



Chrysalis

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*Journal of
The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World*

Dear Reader,

When the Pandemic brought the Center's programs to a close in 2020, we entered into this time of unknowing by engaging in a synthesis of the Center's work in book form. This synthesis was published as *The Place of Our Belonging: A Work for Children and Educators Mentored by Thomas Berry* on May 21, 2023.

It was our hope that the book would be something like a symphony of moments and voices of those deeply involved in the work of the nonprofit at Timberlake Earth Sanctuary from 2000-2022 – a book of memories, of moments that the land remembers, that the children remember, that the educators remember – moments of "love as an inner presence to all things," as Thomas Berry has said.¹

The book was intended as a testament to 22 years of nonprofit presence at Timberlake Earth Sanctuary – a book that takes you deep into the inner landscape of a work devoted to the living reality of an emergent and sacred universe. We are grateful that the book has been very well received so far, with orders from the US, UK, France, Canada and Australia.

While our programs and publications have been visible this whole time, what is less known and less visible is the Educator Council Board that has held this work in trust behind the scenes over all these years. Composed of graduates of our Inner Life of the Child in Nature Program, the Council has embodied a new and sacred form of governance that mirrors and embodies the essence of the Center's mission in all of its endeavors. Over the course of the last 12 years, the Council has met 50 times, mostly in 3-day retreats and sometimes in meetings.

When the Council is called upon to listen for what is coming to the Center from the future, members enter into a threefold contemplative process:

¹ Thomas Berry quoted in Carolyn Toben, *Recovering a Sense of the Sacred: Conversations with Thomas Berry* (Whitsett, NC: Timberlake Earth Sanctuary Press, 2012), 113.



The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World

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1. Taking time to look back at what has been clear in the past and has been unfolding over time to see if we recognize gestation and, if so, what strands have been weaving themselves together?
2. Silence. We offer a question, perhaps, but then contain the energy of the question by letting it nest within us until we are still. When we are still, there is no expectation. We are in a place to *recognize*.
3. This openness to the Mystery makes possible a unifying space (among the group and of the group with the Natural World/Mystery) that is invitational and responsive. This, it appears, is where group recognition can happen.

During the last year, as we lived into this process, the image that emerged is one of the essence of the Center now living and radiating throughout the world, both through those who have directly experienced our programs and now, also, through those who have held our book in their hands and have been inspired to bring forth new emanations of the work.

A feeling of completion rests within us.

We feel resonance with these words of “Beyond Endings” by John O’Donohue:

Creatures made of clay with porous skins and porous minds are quite incapable of the hermetic sealing that the strategy of “closure” seems to imply. The word completion is a truer word. Each experience has within it a dynamic of unfolding and a narrative of emergence....

The nature of calendar time is linear; it is made up of durations that begin and end. The Celtic imagination always sensed that beneath time there was an eternal depth. This offers us a completely different way of relating to time. It relieves time of

the finality of ending. While something may come to an ending on the surface of time, its presence, meaning, and effect continue to be held into the eternal. This is how spirit unfolds and deepens. In this sense, eternal time is intimate; it is where the unfolding narrative of individual life is gathered and woven. Eternal life is eternal memory; therefore it becomes possible to imagine a realm beyond endings where all that has unfolded is not canceled or lost, but where the spirit depths of it are already arriving home.¹

The nonprofit organization of the Center will come to completion in June 2025 – the 25th year of finding ourselves within this form. Between now and then, we will be archiving the Center’s work so that it remains accessible beyond the completion of a nonprofit form. For many years, Thomas Berry’s sister Margaret sent all of our published materials to the Thomas Berry Archive at Harvard University, and we will now update that archive with all that has been published through 2024. Our publications will also be a presence on the Thomas Berry Foundation website.

Over the years we have had many “Days of Gratitude” to express our appreciation for staff, for the earth sanctuary, and for the donors, like yourself, without whom this work would not have been possible. I feel there is no better way to bring this last issue of *Chrysalis* to a close than by devoting the issue to the Center’s Educator Council Board.

Here you will find the Board Wisdoms process that has guided the Educator Council Board in its board retreats, always close to the natural world. And following the Wisdoms, you will read about our Educator Council Board members who have entered into an intimate process of listening together since 2012. Some of our very deepest work has happened within this circle, creating a bond of intimacy and love beyond words. I feel boundless gratitude for their selfless and sacred service that has so quietly resided behind the outer expressions of the Center.

With John O’Donohue, I leave you with these words: “While something may come to an ending on the surface of time, its presence, meaning, and effect continue to be held into the eternal.”

With love and gratitude,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Peggy Whalen-Levitt".

Peggy Whalen-Levitt, Director

¹ John O’Donohue, “Beyond Endings” in *To Bless the Space Between Us* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 156-157.

The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World

Board Wisdoms

The Spiritual Context

The spiritual context of the Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World is guided by the thinking of geologist Thomas Berry as expressed in his writings and talks, including *The Dream of the Earth*, *The Universe Story* (with Brian Swimme), *The Great Work*, *Evening Thoughts* and *The Sacred Universe*.

Board Members of the Center take as their starting place Thomas Berry's understanding "that the universe from the beginning has been a psychic-spiritual, as well as a physical-material reality" (*Evening Thoughts*, 57). From this perspective, the Earth is experienced as our primary mode of divine presence.

Within the context of this reality, the board of the Center acknowledges that "we are constantly drawn toward a reverence for the mystery and magic of the earth and the larger universe with a power that is leading us away from our anthropocentrism to this larger context as our norm of reality and value" (*Dream of the Earth*, 17).

Furthermore, the Board acknowledges that we live in a time-developmental universe and that the human being has a particular role to play in earthly evolution. From Thomas Berry's perspective, "the earth...is finding its way...to interior conscious expression in the human" (*Dream*, 47). Another way to express this would be to say that "the human needs to be seen as that being in whom the universe and especially the planet Earth becomes conscious of itself in a special mode of reflective self-awareness" (*Evening Thoughts*).

Taking Thomas Berry's oeuvre as a touchstone for its work, the Board makes a commitment to the ongoing study of Thomas Berry's work in the true spirit of a council in which board members enter into the living experience of the differing viewpoints in the souls of each other in order to come to living insight.

Therefore, in the context of the spiritual, we recognize

- ❖ that all is sacred – alive and expressive,
- ❖ that we have our place within this psychic-spiritual universe in mutuality and intimacy,
- ❖ that as a board we must attend to that mutuality and intimacy.

To attend means *to be present, to care for*. In this sense, the board must *attend* to the Center and the wider Natural World in which it dwells by purposely functioning within the above mutuality and intimacy. In so doing, we meet the universe with *recognition* and empathy. To attend to our

responsibility entails connection more by empathy and less by analysis, resulting in direction by *recognition* rather than *conclusion* in the usual sense.

Current practice for institutional decision-making relies heavily on the approaches and values of a culture that see the Natural World as a resource, as a means to human ends. Most of our institutions and their boards have generally focused on specific institutional objectives without trying to see the connections between their decisions and the greater natural world as a psychic-spiritual reality.

In contrast, the Center Board recognizes the need to adopt a different model for decision-making, one that we hope will sustain board consciousness of the reality of our belonging to the natural world as a psychic-spiritual reality. Therefore, we make it our sacred intention to proceed with a new type of respectful listening, to pause with our questions and hold them without insistence on a specific kind of answer, and wait. This approach embraces our connection to the larger locus of meaning and fosters a reverence that is expressive of willingness to listen, to hear and *attend*. Attention, as the mystic Simone Weil reminds us, is a form of prayer, and we feel that our life as a board should be marked by such reverence.

To that end, we collectively and individually recognize that we are living beings of the Natural World and that we share our world with other living beings in a sacred community, and our decisions affect others with whom we share the Earth.

To facilitate our consciousness of that sacred connection, the Board will begin its meetings by ritually celebrating our belonging to the more-than-human world (that we are as much a part of the Natural World as any flower or critter). In this space of acknowledged belonging, of humility and openness-to-recognition, we will collectively wait in Silence, offering our listening to *that-which-is-greater-than-we*. In this way, we invite the larger locus of meaning to bless us as the middle point of the Circle and sacred focus of our attention so that we may engage our specific business as a board.

That larger locus of meaning, *that-which-is-greater-than-we*, we may sometimes refer to succinctly as the *Mystery*. As a board, we will embrace our place within the whole by acknowledging and revering the *Mystery*.

Our decisions as a Board require that we be in rhythm with the Natural World and the *Mystery*. When we, as a communion of Presence, *recognize* a course of action has announced itself out of the matrix of our journey within the *Mystery*, that recognition partakes of the larger locus of meaning, brings us the gift of Wisdom, and deserves our trust and commitment. Another way of speaking about this would be to say that the Board listens for the emergence of the Divine Feminine in our time.

Such an approach to decision-making must begin with personal preparation and move into group preparation until we experience that we are moving and breathing in rhythm with the Natural World, that we feel our immersion in the *Mystery*. The preparations that assist our openness to directions include:

1. Taking time to look back at what has been clear in the past and has been unfolding over time to see if we recognize gestation and, if so, what strands have been weaving themselves together?
2. Silence. We offer a question, perhaps, but then contain the energy of the question by letting it nest within us until we are still. When we are still, there is no expectation. We are in a place to *recognize*.
3. This openness to the Mystery makes possible a unifying space (among the group and of the group with the Natural World/Mystery) that is invitational and responsive. This, it appears, is where group recognition can happen.

For us on the board of The Center, the above reflections establish the greater context for all that follows in this document.

The Institutional Context:

The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World is a 501(c)(3) organization that was founded in the year 2000. The following mission statement of the Center was adopted on May 9, 2006:

Mission Statement

The mission of the Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World is to bring to life a new vision of the relationship between the inner life of the child and the beauty, wonder and intimacy of the universe.

Presently, the natural world is viewed as a commodity to be used rather than as a sacred reality to be venerated. A shift in our way of relating to the natural world is essential if we hope to participate in nature's unfolding rather than in its demise. This shift is nowhere more crucial than within the field of education where the child's way of relating to the natural world is formed.

The Board of Trustees, together with the Center staff, holds the trust of the Center, consciously guiding it to fulfill its mission while staying close to its foundation in the thoughts of Thomas Berry over the course of the Center's growth and development. We were gifted with the following quote from Thomas Berry in July 2008:

Today, in this crucial moment of history, we are called to recover the inner vision of a society in harmony with nature, and the urgency of reciprocity of care between ourselves and our environment.

This newly recognized relationship between us and the surrounding natural world rests on our experience of its wonder, beauty, and call to intimacy. In preserving and augmenting these responses, we realize, perhaps never before so vividly, that, as the consciousness of that world, we have an indispensable role to play. More than just protection against pollution and extinction of life forms, that role calls us, further, to revere Earth as that community of which we are a part, the source of our life and livelihood, and, above all, the primary means of our recognition of and communication with the divine.

The Center restores a relationship with the natural world based not on a view of other beings as objects to be used, but as subjects to be communed with in an integral and sacred society.

The Center 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.

The Board also holds in trust the following quote from Thomas Berry and Vision Statement that describe our way of working toward a communion of subjects.

"There is a different way of knowing. The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural world is about this other mode of consciousness. What you are doing at the Center is fundamental and deeply important at this time in history. The children of the twenty-first century will determine the fate of this planet. The twentieth century was a century of death and destruction. The twenty-first must be a century of life. The Center is giving children integral experiences, validating experiences to give immediacy to the natural world in the course of their own human development as an emerging consciousness in our time."

~ Thomas Berry

Vision Statement (adopted in 2011)

The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World is a leading advocate and model of a view of educational practice in which intuitive, imaginal and contemplative ways of knowing, in all their unifying capacities, are seen as central to the development of a mutually enhancing relationship between the human being and the natural world. Such a view, if practiced at all levels of learning, can begin to change our understanding of the role we play within this life-bearing process we know as "nature."

Through its programs for educators and children, the Center is a national resource – a remarkable gestating environment – for reflection and practice that is leading to practical outcomes affecting the child, the natural world, and the culture at large.

In a spirit of shared governance, the Board's primary responsibility is to exercise leadership in the legal and financial domains of the Center, while the staff's responsibility is leadership in the educational spheres.

In particular, there are four principal responsibilities of the Board under North Carolina statutes for non-profit organizations:

- (1) The Board establishes for itself a way of working that is compatible with the mission of the Center that enables it to fulfill its responsibilities to the Center. This includes procedures for arriving at decisions and developing the Board itself, for example.
- (2) The Board, with guidance from the Director, establishes the Center's mission, develops the strategic plan, and reviews the Center's policies to make sure they are effective, well managed, and consonant with the Center's ethos.

(3) The Board is responsible for the Center's legal and financial operations and for facility rental agreements. The Board approves the annual operating budget and receives an annual audit or review of the Center's financial operations and assets. The Board makes sure that facility rentals are adequate for the Center's programs. The Board bears primary responsibility for the financial stability of the Center and for fundraising.

(4) The Board selects the Director and works cooperatively with that person.

In its meetings, the Board acknowledges the more-than-human world by allowing time to be present to the natural world and also allowing time to be in the presence of Silence. These practices encourage board members to listen to Earth and Spirit as they work together on behalf of the Center.

Board members seek to work together in freedom as a living community and acknowledge that *more* can be brought about in knowledge and action through the union of individuals than by the same individuals, each standing alone.

The Board views itself as a “council” – a consulting “together” – and affirms that it is through the inner activity of experiencing and harmonizing the differing perspectives in the souls of others that the group comes to living insight.

Leadership in the board shall be mobile – a free function that moves around within the group depending on the needs of the situation and expertise of individual members.

Board members recognize that they are sometimes entrusted with confidences that should not go beyond Board meetings. It is the responsibility of Board members to be conscious of confidential issues and to maintain confidentiality in relation to them.

Board members agree to make a financial contribution to the Center each year in keeping with their resources.

Board members agree to attend all quarterly board meetings each year and to devote time to one of the working groups of the board outside of board meetings.

Educator Council Board

Renée Eli holds a PhD in Transformative Studies from the California Institute of Integral Studies with an emphasis in Consciousness Studies and an interdisciplinary Master's degree focusing on the human condition from the University of North Carolina Asheville. A contemplative scholar whose work is situated in what she refers to as a "philosophical physiology," Renée offers embodied ways of knowing and being on behalf of human becoming, transdisciplinary perspectives on health and disease, and awakening presence to the body's cues, especially perceptivity through the organ of the heart. A retired healthcare provider recognizing that chronic health concerns are a gateway to wholeness-making, Renée mentors individuals who come to this threshold to embark on a healing journey, calling on phytotherapeutics (plant medicine) in support. She is recipient of a research fellowship from Esalen Institute's *Center for Theory and Research* for her work contributing to the *Future of the Body* project and Herbal Medicine Fellow with the *Association for the Advancement of Restorative Medicine*. Her weekly publication, *Beyond the Comfort Zone*, a 2023 Feature Publication on Substack, invites penetrating questions about life, body, and being human, written while exploring wild reaches of North America. Renée is a 2010 graduate of The Inner Life of the Child in Nature program.

Mary Hartsell is certified as a Family Nurse Practitioner and a Family Psychiatric and Mental Health Nurse Practitioner. She is completing an international certification as an Anthroposophical Nurse Practitioner. She received her Bachelorette in Nursing from UNCG in 1981. She returned to graduate school and received her Master in Science of Nursing with a concentration in Administration of Systems at Duke University in 1996. Dr. Hartsell was committed to health of individuals and returned to school and achieved a Post-Masters at Duke University in 1999 as an FNP. In 2004, She attended Rush University in Chicago and received another Post-Masters as a PMHNP-F in 2006. She holds a Doctorate of Nursing Practice from Duke University. She completed Spiritual Direction from the Alcyon Center in Maine in 2020. She has worked in many capacities of nursing including Pediatrics, Psychiatry, Home Care, Internal Medicine, and Family Health. She currently provides care within a private practice at Integrative Behavioral Health & Healing Practice where she practices as a nurse practitioner and therapist specializing in providing holistic care to individuals with complex chronic medical and psychiatric illnesses. Dr. Hartsell has studied extensively the art of contemplative meditation, spiritual direction, and existential therapies and incorporates these practices as the foundation of her clinical work. Mary is a graduate of The Inner Life of the Child in Nature program, class of 2014.

Catherine Hines holds a BS degree in Chemistry from the University of Pittsburgh and a Doctorate in Optometry from the New England College of Optometry. During optometry school, Catherine cofounded the school's first peer tutoring program and discovered her passion for teaching. After completing a residency program in Philadelphia, Catherine returned to Boston and joined the faculty at her alma mater, where she specialized in ocular disease and focused on innovative teaching methodologies. When Catherine relocated to North Carolina, her focus shifted to administrative and regulatory aspects of optometry, but her passion for teaching and education continued through a variety of volunteer activities. She taught computer labs as a PTA volunteer, served on the Board of Directors for a K-12 charter school, developed and delivered

jewelry-making courses for at-risk girls and young women, and served as a docent at the Carolina Raptor Center. During this period, Catherine's spiritual awakening led to in-depth explorations of transpersonal psychology, archetypes, and shadow work and she was drawn to earth-based spiritual practices. Catherine's volunteer work at the raptor center ignited a desire to share her deep appreciation of nature with others. She became certified as a Master Naturalist through the Central Carolinas Master Naturalist Program and enrolled in the North Carolina Environmental Educators program. When she discovered The Inner Life of the Child in Nature program at CEINW she immediately resonated with its intersection of education, nature, and spirituality. Catherine graduated from the program in 2019.

Andrew Levitt holds a BA in English from Yale University and a PhD in Folklore from the University of Pennsylvania. He trained as a mime with Marcel Marceau and with Paul J. Curtis at The American Mime Theatre. Andrew performed and taught mime professionally for over thirty years and then helped found the high school at the Emerson Waldorf School in Chapel Hill, NC where he taught Humanities and directed theater for seven years. Andrew co-created a performance piece, "The Meadow Across the Creek: Words from Thomas Berry" for the Thomas Berry Centennial and is the author of *All the Scattered Leaves of the Universe: Journey and Vision in Dante's Divine Comedy and the Work of Thomas Berry*, published by the Center in the Fall of 2015, and *Heron Mornings*, published by the Center in 2017. As Dr. Merryandrew, he worked as a clown doctor in the Pediatric unit at Moses Cone Memorial Hospital in Greensboro, NC for nine years until the onset of the COVID pandemic. Andrew is a graduate of The Inner Life of the Child in Nature Program, class of 2008.

Marie Nordgren is the founder of The Children's Garden Preschool, a nature and play-based early childhood program in Durham, NC where she was the director and lead teacher for 18 years. She currently teaches at Sun Star Farm Folk School in Apex, NC. Marie received her training in Waldorf early childhood education from Sunbridge College in Spring Valley, New York. She has engaged in an in-depth study with the Choreocosmos School of Cosmic and Sacred Dance. Her three grown daughters, three grandchildren, and husband, Carl, are also a never-ending source of new learning experiences. Marie is a graduate of The Inner Life of the Child in Nature program, class of 2008.

Sally Pamplin holds a doctorate in Educational Leadership from Nova University, an Ed.S. in Middle School Curriculum, a Master's in Early Childhood from GSU, and a BA in education from Emory University. Her doctoral work consisted of developing and administering a program for low economic, underachieving children. Sally taught and administered curriculum in the Fulton County, GA, school system for 25 years, writing and developing curriculum for differentiated learning, and facilitating Dr. Gerald Lieberman's *Using the Environment as an Integrating Context for Learning*. She co-established a publishing company, Creative Classrooms, and was part of a team who developed the Advanced Training of Environmental Educators in Georgia Certification program (ATEEG). After "retirement" she was an education consultant for 5 years throughout the Eastern States for underachieving schools. Currently, Sally is following her passion delving into the Wisdom traditions, studying *Perennial Wisdom* with Rabbi Rami Shapiro, Teilhard de Chardin with Rev. Dr. Cynthia Bourgeault, *Celtic Spirituality* with Rev. Dr. John Philip Newell, and *The Wisdom of the Sufi Path* with Rev. Matthew Wright. She shares these wisdom traditions with her church's adult education classes, contemplative and interfaith organizations. Sally is a graduate of The Inner Life of the Child in Nature program, class of 2019.

Tom Roepke taught for twenty years in New York City as a literacy specialist at a public school in East Harlem. His role included helping teachers, parents and children experience contemplative practices to promote their well-being. Earlier in his career he became a certified Waldorf teacher and taught a class of children from first through seventh grade at the Rudolf Steiner School in NYC. Tom graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison with a BS in Education. He has a Masters in Early Childhood Education from Antioch New England and a Masters in Special Education from Hunter College. He retired from teaching in 2018 and completed The Inner Life of the Child in Nature Program in 2019. Tom is currently living in a small town in rural Wisconsin where he is exploring how service, hospitality and contemplative practices can cultivate life and nurture people who are experiencing poverty.

Colette Segalla is a psychotherapist in private practice in Raleigh, NC. She approaches psychotherapy with clients from a perspective informed by her ongoing work with the Center. In areas addressed during the therapeutic process, Colette recognizes the interconnectedness of life and the sacred relationship between human beings and the natural world. Her participation in the Inner Life of the Child in Nature program at CEINW coincided with her graduate studies at Pacifica Graduate Institute and became central to her doctoral research. Before returning to graduate school, Colette was an AMI certified Montessori teacher in a lower elementary classroom of six-to-nine-year-old children. Colette is the author of *I am You, You are Me: The Interrelatedness of Self, Spirituality and the Natural World in Childhood*, published by the Center in 2015. She is a graduate of The Inner Life of the Child in Nature program, class of 2008, and has served on the Educator Council since 2010.

Director **Peggy Whalen-Levitt** has been with the Center since its beginnings in 2000. Working closely with Center Founder Carolyn Toben and geologist Thomas Berry, Peggy has been deeply engaged in the formation of a work for adults and children that cultivates an “I-Thou” relationship between human beings and the natural world. Peggy’s early experiences as a storyteller with children led her to complete a Masters degree at the Annenberg School for Communication where her studies focused on perception, aesthetic communication, and phenomenology as in-depth presence with lived experience. These studies continued at the University of Pennsylvania where she earned a Ph.D. in Language in Education with a concentration in Childhood Imagination. It was not until she discovered the work of Rudolf Steiner in 1985 and Thomas Berry’s *The Dream of the Earth* in 1988 that these interests deepened and expanded to include soul and spiritual dimensions of earthly evolution. This deepening has been furthered since 1992 by the contemplative practices of the School of Integral Spiritual Psychology and since 2005 by the meditations of Valentin Tomberg, which include the streams of both Carl Jung and Teilhard de Chardin. Peggy awakens each morning in the foothills of North Carolina by entering Silence in morning meditation. She is the editor of *Chrysalis* (2004-2024), the Center’s journal, *Only the Sacred: Transforming Education in the Twenty-first Century* (2011) and *The Place of Our Belonging: A Work for Children and Educators Mentored by Thomas Berry* (2023).



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