longer remember how to use a fork.
- “Only after surrender can we be led by our own emerging future. Congregations today need to surrender to the realities of decline and stagnation. We need to quit fighting our liminal reality, as if this is something we can ward off by striving harder at what we know how to do. By saying yes to what is, we align ourselves with a future that needs and wants to emerge through us” p.46

- Chapter Three - Tending the Soul of the Institution

- “In the last chapter we explored the presence that serves a leader well during a liminal season. However, a leader must *do* something with their presence. A leader who doesn’t offer some meaningful work for the congregation to do will not remain in leadership long. Followers tolerate ambiguity and inactivity only so long before they attach themselves elsewhere. Any individual who offers an alternative to anxiety will capture their attention.” p.49
- Activities which are helpful in a liminal season:
 - Deepening discernment (Chapter 4)
 - Shaping institutional memory to help make meaning out of experience (Chapter 5)
 - Clarifying the organization’s purpose now (Chapter 6)
 - Engaging Emergence (Chapter 7)
 - Each of these is similar to the others in that all are *not* about striving and certitudes. They are about letting the authentic self of the institution emerge in a new circumstance. They are a form of listening deeply.
 - “On the surface, these activities mirror leadership actions taken in times of certainty. Upon deeper reflection, these are activities deeply rooted in unknowing, attending, and surrender.” p.50

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- “The inner self is as secret as God and, like Him, it evades every concept that tries to seize hold of it with full possession. It is a life that cannot be held and studied as object, because it is not “a thing.” It is not reached and coaxed forth from hiding by any process under the sun, including meditation. All that we can do with any spiritual discipline is produce within ourselves something of the silence, the humility, the detachment, the purity of heart, and the indifference which are required if the inner self is to make some shy, unpredictable manifestation of his presence.” — Merton. *New Seeds of Contemplation*, p7
 - “Soul-tending work begins with a basic assumption—that an organization has a soul—a spark of divine essence that represents the true self of the organization. Furthermore, this work assumes that God is invested in the choices that impact the future of the organization, and that God will reveal God’s interest to those with discerning hearts. Finally, this work assumes that discernment is the key to connecting the authentic self of the leader with the authentic self of the institution.” p.50
- WHAT IS THE SOUL?
- “Evelyn Underhill, poet writer, and mystic, describes the soul as a transmitting instrument that recognizes the fundamental relationship between itself and the divine. She quotes Ignatius in saying, ‘What matters most to soul is the full realization that: We come from God. We belong to God. We are destined for God’” [*The Ways of the Spirit* Underhill p. 116] p. 50.
 - “The voice of the soul has an intuitive sense of integrity, coherence, and elegance. It responds to beauty and to wonder.” pp.50-51
 - A biblical example of institutional “soul” might be the way the Book of Revelation addresses the angles of the churches.
 - Beaumont’s working definition of institutional soul: “*The soul is an agent of the divine spark in the institution. The soul is the authentic and truest self of the institution; the source of its divine calling, character, and destiny; the protector of institutional integrity.*” p. 52
- WHAT THE SOUL IS NOT
- not the “collective voice of the leadership body”
 - not the “culture of the organization”

- not the “spirituality of the organization”
 - not the “movement of the HS through the organization”
 - “The souls is closely related to these phenomena, and may find expression through them, but the divine essence is not contained in these things.” p.52
- CORINE WARE’S FOUR SPIRITUAL STYLES
- Thinking
 - feeling
 - being
 - doing
- I could plot these using Kataphatic/Apophatic *et cetera* chart from my teaching. PHL
- BEAUMONT’S LANGUAGE FOR EXPLORING THE SOUL’S JOURNEY pp.60-61
- **Divine Spark** - pure wisdom that finds expression in divine vocation.
 - **Founding Vision** - Once first spark is experienced, experiments are undertaken and learned from; resources are allocated; institution is established. Vision, vocation, and values are in near alignment with the vision & values of the leader.
 - **Leadership Transitions** - With each new generational shift in leadership the organization become increasingly removed from the simplicity of the founding vision. Fresh expressions of the divine spark may emerge along the way.
 - **Dark Nights and Glory Eras** - institution experiences seasons when it seems Spirit is present and they are fruitful, other seasons when the Spirit seems absent and the institution languishes.
 - **Liminal Seasons** - seasons when the organization is naturally more receptive to rediscovering and working with the divine essence.
- “Institutional soul tending seeks resonance between the divine spark and the actions of the present membership body.” p.61
- APPROACHING THE SOUL OF AN INSTITUTION
- “The soul in humans and in institutions is illusive.” p. 62

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- “The inner self is as secret as God and, like Him, it evades every concept that tries to seize hold of it with full possession. It is a life that cannot be held and studied as object, because it is not “a thing.” It is not reached and coaxed forth from hiding by any process under the sun, including meditation. All that we can do with any spiritual discipline is produce within ourselves something of the silence, the humility, the detachment, the purity of heart, and the indifference which are required if the inner self is to make some shy, unpredictable manifestation of his presence. — Merton *New Seeds of Contemplation*, p. 7
- “The soul is like a wild animal...tough resilient, resourceful, savvy, and self-sufficient: it knows how to survive in hard places...Yet despite its toughness, the soul is shy. Just like a wild animal, it seeks safety in the dense underbrush, especially when other people are around. If we want to see a wild animal, we know that the last thing we should do is go crashing through the woods yelling for it to come out. but if we will walk quietly into the woods, sit patiently at the base of a tree, breathe with the earth, and fade into our surroundings, the wild creature we seek might put in an appearance. We may see it only briefly and only out of the corner of our eye—but the sight is a gift we will always treasure as an end in itself.” Parker Palmer - *Hidden Wholeness* pp.58-59.
- Beaumont intends to focus remainder of the book on four bodies of soulful organizational work:
 - Deepening group discernment (chapter 4)
 - Shaping institutional memory (chapter 5)
 - clarifying purpose (chapter 6)
 - engaging emergence (chapter 7)
- ELIMINATING A FALSE DIVIDE
 - when we put “spiritual people” in charge of faith formation, and pastoral care
 - and put fiduciary and strategic thinkers on boards and trustees groups.
 - This is a false dichotomy — as if there is spiritual work and tactical work. in truth *both* belong to one another and we would do well to keep them holistically understood.
 - She quotes Rohr’s thoughts on dualistic, binary ways of thinking. p.63

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- “Tending the soul of the institution is an ongoing process, a journey without an identifiable conclusion. There isn’t a right way or a wrong way to do this work. It is difficult to know where you are on the path, or even if you are on the path. The work belongs to the community; you cannot do it alone. These features make soul-tending work both dangerous and full of opportunity—much like the times we live in.” p.64
- This makes me think of the following Merton prayer:

“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. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so.

But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.

And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

Thomas Merton from - *Thoughts in Solitude*

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- Chapter 4 — Deepening Group Discernment: Seeing What God is Up To
 - “*God does not exist to answer our prayers, but by our prayers we come to discern the mind of God.*” Oswald Chambers
 - Ben Johnson in 1995 — “We are clever people. We do not need God to *manage* the church to achievable ends. We’re perfectly capable of doing that ourselves. We *need God* when our vision is bigger than we can manage — when we know that without God the vision cannot happen.”
 - My own “Discernment Primer” might be useful in training here, - PHL
 - In the modern age we have thought of “discernment” much like the ancients understood the cardinal virtue of Wisdom - meaning careful and deliberative rational decision-making. To be “wise” is to understand yourself and others as you/they *really are*. To see the situation correctly. What is left out of this is the presence and intention of *God*.

Many Elders are comfortable with leading in wise ways, and yet struggle to practice *discernment* precisely because they are uncertain that God is present and can make God's will known to us.

- Jeremiah 29:13-14 “When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, *I will let you find me*, says the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile. ”
- Romans 12:1-2 “I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that *you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.*”

- WHAT IS DISCERNMENT?

- “... an ever-increasing capacity to ‘see’ the work of God in the midst of the human situation, so that we can align ourselves with whatever God is doing.” p.68
- “To discern is to sow through to the essence of the matter. Discernment distinguishes the real from the phony, true from the false, the good from the evil, and the path toward God from the path away from God.” Chuck Olsen & Danny Morris — *Discerning God's Will Together: A Spiritual Practice for the Church*
- PHL - I am less inclined to like the Olsen & Morris definition. It suggests a binary choice pattern which I think is incorrect. There are many “right, true, real options and when you set it up as binary you lose the freedom of exploring beyond your first “right, true, good, godly” solution. It also begins to sound a lot like classical notions of *wisdom* which is not an evil/bad thing . . . but which does not include God's agency as much as I would want to include it.

- QUICK REVIEW OF WESTERN XN DISCERNMENT pp. 70-71

- From Origen to Cassian discernment was principally thought of as a personal discernment.
- As the church diverged into East and West, the West, heavily influenced by the structures of the Roman Empire, lost much of it's focus on personal discernment and

typically lodged discernment tasks in the hands of Cardinal and Bishops (Abbas and Ammas of monastic communities too).

- In the Dark Ages Meister Eckhart, Thomas a Kempis, and other mystics restored discernment as a part of private piety.
- In the early 16th century Ignatius of Loyola included discernment as a part of the Spiritual Exercises : *Rules for Discernment of Spirits*. These blended imagination with reason, biblical connections, experience, testing and feelings as important components of the discernment process.
- The Protestant Reformation added a strong biblical focus on using scripture as a means to discernment.
- Anabaptists, Quakers, and others recovered the role of silence in the process of discernment.
- The Methodist gave us the quadrilateral
 - **Scripture**
 - **Tradition**
 - **Reason**
 - **Experience**
- Modern attention to practices of mindfulness and meditation can be seen as explorations of discernment in a society which is spiritual but not religious.
- DECIDING VERSUS DISCERNING
 - She basically describes the inclination of modern church-boards to practice decision-making rather than discernment. Tactical decisions, instead of adaptive change.
 - See my own Keynote doc entitled “Technical versus Adaptive change.key”
 - Beaumont provides a helpful table describing a discernment process on p. 73
 - p. 75 she *also* believes that discernment is sometimes hindered by the decision making process and so (like me) has the group agree *not to decide* during the gathering (s) until much time has been given to discernment.
- PREPARING A COMMUNITY FOR DISCERNMENT

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- This begins by unearthing and exploring the community's *assumptions about God's agency*.
 - Recruitment and election of those inclined to *discern* beyond simple decision-making.
 - training of those who already show the early competencies: stillness, prayer, listening.
 - development of an intentional process for group-discernment.
 - WARNING — this will take time. It will also likely move *some* currently leadership out of the discerning-body as they are good decision-makers but lack interest in or trust in discernment process.
 - This is a slow, incremental, and *must be gentle process* of transition to a new way of leading, learning, and discerning.
- **Explore Assumptions**
 - “Discernment makes no inherent sense to people who believe that God set the world in motion and then stepped back to see how humans negotiate things on their own. These people won’t be able to consider God as an active agent in decision-making. Similarly, people who believe that God’s will prevails regardless of the actions we take are not likely to see discernment as a purposeful activity.” p.75
 - God is Self-revealing
 - God gives us choice and the choices we make matter to God
 - Discernment is a **gift** of God mediated through the presence of the Holy Spirit
 - Discernment is a **discipline** we practice
 - The truths of God are revealed and tested *in community*
 - Discernment / clarity unfolds in God’s time — we must get used to trusting the slow work of God.

Questions from Susan Beaumont

10 Questions to Ask Now
June 1, 2020 by Susan Beaumont

We have been reactive. How else can one be during a pandemic? The opinions of outside experts have guided our actions since this all began, and their positions change daily. When to close, how to take church online, protocols to follow before opening. Now, things are slowing down a bit and it is time to become more reflective—tapping into our own wisdom and exploring the potent learning opportunities at hand. The shift begins by asking better questions.

Liminal seasons are rich times, ripe for innovation and creativity. A threshold has opened. Our grasp on the past has loosened. The threshold invites us to let go of our fears and discomforts, along with some things that we hold dear. We are broken open to embrace new possibilities.

Moving from reactivity to reflection calls for three kinds of work: acknowledging our losses, exploring unstated assumptions, and noticing what wants to emerge. Good questions will create a holding space for this transformational work.

I have adapted the following ten reflective questions from “*Strategies for Winter: Redemptive Leadership in Survival Times*,” published in Praxis. I recommend that you find a quiet space to sit, read each of these questions, and journal your responses. Then take the questions to your leadership teams and bring them in on the learning.

What Have We Lost?

All significant transitions begin with an ending. Something must come to an end before we can explore a new beginning. Most of us resist endings, accompanied as they are by loss. We gloss over the painful work of grief to move onto action, which feels more productive. Every leader I have spoken with in recent weeks has a personal story of loss to share about their journey through the pandemic. There are the immediately evident losses associated with sickness and unattended deaths. Then, there are the more subtle, but still painful losses associated with plans abandoned, dreams deferred, and the loss of control over our destiny.

† **What were we on the verge of discovering or accomplishing before the onset of the pandemic? What needs to move forward in different ways now?**

† **What was possible before that may not be possible for some time—if ever?**

† **What seemed important before that feels superfluous now?**

Perhaps you were on the verge of launching a new strategic plan, an organizational restructuring, or a capital campaign. Honor the effort and energy that it took to bring your project to fruition. Now, acknowledge that this is something that no longer matters, at least not in the same way. The loss is real.

On the flip side, some of our losses are freeing. The definition of “membership” which absorbed so much energy in recent years is suddenly not relevant in the same way. Someone new to the congregation stumbles upon us online through a guided prayer meditation offered by our associate pastor. They have attached themselves to us, albeit in a limited way. How will we talk about and nurture that attachment? It is a new and refreshing conversation.

What Did We Assume?

When making decisions, most of us are aware of what we do and what others do. We are also aware of how we do things, the processes that we follow when we act. Most of us are less aware of why we do what we do—the unstated assumptions that undergird our choices. In a liminal season, many of our old assumptions no longer hold true. If we do not acknowledge the truth of this, we will make decisions that are inappropriate for the next season. We need good questions to unfreeze some of our old assumptions and expand our consciousness.

† **What was undervalued before that may hold greater value now?**

† **What mattered about geography before that no longer matters?**

† **What margin or lack of margin was built into our old model of doing church? What new abundance are we experiencing now? Where are we experiencing scarcity now that was not evident before?**

In a recent conversation, one pastor bemoaned the fact that her staff team has one full time equivalent staff to attend the needs of every eight young people in the church. Perhaps that structure made sense when the church pursued excellence through programming. Maybe it never really made sense.

However, this same pastor noted that the audio-visual technical work that makes online worship possible is carried out by a volunteer—the youth director’s husband. If that volunteer takes a vacation this summer, worship will not happen. Needs and priorities are shifting. Values and assets are not the same as they were just a few months ago.

What Wants to Emerge?

In liminal organizations, a new status quo emerges naturally over time as groups interact under conditions of upheaval, disturbance, or dissonance. Eventually, new structures arise in response to a changed environment. Organizations gravitate toward order over chaos.

If we remain protective of the old status quo during the emergence process, our new order will look remarkably like the old normal—not much adaptation will occur.

When we ask better questions, we invite innovation into the new order. We can be led by the future itself into something fresh and exciting. We begin noticing what wants to emerge through us.

† **What is our greatest asset now?**

† **What relationships will we need to build on or strengthen in the months ahead?**

† **What unique role might our congregation play in local, national, and even global recovery?**

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† **What long term changes in the bigger picture would we like to be part of bringing to fruition?**

These questions are not meant to be magic bullets that solve problems. The questions are merely an invitation to pay exquisite attention—to notice why we are making the choices we make, and what wants to happen next. The dialogue that these questions provoke can make the difference between merely surviving this season and thriving in the next.