

Integrities

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GOOD THINGS IN DARK TIMES

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In the words of Amanda Gorman, the nation's first-ever youth poet laureate, from the poem she wrote for President Biden's inauguration, we can find light in dark times.

*“When day comes we ask ourselves,
where can we find light in this never-ending shade?
The loss we carry,
We've learned that quiet isn't always peace
And the norms and notions of what just is
Isn't always just-ice
And yet the dawn is ours before we knew it
Somehow we do it . . .”*

MESSAGE FROM BILL CANE

We are indebted to Linda Wallace for this issue of *Integrities* on the pandemic and on climate change.

GOOD THINGS IN DARK TIMES

The COVID pandemic has infected people all around the world, and people keep dying from it. But at least we can envision an end to COVID.

Climate change is affecting the whole world also. But we can see no end to the destructiveness of climate change.

Here in the US, climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic have had huge impacts on our lives. Hurricanes, flooding, fires, evacuations, toxic air, destruction of homes and businesses, and the deaths of loved ones have devastated growing numbers of people. Lock-downs, quarantines, loss of jobs and businesses, severe illness, and more deaths have further devastated our lives as COVID spreads through our towns, cities and country-side. Climate change and pandemics are no longer theoretical possibilities but have become everyday personal experiences.

Despite the hopelessness many of us feel, some positive things have emerged as a result of the pandemic and the consequences of climate change. There are glimmers of hope emerging around the world. While some of the trends may be temporary, they demonstrate that changes in our way of life are possible—changes that can have positive future outcomes for us and for the planet.

ELECTRIC CARS

In the midst of heatwaves and record-breaking wildfires in California, Governor Gavin Newsom signed an executive order requiring that within 15 years, all new cars sold in California be electric or zero-emissions. He stressed that the ban is a long term measure to fight climate change in a state where transportation is the greatest source of greenhouse gas emissions.

The Governor explained, “For too many decades, we have allowed cars to pollute the air that our children and families breathe . . . Californians shouldn’t have to worry about cars giving our kids asthma. Our cars shouldn’t be allowed to make wildfires worse—and create more days filled with smoky air. Cars shouldn’t melt glaciers or raise sea levels that threaten our cherished beaches and coastlines. . . We can’t continue down this path.” (The Guardian, US edition, September 23, 2020).

Governor Newsom’s words could have ripple effects across the country and prompt automakers to increase production of electric vehicles. California, the fifth largest economy in the world, has the largest market for electric vehicles and hybrids in the US and is an influential leader in clean vehicles and fighting climate change.

Thirteen other states and the District of Columbia have already adopted California’s earlier stringent fuel efficiency and emissions standards. Furthermore, at least four major auto manufacturers and

22 states in addition to California defied or fought former President Trump's rollback of Obama era auto efficiency and emissions standards. It is not unreasonable to believe that other states will also follow Governor Newsom's lead in requiring all new cars to be electric or zero-emissions.



A KIA electric car being charged at a local charging station.

THE PANDEMIC AND AIR POLLUTION

While dirtier air is starting to return, we have all enjoyed the cleaner air resulting from the lockdowns instituted to fight the pandemic. Around the world, industrial soot, tailpipe emissions and greenhouse gases fell to lower levels than have existed for decades. Air pollution in New Delhi, a city with notoriously toxic air, declined by 50% and in Los Angeles and New York City concentrations of particulate matter fell 20-30% from the year before. Decreases in air pollution have been so great that the

Lancet reported they could be seen from outer space. Cleaner air is estimated to have saved 77,000 lives in China alone during January and February of 2020. And, here in the US, according to a New York Times article, “deaths related to more typical respiratory illnesses like asthma and lung disease” have also fallen in the clean air. These statistics clearly show a strong link between air pollution, respiratory illness and premature deaths.

According to the World Health Organization, seven million people worldwide die from air pollution each year. Cleaner air during the pandemic shows us that large reductions in air pollution are possible. We can imagine a world in which improvements in air quality are permanent, skies are blue, and the numbers of premature deaths caused by air pollution are greatly diminished. Although such a scenario might seem implausible, emerging evidence indicates that we might, in fact, be very close to a tipping point—a massive global transition away from fossil fuels to clean, non-polluting renewable energy (The Lancet, Volume 4, Issue 10, October 1, 2020).

Some states, like Maryland, are using pollution data collected during the pandemic to develop legislation to expand telecommuting, which reduces the use of fossil fuels, and to promote electric vehicles to extend the benefits of the cleaner air we’ve enjoyed. At least 15 other countries, including the United Kingdom, France and Germany, have already made pledges mandating zero-emission vehicles.

CITIES FIGHTING CLIMATE CHANGE

Some cities around the globe are also combating climate change. According to the World Bank, 56% of the world's people live in cities. Although they occupy only a small percentage of the world's landmass, cities consume over two-thirds of the world's energy and are responsible for more than 70% of global CO₂ emissions. Every city is different. Each has its own environment, climate, industries, economy, demographics, and culture. Cities in the North and South have different challenges and different solutions. Like states, cities have the power to reduce the carbon emissions of millions of people, and many have already taken action. C40 is a network of 97 megacities around the globe that have committed to addressing climate change and to collaborating with each other to improve and accelerate climate action.

Freetown in Sierra Leone and Bogota in Columbia are both C40 cities and were both featured in the New York Times virtual event series on climate change, "Netting Zero." It was encouraging to hear about the measures each city is taking to reduce carbon emissions. And, the rationales given for selecting the mix of measures being pursued by each city helped me understand that solutions in one part of the world, such as California's electric vehicle mandate, do not necessarily work in other parts of the world.

BOGOTA

Bogota is currently a 2 hour city. People live in one place and work in another. This requires workers to commute to get to their jobs in the city, which can take 2 hours and cost people up to 30% of their income, as well as increasing carbon emissions from cars and buses used as transportation. Claudia Lopez Hernandez, Mayor of Bogota, explained that her city is striving to become a “30 minute city” so that people can reach downtown from their homes in 30 minutes. The first metro line for Bogota and its suburbs is being built and will run through poorer neighborhoods to provide climate-friendly, low cost transportation. Mixed use areas - housing, business and industry - are being planned to reduce the need for commuting. And roads for cars are being taken away and given over to bikes. Currently there are 600 kilometers of bike paths with 250 kilometers additional paths planned.



Bicycles in Bogota

Less than 20% of Bogota’s residents own a car. The mayor made clear that electric cars in developing cities like Bogota are not as appropriate as biking and walking in creating a “30 minute” city.

“The most important thing,” she said, “is a pedestrian and bike network that has good infrastructure and is safe so people in outlying areas can access what is available in cities”.

FREETOWN

Yvonne Aki-Sawyer, Mayor of Freetown, described the initiatives adopted to address climate change in a city which suffers from overpopulation, deforestation, abnormally high rainfall and flooding. In 2017 a very large mudslide killed a thousand people. Now residents understand the relationship between climate change and flooding, making climate change a personal issue.

A million trees are being planted and cared for, not just by hired workers, but by the people who live in the City. These trees will function as carbon sinks by drawing in and holding on to carbon, and distributing carbon into the soil while also mitigating against erosion, run-off and flooding. Known as “afforestation,” planting large numbers of trees is a multidimensional opportunity.



Planting trees in Sierra Leon

Creating new forests can sink carbon and support biodiversity, address human needs for firewood, food and medicine, and provide ecosystem services such as flood and drought protections (Paul Hawken, Drawdown).

When Aki-Sawyerr became Mayor of Freetown, only 21 percent of solid waste was collected. Her goal is to increase collection to 60% by 2022. The design of a sanitary landfill park has been finalized. In addition, the City is working on a cable car system that will carry 6,000 people per hour. The target date for completion of the system is also 2022. Both Projects will create much needed jobs along with reducing carbon emissions.

Situations are different in different parts of the world. Mayor Aki-Sawyerr explained that they are not talking about electric vehicles in Freetown. “Focus on electric vehicles would require building expensive roads and charging stations, which is not feasible. Funding mass transit is a better use of funds”.

Back in the US, **President Biden’s plan to address climate change will ween the US off fossil fuels and enable the US to reach net-zero emissions no later than 2050.**

CHANGING HOW PEOPLE CAN BE FED

The pandemic and climate change have intensified food insecurity across the world. According to the UN World Food Program (WFP), an estimated 135 million people across 55 countries faced life-threatening food insecurity in 2019. The pandemic is projected to nearly double this number. Pandemic lock downs have made it more difficult for people to access food. Massive job losses and economic downturns around the globe have left millions unable to afford food for themselves and their families.

In the US, millions of newly unemployed people are flooding food banks and pantries, which are having difficulty meeting the surging demand. Supermarket shelves in the US were shockingly empty in the early days of the pandemic and scarcity of certain products still exists. But, these disruptions were not caused by food production shortages. Farmers were actually plowing under crops they would have supplied to restaurants and schools or shipped overseas. The empty shelves were due to panic buying, hoarding, increases in the amount of food prepared at home due to restaurant and school closures, shut-downs of meat packing plants, and distribution issues caused by rigid supply chains that were unable to quickly adapt to the abrupt changes in purchasing patterns.

According to Georgina Gustin, a reporter for InsideClimate News, these worldwide disruptions in the food system illustrate “the fragility of the world’s food production system.” Although scientists have long projected that climate change would disturb farming and

food systems, Gustin says there is “no clear global strategy for building resilience” and managing risks to the food supply, or feeding a growing number of people in a warming world.

Fortunately, current disruptions have also prompted many analysts, farmers and researchers to examine how supply chains might be modified or regionalized to deal with disruptions, including those caused by climate change.

This public health crisis has exposed quite sharply the cracks in so many of the systems we're living with, the food system among them...Disaster as it is, it might be an opportunity to rethink food systems fundamentally.

Critics say our food systems are highly vulnerable to disruptions because they're so globalized and concentrated. Mergers and corporate consolidation across the food system mean that just a handful of corporations, including Nestle (the largest food company in the world), control nearly all food production, processing and distribution. Another downside is that large scale industrialized agriculture has a very large carbon footprint.

Because of these weaknesses, **the International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES-Food) is calling for a paradigm shift in agriculture “toward a more diversified system, based on principles of agro-ecology, in which a greater variety of crops are grown, using fewer chemicals, and often on a smaller, regional scale.”** The UN Intergovernmental Panel on

Climate Change agrees that these changes are needed to build sustainable food production and resilience to climate change.

A highly specialized, centralized, concentrated agri-business food system is never resilient, so it's vulnerable to anything that comes its way...Farmers have to be able to make decisions; they can't be beholden to these centralized supply chains. That's going to make us better prepared for climate change and ongoing pandemics (Mary Hendrickson PhD, Associate Professor of Rural Sociology, University of Missouri).

Nevertheless, there is a debate about how future food systems should look. According to Olivier de Schutter, former United Nations special rapporteur on the right to food, there are three primary schools of thought. One that has prevailed for years relies on global trade of food that maximizes the agricultural advantages of each participating country. This model has resulted in monocultures, like the vast corn fields in the Mid-west, and many countries becoming dependent on imports to feed their population. A closely related approach calls for increased use of technologies in developing countries such as “large scale irrigation, mechanization, pesticides and fertilizers, along with high-yielding seeds, similar to those of the Green Revolution.” And there’s growing impetus to give “more support to smaller-scale farmers, working in regional food systems and producing a diversity of crops and livestock” in line with the agro-ecological principles recommended by IPES-Food and the UN.

The European Union (EU) recently published a report in which it “set targets for cutting fertilizer and pesticide use, and increasing organic production and diversity on agricultural lands”

RECENT TRENDS IN THE US

A trend has emerged in the US during the pandemic that embraces the agro-ecological approach to creating a more resilient food system. When grocery stores had empty shelves and couldn't meet the demand for fresh fruits and vegetables, many people began purchasing produce from local farms. Others started gardens and began growing vegetables for themselves. Across the US small produce farms experienced a sudden increase in demand, including applications to purchase Community Supported Agriculture shares, weekly boxes of farm fresh veggies. Like so many others, Live Earth Farms, an organic farm located in Corralitos near Watsonville had more requests than it could handle. My neighbors tried to join its CSA, but were told there were no more memberships available for our area. Seeds also sold out across the country because demand was so high. I had to use seeds saved from previous years to grow my vegetables this year.



Local Community Supported Agriculture packing boxes, purchasing produce from local farms.

All Photos in this issue are courtesy of Linda Wallace except as specifically noted.

Jennifer Grossman, farmer and consultant for the Natural Resources Defense Council, explains:

This challenge we're now facing has refocused the value of regional food systems as they are proving to provide resilience and transparency in a time when so much is uncertain. There's a reason Americans have purchased every last seed packet and baby chick in America: We're all concerned about what happens if the trucks stop running, the cashiers strike, or farm workers can't get visas. Connecting directly with a local farmer cuts out questions about trucking and store stocking. It's a little veggie insurance policy. People staying home have more time to cook. People want to support local businesses.

Like the many organic farms in Santa Cruz County, small farms are inherently less carbon-intensive because they use fewer "inputs" like chemical fertilizer and are more resilient because they produce more than one product and tend to use more soil-conservation practices that trap carbon in the soil.

So, good things are coming out of the dark times brought about by climate change and the pandemic after all! And, knowing that efforts are being made all over the world to reduce carbon emissions, increase resilience and create more sustainable consumption patterns can give us hope for a healthier planet and, in turn, motivate us to make the changes necessary to help it happen.

IN MEMORIAM

**IT IS WITH A SAD HEART THAT IF
SAYS GOOD-BYE TO A MUCH LOVED
FRIEND, BOARD MEMBER AND
HUMANITARIAN
BILL LEININGER.
YOU WILL BE MISSED BY ALL WHO
HAVE KNOWN YOU.**



Bill Leininger photo courtesy San Jose Mercury

REMEMBERING BILL LEININGER

by Linda Wallace

Bill Leininger, who served on the IF board for decades, passed away on Jan. 2 at his home in Los Gatos. As we mourn Bill's passing, we remember him in many ways: as a champion for social justice, as a laughing Santa Claus at our Light and Darkness gatherings, as a priest who truly sought to be love in action. He worked on many IF projects over the years, including creating and running IF-WHEN, which directed thousands of dollars each year to social justice and humanitarian organizations.

I met Bill in the late seventies when I was a graduate student in Social Work trying to find solutions to the shortage of affordable housing in San Jose and Bill was working with Catholic Social Services to find housing for people in need. Bill marched with Cesar Chavez and fought for janitors seeking higher wages, better working conditions and benefits. He joined vigils to support Walmart employees. He fought for immigrant rights and was one of the recipients of the 2005 Advocate Award from the Services, Immigrant Rights and Education Network. He worked with environmental groups, homeless advocates, and groups that promote accessible health care, always striving to improve the lives of the poor and marginalized. His good works touched the lives of many people and his smile and twinkling eyes lifted the spirits of all with whom he came in contact.

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