

A photograph of a sandy dune with sparse green vegetation and a blue ocean in the background. The foreground is dominated by tall, thin green plants with small, round, green seed heads. The sand is light brown and shows some tracks. In the background, the ocean is a deep blue, and the sky is a lighter blue. The overall scene is bright and sunny.

Refugia Faith:
Seeking Hidden Shelters,
Ordinary Wonders, and the Healing of
the Earth



Climate Crisis

- Droughts
- Wildfires
- Floods
- Ocean acidification and warming
- Increasing heat
- Species extinctions
- Crop failures
- Conflict and migration



Crisis Convergence

But also...

- COVID-19
- Persistent racism and racial inequities
- Political division
- Russian invasion
- Refugees

We are living at an “inflection point”

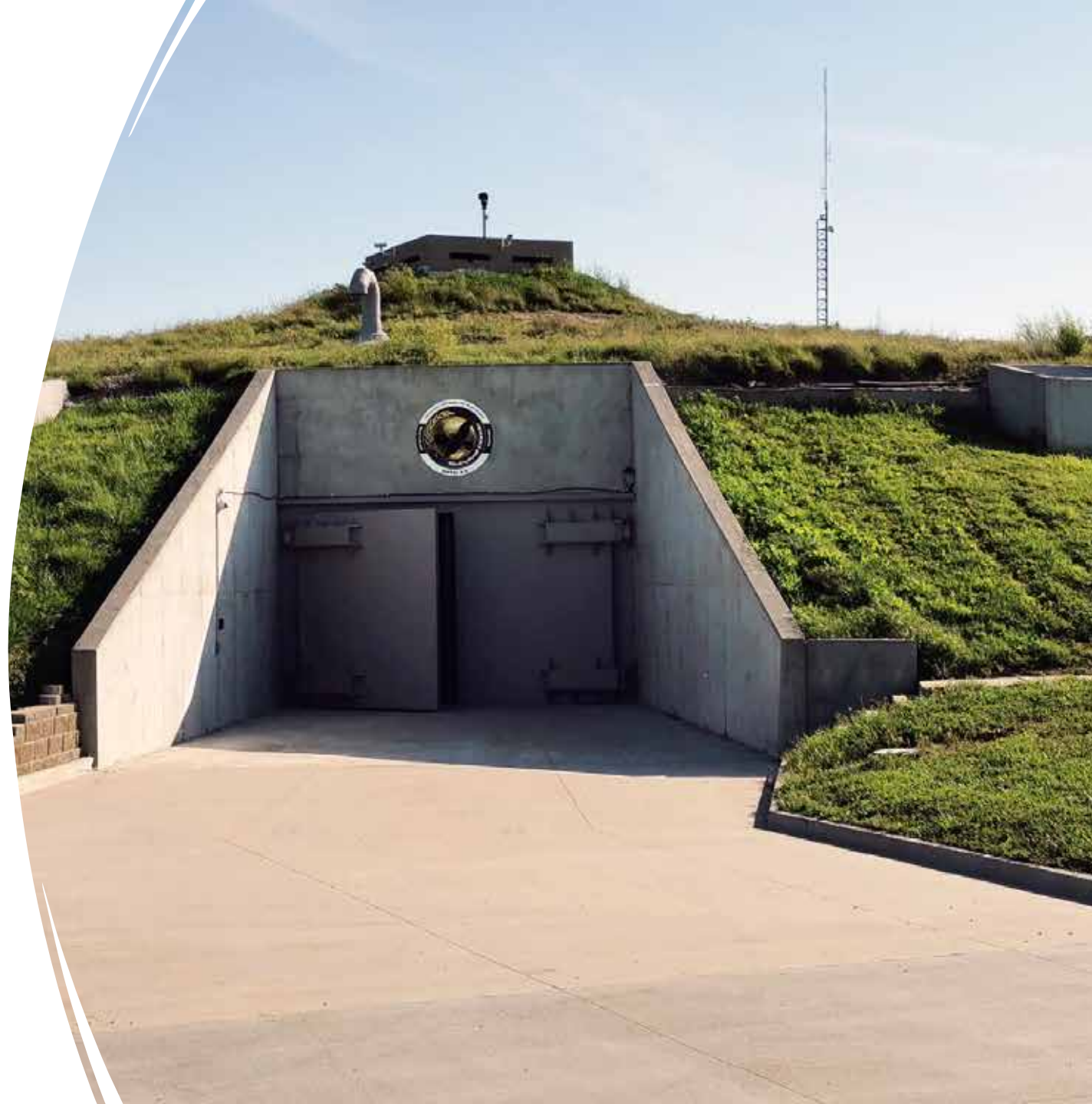
Church amid crisis

We tend to respond in one of two ways:

1. Bunker up!

- Withdraw from “society”
- Create “safe” places
- Seek uniformity in the name of holiness

Image credit: Claire Reilly/CNET



Church amid crisis


OR

2. Church of Empire

- Seek cultural and political power
- Emphasize dominance
- Treat anyone who resists/ disagrees as “other”

Image source: Pinterest





A third way: we can be people of refugia

Well, what are refugia????





How nature handles a
crisis...

Mt. St. Helens, one day
before eruption in 1980

Image credit: USGS.gov



Shortly after eruption

Credit: Phil Degginger/Alamy



What are refugia in nature?

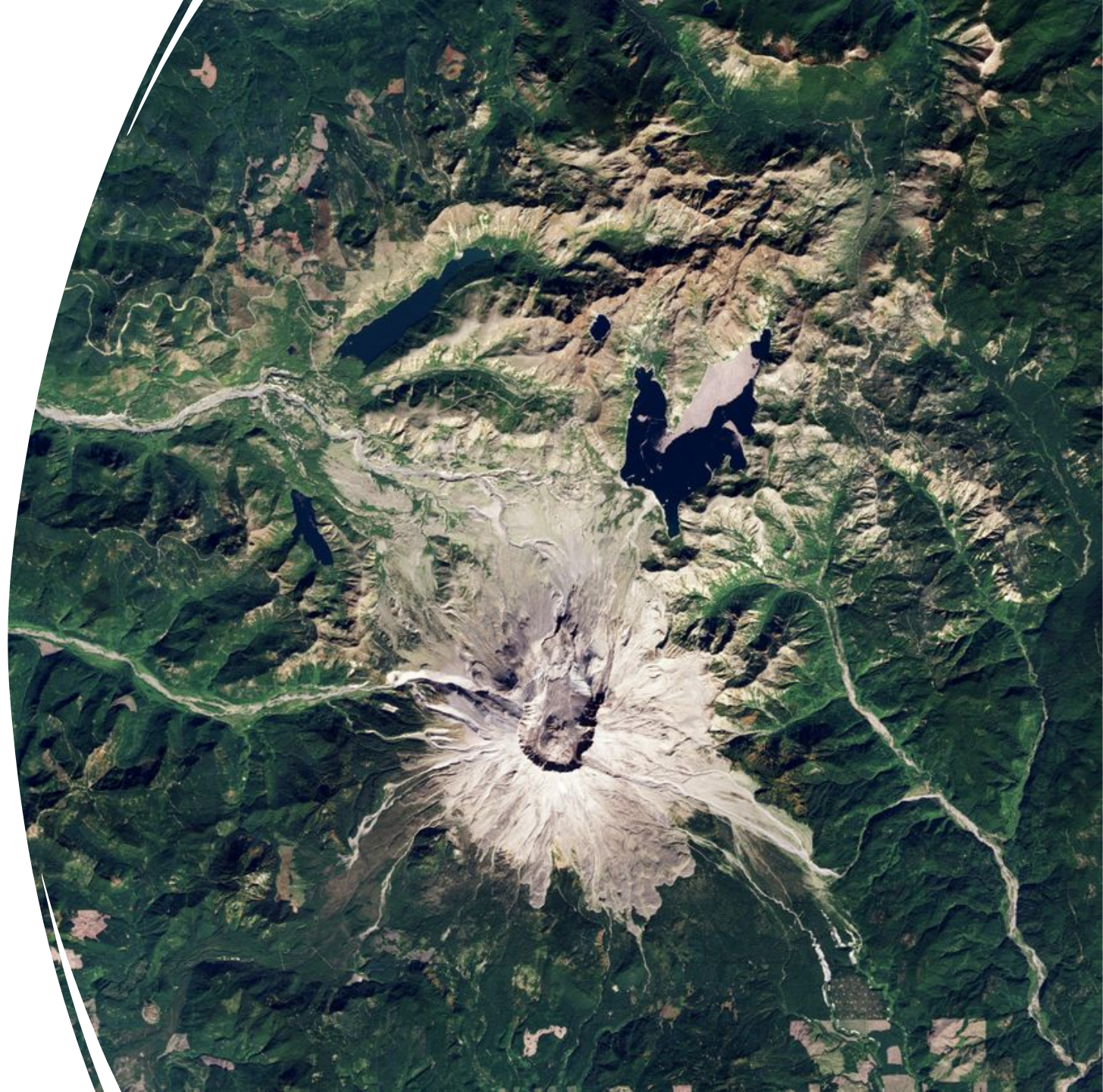
- Refugia are “habitats that components of biodiversity retreat to, persist in, and can potentially expand from under changing environmental conditions.” (Keppel 2012)
- They are pockets where life survives in a crisis
- They are places where capacities rebuild
- where nature renews itself through disturbance
- (Note: photo is 25 years after eruption)

Image credit: Wikipedia Commons



35 years after eruption

- Satellite photo from 2015



Refugial conservation biology

Krawchuk, Meg A., et al. "Disturbance refugia within mosaics of forest fire, drought, and insect outbreaks."

Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment, June 2020



Shouldn't we be the
people of refugia?

How can we find and nurture
refugia

- In the earth
- In human cultural systems
- In our spiritual lives?

How can we become healers?



After all, God loves to work through...

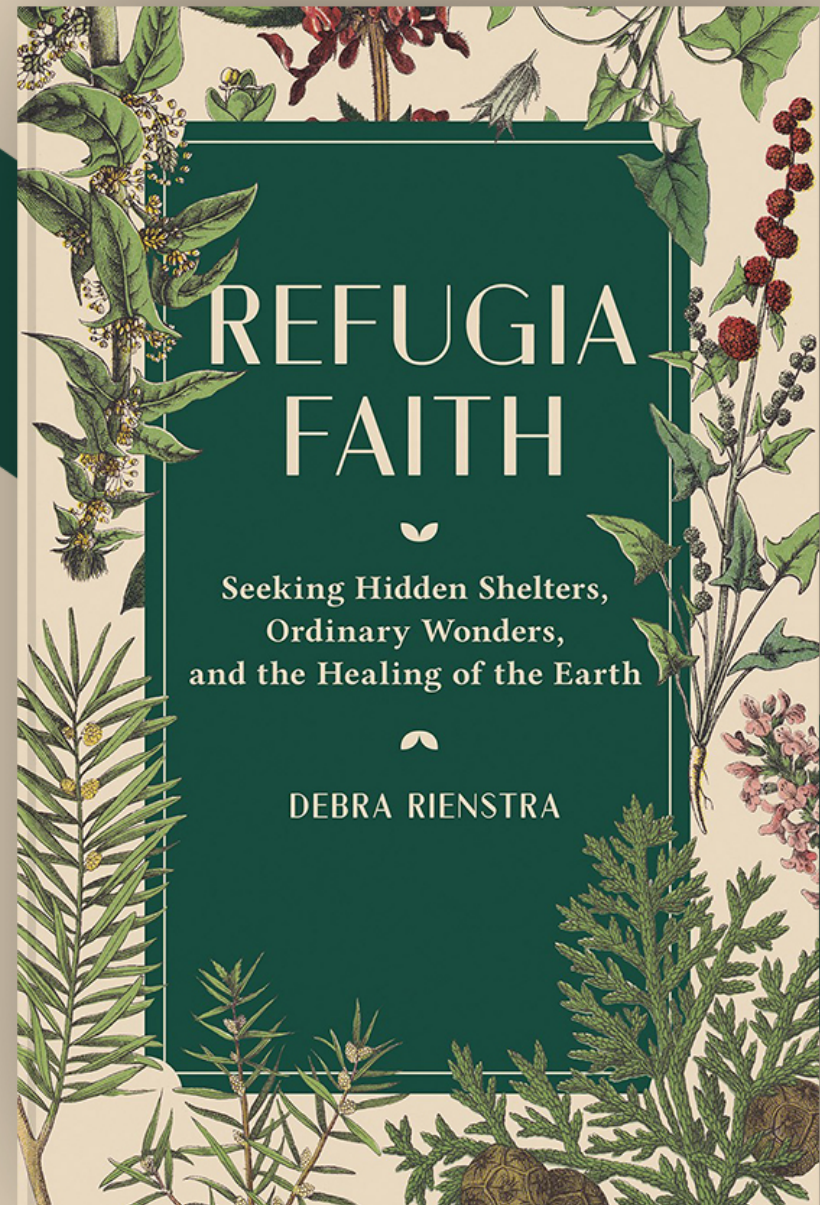
... the small, the hidden, the inconsequential, the remnant.

- Noah's ark
- Abraham's family
- Israelites in the desert
- Jesus and disciples
- Seeds, yeast



How must our faith and practice adapt for crisis times?

- ❖ What transformations are required to become people of resilience and healing?
- ❖ What must we leave behind and what capacities must we build?
- ❖ We have the resources we need in “treasures new and old.” (Matt 13:52)



Transformations through the church year...

- ❖ Despair to preparation
- ❖ Alienation to kinship
- ❖ Consuming to healing
- ❖ Avoiding to lamenting
- ❖ Resignation to gratitude
- ❖ Passivity to citizenship
- ❖ Indifference to attention





❖ With value-added bonus: nature writing!

❖ To embody the importance of connection to the land, waters, creatures where we live.

Transformation 1: From despair to preparation

“In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord.” (Is 40:3)

- Grief
- Deconstruction
- But also preparation!

→ Advent

Photo credit: visitgreaterpalmsprings.com



Transformation 1: Refugia sighting!

Plaster Creek Stewards

Calvin University

- Ecosystem restoration
- Community outreach
- Education
- Research

Image credit: Calvin Chimes



Transformation 3: From consuming to healing

- Not just stewards but healers (beyond the Genesis vocation).
 - Not “What do we want” but “What needs healing and how can we help?”
 - Randy Woodley: “community of creation” instead of kingdom
- Epiphany



Transformation 3: Refugia sighting!

The Refuge Church CRC

Grandville, Michigan

- “Outdoor discipleship”
- Refugee ministry
- Inclusion of people with disabilities

Image credit: refuge-church.com





Transformation 6: From passivity to citizenship

“I have called you friends.” (John 15:15)

- We are tempted to bow down and wait for God to fix
 - But we are called to agency and responsibility
 - We are citizens in a resurrection community
 - This calling is difficult, costly, and frightening
- Pentecost

Transformation 6: Refugia sighting!

Eloheh Indigenous Center for
Earth Justice

Yamhill, Oregon

- Founded by Randy and Edith Woodley
- Christianity and indigenous worldview
- Regenerative agriculture
- Education and training



ELOHEH
INDIGENOUS CENTER
FOR EARTH JUSTICE



Summary of refugia
characteristics:

- ❖ Humility
- ❖ Inclusivity
- ❖ Lament
- ❖ Challenge
- ❖ Healing
- ❖ Reorientation...
- ❖ ... and joy.



Refugia are meaningful in nature because they

- protect
- transform
- revive

In human culture, our refugia take even more varied and complex forms, with even more permeable edges.

Thought experiment:
What would it mean for you
and your church
to be people of refugia,
in the name of Christ?



Thank you!



Acknowledgments

- Bible references from New Revised Standard Version
- Quotations from Debra Rienstra, *Refugia Faith: Seeking Hidden Shelters, Ordinary Wonders, and the Healing of the Earth* (Fortress 2022)
- Image credits: Debra Rienstra or as shown where available

