change (almost) everything.

slides will be available:

brianmclaren.net
Dear Lord, I have swept and I have washed but Still nothing is as shining as it should be for you. Under the sink, for example, is an uproar of mice—it is the season of their many children. What shall I do? And under the eaves and through the walls the squirrels have gnawed their ragged entrances—but it is the season when they need shelter, so what shall I do? And the raccoon limps into the kitchen and opens the cupboard while the dog snores, the cat hugs the pillow; what shall I do? Beautiful is the new snow falling in the yard and the fox who is staring boldly up the path, to the door. And still I believe you will come, Lord: you will, when I speak to the fox the sparrow, the lost dog, the shivering sea-goose, know that really I am speaking to you whenever I say, as I do all morning and afternoon: Come in, Come in.
receptivity
letting go

letting be

letting come

receptivity
Visionary/Prophetic Religion
leading forward

Why lead forward?
The historical challenge

The doctrinal challenge

The structural challenge

The missional challenge

The liturgical challenge

The spiritual challenge
The historical challenge
The doctrinal challenge
The structural challenge
The missional challenge
The liturgical challenge
The spiritual challenge
The demographic challenge
shrinking & wrinkling ...
decline isn’t the only story. some churches are thriving & growing ...
decline isn’t the only story. some churches are thriving & growing … often with

- extraordinary leaders
- ideal contexts
- creative experiments
- desirable “product” in market for religious goods & services
but even where we find growing churches …
- at the expense of their communities?
- pastoral burnout/flame-out?
- generational retention?
- resurgence of white Christian nationalism?
when we acknowledge the status quo isn’t working …

change becomes possible.

a funny thing about pastoral ministry …
your unwritten mission:
your unwritten mission:

keep people happy
your unwritten mission:

keep people happy

but happy people

don’t change.
pain of change

ease of denial

pain of not changing
most churches will exhaust themselves and their resources micromanaging their own decline
but some will take the path of descent and discover new beginnings
vision of future

comfort in present

nostalgia for past
Understanding America

The population of the United States is not distributed evenly. Instead, we tend to bunch up in communities, leaving the spaces in between more sparsely inhabited. Most Americans live in or near cities; today 53 percent live in the 20 largest cities. 75 percent of all Americans live in metropolitan areas.

This map shows population density. The relative height of each major city reflects its population in 1990.

Go West. Nevada is the fastest growing state, followed by Arizona, Idaho, Colorado, and Utah.

Wyoming has the lowest population density of all states in the lower 48 with an average of five people per square mile.

What happens in the empty spaces? Some of it is farming country. More than one quarter of America's crop land is used to grow corn. One third of what is produced is exported to other countries.

Chicago, the country's third largest city, has a population of about 3 million people. There are 21 states with populations smaller than this city.

Largest metropolitan area includes New York City and portions of New Jersey and Long Island with a total population of 26 million.

Population density is high in New York City, where there are 23,000 people per square mile.

West. Some states are full of water. For example, Louisiana includes more than 8,000 square miles of lakes and wetlands. That's an area bigger than Connecticut and Rhode Island combined.

Coastal areas are home to more than half the U.S. population.

Approximately one in nine Americans lives in the nation's most populous state—California. More than 15 million people live in the Los Angeles, Riverside, and Orange County metropolitan area.

Distributing our population evenly would put an average of 76 people per square mile.

New Jersey is the most densely populated state with an average of more than 8,000 people per square mile.

Alaska is a sparsely populated state with an average of one person per square mile.
“84% of Americans now live in or around urban areas. But I’m United Methodist, so I speak out of the context of what I know best. 74% of our capital resources (that’s our buildings) are where only 16% of the American population lives. The Methodist Church flourished in the 1800’s and early 1900’s in small towns and rural areas. But now we continue to send pastors to church buildings instead of populations. And if we’re really going to reach people, we’re going to have to radically rethink our paradigms of what it’s going to mean to be missional.” - Rev. Mike Slaughter

More here: http://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/1227/interview-w-mike-slaughter
nostalgic

PCUSA

UCC

UMC

Christian Church

Disciples of Christ

ELCA

Historic Black, Ethnic/Immigrant, Progressive Roman Catholic, Progressive Evangelical, etc.

eggshell

holding tension

creative
nostalgic

PCUSA

UCC

UMC

Episcopal

Disciples of Christ

ELCA

Historic Black, Ethnic/Immigrant, Progressive Roman Catholic, Progressive Evangelical, etc.

eggshell

holding tension

creative
Working in our tribes

PCUSA  UCC  UMC  Episcopal  Christian Church DoC  ELCA

Historic Black, Ethnic/Immigrant, Progressive Roman Catholic, Progressive Evangelical, etc.

A BOLD, VITAL SPIRITUAL MOVEMENT for JUSTICE, JOY, & PEACE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT
God of Yesterday,  
we knew you then;  
your promises; your words;  
your walking among us.  
But yesterday is gone.  
And so, today, we are in need of change.  
Change and change us.  
Help us see life now  
not through yesterday’s stories alone,  
but also through today’s.  
Amen.
God of Endings,
What we thought would not have end
Has ended.
And we find ourselves here
wondering where we are
and how we got here
and where to go from here.
Be with us, here, at the end.
Help us to place our feet on this ground,
help us lick our wounds,
help us look up and around.
Help us believe the story of today
because you know all
about the endings of today.
And you are not afraid.
Amen.
Changing God,
You changed your mind.
And we, too, change our minds
about you.
We want to change
toward the better.
Change with us
because we know
you want to.
Amen.
around tables

what are you thinking?
what are you feeling?
what are you wondering?
THE GREAT SPIRITUAL MIGRATION

HOW THE WORLD’S LARGEST RELIGION IS SEEKING A BETTER WAY TO BE CHRISTIAN

BRIAN D. McLAREN

AUTHOR OF A NEW KIND OF CHRISTIAN TRILOGY AND A GENEROUS ORTHODOXY
A spiritual migration

from system of beliefs to way of life/
way of love
Christianity is currently defined for many by adherence to a list or system of beliefs.
What is the one greatest commandment?

“You shall have the correct beliefs system!”

(not)
What is the one greatest commandment?

Love ...

and the second is equally important ...
Jesus
Paul
John
James
Love 101:

neighbor

stranger

outsider/outcast

enemy
Love 201:

self

not selfish

not self-hating
Love 301:

the earth

all creation

for neighbors & self

for God’s sake
Love 401:

God
People who are learning to love their neighbors, themselves and the earth will not find it hard to learn to love God, because God will not be for them a doctrine or theory separate from or inconsistent with what they already love. Rather, in their experience of love for neighbor, self and creation, they will already have experienced God, because, as Richard Rohr says, ‘God is an event of communion.’

They will already have come, as the Quakers say, to love and reverence ‘that of God in every one’. So in Love 401, people learn to recognize and love the familiar light they see radiant in everything they already love. They learn to inhabit God as the loving reality in which they ‘live and move and have their being’, the all-encompassing ‘event of communion’ in which they have experienced countless events of communion. Each experience of love itself, they will realize, has been an experience of God, for, as John said in the New Testament, ‘Love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God … for God is love’ (1 John 4:7–8).
Yes, loving a distant and theoretical God who must be approached through complex belief systems can indeed be tough – even exhausting, mentally and emotionally. But loving the God who is experienced in love for neighbor, self and creation comes as naturally as breathing. A character from Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov* captures it perfectly:
Love all of God’s creation, both the whole of it and every grain of sand. Love every leaf, every ray of God’s light. Love animals, love plants, love each thing. If you love each thing, you will perceive the mystery of God in things. Once you have perceived it, you will begin tirelessly to perceive more and more of it every day. And you will come at last to love the whole world with an entire, universal love.
Love can only begin from knowing God, as love comes from God. As we live out the mandate of loving others, self and creation, we must continue to know, in order to love better. This is a cycle, not a linear process. As we go through the outer circle, we are learning to love God. It is ONLY through loving people, self and creation that we are able to love God in a real way. As you continue to go through the love cycle, the breadth and depth of your capacity to love increases.
If love is the point ...
A theological migration:

from violent Supreme Being

to nonviolent Holy Spirit/Spirit of Christ
In Fourteen Hundred and Ninety-Two, Columbus sailed the ocean blue.

In Fourteen Hundred and Fifty-Two, Pope Nicholas told European Christians what to do.
“...invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue all Saracens and pagans whatsoever, and other enemies of Christ wheresoever placed, and the kingdoms, dukedoms, principalities, dominions, possessions, and all movable and immovable goods whatsoever held and possessed by them and to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery, and to apply and appropriate to himself and his successors the kingdoms, dukedoms, counties, principalities, dominions, possessions, and goods, and to convert them to his and their use and profit.” - Pope Nicolas V, Romanus Pontifex, 1452-4, Doctrine of Discovery
1495

2nd Voyage Return Cargo: 1600 male and female Taino slaves for Spain

“It is possible, with the name of the Holy Trinity, to sell all the slaves which it is possible to sell ... Here there are so many of these slaves ... although they are living things they are as good as gold.”
As a result of the sufferings and hard labor they endured, the Indians choose and have chosen suicide. Occasionally a hundred have committed mass suicide. The women, exhausted by labor, have shunned conception and childbirth.... Many, when pregnant, have taken something to abort and have aborted. Others after delivery have killed their children with their own hands, so as not to leave them in such oppressive slavery.
From this vantage point, Christianity has nothing – absolutely nothing – to teach Indigenous people about how to live in a good way on this land. In fact, Christians have only demonstrated that there is something profoundly wrong with the cosmology and worldview behind more than five centuries of carnage—carnage that has yet to even slow down. Christians have so much negative history and dogma to overcome within their own tradition, I do not believe the religion is even salvageable. The world is deep in the throes of an ecological crisis based in Western economies of hyper-exploitation. The planet will not survive another 500 years of Christian domination.

- Waziyatawin, PhD, 2012
It’s time to disarm our understanding of God and cut up the genocide card.
How to Read the Bible: 6 Options

(beyond liberal and conservative)
Literal:
Like a newspaper, science text, or work of nonfiction - attempting to tell objective, literal, observable, scientific facts.

 Literary:
Like a poem, novel, journal, or movie - attempting to convey meaningful, mysterious, multi-faceted beauty and truth.
Post-Critical/Integral:

Seen as a whole, with internal tensions, with potential for instruction, inspiration, even revelation.

Critical:

Questioned. Tested. Scrutinized. Evaluated. Treated as human, situated, constructed, and interpreted.

Innocent:

Taken at face value. Unquestioned. Univocal. Treated as divine, transcendent, incorrigible, or absolute.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Innocent</th>
<th>Literal</th>
<th>Literary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Innocent Literal</td>
<td>2. Innocent Literary</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Integral Literal</td>
<td>6. Integral Literary</td>
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Option 1: Innocent Literal

The Bible is a divine text, akin to a

Textbook
Instruction manual
Objective historical account
Audit report
Constitution

that states simple & clear facts about the universe and God.
Option 2: Innocent Literary

The Bible is a collection of literary artifacts, akin to ...

- an anthology of moralistic fables
- a collection of magic chants or mantras
- a source of inspiring stories and quotations

through which we may gain personal inspiration, personal guidance, and/or experiences of mystical revelation.
Option 3: Critical Literal

The Bible is a human text, akin to a collection of myths, a collection of folk tales, a collection of propaganda, a collection of misinformation that contains many falsehoods and disprovable assertions, along with a window into the minds of original authors and audiences.
Option 4: Critical Literary

The Bible is a collection of human literary artifacts, akin to

- a museum
- an heirloom quilt
- a family scrapbook or photo album
- a refrigerator door or classroom bulletin board
- a specialized library

through which we may gain personal inspiration, personal guidance, and/or experiences of mystical revelation, along with insight into the cultures that produced them.
Option 5: Integral Literal

The Bible is a collection of human literary artifacts, akin to ...

- a museum
- an heirloom quilt
- a family scrapbook or photo album
- a refrigerator door or classroom bulletin board
- a specialized library

through which we may learn facts about the views of original authors and audiences, and which may provide a mirror to better understand ourselves.
Option 6: Integral Literary

The Bible is a collection of human literary artifacts, akin to a museum, a family scrapbook or photo album, a refrigerator door with kids’ art, a specialized library, through which we can gain vital wisdom and through which God can speak to us today.
<table>
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From this perspective …
The Bible leads us to Jesus.

Jesus imaged God as nonviolent, nondiscriminatory, loving to all.

After Jesus, the word “holy” changes in meaning.

From markers of “clean” to qualities of nonviolence.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of love, the nonviolent Spirit, the Spirit of peace, reconciliation, and harmony.

Being filled with the Holy Spirit is being filled with the non-violent power of reconciling love.
around tables

what are you feeling?
what are you thinking?
what are you wondering?
If love is the point ...

and if God is non-violent and loving toward all creation and all people (no exceptions) ...
A missional migration:

from organized religion (for self-protection)

to religion organizing for the common good

(institutions and movements in romance, forming & deploying spiritual activists)
From Greg Leffel

Faith Seeking Action: Mission and Social Movements
A movement is born when 3 things happen:

- 2 or more people agree what’s wrong.
- They agree what should be done.
- They begin to do it.
Leffel’s 6 Characteristics of Vibrant Social Movements

1. Opportunity Structure
2. Rhetorical framing
3. Protest (messaging) strategy
4. Mobilization strategy
5. Movement culture
6. Participant Biography
Jesus seizes the opportunity structure provided by conflicted elites (Pharisees/Sadducees; Herodians/Zealots) and struggling masses (Galilee/Judea)
He provides **rhetorical framing** on hillsides, in houses, on retreats, in public teach-ins, in debates, through parables, through rituals and practices. He repeats key themes - commonwealth of God, life to the full, life of the ages, liberation - rooted in dynamic tension with tradition.
His protest (messaging) strategy includes public demonstrations (healings & miracles), teach-ins (sermon on mount), civil disobedience (turning tables), guerilla theatre (exorcisms), festivals (feasts & feedings), naming evil (woes), naming heroes (blessings).
He develops a mobilization strategy based on 3, 12, 70, and multitudes. He entrusts freely with responsibility and expresses high confidence in his agents (greater things shall you do ...)
He associates his movement culture with love, joy, justice, risk, hope, creativity, courage, service, willingness to suffer, nonviolence.
He provides his disciples challenge, rest, retreat, encouragement, recovery after failures. They testify that their participant biographies have been forever changed for the better.
What spiritual movement is trying to be born among us today?

What are its demands/proposals?

What role might we play in its emergence?
A movement of Spirit-empowered revolutionary love in the way of Jesus,
to save the planet
to join in solidarity with the poor
to work for peace
to transform politics & religion
to the glory of God.
You have one job or calling. You may also have a second.

One: to be an institutional & community leader, providing for the spiritual needs of your community.

Two: to be a movement leader in and from (or apart from) your congregation to the community and world.

I am encouraging you to complicate your life by accepting this dual calling.
your face here
around tables

what are you feeling?
what are you thinking?
what are you wondering?
three christian futures

**creative emergence:** christian faith as a vital spiritual/social movement

**continuing trends:** managing decline

**supremacist resurgence:** white Christian nationalism, christo-fascism
The historical challenge
The doctrinal challenge
The structural challenge
The missional challenge
The liturgical challenge
The spiritual challenge
The demographic challenge
The historical challenge

The doctrinal challenge

The structural challenge

preferential option for the young

The missional challenge

The liturgical challenge

The spiritual challenge
The historical challenge
The doctrinal challenge
The structural challenge
The missional challenge
The liturgical challenge
The spiritual challenge
what stays the same?

what must change?
what stays the same?

let’s see!

what must change?
what stays the same?

- temple
- priesthood
- sacrifice
- holidays
- Sabbath
- holiness code
- Jerusalem
- circumcision
- canon
- supremacy of law
- absolute unity of God
- exclusive us/them identity

what must change?
INNOVATION

maximize disruption

IMITATION

minimize disruption
Christian faith of the future:

**Spirituality:** revolutionary love - neighbor, self, earth, God

**Theology:** nonviolent (holy) Spirit - trajectory of Scripture

**Mission:** joining God in transformation of the world (planet, poverty, peace, politics/religion)
You say you love your children above all else, and yet you are stealing their future in front of their very eyes.

Greta Thunberg
"People tell me I should study to become a climate scientist so I can solve the climate crisis. But the climate crisis has already been solved. We already have all the facts and solutions. All we have to do is to wake up and change." Greta Thunberg
“I don’t want your hope. I don’t want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic ... and act as if the house was on fire.”

Greta Thunberg
Environmental Activist
In light of our current global emergency, we hereby call on the Christians of the world to refuse to conduct church as usual, and instead, we call for a time of creative disruption and liturgical, theological, spiritual, and missional innovation.

We urge every Christian around the world to ...
Rediscover God as the loving Presence who beckons us to grow beyond personal, racial, religious, national, and human selfishness.

Rediscover Jesus as the enfleshed Word who reveals God’s embodied solidarity with all creation.

Rediscover the Spirit as God’s creative breath hovering over and moving through all of creation to foment justice, joy, and peace.

Rediscover the gospel as good news of great joy for all people, but first for the poor, and ultimately, for all creation.
Don’t criticize what others are doing. Instead, improvise. Create. Adapt.

Stop being so afraid of breaking rules that made perfect sense in the distant past. Instead, fear repeating the failures of the past and present in the uncertain future.

Show the same creativity, freshness, and boldness in your time as your ancestors did in theirs. Dare to say, “You have heard it said, but …”

Don’t be slaves to the same old thing. Don’t merely tend the tombs of the prophets.

Behold, God is doing a new thing, and calling forth a new generation of leaders to face the current global emergency.
your face here
around tables

what are you thinking?
what are you feeling?
what are you wondering?
A Benediction for these times:

May God bless you with a restless discomfort about easy answers, half-truths and superficial relationships, so that you may seek truth boldly and love deep within your heart.

May God bless you with a holy anger toward injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that you may tirelessly work for justice, freedom, and peace among all people.

May God bless you with the gift of tears to shed with those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, or the loss of all that they cherish, so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and transform their pain into joy.

May God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you really can make a difference in this world, so that you are able, with God’s grace, to do what others claim cannot be done.

— A Benedictine Prayer
change (almost) everything.

slides will be available:

brianmclaren.net
q & r
THE GREAT SPIRITUAL MIGRATION