

## **Presidential Welcome – Conference Opening and Honoring of the CFHA Luminaries**

Good afternoon, my friends. Shall we begin by centering ourselves for today?

1. I invite you to close your eyes or gaze at spot in front of you
2. Sit and know that you are sitting – Breathe and know that you are breathing
3. As you take your next breath, I invite you to recall memories where you honored people in your life or people honored you. This honoring could be formal, informal, or even silent. Note in your body how either receiving honor or preparing for giving honor feels like and where you notice it the most.
4. As you notice the time lapse of memories of honor and being honored, notice the actions you took to honor others or actions you received as others honored you. Recall how you learned to honor important people in your life.
5. Bring the benevolent emotions with you to this place we are today. May the traditions of honor, memories of honor and being honored ground us for this opening ceremony.\*

Dearly beloved, we are gathered here tonight—I know that sounds like the beginning of a wedding 😊. No one is getting married here today, although you have walked into a family affair\* this afternoon.

Among us sit very special members of this beloved community who laid the relational foundations of this cherished community. In our \*30<sup>th</sup> year as, it is only fitting that we honor them, who formed something at a time when a non-guild, multidisciplinary gathering was not the norm.

\*Also with us are generations of integrated care professionals\* – the legacy children and grandchildren – of our honorees. I know we have

some first-time attendees. If you are a first-time attendee – would you raise your hands?\* First, a big round of applause to you. Welcome to the family and a very special family event!

\*So, what do you do when special people move you, and you are spiritually compelled to honor them? Today is a small answer to that question. We begin by naming them. What is appropriate for a group of people who have nurtured us to today? Are they legends – for sure? Are they guardians – perhaps? Here is what I learned in the unlikely story of us: In a healthcare world where fragmentation is rewarded – without much fuss or fanfare, across the nation, the idea of integration began percolating. The people who embodied this idea became lights, with a gravitational pull that gathered unto them networks of people who were similarly lit from within and were undaunted by a hazy future. Because they lit\* and continue to light the path we have traveled for 30 years, they are \*the Luminaries of CFHA. Though there are many, we are graced today by 22 Luminaries.

After naming them, the next wholehearted action is to bring them home or bring a bit of home to them. In my home state of Kerala, India, we honor our teachers, elders, mentors, – through a ceremony called Ponnada Aniyikkal. Ponnada is a shawl adorned around the shoulders of a dignitary being honored. The literal meaning of the word Ponnada is “Precious Golden Cloth”. So, I hired two agents in Kerala – \*my loving mom and dad – who ran around to secure the goods. Though our tradition uses a white cotton cloth with golden borders, we have adapted the tradition so that our Luminaries may warmly remember us and this moment. With expert consultation from my parents\*, our Luminaries will be warmed today by Kashmiri shawls. Embroidered in each of these Shawls are the words\* “Celebrating you as a CFHA Luminary – San Antonio, TX, October 2024”.

Neftali and I will adorn each of them, one after the other, as they are led onto the stage. Their names and pictures will be shown on the screens behind us. We asked them to give us words or phrases for each of you who are future Luminaries of CFHA. Dr. Macaran Baird will provide a short reflection once we finish. So, CFHA, hold this space for us as we honor them!

**Ceremony  
Mac Baird speaks**

\*Let me end with a reflection on the word "Family." \*The institution of the family has profoundly and resiliently changed over the past thirty-plus years. From the stereotypical single-family unit of mom, dad, and children, society has evolved to make room for divorced and remarried families, stepfamilies, same-sex couples and families, and even families of kinship without biological ties. Regardless of who makes a family, the family unit still has the same functions: \* calibrate cohesion and flexibility throughout their lifecycle stage as a unit to form and nurture healthy individuals who can reasonably differentiate to make choices of their own. Differentiation of Self – a core concept in Bowen Family Systems Theory – is the ability to balance emotional and logical processes and to maintain independence while still connecting with others.

From my reflections, CFHA has, in its own way, transitioned in shape and form like the Family while remaining true to its function. Though the word "Family" in our name may have had some disciplinary convictions, I take the view that over time, \*CFHA functioned more as a Family - stable professional home base/unit to launch many differentiated ideas and individuals into the world to transform the world around us, while still remaining connected. The history of this family begins with displacement from another professional organization – so naturally, we became a home for belonging for all – regardless of

disciplinary identity – who believed in displacing fragmented care with whole-person and family care.

CFHA became a professional, safe space where new, awkward, and odd ideas would be nurtured to become vehicles of change. \*When our family unit became nearly extinct multiple times, like all families, \*members over-functioned to return us to stability. Like all families \*with young children, we had sibling rivalries between models. We even had a season of consternation as we debated the word Family itself in our name. A healthy family has such tensions\*. Last year, I used the metaphor of a greenhouse\* to represent us – a developmental\* marker of our ongoing maturity and differentiation. A majority of you rely on this gathering, year-after-year as your recharge point to return home with new vigor to fight for a less fragmented healthcare system. \*Much like we all need our families, we also need a professional family – a functional relational system to help us see ourselves, nurture each others, so that we may be more fruitful when we return to our places of work. A colleague of mine was surprised when I used the word Love to describe CFHA to him – where else can love reside other than in a family.

\*So, Luminaries – thank you for creating something that you felt was worth saving and burning your lights brighter when the storms came. You have lit a flame that many carry around the country today into exam rooms, community settings, education settings, policy conversations, and leadership positions. \*We are indebted to you and warmed by you. Thank you. As each of you continue your brilliant lives, should clouds of despair ever darken your hour, remember the warmth of this moment and remember the warmth of the shawls we adorned on you today.

And to the rest of us, get to know your siblings and cousins, especially the new ones. Our Board of Directors – if you can raise your hands – are sitting among you today, with a targeted goal of linking them more

directly to you. They are the guardians of this family – so know them, talk to us, reach out to us – for this is a family affair.\*

\*So, whoever you are and wherever you are in your journey of integration, fight for equity or just need a respite to recharge your souls – Welcome home. Welcome to CFHA.