

Thomas Berry Engaged Legacy Projects

The work of Thomas Berry has inspired the development of many ecological projects and learning centers in the United States, Canada, Ireland, England, and Australia. The list compiled here is by no means exhaustive, but indicates some of the range of people, programs, centers, and institutes that Berry's ideas influenced. We welcome additions. They can be sent to [Elizabeth McAnally](#).

Thomas Berry's Legacy in Academia

Center for the Story of the Universe – 1990

[The Center for the Story of the Universe](#) is directed by Brian Thomas Swimme, professor at the California Institute of Integral Studies and co-writer of *Journey of the Universe*. As it states on the Center's website, "The mission of the Center for the Story of the Universe is to redirect the current self-destructive trajectory of society into one whose actions can realize a vibrant community that transcends individual, human and geo-political boundaries. The Center achieves this mission by assisting people in making the transition from modernist forms of consciousness to the emerging forms resonant with an ecological civilization. Through the production and distribution of DVDs, the Center for

the Story of the Universe provides educational processes for exploring and embodying the new cosmological understanding of the universe, earth and human.

Elliott Allen Institute for Theology & Ecology, University of Toronto - 1991

[The Elliott Allen Institute for Theology & Ecology \(EAITE\)](#) was launched in 1991 and became a major center in Canada for study and research on this topic with a special focus on Thomas Berry's work. It offered a certificate of Specialization in Theology and Ecology through the Faculty of Theology at the University of St. Michael's College, part of the Toronto School of Theology in the University of Toronto.

Founded by Passionist Stephen Dunn and later directed by Dennis O'Hara, the Institute also sponsored lectures, conferences, and workshops. Deeply inspired by Berry's thinking, its mission was described as follows: "In expressing our concern for the ecological crisis, the Institute seeks integrative methods for contributing to the healing of the Earth in all of its life systems... Interdisciplinary by definition, the Institute facilitates serious contact between the theological disciplines and the scientific, cosmological, and cultural paradigm shifts that are shaping our times." Several leading theologians received their doctorates under Stephen Dunn's mentorship. These included Heather Eaton, Laurent LeDuc, Jai-Don Lee, and Dennis O'Hara.

In the late 1970s, the Passionists' Holy Cross Centre for Ecology and Spirituality in Port Burwell, Ontario, Canada began exploring the emerging relationship between theology and the ecological crisis. Stephen Dunn and the other members of the Centre's staff used the workshops, retreats, and colloquia of the Centre to delve into this new field guided by their interest in Berry's thought. This collaborative process prompted the

Faculty of Theology at St. Michael's to welcome the creation of the Elliott Allen Institute in 1991.

Holy Cross Centre Colloquia in Port Burwell, Ontario – 1979-2000

Each summer from 1979-2000 Thomas Berry would travel to the Passionist's Holy Cross Centre for Ecology and Spirituality. This was located in Port Burwell on Lake Erie in Ontario, Canada on a beautiful fifty-five acre site with a woodlot, meadow, and beach. Meetings took place either in a Normandy style Main House with its Great Room paneled in Double Linenfold Oak, or in the converted barn. There were three additional buildings open where guests could stay.

In Thomas' early visits to Port Burwell, he led two small retreats, the first for the Staff of Holy Cross Centre in 1979 and the second for Centre Associates in 1980. Based on the appeal of these retreats, the decision was made to hold an annual summer colloquium on the topic of ecology and religion. At each colloquia Thomas would interact with theologians, intellectuals, artists, environmentalists, and other public figures on a broad range of issues. Like the Riverdale Center, this was a perfect summer environment for Thomas to continue to develop his ideas. In a relaxed lakeside setting, people gathered for several days of talks and discussions. Stephen Dunn, C.P., with the help of Cenacle Sister Anne Lonergan, organized these colloquia and hosted visitors from across Canada, the United States, and abroad.

The first colloquium in 1982 was on a range of related topics: John Livingston on philosophy, Edmund O'Sullivan on education, Charles Long on simplicity, and Janet Somerville from the Canadian Council of Churches on justice and peace. Subsequent

colloquia tended to focus on single themes: In 1983 on economics with Bill Dyson of the Vanier Institute for the Family; in 1984 on agriculture and food with Stuart Hill of McGill University; in 1985 on ritual with Ron Grimes of Wilfrid Laurier University. It was during this colloquium that the outdoor “Cosmic Stations” were introduced.²

The high point of this initial series was in 1986 when Brian Thomas Swimme and Thomas spoke on the New Story. Previous audiences hovered around the fifty mark, which was a full house for a small retreat center. However, on this occasion, more than 100 attended, taking advantage of local inns. Arts and ecology shaped the theme in 1987, during which Thomas was in conversation with Rev. James Parks Morton of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Caroline Delaney, the artist of the stained-glass windows of the Cosmic Stations, Sara Rubin, ceramic artist, Jane Abbot, artist, Susan Shantz, whose master’s thesis on the Stations of the Cross included a study of the Cosmic Stations, and Alexandra Caverly-Lowery, ballet dancer and group facilitator.

Another landmark colloquium took place in 1990, when Thomas was in conversation with Thomas Clarke, S.J., a prominent author in the field of social justice and liberation theology. This event was professionally videotaped (produced by Dawn MacDonald of Villagers) and published by Twenty-Third Publications as a book and as a thirteen-part video titled *Befriending the Earth: A Theology of Reconciliation Between Humans and the Earth*. It was featured on CityTV, a creative Canadian channel founded in 1972 by Moses Znaimer. By 1990 CityTV was a popular source of new ideas.

² The Stations of the Cosmos were built on the grounds at Holy Cross Centre, and at the same time Carolyn Delaney created the series in stained glass windows, which were installed in the chapel there. Subsequently the windows were reproduced as outdoor panels, now forming a walk in the Garden of St. Gabriel's Church in Toronto. Stations of the Cosmos were also built at the [Ignatius Jesuit Centre](#) in Guelph, Ontario under the direction of Jim Profit, SJ with input from Christina Vanin. The Stations of the Cosmos was also built at a [Maryknoll center in Baguio](#) in the Philippines.

Befriending the Earth was subsequently translated into several languages, including Korean and Spanish.

Two colloquia dealt directly with ecology and the First Nations peoples of Canada. In 1988 Leona Nahwegahbow, a native leader, and Al Chrisjohn, a native journalist, spoke on *Native Experience and the Ecological Quest*. Two following colloquia dealt with the topic of ecofeminism: the first in 1989 featured Rachel Bagby, artist and dancer from San Francisco; the second in 1991 featured Elisabet Sahtouris, author and evolutionary biologist, Mary Malone, theologian and feminist, and Judith Plant, author. In 1992 Dr. Joan Morrison, geologist at McMaster University, and Brian Wright McLeod, native artist, explored *The Myth of North America* with Thomas Berry.

The largest colloquium in 1993 celebrated the book, *The Universe Story*, which Thomas and Brian Swimme had just published. Several developments gave this gathering further focus. The Elliott Allen Institute for Theology and Ecology at St Michael's College at the University of Toronto had started two years earlier, and this colloquium offered the opportunity to hold the Institute's inaugural Summer Lecture in Convocation Hall at the University of Toronto. Brian Swimme was the lecturer, and it was videotaped by Villagers Media. The attendance in Toronto was strong, and that was reflected in the continuing colloquium held in Port Burwell with more than 200 participants. The book signing ceremony at the conclusion was also videotaped, highlighting Thomas' address on the importance of the occasion. This colloquium was the high point of the entire series.

In the years that followed, some notable interlocutors continued the discussion of ecology and religion with Thomas. In 1994, Theodore Rozak pursued the theme of eco-

psychology in Port Burwell, with additional public lectures in Toronto and London, Ontario. That same year there was another event entitled “Thomas Berry and the Next Generation” that celebrated the relationship of the Elliott Allen Institute with the work of the Centre for Ecology and Spirituality. It offered the opportunity for several new entrants into the field of Religion and Ecology to put their work into conversation with Thomas. This included Laurent Leduc, Cristina Vanin, Jang Woo Lee, Mary Heather MacKinnon, Paul Cusack, Heather Eaton, Anne Marie Dalton, Dennis O’Hara, and Michael Dowd. Most were on their way to attaining their doctorates at the University of Toronto through the Institute.

In 1995 the theme of the Great Lakes was particularly directed towards activists. It featured David Crombie, former Mayor of Toronto and highly regarded public figure, as well as Sr. Paula Gonzales and Dorothy Goldin Rosenberg, American and Canadian environmental activists, respectively. In 1996 Terri McLuhan, Marshall McLuhan’s daughter, gave the Elliott Allen Lecture at Emmanuel College in Toronto. In 1997 environmentalists Nancy and Jack Todd dialogued with Thomas on the topic of the natural regeneration of the land. In 1998 Hyun Kyung, Korean author on ecology and feminism, and Eva Solomon, author on indigenous religions and Christian spirituality, took up the theme of ecofeminism in conversation with Thomas.

In 1999 negotiations were taking place to find a buyer for the Port Burwell property. The financial constraints involved in maintaining all of this dictated the unfortunate decision to sell. However, that summer, Anne Lonergan and Stephen Dunn were able to bring the Colloquium to two audiences in western Canada: The Ursuline

Sisters in Bruno Saskatchewan, and a general convocation of religious educators in Saskatoon SA.

The summer Colloquium series was brought to a formal conclusion in 2000 with two special events. At Port Burwell, by arrangement with the new owners, Thomas presented a retreat on the theme of the cosmology of religions. During those few days in Port Burwell, he also taped an interview for a television series for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) called *Man Alive* with R.H. Thompson. The program received national attention and became commercially available. In Toronto, Brian Swimme gave that year's Elliott Allen Lecture: a presentation on "Earth's Imagination" to a full house in the auditorium of the Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine.

For over twenty years, from 1979-2000, Holy Cross Centre in Port Burwell was an incubator of dialogue around Thomas' ideas. He became widely appreciated in Canada through these colloquia and the CBC television program. This was due to the dedicated efforts of Stephen Dunn, assisted over the years by Anne Lonergan. For this work Dunn received the [Thomas Berry Award](#) in 2012 in Toronto.

Philosophy, Cosmology, and Consciousness Program at the California Institute of Integral Studies - 1994

The Philosophy, Cosmology, and Consciousness program at the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco, CA is a graduate program dedicated to re-imagining the human species as a mutually enhancing member of the Earth community. This graduate program draws much inspiration from the work of Thomas Berry. The [mission statement](#) of the program states,

Scientists, scholars, and visionaries recognize that the Earth community is facing an unprecedented evolutionary challenge, the most severe degradation of life in the last 65 million years. This multifaceted crisis requires a fundamental reorientation of our civilization, where a compassionate humanity becomes a mutually enhancing presence within Earth's complex systems of life. Cultural historian Thomas Berry has called this task “the Great Work.”

Faculty members include Brian Thomas Swimme, Jacob Sherman, Elizabeth Allison, Sean Kelly, Richard Tarnas, Robert McDermott, and Matt Segall.

Thomas Berry Foundation - 1998

The Thomas Berry Foundation was created in 1998 by Mary Evelyn Tucker, John Grim, and the lawyer, Martin Kaplan, along with Thomas and his sister Margaret. Thomas’ nieces, Ann Berry Somers and Teresa Kelleher, both academics, later joined the board along with Brian Brown and Amarylis Cortijo, Berry’s former doctoral students at Fordham. The Foundation has promoted Thomas’ ideas through establishing a website for Thomas (thomasberry.org), initiating his archive at Harvard, publishing his essays and overseeing translations, organizing the Thomas Berry Award and Lecture, founding the Forum on Religion and Ecology, and creating the *Journey of the Universe* project.

Harvard Archive: 1997 - present

While John Grim and Mary Evelyn Tucker were leading a series of conferences at Harvard on world religions and ecology in the mid-1990s, a new archive was being formed to honor key environmental thinkers. This was called the Harvard Environmental

Science and Public Policy Archives. It was originated by Professor William Clark who specializes in sustainability science and policy at the Kennedy School at Harvard. When Tucker and Grim approached Clark about Thomas Berry's possible inclusion in this archive, he readily agreed. Clark understood and appreciated the original contributions Berry was making to rethinking human-Earth relations. He even offered to travel to Greensboro to speak with Thomas about the archives. Over many years, Thomas' papers and letters have been transferred to Harvard with the dedicated assistance of his sister Margaret. George Clarke oversees the archives.

Thomas Berry Award: 1998 - present

[The Thomas Berry Award](#) was inaugurated in 1999 in Washington DC when the Center for Respect of Life and Environment at the Humane Society of the United States created the award to honor Berry's legacy. Since then it has been presented to select individuals who have modeled the "Great Work" in their teaching, writing, or public service.³ The Forum on Religion and Ecology partnered with the Center for Respect of Life and Environment in presenting the Award in its early stages and now sponsors the Award.

Forum on Religion and Ecology – 1998 - present

The objective of the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale University is to create a new academic field of study that has implications for environmental policy and

³ The Thomas Berry Award Recipients are: Paul Winter (May 4, 2019) John Grim (May 20, 2017), Brian Edward Brown (January 24, 2016), James Gustave Speth (November 8, 2014), James Conlon (July 18, 2013), Stephen Dunn (November 1, 2012), Martin S. Kaplan (September 26, 2009), Fritz and Vivienne Hull (October 15, 2007), Miriam Therese MacGillis (October 1, 2005), Reverend James Parks Morton (2004), Steven C. Rockefeller (May 17, 2002), Tu Weiming (August 30, 2000), Brian Thomas Swimme (October 8, 1999), and Mary Evelyn Tucker (November 10, 1998).

environmental humanities. To this end, the Forum has organized some 30 conferences, published books and articles, and developed a comprehensive website on world religions and ecology. The largest international multireligious project of its kind, the Forum recognizes that religions need to be in dialogue with other disciplines (e.g., science, economics, education, public policy) in seeking comprehensive solutions to both global and local environmental problems. To this end, the Forum works closely with students in the joint master's degree program in religion and ecology at Yale between the School of Forestry & Environmental Studies and the Divinity School, as well as the Master's of Arts in Religion and Ecology at the Divinity School. It also sends out a newsletter via email to some 12,000 people around the world.

Grim and Tucker initiated this work with a series of conferences on religion and ecology from 1996-1998 at Harvard's Center for the Study of World Religions. Over 1000 environmentalists and international scholars of the world's religions participated. Ten volumes resulted that were published by Harvard. A concluding series of conferences were held at Harvard, including one on world religions and animals (published by Columbia University Press), one on the ecological imagination with *Orion* magazine, and one on world religions and climate change published by *Daedalus*.

Twenty years ago religion and ecology was neither a field of study nor a force for transformation. Over the past two decades a new field of study has emerged within academia with courses being taught at colleges and high schools across North America and in some universities in Europe. Moreover, a new force of religious environmentalism is growing in churches, synagogues, temples, and mosques around the world. Now every major religion has statements on the importance of ecological protection, and hundreds of

grassroots projects have emerged. The Forum on Religion and Ecology has played an active role in these developments.

Journey of the Universe – 2011

In an effort to implement Thomas' fundamental insight of the need for a New Story, Brian Thomas Swimme, Mary Evelyn Tucker, and John Grim developed the *Journey of the Universe* project. This was issued in 2011 as a film, a book, and a series of twenty conversations with scientists and environmentalists. The film, dedicated to Thomas Berry, was broadcast in the United States for three years on public television. It was broadly acclaimed and won a regional Emmy Award. To make the Journey project available to a worldwide public, massive open online courses (MOOCs) were released from Yale/Coursera in fall 2016. These were translated into Chinese a year later. This also includes a course on Thomas Berry. In November 2014 Tucker and Grim organized a conference at Yale to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of Thomas' birth and the fifth anniversary of his death. From this conference a book was published titled *Living Cosmology: Christian Responses to Journey of the Universe* (Orbis 2016). In 2017 it received a first place award from the Catholic Press Association in the category of Science and Religion.

Thomas Berry Forum for Ecological Dialogue at Iona College - 2009

In 2009, after the death of the celebrated geologist and cultural historian, Thomas Berry, CP, four of his students--Dr. Brian Brown, Dr. Kevin Cawley, CFC, Dr. Kathleen Deignan, CND, and Dr. Daniel Martin--gathered at Iona College to initiate the Thomas

Berry Forum for Ecological Dialogue to celebrate and promote his wisdom legacy.



Back row: Daniel Martin, Ph.D., Brian Brown, Ph.D.

Front row: Br. Kevin Cawley, Ph.D., Kathleen Deignan, Ph.D.

It is our hope that this Forum will be a creative resource for the entire Iona College community, and for the many other dialogue partners--regional, national and global--whom we hope to engage in the Great Work to awaken the ecological phase of human development. In particular, we wish to serve Iona's interdisciplinary and integral Environmental Studies Program as a hosting platform for conferences, convocations, lectures, retreats, campus sustainability initiatives, and eco-pilgrimages that will enhance our academic enterprise.

The Mission of the Thomas Berry Forum for Ecological Dialogue at Iona is as follows: educate for awareness of the integral Earth community; facilitate deeper understanding of human responsibility for care of Earth; promote scholarly dialogue and

engagement around significant ecological concerns; celebrate our communion in the family of God's creation; and inspire hope and empower action for a sustainable and environmentally just world, with special concern for the most vulnerable members of the Earth community. The Thomas Berry Forum is an open and inclusive space for ecological education, exploration, and transformation.

“Carbon Rangers” Newsletter - Br. Kevin Cawley - 2008

Former students of Thomas Berry at Iona College Department of Religious Studies brought his teaching to Iona. Following his passing in 2009, they committed to sharing his legacy more formally by founding the Thomas Berry Forum for Ecological Dialogue. I had been producing a small newsletter on care of Earth beginning in 2007 and was invited to participate as a founding member of the Forum after meeting with Fr. Thomas in 2007. I began to incorporate the teaching of Fr. Thomas in the production of my newsletter on care of Earth at that time. The [July 2009 issue](#) includes a report on the burial of Fr. Thomas at Green Mountain Monastery.

The original audience was a small group of Edmund Rice Christian Brothers gathered at a Province Assembly in Canada in 2007. Edmund Rice, an early 19th century Catholic businessman, founded two religious congregations of Brothers after seeing the injustices visited upon the poor in Ireland of his time. We Brothers in the early 21st century were drawn together at our assembly by a common interest in care for Earth and were convinced that we had to take action in some way for the sake of justice. Taking proper action requires good information. The group agreed to the name “Carbon Rangers” because of the links between carbon emissions and global warming. We have

subsequently come to understand that care of Earth and sustainable living will require profound shifts in behavior for all of us. The newsletter archives are hosted on the website of [Edmund Rice International](#), accredited to the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

I make several assumptions in assembling the news here: Climate change is happening now and is a real threat to the future of human life on the planet, and human activity contributes significantly to the problems. Poor and vulnerable populations are likely to suffer the effects of the changes first and in the most destructive form. Human extraction of the planet's resources at current levels is unsustainable and unjust. Care of Earth must now guide all decisions.

- Br. Kevin Cawley, Executive Director of the Thomas Berry Forum for Ecological Dialogue at Iona College.

Assisi Programs – St. Thomas University and the Center for Respect of Life and Environment – 1991-2000

While Thomas traveled less than in his early years, he continued to go to Italy most summers for two programs in Assisi. These were organized by Elisabeth Ferrero, Professor of Humanities at St. Thomas University in Florida. The first were the Study Abroad for the Earth programs (1991-1998) and the second were the “Spirituality and Sustainability” conferences sponsored by St. Thomas University and the Center for Respect of Life and Environment (1995-2000).⁴ Rick Clugston, the director of the Center,

⁴ Dr. Ferrero describes the process of developing these programs: “In the late 1980s, Dr. Iannone, Dean of Religious Studies at St. Thomas University, started a ‘base community’ concept. Thomas Berry’s cosmology was at the center of our gatherings, with frequent visits by Dr. McGregor Smith, Director of the

was a co-organizer along with Elisabeth. Thomas was the keynote speaker in the conferences, which over the years drew other notable environmentalists, scientists, religious figures, and NGO leaders.⁵ The purpose of these conferences was to “identify and celebrate developments in religion, economic, science, education, politics, and the arts to promote eco-justice and sustainability.”⁶ Thomas’ presence was appreciated by many:

The presence of Fr. Berry in Assisi was not just the focal point of intellectual dialogue within the study abroad program and the conferences, for the entire city participated in the extraordinary events taking place during the summer months. The owners of the shops around the fountain in Assisi’s main square would wait impatiently for *Padre Berry’s* presence and open smile. The *Posta’s* cook would always think of new treats to prepare for him. At sunset, as the colors of the sky take on muted and splendid shades in Assisi’s *piazza*, at one of the coffee-shop-outside tables...observers would find Thomas Berry and a large circle of students, colleagues, friends from Assisi and abroad all around him. More than once someone had to go and fetch him, letting him know that dinner was getting cold.⁷

Joe Holland, a professor at St Thomas University, recalls meeting Thomas at the Rome airport to bring him up to Assisi:

Environmental Center at Miami Dade College; Miriam MacGillis from Genesis Farm; and others. The resulting intellectual ferment changed many people’s lives and work. Healing the Earth was conceived with important events open to the entire South Miami community. In October 1990, I knocked on Dean Iannone’s office with a unique idea: a summer ecological study abroad program in Assisi, Italy, centered on Thomas Berry’s cosmology. The following June, Study Abroad for Earth was underway in Assisi with Fr. Berry as the Visiting Scholar for the next seven years.” Elisabeth Ferrero, ed., *Thomas Berry in Italy: Reflections on Spirituality and Sustainability* (Washington DC: Pacem in Terris Press, 2016), 20.

⁵ This included, John Brinkman, Tony Cortese, Drew Dellinger, John Grim, Joe Holland, Hildur Jackson, Pamela Kraft, Miriam MacGillis, Gary McClosky, David Orr, Rodney Peterson, Lauren Ross, Rupert Sheldrake, Karl-Ludwig Schibel, Steve Snider, Brian Thomas Swimme, and Earth Charter drafters such as Steven Rockefeller, Mirian Vilela, and Mary Evelyn Tucker.

⁶ Elisabeth Ferrero, ed., *Thomas Berry in Italy: Reflections on Spirituality and Sustainability* (Washington DC: Pacem in Terris Press, 2016), 21.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

Greeting Thomas as he exited from security area, I noticed he was wearing only a light jacket. When I asked if he had a warm coat, Tom said the jacket would be sufficient. Then I noticed he was carrying a small paper bag that looked like a lunch bag. So I asked him to what baggage area his luggage was being delivered. He looked at his little ‘lunch bag’ and said quietly, ‘This is all I have.’ Tom thus personified the simplicity promoted by Saint Francis of Assisi, patron of the city where we had last met.⁸

**Miami Dade Community College – Colleen Ahern-Hettich, Earth Ethics Institute -
1988**

“In 1988, McGregor Smith, Jr, was already an innovative and engaging educator at Miami-Dade College in South Florida. He had begun teaching there as a journalism instructor, and after finishing his doctoral work on "self-directed" interdisciplinary learning models, he piloted an innovative program called Life Lab. Affectionately known as "Mac" Smith, he would later use this model to build an Environmental Demonstration Center and offer a wide range of community education classes in all aspects of earth-friendly and sustainable living. In that same year he attended the First North American Conference on Christianity and Ecology in Webster, Indiana, where Thomas Berry was a major presenter. This was his first exposure to a new functional cosmology as a basis for cultural transformation, and it became a turning point that would shape the next decades of his personal and professional life. Shortly after, Mac invited a group of educators to meet in Florida and begin developing resources and curriculum materials for college courses based on the insights of Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme. The group called themselves the Earth Literacy Communion, and their collaborative efforts created the substantive content of an Earth Literacy curriculum. In a unique partnership with St. Thomas University in Miami, these courses became a pilot for graduate and

⁸ Ibid., 180-181.

undergraduate accreditation at Genesis Farm and began to extend into several other colleges and universities. From these efforts, Mac also helped in the founding of Narrow Ridge, a bioregional Earth Literacy center in Washburn, Kentucky. To assure the longevity and financial and institutional support for these efforts, Mac also developed the [Earth Ethics Institute](#) at Miami-Dade College. It was founded with a mission of infusing Earth Literacy into all the academic disciplines and operations of its diverse campuses. He believed that every student and every faculty and staff member should be invited into the study of the evolutionary story of the Universe and Earth and be given the insights and tools for creating their lives in harmony with the mystery of Earth.” Adapted from the Genesis Farm e-newsletter, May 28, 2018.

The Sophia Center in Culture and Spirituality – Jim Conlon - 1996

The Sophia Center story began in the birth of the Institute in Culture and Creation Spirituality (ICCS) at Mundelein College in Chicago in 1978, under the direction of Matthew Fox. In 1983, ICCS moved to Holy Names University in Oakland, California, and on July 1, 1996, the Sophia Center was born as an offspring of ICCS. The inclusion of “culture” in ICCS’s name reflected the influence of Thomas Berry, a cultural historian. ICCS met the need for a dynamic integration of science, art, and mysticism. Its pedagogy was focused on transformational learning, and was based on the conviction that spirituality cannot be taught without the inclusion of art (creativity) in the program. Creation spirituality was included in the name to reflect the work of Matthew Fox at Mundelein and later at ICCS.

I began as director of ICCS in 1991. When I was invited to found a new program at Holy Names in 1996, I sought the advice and counsel of Miriam Therese MacGillis, founder of Genesis Farm Learning Center in New Jersey, and Brian Thomas Swimme, evolutionary philosopher at the California Institute for Integral Studies. With their support and in conversation with our faculty, we called the new program the Sophia Center in Earth, Art and Spirit. We chose the work and writings of Thomas Berry as the core focus of the curriculum. The name “Sophia” had its foundation in the wisdom literature of the Hebrew bible, which understands wisdom as the capacity of a listening heart. The words “Earth, Art and Spirit” were taken from the vocabulary of the new cosmology and its dynamic principles of communion, differentiation, and interiority. Our new program drew on matter (geosphere), life (biosphere), and mind (noosphere). The core curriculum featured the writings of Thomas Berry, including *The Dream of the Earth*, *The Great Work*, and the *Universe Story*, co-written with Brian Swimme. Our mission was to develop a program that aligned this body of work with the overarching dynamics of the universe, and to participate in a new Exodus as we moved from a destructive industrial era to a new era characterized by a deepening experience of the divine presence that holds all things in one numinous embrace.

The Sophia Center was created as a graduate program at Holy Names University, and was fully accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). Graduates could receive a master’s degree in culture and spirituality, or they could follow a certificate option. We employed three formats: semester, weekend, and summer. The semester format held classes during the week, the weekend format met four weekends each semester, and the Summer Institute was offered each summer. Approximately one

hundred students attended the Summer Institute each year, and approximately thirty were enrolled during the semesters. Each format focused on the universe story, the great work, and related themes. The Sophia Center faculty comprised theologians, artists, social activists, psychologists, health professionals, ecologists, spiritual directors, scientists, indigenous leaders, ecofeminists, cosmologists, and others. Among our faculty were Rosemary Radford Ruether, Brian Thomas Swimme, Mary Evelyn Tucker, Dody Donnelly, Josefina Burgos, Barry Friedman, Carol Lee Flinders, Tim Flinders, Michele Cassou, and myself. I directed the Sophia Center until my retirement in 2015.

Centers/Programs Beyond Academia

The Whidbey Institute - Fritz and Vivienne Hull - 1978

Almost 40 years ago Thomas Berry walked into the living room of our very old rustic farmhouse. None of us knew him. We had no idea of what to expect. We were in the early formative years of shaping the Chinook Learning Center dedicated to new spirituality, nature, community, and alternatives to much of what we had experienced and rejected in the sixties. On Whidbey Island, north of Seattle, on an old abandoned farm, we were building a small outpost for new ways of thinking and living. Most of us were somewhere in the process of re-examining traditional religious forms, looking for something new that felt unbounded and exciting. Our old farm was in the forest where it was quiet. Here we got better at listening to wild nature and to each other. So when Thomas Berry walked into the room, we must have been ready. We were immediately

drawn to Thomas, and the more he spoke, the more we knew we had found a teacher. He became for us a profound source of ideas and inspiration. Over the ensuing years we met with him in many places, including Seattle with return visits to our center on Whidbey.

After twenty years into our work as a learning center, we changed the name to the Whidbey Institute. We built a beautiful hall, a place for programs large and small, including lecture presentations, concerts, celebrations, and powerful gatherings meant to bring change into the world. When we built it in 2000, we had a very short meeting deciding what to name the hall. All agreed, there was no doubt about it. The name of our new structure was to be the Thomas Berry Hall. It seemed so totally appropriate that a place dedicated to creative work on behalf of the Earth community would carry his name. It pleases us that forevermore it would be called by that name alone, so his name is now repeated constantly in our conversations, our literature, in the press, and in the stories and recollections of times at the Whidbey Institute.

For all these last 40 years, Thomas Berry has remained a powerful presence through his writings and our memories. We now have a different perspective about the forest around us, the waters around our island, and the mountain ranges beyond the waters. Thomas helped us grasp that this planet is our home, and that we belong to this place. We began to realize that in our personal lives and in the life of this learning center, we are moving toward a consciousness of being part of it all, an integral piece of the long story of the universe and Earth. We are learning that it is now our responsibility to help weave the story of the future. That is why the Whidbey Institute is creating and hosting programs to help make a difference in the world – in issues of the environment, equity and justice, building resilient communities, learning to create mutually enhancing

relationships with the Earth community. Thomas helped us to shape our purpose and goals, gave us content and language, and instilled in us the sense that we are indeed contributing to the great work of our time.

The Whidbey Institute continues to build on the legacy of this remarkable man. As founders we are immensely pleased and grateful with what is happening. We also wonder about how easily in the Institute's life something might someday fade away, or how a significant through-line might become lost. Maybe placing Thomas' name on the hall came from a wisdom that exceeded our own. We repeat his name over and over. Long into the future, people here will ask about Thomas Berry, realize him as the Whidbey Institute's profound visionary guide and friend, and return to his writings to discover Thomas Berry for themselves and the Great Work of a future time.

Genesis Farm – Miriam MacGillis – 1980

[Genesis Farm](#) is an ecological center founded in 1980 as a project of the Dominican Sisters of Caldwell, New Jersey. Miriam MacGillis, OP, has served as the director since its founding. Genesis Farm is dedicated to understanding the Universe and Earth as a single, unfolding process. The scientifically-based story of the Universe offers profound insights into our public, personal and spiritual lives. Through its educational programs and its commitment to action, Genesis Farm has offered diverse and innovative experiences that inspire a comprehensive approach to personal and social change. Genesis Farm is open to all who are interested in exploring this sacred land, our mission, and our work.

Genesis Farm is located in Blirstown, New Jersey on 226 acres of preserved

farmland. There are two guest residences, and additional buildings house a library and media area, a resource center, art studio, and program offices. We are also the home of the Community Supported Garden at Genesis Farm, which has over 300 members and was founded by Genesis Farm and local community members.

The original 140-acre farm--with its rolling hills, woodlands, marshes, houses, and farm buildings--was bequeathed by Ruprecht and Mary Von Boecklin who had lived and farmed there since the 1940s. Before their arrival, the farm had been in the Kerr and DePuy families. Over the years it had been used for cattle, dairy, and sheep farming and was known as the Red Cat Farm to people in this area. There was no association between the Von Boecklin family and the Dominican Sisters, but through some providential purpose this farm was left to the Sisters, who used it as a new expression of their traditional work in education. In 1998, an additional 86 acres of adjoining land was donated by neighbor and friend, Katherine Shepard. This land, which includes a beautiful pond, has come to be known as Shepard's Blessing. In 2001, this land was also put into conservation to protect it from any future development.

The decade of the 1970s marked a growing awareness of the urgent problems that were affecting the planet worldwide. During the 1960s and 1970s the family farm crisis with its consequent effects of malnourishment and world hunger had also become evident. Racism and war had torn deep rifts in the fabric of our national life, and the connections between our local and global problems had become much clearer. This is the context in which the Dominican Sisters founded Genesis Farm. Reflecting on these major issues prompted them to deepen their commitment to education as a way to help shape a more hopeful future and to place this land into permanent conservation. Thomas Berry,

who visited and lectured at Genesis Farm on numerous occasions, provided the intellectual and spiritual framework for Genesis Farm's work.

Over the ensuing decades, people from all over--from local towns to every continent on the planet--came to immerse themselves in Earth Literacy at Genesis Farm. Many participated in our residential learning courses, which taught the science of the Universe Story and its many implications for social change and spirituality. A master's degree in Earth Literacy was offered in cooperation with Saint Thomas University. A large number of Earth Literacy graduates went on to found successful non-profits and ecology centers of their own. Genesis Farm also offered seasonal rituals, workshops, film showings, study groups, and classes that took place year-round. It was a major supporter and catalyst for many local ecologically-based organizations that formed and thrived over the years.

In 2012, Genesis Farm reduced its operations and entered a new phase of contemplation on the future of our work. The focus since that time has been on deepening our relationship to the land and developing demonstration gardens and ceremonial spaces to nourish body and soul. We have been designing learning materials to make long-distance learning feasible and accessible, and will continue to collaborate with colleges, offering learning opportunities to students and faculty. We also welcome other groups and organizations whose work aligns with our own to make use of our resources and accommodations.

Crystal Spring, Plainville, MA – Chris Loughlin - Early 1980s

We arrived in the early 1980s to a place offering itself to new beginnings. Amid the cross currents drifting toward a new shoreline, the voices of women had become a tidal surge for change. Crystal Spring grew into a center for the evolving of a woman's perspective of justice focused on politics, spirituality, and the arts. Through the art of story, we bore witness to the cultural patterning that defined women as 'other,' a model for all other separations. Women garnered fresh insights into their assigned values of connecting, nurturing, and practicing reverence for life. These tangible values had awakened across time and across cultures a spiritual dimension that held fast to the spinning thread of cosmic mystery. Our work therefore is nothing less than daily daring to lean our species into wonder for the mystery of being.

Near the end of that decade, a new publication entitled *The Dream of the Earth* found its way to this place. Here Berry writes, "the greatest support for the feminist movement can be found in the ecological movement." While stories had revealed how the dynamic of rage shifts one's mind-set to a new integration of love, Thomas' reflection stated that "every significant moment in western cultural transformation requires for its psychic dynamism a new pattern of historical interpretation." Our practices, programs, and projects became the mode to re-think and recover our relationship with the community of beings. The Community Supported Garden ushered in festivals and food economy, the unfolding of our land ethic birthed our religious lands conservancy project, and the home school program marked our way. We became the primary students of the *Journey of the Universe* in our telling and retelling of the story in family programs and

children's play. In the deepening of community to include the most ancient voices came the transformation of old loyalties and affections, and a sustaining faith was born.

Crystal Spring has become an integrated collective of human imagination and activity. The old meeting rooms are the offices of a USDA food hub. Red Tomato is a multi-structured non-profit with a passionate belief that local family farms and fair-trade food systems are key to bioregional recovery and healing our planet. The Religious Lands Conservancy Project celebrates a multitude of 'good news' stories. In partnership with the coalition of Land Trusts, the project explores with religious congregations and churches a radically different context for making decisions about their lands. Through preservation we come to participate in a deep spiritual, ecological, and social healing in the regions where we dwell. Our permaculture garden brings the local community onto the land and is a shining example of how humans can be a beneficial part of their environment.

EarthCommunity Center - Jane Blewett - 1989-2000

In 1989, with the encouragement of Thomas Berry, I founded the EarthCommunity Center in Laurel, MD. The mission was expressed in the phrase: "Justice for People, Justice for Earth: Two Sides of the Same Coin." This is now called eco-justice and is seen in the Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si*. The goal was to bring the central themes of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) into conversation with a growing ecological consciousness in the Catholic community, particularly among women religious, through writing, workshops, and retreats. Could the value of core social teachings of Catholicism--the dignity of all, the common good, option for the poor, the

right to participation--be applied to the total community of Earth life, beyond simply the human community? I believed they could bring a new energy and urgency to address critical environmental issues of the day. After all, Berry had defined Earth as "a communion of subjects," with each individual being containing an interiority and possessing rights appropriate to its nature. Earth is not a "collection of objects" for human use or abuse. In fact, it is a sacred community within which humans are privileged to dwell and upon which they are totally dependent for every aspect of life.

In January 1989 my "manifesto," as it were, was published in *The Way, A Review of Contemporary Christian Spirituality*, with the title "Social Justice and Creation Spirituality."⁹ To make the case for a movement to bring a new focus on justice to the ecological issue, it was imperative to tell the New Story, the evolutionary story of a 13.8 billion year continuous journey, from that first burst of creative energy to the present moment. This had been Berry's single admonition to us: tell the Story, a Story appropriate to our times and very different from the origin story we inherited from the Book of Genesis, a Story verified by current science from archeological digs to astounding revelations by astrophysicists and mathematicians, a Story with profound implications for the human community to absorb, to see with new eyes the honor of belonging *within* the sacred life community, not above or separate from it, and to live out of that new awareness.

In the context of the New Story, Catholic social justice teaching can be expanded to include not only humans, but the larger community of life. Thus, a *dignity* demanded

⁹ *The Way, A Review of Contemporary Christian Spirituality*, Volume 29, Number 1, January 1989. I wrote this "Manifesto" while studying at the Passionist's Holy Cross Centre for Ecology and Spirituality in Ontario, Canada, where Thomas Berry was a frequent mentor and Stephen Dunn, CP and Cenacle Sister Anne Lonergan provided on-going education and critical insights and support.

for all humans applies equally to the total life community; a fair share of the *common good* claimed for all humans is also a "good" now claimed by the "Commons," land, air and water alike; an *option for the poor* now exposes a "new poor" apparent in the devastated environment on every continent; the *right to participate* in decisions affecting the well-being of the Earth community is now articulated in the *Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth*, a document brought to the floor of the United Nations. In making these and other claims linking the social and ecological, there is growing support among some ecologists and biologists, as well as among religious leaders and laity. This is becoming urgent with the experience of communities around the world alarmed at the losses in their own neighborhoods and aroused to demand change.

The EarthCommunity Center remained active until 2000 when I retired. In those ten years, I participated in various national and international conferences. In March 1990 I was invited to be part of the Catholic delegation to the World Council of Church's Conference in Seoul, Korea. The conference adopted the integrated perspective of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC), embracing the whole of creation in their commitments moving forward. I was active in the preparation for the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago in 1993. I worked closely with Dr. Gerry Barney, Director of the Millennium Institute, to prepare his opening talk. Thomas Berry also delivered a plenary talk at this historic conference held one hundred years after the first Parliament in 1893. I also served on the Board of the North American Conference on Christianity and Ecology (NACCE) and was active in the NGO community involved in the UN Earth Summit and the Earth Charter. Throughout these years, many communities of religious women in the United States took part in workshops or retreats and brought

their wisdom to our common search for a sustainable future for all.

During those same years, my husband, Lou Niznik, directed his Earth Communications project. His admiration for and keen interest in the work of Thomas Berry and others who were spreading the New Story determined the focus of his photography and video taping over those years. He traveled widely to film speakers at conferences where the ecological movement was being advanced along the lines of Thomas' thought. A number of his recordings of Thomas's talks are available on the Thomas Berry website (thomasberry.org). Lou also filmed the annual conferences Jim Berry organized in North Carolina, as well as the conferences organized by Jim Schenk and the Imago community in Cincinnati and Louisville.

Lou's classic photo of Thomas Berry has appeared in publications across the country and is on the cover of *Thomas Berry: Selected Writings on the Earth Community*, edited by Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim. Every summer for a number of years, Lou and I traveled together to take part in Jim Berry's workshop at Camp New Hope in North Carolina. We were joined by many who subscribed to Jim's excellent publication from his Center for Reflection on the Second Law, where he spread Berry's thought. Thomas and others of the remarkable Berry family would usually attend and bring new insights and added dimensions to our discussions. Each year participants re-enacted the Cosmic Story, acting out in creatively delightful fashion the 13.8 billion year evolutionary journey. It was a unique telling of the New Story and a highlight of the weekend.

Spiritearth - Mary Southard & John Surette - 1990

Spiritearth was a center we founded in 1990 to carry on Thomas Berry's vision of

the Universe Story. We offered retreats and programs for religious congregations, parishes, and churches. We told the story of the Universe and reflected on our role as participants in a Sacred Universe. We developed dynamic ways of inviting people back into relationship with Earth. We discussed the importance of a people's Creation Story and how that shapes our sense of time and space. The Universe Story provides a sense of who we are, where we are, and what we are to do. It initiates us into the importance of communion rather than objectification. It shows how our western sense of isolation from the natural world and one another has impacted the shaping of our worldview and our culture, and how that is now destroying Earth's systems.

We put out a quarterly Spiritearth publication, which continued even after Spiritearth closed in 1998, and it was published for the thirteen years while John was on the Staff of The Well in La Grange, Illinois.

In our early years we celebrated a Cosmic Holy Week Triduum at Cohasset by the ocean. We started down by the ocean, grieving Earth's suffering on Good Friday and repenting for our human blindness. We began our Easter morning gathering at dawn on the hill overlooking the ocean and began drumming up the sun, and concluded back indoors with a great Eucharistic celebration of Resurrection!

We began to give a "Sacred Universe" award in 1993 when we honored Thomas Berry. The subsequent awardees were Brian Swimme, 1994; Miriam MacGillis, 1995; James Parks Morton, 1996; Manna Jo Greene, 1996; Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ, 1999; Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, 2004; John Haught, 2005; Patricia Mische, 2006; Diarmuid O'Murchu, 2007; George Coyne, S.J. 2009; Judy Cannato, 2010; Paula Gonzalez, SC, 2010; Gail Worcelo, 2011; Bill Plotkin, 2012; Denis Edwards, 2013; Ilia

Delio, 2014; Carolyn Toben, 2015; Drew Dellinger, 2016; Marya Grathwohl, 2017; and Sara Thomsen, 2018.

Our staff included Mary Lou Dolan, CSJ, Toni Nash, CSJ, and Mary Ellen Curtin. Our programs began to have wider outreach as the years went on. Spiritearth was located in the Boston area in 3 different locations for the first four years, and then moved to Saugerties, NY until its closing in 1998.

To those who are interested in John Surette's reflections on the interface of spirituality-ecology-cosmology, check out the [Campion Center website](#). You may also be interested in reading his essay, "[The Promise of More.](#)"

***EarthLight Magazine* – Lauren deBoer - 1990**

EarthLight Magazine began in 1990 at the Pacific Yearly Meeting of the Society of Friends (Quakers). The keynote speaker at that meeting, Marshall Massey, had a message that resonated deeply with many at the gathering—that the environmental crisis was not simply a material, ecological, or political crisis. At its root it was a spiritual crisis and the only way for the human to truly change its course of destruction was to address it as such. Religious communities had fallen short in this work, Massey added, and he called on the Society of Friends to respond. A small group of individuals felt that one response was to begin a magazine of spirit and ecology.

The first issue, "Renewing the Earth," included a call from Founding Editor Robert Schutz for "a vision of an Earth restored, an Earth sustained, Earth as our mother, Earth as a fair and beautiful place to live in, not to perish in. Without our vision of Earth as it ought to and must be, we and it will perish. *EarthLight* is part of the vision process."

EarthLight's message was non-sectarian, and it turned out to have broad appeal for many within religious communities. It quickly grew beyond the Quaker community and attracted subscribers from diverse sources, including Catholicism, a variety of Protestant denominations, Buddhism, other world religions, as well as people with no affiliation to religion but who recognized their spiritual connection to the planet.

EarthLight had three editors over its 16 year publication: Chris Laning from 1990 through 1992; Paul Burks from 1992 to 1995; and K. Lauren de Boer from 1995 to 2005.

Thomas Berry was on the editorial board from the very first issue of the magazine, and the influence of his thought on the content would continue through to the final issue in Fall of 2005. Other prominent editorial advisors at the onset were Joanna Macy, Robert Rodale, Al Baez, and Charlene Spretnak, as well as several members of the Quaker community. The magazine augmented its editorial advisory group over time to include John B. Cobb, Jr., Brian Swimme, Miriam MacGillis, Mark Dowie, James Conlon, Mary Evelyn Tucker, John Grim, arts and ecology advisor Jo Hanson, science advisors Larry Edwards and Connie Barlow, poetry editors Jeanne Lohmann and David Oates, and several others.

Issue #34, "Celebration," was a 10th anniversary edition and a special tribute to Thomas Berry. It coincided with publication of *The Great Work* in 1999, and key excerpts of the book, notably on the need for the reinvention of the human, were published as a special feature of the issue. Issue #39, "The Fire of a New Faith in the Human," took as its theme the life and work of Teilhard de Chardin, including Thomas Berry's perspective on and critique of Teilhard's work. These two issues continued to be among the most popular back issues.

While *EarthLight's* mission statement evolved over time, its original vision of an Earth restored remained constant and consistent with the vision Thomas Berry had set out in his 1988 book *Dream of the Earth*. The mission statement in the final five years of publication reflects Thomas's growing influence over the course of its publication:

“*EarthLight* celebrates the living Earth and the human role within the 13-billion-year story of the Universe. *EarthLight's* purpose is to cultivate an awareness that Earth is a sacred community of life to be cherished, protected, and restored, not a commodity to be exploited. Spiritual ecology, as a practice, applies this sacred vision of the oneness of all life to everyday living in a way that people of all faiths and backgrounds can adopt.”

Throughout its publishing history *EarthLight* attempted to present perspectives from diverse religious and spiritual traditions. The spirituality of indigenous traditions was especially well-aligned with the magazine's vision. Issue themes explored the spiritual dimensions of a wide array of societal, spiritual, and ecological concerns, including ecological design, water, food and agriculture, the media, education, health, economics, politics, art and creativity, energy use and climate change, science and technology, death and dying, activism, globalization, and more.

Writers for the magazine ranged from the well-established and cutting edge to newly emerging and less well-known. Depth of ideas, quality of writing, and an exploration of the spiritual and psychological connection to Earth were the main criteria for publication in *EarthLight*. Better known writers included David W. Orr, Theodore Roszak, Matthew Fox, Joanna Macy, Brian Swimme, Helena Norbert-Hodge, John Seed, Terry Tempest Williams, Donella Meadows, Mary Evelyn Tucker, John Grim, Martin Prechtel, Derrick Jensen, Starhawk, Vandana Shiva, Michael Dowd, Henryk

Skolimowski, Gary Paul Nabhan, Jacob Needleman, Bill Plotkin, and many others. Poets included William Stafford, Mary Oliver, Patiann Rogers, Gary Snyder, and numerous others with a focus on spirit and nature.

Editor K. Lauren de Boer introduced interviews as a regular feature of the magazine, interviewing leading-edge figures in ecology, the arts, sciences, and religion. These included storyteller Michael Meade, evolutionary philosopher Brian Swimme, theologian Matthew Fox, folk singer Pete Seeger, U.S. congressman Dennis Kucinich, British author Peter Russell, artist Jackie Brookner, Genesis Farm founder Miriam MacGillis, environmental authors David W. Orr and Bill McKibben, and others.

The final issue, “Becoming Wonder,” was published in 2006. In his editorial for the issue, K. Lauren de Boer wrote: “One final word about a reason for hope: When I began this work ten years ago, spiritual ecology was a mere whisper. It has amplified since then, if not to a shout, at least to a clear voice being heard and joined by growing numbers of people. Together, we are doing a great work...There are many more of us earnestly dipping into that deeper well of connection now and a momentum is growing in the movement for a cosmologically based Earth ethic. I hope we will continue to join together in the work, to empower one another to draw on the unique inner genius we each have to contribute toward a sustainable future.”

That final issue fittingly gave Thomas Berry the last word. The back cover of that issue depicted a drawing of Thomas by artist Mary Southard with what are perhaps his most inspiring words about the human prospect. Entitled “Confidence in the Future,” the passage was from the chapter “The New Story,” from *Dream of the Earth*, reprinted below. It represents the kind of faith in the future that *EarthLight* continually strove to

keep burning, a faith that moves beyond false hope and looks to Earth and to the deeper powers that brought us into being for guidance.

The basic mood of the future might well be one of confidence in the continuing revelation that takes place in and through the Earth. If the dynamics of the Universe from the beginning shaped the course of the heavens, lighted the sun, and formed the Earth, if this same dynamism brought forth the continents and the seas and atmosphere, if it awakened life in the primordial cell and then brought into being the unnumbered variety of living beings, and finally brought us into being and guided us safely through the turbulent centuries, there is reason to believe that this same guiding process is precisely what has awakened in us our present understanding of ourselves and our relation to this stupendous process. Sensitized to such guidance from the very structure and functioning of the Universe, we can have confidence in the future that awaits the human venture.

Sisters of Earth – Mary Southard, Gail Worcelo, Maureen Wild, and Toni Nash - 1994

The Sisters of Earth informal network began in 1994 as a way for religious and non-religious women who were teaching and implementing Thomas Berry’s new cosmology to make connections, find support, and evolve together with other “trail blazers.” The original conveners wanted to model the new worldview in the way the conference was structured, and so, counting on the principle of self-organization, provided plenty of time for interest groups to organize and set their own agendas.

In addition, our conference began with “Sharing the Wisdom” – a day to hear from the members about how they were living Thomas’ vision, before an outside presenter, who, having heard the wisdom of the group, on the second day challenged us to continue “Shaping the Dream.” While the conference has not always held to this model, the conveners believed in its evolutionary potential.

The Sisters of Earth have continued to meet every two years since 1994, in different areas of the United States, to help local groups become established. Past

conference themes have addressed “An Emerging Earth Spirituality,” “Healing as a Planetary Agenda,” “The Beautiful Wild Forces Within,” “The Waters, Woods, Prairies, & Peoples of the Northland,” “Pax Gaia: Peace for the Living Earth,” “The Wisdom of Women, the Wisdom of the Indigenous,” “Deep Transition,” “The New Emerging Humanity,” “Zest for Life: Partnering with Our Sacred Earth Community,” and “Creating the Future We Want.”

The membership of over 300 women ranges from teachers, farmers, and artists, to grandmothers, organizers, and contemplatives in the United States, Canada, and beyond. It is open to any woman whose life and work would identify her as a sister of Earth. You can read about past and upcoming conferences [here](#).

Waterspirit – Suzanne Golas - 1997

After finishing the Earth literacy program at Genesis Farm, I did a sight study with Miriam MacGillis on the Hudson River and the Delaware River. We concentrated on the ecology, history, and beauty of these two magnificent rivers as well as the abuse, contamination, and restoration efforts. It was this experience that led to the founding of [Waterspirit](#), which was deeply inspired by Thomas Berry’s thought.

Waterspirit is committed to informing, inspiring and enabling people to deepen their consciousness of the sacredness and interdependence of all creation with a focus on the role of water as critical in sustaining life. To this end Waterspirit educates, advocates, and collaborates to promote both individual transformation and systemic change.

I am also an NGO representative of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace at the UN where I focus on water and sustainable development. The Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace

are the sponsors of Waterspirit.

Green Mountain Monastery and the Thomas Berry Sanctuary – Gail Worcelo and Bernadette Bostwick - 1999

Green Mountain Monastery and the Thomas Berry Sanctuary was co-founded in 1999 by Thomas Berry along with Gail Worcelo and Bernadette Bostwick. In 1982, Sr. Gail entered the Passionist Nuns of St. Gabriel's Monastery in Pennsylvania. During her novitiate in 1984, the Passionist Leadership arranged a joint novitiate experience with both the women and men novices in the USA. Thomas Berry was among the scholars of the Passionist Congregation invited to give classes to the novices, and it was following this formative experience that Sr. Gail began studying with Thomas through monthly visits to the Riverdale Center for Religious Research in NY. In addition, Thomas would on occasion visit St Gabriel's Monastery, giving lectures to the community and the public on the Universe Story and our role in that story.



In 1991, Thomas presided over the Final Vow Ceremony of Sr. Gail, giving her the ring of Final Profession and celebrating her commitment within the comprehensive

context of our emerging universe. Following her Final Vows, with the guidance of Thomas, Gail founded “Homecomings: Center for Ecology and Contemplation” as part of the ministry of the Passionist community. Through Homecomings, Gail and Bernadette Bostwick (who joined Homecomings in 1994) began a Children’s Garden, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), brought in volunteers from around the world to work in the organic gardens, established art and educational programs, offered lectures, and brought in speakers on the themes of Cosmology and Spirituality.

In addition, Gail began traveling around the world teaching and leading programs to religious communities of men and women, LCWR and houses of formation on the thinking and challenges of Thomas Berry.

In 1994, Sisters Gail, Mary Southard, Toni Nash and Mary Lou Dolan gathered Catholic sisters from around the country together to form what has become the network, Sisters of Earth. The first gathering took place at Gail’s monastery in Pennsylvania.

Also in 1994, Thomas Berry’s Paper, “Women Religious: Their Future Role” made a significant impact on Gail’s work and future. In the paper, Thomas pointed out that throughout the ages, religious communities were founded to meet the needs of the human community (such as schools, hospitals, etc.), but no community had been founded to tend to the needs of Earth. This pivotal paper along with conversations with Thomas inspired Gail to ask her community to mission her and two others (Sister Rita Ordakowski and lay associate Bernadette Bostwick) to begin a new community of Catholic sisters whose mission would be the healing and protection of Earth and its life systems.

In 1999 the sisters of St Gabriel's Monastery gave their blessing and missioned Gail, Rita and Bernadette. The prioress wrote to the Bishop of Vermont asking him to welcome the sisters to his Diocese, and he did. On June 1, 1999, Sisters Gail, Rita and Bernadette arrived in Vermont to found a new religious community and monastery within the Catholic tradition, with roots in the Passionist charism yet creating a fresh expression fashioned on Eco-Zoic Principles within a cosmological context.



During the years 1999-2009, Sisters Gail and Bernadette made many trips to North Carolina to visit Thomas and Thomas also made several trips to Vermont. A 30 member Advisory Board was formed as well as 100 Companion members accompanying the new community. Sr Gail continued to travel around the world (2000–present) leading programs and retreats, while Sr Bernadette worked on art projects (2000–present) designing Mary of the Cosmos Icon and Earth Prayer Beads both of which are found in centers all over the planet.

In 2005, 160 acres was purchased in Greensboro, Vermont which became Green Mountain Monastery and the Thomas Berry Sanctuary, designed at all levels to reflect a consciousness of communion with the total community of life. Work continued with

many programs, retreats, guests, and visitors from around the world spending time at Green Mountain Monastery/Thomas Berry Sanctuary. In addition, many gatherings took place around the arts—concerts, writing, poetry readings, dance—to express ourselves as a single, sacred community.

On June 1, 2009, ten years to the day of our founding, Thomas Berry passed on and at his request was buried in a meadow on our land where many visitors from around the world have come to pay their respects. We continue to be custodians of this sacred space.

In the years to follow new sisters joined the community (Amie Hendani, Kris Prasetyo and Elizabeth Carranza) from Indonesia and Philippines with several women currently in discernment. These women continue to bring our mission and legacy of Thomas Berry to many gatherings and places in Asia, especially to younger generations. New technologies such as Zoom are linking us even further with others engaged in the Great Work.

On June 1, 2019 we celebrated our 20th anniversary and 10th anniversary of the passing of Thomas Berry. Highlights of the weekend included the unveiling of 4 Cosmic stained glass windows by the glass artist Amber Hiscott from Wales (a 5 year project), along with the conferring of the Thomas Berry Award for Selfless Service to three friends who have given so generously of themselves over the many years of our unfolding. Our celebration continues as we get ready to finalize placing 150 acres of our land in a conservation easement with the Nature Conservancy and Vermont Housing and Conservation Board.



Center for Ecozoic Studies - Herman Greene - 2000

During Thomas' Greensboro years the Center for Ecozoic Studies (CES) was founded in 2000 in Chapel Hill by attorney Herman Greene, who was inspired by Thomas' work.¹² He had met Thomas when he lived in New York City and reconnected with him after returning to North Carolina at a conference Jim Berry organized in 1995. The Center is committed to developing the work of Thomas Berry, with particular attention to his historical analysis, cultural critique, philosophical ideas, and guidance for social reform. The Center has directed conferences and workshops on Thomas' ideas and published a quarterly journal, *The Ecozoic Reader*. In 2009, the year of Thomas' death, it

¹² The founder of CES is Herman Greene. He holds degrees in Spirituality and Sustainability, DMin, United Theological Seminary 2004; Law, JD, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill 1979; Ministry, MTh and MDiv, University of Chicago Divinity School 1969 and 1970; Political Science, MA, Stanford University 1967; and Political Science, BA, University of Florida 1966. His work life began at the Ecumenical Institute of Chicago, a division of the Church Federation of Chicago, where he lived and worked from 1967-75. He practiced corporate, tax, and securities law, with firms in New York City, Denver, Colorado, and Chapel Hill, North Carolina from 1978-2017. He has served as Board Member and President of CES since its inception. He has spoken and published widely and has served on various boards.

compiled a large memorial volume of 152 tributes from people throughout the world. In 2017, it published a series of 26 essays on Thomas Berry's Work, which had resulted from a conference it organized in 2014.

The premise of the work of the Center is that humans are in the midst of two great transitions: a geo-biological change from the terminal Cenozoic era to the emerging Ecozoic era, and a historical change from industrial-economic societies to ecological-cultural (ecozoic) societies. This premise creates a need to understand these transitions, advance ideas and actions for new modes of human presence on Earth, support people in their ecozoic journeys, and take action to foster ecozoic societies. In this spirit, the Center for Ecozoic Studies works in several areas: providing education concerning the "Ecozoic era" and the "Great Work," so that these terms and their meanings would become part of the global lexicon; supporting research, education, art, and action concerning ecozoic societies; assisting in the sharing of critical reflections, stories, and dream experiences of an Ecozoic era; and providing resources for individuals and groups engaged in the Great Work.

The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World—Carolyn Toben and Peggy Whalen-Levitt - 2000

One of Thomas' close friendships during his years in Greensboro was with Carolyn Toben. In 1978, while teaching an adult class in Greensboro, Carolyn was introduced to his work by Thomas' sister, Theresa. Many years later, when she visited him in New York on a January morning with light snow falling, Thomas met Carolyn at La Guardia Airport without a hat or jacket. He had given his jacket away, she later

learned, to someone “who needed it more than I did.” Carolyn describes this meeting as marked by “extraordinary graciousness and hospitality.”

After her husband’s death in 1999, Carolyn inherited Timberlake Farm Earth Sanctuary in Whitsett, just outside Greensboro. For over three decades, the 165 acres of woods, meadows, ponds, and trails had been the family home. Carolyn’s future was uncertain at the time, but she wished to preserve the farm. After discussions with Thomas, she requested colleagues from the fields of history, geology, art, music, and creative writing to assemble at the Farm to imagine how to proceed. For the next ten years, Thomas’ inspiration guided the development of the [Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World](#).

In March 2000, Carolyn formally established the nonprofit Center, with the mission of “bringing to life a new vision of the relationship between the inner life of the child and the beauty, wonder, and intimacy of the universe.” During the ensuing years, Thomas met frequently with Carolyn and Center staff to further develop the context in which the organization would evolve.¹

The life of the child,” he reminded his listeners, “has always been *organized* around a real abiding world of beauty, wonder, and the intimacy of living processes....the wind, frogs, butterflies...not a manufactured electronic world of virtual reality. The child has a natural bond of intimacy

¹ Carolyn Toben took notes on these conversations, which culminated in the publication of her book, *Recovering a Sense of the Sacred: Conversations with Thomas Berry* in 2012.

with the natural world, a remarkable sense of identification with all living things.²

He continued:

The long-term survival of our children will actually depend on a new relationship between the natural and the human worlds. Children need to develop within a whole cosmology of the sun, moon, stars; they need to awaken to a world to *relate* to as a communion of subjects, not to *use* as a collection of objects. Relationships are the primary context of existence, and children need to see us practice a *sympathetic presence* to the Earth, as a means for being in a mutually enhancing relationship to it.³



² Carolyn Toben, *Recovering a Sense of the Sacred: Conversations with Thomas Berry* (Whitsett, NC: Timberlake Earth Sanctuary Press, 2012), 96.

³ *Ibid.*, 98.

Center staff began to practice a *sympathetic presence* to Earth with children on Timberlake trails and meadows. This enhanced the children’s inner awareness of the natural world, as Thomas continued to encourage and inspire. Programs like “Awakening to Nature,” “Empathetic Listening,” and “Poetry of Nature” created a context in which children could experience a living and loving relationship with Earth.

In 2006, the Center began a two-year program, “The Inner Life of the Child in Nature: Presence and Practice,” where this learning could be shared with educators and others with children in their care. The program culminated in a collection of practices created by participants during their second year. In 2011, many of these essays were published in *Only the Sacred: Transforming Education in the Twenty-first Century*,⁴ edited by Peggy Whalen-Levitt. The collection includes Thomas’ essay “Our Children, Their Future.” The Center publishes a biannual journal, *Chrysalis*, and has published four books written by graduates of the “Inner Life of the Child in Nature” program.¹⁵ “The Center,” Thomas wrote in a brochure, “is a perfect context for the continuity of this work with children and the sacred. It has brought joy in the last years of my life, for the children have always been closest to my heart.”

⁴ Peggy Whalen-Levitt, ed. *Only the Sacred: Transforming Education in the Twenty-first Century*. Greensboro, NC: The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World, 2011.

¹⁵ *All the Scattered Leaves of the Universe: Journey and Vision in Dante’s Divine Comedy and the Work of Thomas Berry* (2015) by Andrew Levitt; *I am You, You are Me: The Interrelatedness of Self, Spirituality and the Natural World in Childhood* (2015) by Colette Segalla; *Opening Forgotten Sanctuaries: Recognizing Education as Sacred Encounter* (2015) by Clay Lerner; and *Heron Mornings* (2017), a collection of poetry by Andrew Levitt. Peggy Whalen-Levitt’s essay, “Thomas Berry’s ‘Communion of Subjects’: Awakening ‘The Heart of the Universe,’” was published in *The Ecozoic: Thomas Berry’s Work: Development, Difference, Importance, Applications*, Number 4 (2017).

Earth Jurisprudence - Mike Bell

Thomas Berry had a shamanic vision and mission. It focused on the Universe, our Earth, our species, and our relationship to other species. Most of us who seek to follow his vision and mission have a more “down to earth” approach, which we try to apply to our own situations.

I’ve spent all of my adult life working as an organizer in local communities, most of them in Inuit and Dene communities in the Canadian Arctic. In recent years my focus has been on climate change, which affects or will affect all aspects of community life.

The major cause of climate change is the systems we have put in place, especially the economic and political systems. To justify these efforts many corporate and elected leaders promote the illusion that we can pass human laws to protect the damage our systems are doing to Earth. But human laws are only concerned about the rights of humans.

It isn’t obvious to most people that human environmental laws are not designed to protect nature. They are designed to limit the amount of damage we can do to nature. Nor do we recognize that most of the damage being done is “legal.” Thus, we need a different kind of laws. We must recognize that nature, a living reality, has its own laws that have existed since time immemorial. We need to adopt Thomas Berry’s seminal concept of an Earth Jurisprudence on the Rights of Nature.

It is only at the community level that most of us can bring about significant change. This is happening in communities all over the world. My work in communities is based on stories that relate to people’s family and work experiences and are told in plain

language. They provide a context for understanding. Thomas advised us to use stories, especially the New Story of our relationship with Earth and the Universe.

For a dozen years I was fortunate to belong to the Passionist monastic community, the same community as Thomas. In the last dozen years of his life some of us former monks would make regular trips down to his home in North Carolina. We wanted to learn more about his vision and mission. I've always considered those visits, to use Thomas' own expression, "moments of grace." I'm now in my 80th year. I'll continue to try to apply Thomas' vision and mission to life at the community level.

Enright Ridge Urban Ecovillage – Jim Schenk – 2004

Inspired by Thomas Berry's idea of the New Story, we began in 2004 by inviting our 29 neighbors on Enright Avenue to come join us for a meeting looking at developing an eco-village on Enright Ave. Seventeen of them showed up. On this evening the ecovillage began. Out of this meeting we:

1. Declared Enright Avenue an eco-village, Enright Ridge Urban Eco-village,
2. Set up task groups to begin the process of developing the eco-village, and
3. Committed to keeping communication open with all residents.

We now have a neighborhood where almost everyone knows everyone else and enjoys being a part of this ecovillage community.

Thomas says, "We must now reinvent the human as species within the community of life species." Our goal with the eco-village is to reinvent ourselves, and to do it as a model for other neighborhoods. We are in a time of serious Earth changes. It is critical

that we quickly reinvent ourselves, and to do it in the urban setting. [Enright Ridge Urban Eco-village](#) is a demonstration of one possible way of doing this.

Global Generation - Jane Riddiford - 2004

[Global Generation](#) supports children and young people to become catalysts for positive social and environmental change. Working within the three territories of ‘I, We and the Planet,’ the charity fosters trans-disciplinary approaches that include rather than separate. Operating out of educational gardens, located in gritty urban locations in central London, Global Generation uses land-based activities and the metaphors of ecological and cosmic processes to nurture a sense of community between different people and the natural world. The work is hands on and reflective including different ways of knowing. Activities such as working with wood and clay, growing, cooking and eating together are combined with creative writing, storytelling, and photography. Woven throughout the work is an appreciation of silence and stillness and the awe and wonder that comes with the realization that we are all part of an evolving story that is still in the making. The work of Thomas Berry, Brian Swimme, and Mary Evelyn Tucker has informed the way Global Generation supports children and young people to develop a sense of home in the cosmos.

The New Story Group at the Friend’s Meeting in Cambridge, MA - Mary Coehlo - 2005

The “New Story Group” in Cambridge, MA is an interfaith group that has been meeting monthly at the Friends Meeting at Cambridge (Quaker) since 2005. The name of

our group, “New Story,” comes from Thomas Berry. Beginning with five people, we have grown to 20 or 25 attending our monthly meeting, and we have a long email list of interested people who may come to special events. Fifty people attended our recent workshop, “Recovering Sacred Presence in a Disenchanted World” in October 2017. The workshops we have offered in cooperation with Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries, an interfaith group in Boston, have been an important form of outreach. We meet with profound gratitude to Thomas Berry, Brian Swimme, and Teilhard de Chardin, as we would not exist as a group without their wisdom.

It has been a pleasure to be part of a group of people who have glimpsed the significance of the emerging worldview and who want to understand it more fully and live more deeply within it. It is important that we seek to understand the revelations of science, particularly cosmic evolution and the fundamental discoveries in physics, in the context of a spiritual community. We have been enriched by a wealth of videos, books, articles, visiting speakers, and reflections offered by individuals who are members of our group. The visitors have included Philip Clayton, Mary Evelyn Tucker, John Grim, Jennifer Morgan, and Rodney Petersen. Brian Swimme’s video series *Canticle to the Cosmos* and *Powers of the Universe* have provided remarkable and compelling insights. In addition to Berry and Swimme’s books, some of the books that have provoked the most interest and discussion include the following: *Evolution’s Purpose* (Steve McIntosh), *The More Beautiful World Our Hearts Know Is Possible* (Charles Eisenstein), *The Wisdom Way of Knowing* (Cynthia Bourgeault), *Evolutionaries* (Carter Phipps), and *Presence: Exploring Profound Change in People, Organizations and Society* (Peter W. Senge, C. Otto Scharmer, Joseph Jaworski, and Betty Sue Flowers).

We turn again and again to many topics that continue to engage us. We ask: What is the new story? Is there directionality in evolution? Do human beings have agency? Can the new story play a significant role in our search to address the ecological crisis? How can we again become indigenous to place in a contemporary context? We've explored artistic expressions of cosmology and the contemplative life within the context of the new story. The allure of truth, beauty and goodness (love) engages us again and again. We've studied panentheism, the teaching of Teilhard de Chardin, and made initial inquiries into other theologies. We are beginning to understand why western culture tolerates and even enables the destruction of our home, Earth, and how the cosmic origin story can offer individuals and cultures understanding of the depth of our spiritual and physical belonging important to humankind's survival. Our panentheistic explorations undergird our commitment to find better ways of living in alignment with nature, recognizing the global need for long-term, systemic action. We are delighted that two new groups have formed in New England, inspired, at least in part, by our group. We have a [website](#). I have made accordion books, paintings, and collages to celebrate our new cosmology, which can be found [here](#).

Passionist Earth & Spirit Center - Joe Mitchell - 2005

[The Passionist Earth & Spirit Center](#), founded in 2005 by Passionist priest Joe Mitchell, is dedicated to continuing the work of Thomas Berry with a mission to help cultivate the sacred connections between Earth and its people.

Situated on 21 acres of land behind the Passionist Monastery in the heart of

Louisville, Kentucky, the center is housed in a renovated barn built in 1915. First occupied by cows, horses and mules, the barn is now a pulsating force for the Great Work of bringing forth a new human-Earth relationship.

The Earth & Spirit Center offers transformative learning experiences and service opportunities through three schools: School of Meditation, School of Social Compassion, and School of Earth Literacy. Almost 900 people annually participate in 10-week courses. The land, which had become degraded through years of neglect, now has an outdoor classroom, nature trails, and is becoming a model of sustainable urban farming.

Recognizing Earth as a sacred endowment and collective responsibility, the Earth & Spirit Center established an Academy for Living in Harmony with a vision of a world in which human beings can live in three-part harmony – harmony within themselves, harmony with one another, and harmony with the natural world.

St. Gabriel's Parish in Toronto – completed in 2006

[St. Gabriel's Parish in Toronto](#) is the first LEED Gold Church in Canada. The pastor (Fr Paul Cusack) and architect (Roberto Chiotti) were both inspired by Thomas Berry's thought.

“As humans, the time has come for us to forfeit our role as exploitive dominators and to assume the more responsible role of participatory co-creators with God by re-aligning our sense of creativity with the creative principles of the universe and the planet. Only then can we contribute to the healing of the Earth in all its life systems and achieve a relationship with the Earth that is mutually enhancing.”

The decision to build a new church was finalized in 2001. After a search process

and competition, the Passionist community commissioned Roberto Chiotti (Larkin Architect) with the design of the new church. Chiotti is a Canadian architect who is also trained in theology, especially in eco-theology arising from the wisdom of Father Thomas Berry — the Passionist thinker whose work inspired many in the ecological movement around the world.



The sun plays through the stained-glass sunlight

After its completion in 2006, the new church of St. Gabriel's became the first church in Canada to receive Gold certification from the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED™) Green Building Rating System.

“While reducing energy costs was one of the reasons for building a ‘green’ church, our primary motivation was to establish a link between the sacredness of the gathered community of Faith and the sacredness of the Earth,” stated Father Paul, our Pastor.

This is precisely what Chiotti attempts to express in his design. He explains: “The entire south façade of the worship space at St. Gabriel’s is glazed with clear glass. This has been done in order to passively harness the winter sun’s energy and to extend the sacred space of the worship area into the sacred space of the world beyond, emphasizing that when we gather to worship, we do so within the greater context of creation. The remaining three walls of exposed architectural concrete serve as a constantly changing canvas for the dynamic play of natural light that is filtered by the coloured glass panels of the continuous perimeter skylight.”

To learn more about the eco-theology behind the church and its application, these two articles in the *Celebrate Liturgy* magazine may be of interest to you: [St. Gabriel’s Church: A LEED™ church building project #1](#) (pertains to theology) and [St. Gabriel’s Church: A LEED™ church building project #2](#) (pertains to practical application).

The Deeptime Network – Jennifer Morgan - 2013

Thomas Berry’s profound work is a principle inspiration behind the formation of the [Deeptime Network](#), a global educational and social network founded in 2013 that refers to an emergent and interconnected universe as primary and foundational for understanding, inner transformation, and creating a flourishing future for our planet. Members have also been inspired by Brian Swimme, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Mary Evelyn Tucker, John Grim, Maria Montessori, James Lovelock, Fritjof Capra, numerous Big History scholars, and many others as well.

Deeptime Network Members in over 20 countries are teachers, preachers, religious practitioners, scientists, musicians and artists of all kinds, and people from all

walks of life. What draws the Network together is an understanding that the story of the universe is of huge significance for understanding our place and role in the world today. The Network is a way to 1) find out who's doing what, 2) connect, and 3) collaborate with others near and far. Members add their profiles, resources they've created themselves and those they recommend, and post events. Forum discussions explore topics such as curriculum, art projects, debates about core ideas, and more. Training teachers is also a major focus of the Network.

The Network offers professional development for teachers of ages 0 to 18, offering professional development hours that are recognized by the American Montessori Society and most public and private schools. Programs that are already available include:

- Deep Time Framework: A Foundation for Education (with Jennifer Morgan)
- Cosmic Education as a Continuum Across All Levels (with Dr. Betsy Coe and Ann Sutton)
- An Introduction to Montessori Cosmic Education (with Michael and D'Neil Duffy)
- How to Meet Standards & Give Students The Universe (with Linda Aaquist)
- Unrolling the Scroll of Life: Making Materials (with Ann Rose Gavey)
- Deep Time Education in a K-8 Public School
- Cosmos and Gaia and Emergence of a New Human (with Dr. Philip Snow Gang)
- Deep Time Storytelling for All Ages (with Jennifer Morgan)
- Big History in Montessori Adolescent Programs (with Kyle Herman)
- Exploring the Universe Story Through Myth and Ritual (with Jane Riddiford and Rod Sugden)

- A Cosmic Program: It's Not Just for Elementary; It's For Everyone!

Emergent Universe Oratorio: A Cosmic Celebration for a Flourishing Earth and Human Future - Sam and Paula Guarnaccia - 2013

The *Emergent Universe Oratorio* tells the Great Story of the Universe from the Big Bang (the Great Flaring Forth) to the emergence of Earth's global consciousness, in a series of alternating intensively scored recitatives with major lyrical choral movements. Written by composer and classical guitarist Sam Guarnaccia, it is chiefly inspired by the axial work and thought of cultural historian, author, and "geologian" Thomas Berry. Throughout his life Berry encouraged artists and musicians to tell the stunning 13.8 billion-year story of the universe through music, poetry, and dance. Critical inspiration and guidance have also come from scientist and priest Teilhard de Chardin, as well as from the work of our colleagues, including evolutionary philosopher Brian Thomas Swimme and Confucian scholar Mary Evelyn Tucker in their multimedia work, *Journey of the Universe*. The Oratorio also draws from the poetic works of Rainer Maria Rilke, Gerard Manley Hopkins, William Blake, Wendell Berry, John Elder, and Thomas Berry.

The *Emergent Universe Oratorio* was first performed in Shelburne, Vermont in 2013. The world premiere took place at the World Union of Jesuit Alumni 2017 World Congress in Cleveland. The Oratorio brought to the program Pope Francis' vision of a unified humanity empowered by a new consciousness and responsibility to our Earth home. The Oratorio was supported by Case Western Reserve University, the American Teilhard Association, the Thomas Berry Foundation, and others, and brought a rich tapestry of spiritual, educational, and artistic depth to the Cleveland event.

Teilhard de Chardin's transformative cosmology identifies these critical fields of human endeavor as caught up in a new stage of evolution. This concept is the realm of the "Noosphere," a term co-invented by Teilhard to describe the "interactive web of human thought and influence." This realm follows upon the two earlier phases of terrestrial development, the emergence of the geosphere and of the biosphere. And just as the emergence of biological life altered the geosphere, so too do the emerging interaction of human minds and cultural memes fundamentally transform the biosphere. The challenge for humankind, powerfully elaborated in Pope Francis' *Laudato Si,* is to accept its new evolutionary responsibility: to recognize that the fate of the biosphere -- life on Earth -- rests upon the monumental task of harnessing the most life-nourishing aspects of the emerging global human consciousness, and employing these for restoration and care of the biosphere for the common good.

The *Emergent Universe Oratorio* seeks to inspire and support a new integrated consciousness for humanity – that we are intimately, irrevocably, irreversibly interconnected and interdependent with each other and with all life systems through the whole 13.8 billion years of this tremendous story. Both music and art are central to cultural transformation since they most easily reach the heart and the motivating sources of civilization and life itself. In bringing forward these understandings into educational initiatives and world culture as guiding principles, the *Emergent Universe Oratorio* hopes to help integrate the domains of science, culture, theology, cosmology, education, and ecology through an experience of aesthetic and intellectual beauty. We are developing a series of educational videos and curricular models using the music and texts of the

recitatives as exploratory offerings for Cosmic Education and Big History education through the International Big History Association (IBHA).

For information about the *Emergent Universe Oratorio*, composer Sam Guarnaccia, and educational videos, visit this [website](#).