

MICHAEL J. POAGE (1945 -)



Michael Poage has been a Kansan since 1985, when he began serving United Church of Christ congregations in Council Grove, Lawrence and Wichita. He has advanced degrees in both theology and creative writing. While a student at the University of Montana, he studied poetry with Richard Hugo and Madeline Defrees, one of the great teaching teams of the 20th century. He learned economy of words and focus. This poet's work begins with commonplace moments that are synecdoches—parts representing the whole (as sunflowers represent Kansas prairies). Poage's poems resemble enfolded macramé knots made of simple twine. His words are familiar yet they evoke nature's possible theological order.

"Pelagic" in this title means living in open waters, referring most often to birds. With this poem, then, Poage might refer to how prairies resemble large bodies of water. However, he turns the sky, not ripples of grass, into the ocean, with the bird "swimming in the air." The counterbalance is land, or "home's street." To extend the water comparison further, he then imagines the moon also moving within an oceanic sky. He suggests the moon is love, "beauty," and mystery—all universal associations. The "small bird" and the moon both share the same fate as humans: all are "condemned" to struggle in "the open sea." Home is the familiar, and the sky is the natural world with all its powerful, uncertain forces.

PELAGIC

**In the breath
of a hand
we saw a small bird
swimming in the air.
We returned
to home's street.**

**The moon
is a human back
caught again
in an act of passion
and condemned
with all its beauty
and common questions
to the open sea.**

Education: BA, Westmont College, 1967; MFA in Creative Writing, University of Montana, 1973; Master of Divinity, San Francisco Theological Seminary, 1985.

Career: *BORN*, (Black Stone Press, 1975), *Handbook of Ornament* (Black Stone Press, 1979), *The Gospel of Mary* (Woodley Press, 1997), *god won't overlook us*, (Penthe Press, 2001), and *Abundance* (219 Press, 2004). He has taught at Friends University (Wichita), Wichita State University, and the University of Latvia in Riga, Latvia. Currently, he is pastor of Fairmont United Church of Christ, Congregational, in Wichita; some sermons are posted at <http://www.fairmountucc.com/sermons.htm> .