

A discussion about generational responsibility by Dr. Victor Bremon, March 1, 2015

I know that many of you in this congregation are actively making a significant difference for people in this community and it is important work. And there is another battle going on. A fight for the future of our children, and grandchildren. It is to that issue that I am addressing this sermon. You are desperately needed in the fight for the future. You have much experience and many resources available to you. Your wisdom allows you to see the different sides of an issue and to help formulate real solutions for the future. A friend of mine calls you ‘new integrationists’.

A few years ago while leading a symposium about the future for the Pachamama Alliance called “Awakening The Dreamer, Changing the Dream” I participated in a multi-generational circle of people witnessing our feelings about the future. There was a marked difference between the sharing of the elders in the room and the youngers. The elders talked about the problems but were hopeful about the future. The youngers were less optimistic. Before sharing we were asked to pick up an object that best expressed our feelings. Representing things like anger, loss or feelings of emptiness.

An 18-year-old boy walked to the center of the circle picked up an anger stick and stared at us for a minute before he said to the elders in a strong angry voice. These were his exact words. I apologize if the profanity offends.

“You have been lying to us. You have been fucking lying to us. You keep saying that things are going to be ok but they are not. The future is not going to be ok.” He stood and stared at us. The room was silent for a number of minutes. No one knew what to say.

So what does it mean to be present for the future?

I guess for me it all started one day when I was in the birthing room of my first grandchild. Customs had changed and this was the first time I was given that amazing opportunity. It was a very tough delivery and the doctors went into emergency mode to make sure that Elliot would survive. That experience bonded me to Elliot and my future grandchildren in a very powerful way. I knew that I would do anything to ensure their survival. It would also happen often again when I would be playing with one of my young grandchildren and they would squeeze my hand and hug me with an innocent love that was just perfect.

But let me lighten up and digress for a minute and tell a couple of my favorite stories about grandchildren. MANY OF YOU MIGHT RELATE The first is what I have been told is the real title of a book about

grandchildren. "If I knew it was going to be so good I would have done it first". The second is a riddle--- Why do grandparents and grandchildren get along so well? The answer-- It is because they have a common enemy. J After a 4 ½ year stint as a US Navy Officer during the Viet Nam War, I worked as a corporate turnaround consultant. That meant that I would take on long, difficult, projects of saving companies.

I learned a great deal about things like globalization from doing that work. I personally witnessed from the inside how large companies like Wal-mart, Home Depot and Amazon could destroy a community through unfair business competition. I did the best I could to help my clients withstand the challenges that this presented. But as a result, I know better than most how the business practices of these large corporations have been used to destroy a lot of our way of life and create many of the problems that we have today. I also was involved early in activism. I have memories in high school and college of being involved in community politics and school desegregation issues. In the 1970's I got involved with a group called Creative Initiative Foundation and my activism went to a new level. Creative Initiative got involved in fighting for Nuclear Plant Safeguards and eventually morphed into Beyond War during the 1980s where we taught about the insanity of nuclear war. We used to drop 50,000 bb's slowly into a metal wash-tub to illustrate what the 50,000 nuclear weapons currently in world arsenals bombs-- each with greater fire power than all the weapons used in WWII sounded like.-- we would take minutes to pour the BB's slowly into the tub. The sound and obvious insanity of it would often make people break into tears.

A final important piece of my story has to do with, after retiring, receiving a Doctor of Ministry, from a small private college in California now called Wisdom University. The purpose of this school was to educate people in a wisdom-based view of the world. We studied the teachings of great mystics such as Teilhard De Jardin, Meister Eckhart, Mahatma Gandhi, Howard Thurman and Martin Luther King, as well as the study of myths, dreams and the teachings of Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell. We took times to reflect on what was happening in the world and what part we could play in allowing new ideas and actions to emerge. It was an incredible place to take a hard-nosed corporate consultant who already had a tinge of activism into a life of full time activism.

So you have a corporate consultant with great experiences at fixing companies mixed with a doctor of ministry. The joke among my friends was that saving companies was no longer enough of a challenge for me. I needed to find something bigger to save. Like maybe the world.

My Friends would often follow-up their joke with asking me “how is it going”?

And along the way my grandchildren showed up. I don’t know if the realization came to me in just one moment of enlightenment like the one I shared or whether the understanding came to me over a period of time. This innocent child that loves me unconditionally was coming into a world that my generation was screwing up so bad that I couldn’t look them in the eyes anymore and say everything was going to be ok.

This may sound like guilt to you but the knowledge and the feeling goes way beyond guilt. And so I began to think about starting a non-profit around the idea of Generational Responsibility. It was called ForTheGrandChildren and although the organization did not succeed I have been organizing programs under that name for the last 10 years.

As Buddhist Teacher Pema Chödrön reminds us, “What we do accumulates; the future is a result of what we do right now.” How many of you were activists for social and environmental justice when you were younger. Raise your hands. How many of you still are?

Being present for the future simply means living a joyful but intentional life that benefits future generations. Worrying about the future or even talking about our problems is not productive. But being present, showing up in the now, for the future, can have a huge impact.

Here are 3 stories about the idea of being present for the future...

The first is a story that is in truth partially a folk tale but it makes for a great teaching story. The new college at Oxford was built more than 500 years ago. it had a great dining hall with a central beam running 45 feet long and two feet square. Some years ago it was discovered that the central beam had become weakened by beetle infestation and needed to be replaced. a worldwide search was launched to find a new beam without success.

Someone suggested checking with the school forester to see if any such oaks existed on their lands which were spread out throughout Great Britain. To their surprise they found out that when the dining hall was built -500 years ago-a stand of oaks was planted, because the people in those days knew that eventually the beam would need to be replaced.

These people were thinking 500 years into the future!

2. This second story was used in Atención. Dee Hock, was the founder and original CEO of the credit card association known as VISA. He became very successful. He wrote about his wake up call on this topic of Being Present For The Future. After achieving hard won success in the credit card business- Hock chose to walk away, partially because he was very pessimistic about the fate of the planet. He purchased 200 acres of ravaged

farmland, sequestered himself, working to bring it back to health, but with “no hope for the planet”. 9 years later, at a family event at the farm in which all seven of his grandchildren were present, a wave of recognition came over him; he saw the planet 30 years hence with his grandchildren in the middle of the devastation he envisioned. They were asking him, “Grandpa, couldn’t you have done something?” This vision moved Hock to re-engage the world, and work diligently for a positive future.

3. And a personal story. I have a friend who was a space engineer. He had an opportunity to work for the founder of Amazon on building ‘lifeboats into space’ because Amazon founder Jeff Bezos doesn’t believe the human race will survive. Paul refused the job because he could never explain to his children why he didn’t do everything he could to protect all of our combined future.

So what does one do to become present for the future?

I think to begin with you must focus on the fact that anything you do is important. You don’t have to stop global warming or eliminate war. But you do have to get involved and do something.

Let me read again the quote from Buddhist Pema Chodrin:

“What we do accumulates; the future is a result of what we do right now.”

-This works on both the negative and positive side. We all need to be present for the future in three specific areas.

1. We need to stop the destruction- do holding actions like SAVING MONARCH BUTTERFLIES OR stopping the Keystone and Northern Gateway pipeline BC

Do you know why Monarch Butterflies are SO important? The monarch lays its eggs exclusively on the milkweed plant. Conversion of prairies into cropland and the increasing use of weed killer-resistant crops created by Monsanto have greatly reduced the amount of milkweed on breeding grounds in the U.S. The Monarch species also faces challenges here in Mexico, where its primary wintering grounds are being threatened by logging and climate change. Monarchs are major pollinators of many crops that our future depends on. And they are just one species that is facing possible extinction. We cannot survive without these other species.

Stopping Keystone and Northern Gateway pipelines may seem like symbolic acts in the battle against fossil fuel usage but we desperately need symbolic acts right now. Time is running out-- the fossil fuel insanity must be stopped.

2. We need to be building new institutions and tools that will change the future. The old ones have failed. Our economic system is failing. Our schools are failing. Our political systems are failing. The future demands

that new institutions be created that are life sustaining and community serving.

During the revolution against the Soviets in Poland--- the Solidarity Movement had an expression--- Live As If You Are Free ---(They built their own schools)

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Our children need institutions to support new lifestyles, for example new forms of intentional communities that are not dependent on the corporate grid and are mostly self dependent are needed. -maybe like those being modeled by the Zapatistas in southern Mexico.

We need to be raising our own consciousness and compassion and I know that many of us here are. Another Buddhist teacher Joanna Macy teaches the legend of the Shambala Warrior. The legend says that at the point where our species is in its greatest danger a new class of warriors will emerge. These warriors will have only TWO tools to save the future. The first is a great sense of compassion for all and the second is an advanced consciousness about the interconnectiveness of all life. Millions of us, including many in this room, have unconsciously been in training for this moment. And we may never know what it is that we have done. It is probably better if we don't. The ego can easily take over our best efforts.

There are a couple of Jewish teachings that speak to this doing with out knowing.

The first has to do with who is the most important person in the Torah or Old Testament. And we don't even know his name. The story of Joseph. Think about it. Joseph goes out in search of his brothers and searches high and low without results. He is about to give up and go home. He meets a man on the road whose name we don't know, who tells Joseph where his brothers are camped. Joseph follows the man's instructions and goes to the camp where his brothers threw him into a pit and sold him into slavery and he is sent off to Egypt. If Joseph doesn't get to Egypt, Judaism, Christianity and Islam have no beginning. And we don't even know the name of the man who told Joseph where his brothers were. No ego satisfaction here.

The second story is about a legend in Judaism that teaches that there are 36 righteous men whose actions and fate the world rests on. I am sure a modern text would say 'women'. The interesting part of this teaching is that if any of the people figure out, or even get an inkling that they are one of the 36 then they are no longer one of the 36. Again, the importance of just doing good without knowing how important your acts are. No ego satisfaction here.

And one final teaching from the Iroquois Culture requires that all decisions consider the well being of the 7th generation. How many of our PRESENT

decisions consider the future.

Compare this idea of the 7th generation with our society's obsession with quarterly earnings on the stock market without any concern with long term solutions to major problems, because they don't affect our stock prices.

I have come up with a five step program to get you started on the road to being present for the future. I think they are all critically important. I created an acronym for this five step program: MEDIC

What does a medic do?

Motivate--Energize--Design—Ignite—Claim

1. The first step or motivate requires that you remember what you love. This sound so simple--- but really think about what you love. Create a journal of things that you love. How about beginning with your grandchildren - what kind of world do you want for them?

But it could be Family members---beautiful places in nature- an animal --...

Try creating a journal put photographs in. Write letters or poems. Make it your holy book. Look at it every day. Take a minute right now – close your eyes---- what comes to mind. What do you love enough to do anything to protect?

2. The second step is to Energize--- make a powerful commitment to do something to protect that what you love regardless of the cost. Write it in your journal. Use it as a daily affirmation. Affirmations are very powerful tools. They are usually written as something that one has already completed. Here is a simple example of an affirmation. It is meant to be said every day.

“I have two amazing children. I enjoy watching them grow every day.

3. The third step is to design an effective direct action that will accomplish your goal of protecting that which you committed to. The great activist teachers chose their actions carefully Like King’s march from Selma to Montgomery or Gandhi’s salt march. Here are a few steps to include in your design.

Educate yourself

choose an action that will cause the other side to react or overreact. The action should also educate the greater community.

Try negotiation.

Prepare yourself for possible suffering.

Practice non-violence.

Engage the media.

Try not to defeat your opponent. Reconciliation is always important.

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I just completed leading a workshop here in San Miguel about how to create

a personal direct action. Here are some of the actions that are developing by the participants.

-Increasing the amount of solar energy usage in SMA. The group has already created a plan to re-light bulb the Biblioteca with energy saving bulbs.

-Returning to Ohio and convincing their University Board of Trustees to divest all holdings in fossil fuel companies.

-Joining a campaign to stamp all US dollars with the saying..."NOT TO BE USED FOR BRIBING POLITICIANS"

-Creating a boycott in BC or Alberta to stop the Northern Gateway Pipeline

4. THE FOURTH STEP Ignite the action. Bring it to life. Do what is

necessary.

5. THE FINAL OR FIFTH STEP Claim it with your community what you have done. Share your story. This last step is critically important because we gain power by knowing that others are stepping forward and taking the risks. No one wants to be alone. Think of the hero stories in your life and how they help to motivate. Can you think of a hero in your world right now?

I would implore all of you to become a MEDIC for the future.

I would like to introduce to you 16 year old Loreto Sauttoshe is going to close my sermon by reading a speech given to world leaders many years ago by 12-year-old Severn Suzuki, the daughter of Dr. David Suzuki, a famous Canadian Environmental Scientist, at the Rio Conference on the Environment in 1992.

PLEASE Remember this piece was written 20 years ago. Some solutions have been found but many problems have gotten worse.

I want to invite any of you who would be interested to join a circle after the service to discuss this subject in more depth.

LORETO:

Hello, I'm Severn Suzuki, speaking for ECO, the Environmental Children's Organization. We are a group of four twelve and thirteen year-olds from Canada trying to make a difference...

We raised all the money ourselves to come 6,000 miles to tell you adults you must change your ways.

Coming here today I have no hidden agenda. I'm fighting for my future.

Losing my future is not like losing an election or a few points in the stock market.

I am here to speak for all future generations yet to come. I am here to speak on behalf of the starving children around the world whose cries go unheard. I am here to speak for the countless animals dying across this planet because they have nowhere left to go.

I am afraid to go out in the sun now because of the holes in the ozone. I am

afraid to breathe the air because I don't know what chemicals are in it. I used to go fishing in Vancouver, my hometown, with my dad, until just a few years ago we found the fish full of cancers.

And now we hear about animals and plants going extinct every day—vanishing forever. In my life, I have dreamt of seeing the great herds of wild animals, jungles, and rain forests full of birds and butterflies, but now I wonder if they will even exist for my children to see.

Did you worry about these things when you were my age?

All this is happening before our eyes, and yet we act as if we have all the time we want and all the solutions.

I'm only a child and I don't have all the solutions, but I want you to realize, neither do you! You don't know how to fix the holes in our ozone layer. You don't know how to bring the salmon back up a dead stream. You don't know how to bring back an animal now extinct. And you can't bring back the forests that once grew where there is now a desert.

If you don't know how to fix it, please stop breaking it!

Here you may be delegates of your governments, business people, organizers, reporters, or politicians. But really you are mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, aunts and uncles. And all of you are somebody's child. I'm only a child, yet I know we are all a part of a family, five billion strong—in fact, 30 million species strong. And borders and governments will never change that.

I'm only a child, yet I know we are all in this together and should act as one single world toward one single goal.

In my anger, I am not blind, and in my fear, I am not afraid to tell the world how I feel.

In my country, we make so much waste. We buy and throw away, buy and throw away. And yet northern countries will not share with the needy. Even when we have more than enough, we are afraid to lose some of our wealth, afraid to let go.

In Canada, we live the privileged life with plenty of food, water, and shelter. We have watches, bicycles, computers, and television sets. Two days ago here in Brazil, we were shocked when we spent time with some children living on the streets. And this is what one child told us:

"I wish I was rich. And if I were, I would give all the street children food, clothes, medicine, shelter, love, and affection."

If this child on the street who has nothing is willing to share, why are we who have everything still so greedy?

I can't stop thinking that these children are my own age, that it makes a tremendous difference where you are born. I could be one of those children

living in the favelas of Rio. I could be a child starving in Somalia, a victim of war in the Middle East, or a beggar in India.

I'm only a child, yet I know if all the money spent on war was spent on ending poverty and finding environmental answers, what a wonderful place this Earth would be.

At school, even in kindergarten, you teach us how to behave in the world. You teach us not to fight with others, to work things out, to respect others, to clean up our mess, not to hurt other creatures, to share, not be greedy. Then why do you go out and do the things you tell us not to do?

Do not forget why you are attending these conferences, who you are doing this for—we are your children. You are deciding what kind of a world we will grow up in.

Parents should be able to comfort their children by saying, "Everything's going to be all right." "We're doing the best we can." "It's not the end of the world."

But I don't think you can say that to us anymore. Are we even on your list of priorities?

My dad always says, "You are what you do, not what you say."

Well, what you do makes me cry at night. You grown-ups say you love us. I challenge you, please, make your actions reflect your words. Thank you for listening.

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But let me lighten up and digress for a minute and tell a couple of my favorite stories about grandchildren. MANY OF YOU MIGHT RELATE
The first is what I have been told is the real title of a book about grandchildren. “If I knew it was going to be so good I would have done it first”. The second is a riddle--- Why do grandparents and grandchildren get along so well? The answer-- It is because they have a common enemy. J After a 4 ½ year stint as a US Navy Officer during the Viet Nam War, I worked as a corporate turnaround consultant. That meant that I would take on long, difficult, projects of saving companies.

I learned a great deal about things like globalization from doing that work. I personally witnessed from the inside how large companies like Wal-mart, Home Depot and Amazon could destroy a community through unfair business competition. I did the best I could to help my clients withstand the challenges that this presented. But as a result, I know better than most how the business practices of these large corporations have been used to destroy a lot of our way of life and create many of the problems that we have today. I also was involved early in activism. I have memories in high school and college of being involved in community politics and school desegregation issues. In the 1970’s I got involved with a group called Creative Initiative Foundation and my activism went to a new level. Creative Initiative got involved in fighting for Nuclear Plant Safeguards and eventually morphed into Beyond War during the 1980s where we taught about the insanity of nuclear war. We used to drop 50,000 bb’s slowly into a metal wash-tub to illustrate what the 50,000 nuclear weapons currently in world arsenals

bombs-- each with greater fire power than all the weapons used in WWII sounded like.-- we would take minutes to pour the BB's slowly into the tub. The sound and obvious insanity of it would often make people break into tears.

A final important piece of my story has to do with, after retiring, receiving a Doctor of Ministry, from a small private college in California now called Wisdom University. The purpose of this school was to educate people in a wisdom-based view of the world. We studied the teachings of great mystics such as Teilhard De Jardin, Meister Eckhart, Mahatma Gandhi, Howard Thurman and Martin Luther King, as well as the study of myths, dreams and the teachings of Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell. We took times to reflect on what was happening in the world and what part we could play in allowing new ideas and actions to emerge. It was an incredible place to take a hard-nosed corporate consultant who already had a tinge of activism into a life of full time activism.

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knowing.

The first has to do with who is the most important person in the Torah or Old Testament. And we don't even know his name. The story of Joseph. Think about it. Joseph goes out in search of his brothers and searches high and low without results. He is about to give up and go home. He meets a man on the road whose name we don't know, who tells Joseph where his brothers are camped. Joseph follows the man's instructions and goes to the camp where his brothers threw him into a pit and sold him into slavery and he is sent off to Egypt. If Joseph doesn't get to Egypt, Judaism, Christianity and Islam have no beginning. And we don't even know the name of the man who told Joseph where his brothers were. No ego satisfaction here.

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3. The third step is to design an effective direct action that will accomplish your goal of protecting that which you committed to. The great activist teachers chose their actions carefully Like King’s march from Selma to Montgomery or Gandhi’s salt march. Here are a few steps to include in your design.

Educate yourself

choose an action that will cause the other side to react or overreact. The action should also educate the greater community.

Try negotiation.

Prepare yourself for possible suffering.

Practice non-violence.

Engage the media.

Try not to defeat your opponent. Reconciliation is always important.

South Africa reconciliation--- Most important act of the 20th century.

South Africa reconciliation--- Most important act of the 20th century.

I just completed leading a workshop here in San Miguel about how to create a personal direct action. Here are some of the actions that are developing by the participants.

-Increasing the amount of solar energy usage in SMA. The group has already created a plan to re-light bulb the Biblioteca with energy saving bulbs.

-Returning to Ohio and convincing their University Board of Trustees to divest all holdings in fossil fuel companies.

-Joining a campaign to stamp all US dollars with the saying...”NOT TO BE USED FOR BRIBING POLITICIANS”

-Creating a boycott in BC or Alberta to stop the Northern Gateway Pipeline

4. THE FOURTH STEP Ignite the action. Bring it to life. Do what is necessary.

5. THE FINAL OR FIFTH STEP Claim it with your community what you have done. Share your story. This last step is critically important because we gain power by knowing that others are stepping forward and taking the risks. No one wants to be alone. Think of the hero stories in your life and how they help to motivate. Can you think of a hero in your world right now?

I would implore all of you to become a MEDIC for the future.

I would like to introduce to you 16 year old Loreto Sauttoshe is going to close my sermon by reading a speech given to world leaders many years ago by 12-year-old Severn Suzuki, the daughter of Dr. David Suzuki, a famous Canadian Environmental Scientist, at the Rio Conference on the

Environment in 1992.

PLEASE Remember this piece was written 20 years ago. Some solutions have been found but many problems have gotten worse.

I want to invite any of you who would be interested to join a circle after the service to discuss this subject in more depth.

LORETO:

Hello, I'm Severn Suzuki, speaking for ECO, the Environmental Children's Organization. We are a group of four twelve and thirteen year-olds from Canada trying to make a difference...

We raised all the money ourselves to come 6,000 miles to tell you adults you must change your ways.

Coming here today I have no hidden agenda. I'm fighting for my future. Losing my future is not like losing an election or a few points in the stock market.

I am here to speak for all future generations yet to come. I am here to speak on behalf of the starving children around the world whose cries go unheard. I am here to speak for the countless animals dying across this planet because they have nowhere left to go.

I am afraid to go out in the sun now because of the holes in the ozone. I am afraid to breathe the air because I don't know what chemicals are in it.

I used to go fishing in Vancouver, my hometown, with my dad, until just a few years ago we found the fish full of cancers.

And now we hear about animals and plants going extinct every day—vanishing forever. In my life, I have dreamt of seeing the great herds of wild animals, jungles, and rain forests full of birds and butterflies, but now I wonder if they will even exist for my children to see.

Did you worry about these things when you were my age?

All this is happening before our eyes, and yet we act as if we have all the time we want and all the solutions.

I'm only a child and I don't have all the solutions, but I want you to realize, neither do you! You don't know how to fix the holes in our ozone layer. You don't know how to bring the salmon back up a dead stream. You don't know how to bring back an animal now extinct. And you can't bring back the forests that once grew where there is now a desert.

If you don't know how to fix it, please stop breaking it!

Here you may be delegates of your governments, business people, organizers, reporters, or politicians. But really you are mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, aunts and uncles. And all of you are somebody's child.

I'm only a child, yet I know we are all a part of a family, five billion strong—in fact, 30 million species strong. And borders and governments

will never change that.

I'm only a child, yet I know we are all in this together and should act as one single world toward one single goal.

In my anger, I am not blind, and in my fear, I am not afraid to tell the world how I feel.

In my country, we make so much waste. We buy and throw away, buy and throw away. And yet northern countries will not share with the needy. Even when we have more than enough, we are afraid to lose some of our wealth, afraid to let go.

In Canada, we live the privileged life with plenty of food, water, and shelter. We have watches, bicycles, computers, and television sets. Two days ago here in Brazil, we were shocked when we spent time with some children living on the streets. And this is what one child told us:

"I wish I was rich. And if I were, I would give all the street children food, clothes, medicine, shelter, love, and affection."

If this child on the street who has nothing is willing to share, why are we who have everything still so greedy?

I can't stop thinking that these children are my own age, that it makes a tremendous difference where you are born. I could be one of those children living in the favelas of Rio. I could be a child starving in Somalia, a victim of war in the Middle East, or a beggar in India.

I'm only a child, yet I know if all the money spent on war was spent on ending poverty and finding environmental answers, what a wonderful place this Earth would be.

At school, even in kindergarten, you teach us how to behave in the world. You teach us not to fight with others, to work things out, to respect others, to clean up our mess, not to hurt other creatures, to share, not be greedy. Then why do you go out and do the things you tell us not to do?

Do not forget why you are attending these conferences, who you are doing this for—we are your children. You are deciding what kind of a world we will grow up in.

Parents should be able to comfort their children by saying, "Everything's going to be all right." "We're doing the best we can." "It's not the end of the world."

But I don't think you can say that to us anymore. Are we even on your list of priorities?

My dad always says, "You are what you do, not what you say."

Well, what you do makes me cry at night. You grown-ups say you love us. I challenge you, please, make your actions reflect your words. Thank you for listening.